

Jalloh - Heather and AJ Jalloh

'With this mask, I thee wed'

Couple ties the knot amid COVID-19

By Micah McCartney | Published on May 09, 2020



MASKED KISS – Heather and AJ Jalloh, of Briar, celebrated their love with a kiss while wearing masks during their wedding ceremony April 25, at a family ranch in Alvarado. Messenger Photo by Micah McCartney

Although love knows no boundaries, many engaged couples have been forced to change their wedding ceremonies, even going as far as cancelling or postponing due to COVID-19.

For Heather and AJ Jalloh, the decision was simple.

The couple was joined together in marriage April 25, even though the ceremony wasn't exactly like the one they had envisioned when they started planning for their big day months before.

"Coronavirus changed a lot of things we had planned for the wedding," Heather said. "Basically everything was changed or impacted in some way except the actual date for the ceremony. We had friends and family, and even people in our wedding party, who were unable to make it because of the restrictions. "Although it didn't go as we planned it, I still couldn't have asked for a better wedding. I'm glad we made the decision to not have fears about the virus affect our marriage."

Heather, who lived with her parents in Briar before the marriage, met AJ in 2016, when both were employed at the Walmart in Saginaw. The two began dating shortly afterward in 2017.

"We were both working at Saginaw Walmart and starting hanging out with friends," AJ said. "A little later on, I asked her out on a casual date and she agreed."

After dating for two years, the couple was engaged in 2019. With complete focus on the planning that's necessary for their dream wedding ceremony, Heather and AJ began making arrangements.

However, their plans for an April wedding were changed in early March, as governments at the local, state and federal levels implemented social distancing measures.

Due to the restrictions, the wedding's guest list dwindled. Heather's brother, a United States Marine stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, as well as her cousin in the United States Air Force stationed in London, were unable to return to Texas for the ceremony.

Restrictions also barred AJ's cousin, who serves in the United States Army stationed in Germany, and his best man, a firefighter in Houston, from attending.

"It was actually going to be a big wedding. Our guest list was over 200 people," said Heather. "We intended to celebrate and have this big shindig. However, slowly but surely, coronavirus started taking over everything and forced us to make adaptations and changes to the wedding planning process with very little time to spare."

"I was kind of put out and even thought, 'Let's just not do it.' We had to basically put everything on pause for a little bit because we didn't know if the virus would let up and go away by March, and then we could have the wedding in April. We didn't give much notice about what changes we made to our plans, simply because we didn't know what we were going to do. It was totally last minute."

The couple ran into another obstacle in their planning process as they were unable to obtain a marriage license through any county clerk's office throughout the Metroplex. They drove to the first place they could find issuing licenses – the McLennan County county clerk's office in Waco.

"We had to go all the way down to McLennan County to get our marriage license, which we definitely were not expecting to do that," AJ said. "All of the county clerk offices around here were shut down. We couldn't set an appointment, go inside or anything."

They also had to change their wedding venue. The couple originally planned to say their "I Do's" inside Hilltop Assembly of God in Boyd – Heather's childhood church. After being told the site would need to be moved, the wedding was relocated to a family ranch in Johnson County.

"The wedding was at my uncle's ranch," Heather said. "We wanted it to be just a casual, yet beautiful, ceremony. It was definitely different than what we planned, but it ended up working out very well. There were less restrictions because it was an outdoor venue. We could have some people stay in their cars for the ceremony, but still interact with them. It really was a very intimate ceremony because of the limited attendance."

AJ said he was glad the virus did not have an effect on the wedding's planned date.

"I'm glad the date stayed the same," he said. "It wasn't so much that the date mattered, we just didn't want to have to put our lives on hold. Coronavirus restrictions are still in place today, so we still would be unable to have the wedding we wanted. Also, we don't know if gatherings of 200-plus people will be allowed at all this year."

Many family members attending the ceremony were asked to stay in their vehicles. Only the wedding party, the minister, the photographer, and Heather's parents were allowed to be outside.

"The wedding party shrunk from five groomsmen and bridesmaids each to just the maid of honor and best man, as well as a flower girl and a ring bearer," Heather said. "The bridesmaids had already bought their dresses when we went shopping in February, so it was really hard to cancel them. We lost a lot of money on that."

During the small reception that followed, attendees practiced social distancing, greeting the new bride and groom and celebrating with wedding cake and punch.

The couple is planning to enjoy personal time together at home, while planning for a honeymoon trip around their first wedding anniversary. They are also hoping to have a reception on their one-year anniversary.

"We want to do a big reception for our one-year [anniversary] so we can get together with the people we love – our friends and family – and be able to celebrate in the right way," Heather said. "I think it'll be really fun. We didn't get to have all the traditional events that go with a wedding, so we want to have a big celebration."

With all the changes the couple needed to make in order to tie the knot during these uncertain times, AJ said the end result was worth all of the investment.

"It was all worth it. We were able to do something we've been planning to do for a long time and begin our life together as man and wife," said AJ. "It was different than our plans, but it turned out being better than expected."