

LIFE



Newlywed couple Jake and Liana Long ride in the back of a 1913 Model T after their wedding ceremony on July 2.

Photos courtesy of Anna Ko Photo

'Special in its own way'

Couple proceeds with wedding celebration while following COVID-19 guidelines

By Jasmine Johnson
jrjohnson@echopress.com
Liana and Jake Long were engaged in May 2019, and they originally scheduled their wedding for May 2020.

When they first talked of postponing due to COVID-19, they were thinking of having it in the fall, but they didn't know if anything would change by then. Liana said she waited on the governor's updates to decide how to move forward.

"It was hard because nobody knew how to advise us," Liana said.

Hearing silence from their vendors during that time made it especially difficult to plan, and Liana said she had questions swirling around her head:

Should we still have the wedding? What does this mean? How many people can be there?

"You grieve the wedding you thought you would have," she said.

Roller coaster of replanning

"Every young girl growing up, their wedding is their dream," Liana's father, Gary Lien, said.

When they first started planning in 2019, Lien said Liana was most concerned about avoiding a rainy day.

"It never dawned on us that something like this would come about," Lien said. "Being a parent, you want to stay optimistic for your kids, even when you can't see a whole lot of light at the end of the tunnel."

So, instead of waiting,

the Longs chose another new date: Thursday, July 2. Liana said the timing of the holiday weekend made it feel like a Friday wedding, and more people were able to come. Vendors were able to adjust as well because no other events were booked for a weeknight.

The Longs had planned to have their ceremony at First Lutheran Church and the reception at Gathered Oaks, but the church hadn't reopened. So, they shifted all the wedding festivities to Gathered Oaks.

When they changed to an outdoor ceremony, they ended up having around 115 people come. They limited their guest list to the indoor capacity of 25 percent in case it rained and they would have to move inside the barn.

"It's the climax of your relationship," Liana said. "It shouldn't be about how many guests are going to be there."

Gathering the guests

They sent out 400 original invitations, and then had to follow up with cancellation notices, saying that their wedding would be held in a private ceremony.

The third round of invitations went out to immediate family members, the wedding party and their guests.

But there was more on Jake and Liana's minds than the length of the guest list.

"It was kind of a roller coaster of emotions

leading up to it," Jake said. "Everything with COVID was constantly changing."

One of their groomsmen had COVID-19, and his last day of quarantine was the day before the wedding. An usher was on the fence about whether he could come while he waited for a family member's test results to come back.

"They were still able to make it, but these are definitely uncertain times," Jake said. "And it still is right now."

Weeks after the wedding, Liana said no one who attended had tested positive for COVID-19, so their extensive plans seemed to have paid off.

Liana's matron of honor, Talia Anderson, was from West Fargo and could still make the wedding, but no matter when or how the Longs rescheduled, Liana's friend from Switzerland, Anina Himmelberger, wasn't able to serve as her maid of honor.

"That was sad, and we shared tears together," Liana said. "In Switzerland, bridesmaids haven't been a tradition for a long time, so she was really honored in the first place to be in our wedding party, let alone the maid of honor. So that was really hard."

Through the complications, Himmelberger surprised Liana with a speech sent through technology, with her bridesmaid dress on and her hair and makeup done. Himmelberger recorded a video and sent it to Anderson to show

during the celebration.

"There are a lot of brides and grooms that are feeling really unsure and thinking they have to postpone to still have a special day," Liana said. "Small weddings have their benefits, too. It helped us just focus on each other."

'Everything we wanted'

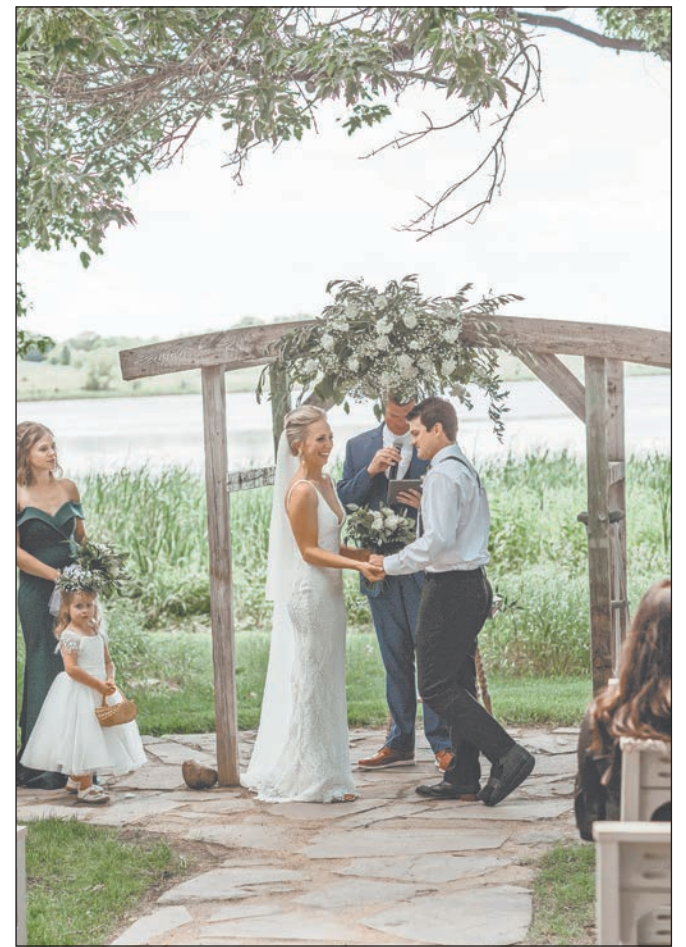
When Liana sought out inspiration for how to adjust their plans, she looked at how weddings were celebrated in the 1950s. The Longs had a half-hour ceremony at 3 p.m. since only wedding ceremonies were allowed, not receptions.

The Longs followed COVID-19 regulations as much as possible. The ceremony was held outdoors, even though the temperature exceeded 90 degrees and humidity levels were around 90 percent.

"We kept everything outside, even though everyone was sweating bullets," Liana said. "We wanted to keep everybody safe."

They had a mini-social behind the barn where guests could have cookies from Elden's Fresh Foods. Her mother individually wrapped each of the desserts, and there were single-serving packages of popcorn and gummy bears so that no one was touching other people's food.

"Life's too short to wait until after dinner for dessert," Liana said.



Liana and Jake Long celebrated their wedding at Gathered Oaks in Alexandria on July 2.

Photos courtesy of Anna Ko Photo

After the ceremony, the Longs took a 45-minute drive in a 1913 Model T to signal to the guests that it was time to go.

During the break from the celebration, the Longs brought a few roses to Liana's brother's gravesite.

Liana said that this was the silver lining to their marriage. After her brother died, she met one of her bridesmaids because their parents attended the same grief group. It was through their mutual friends that she met Jake.

When they returned, some guests stayed at Gathered Oaks for the night. The venue provided outdoor speakers, and one

of their family friends served as the emcee. Jake and Liana had their first dance outside in the grass, even though Jake had broken his leg a few weeks before and was on crutches.

The Longs rented a canopy tent and catered Mi Mexico for dinner. They had tables organized by those who were already social distancing together, and a few family members dished the food cafeteria style.

"It turned out to be everything we wanted," Jake said. "It was still a very special day. We look back on it and wouldn't change a thing."

Offering a road to *recovery* that doesn't require a map.

