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JOYCE MAYNARD AND JIM BARRINGER

Just the Beginning of Their Growing Time



Cheryl Senter for The New York Times

Joyce Maynard and Jim Barringer were wed in a meadow at the Cobb Hill Estate in Harrisville, N.H.

By LOIS SMITH BRADY  
Published: July 26, 2013

Describing her view of life, the writer Joyce Maynard said: “I’m a believer in diving in. It has sometimes been disastrous and painful for me but I think I have better judgment about where to dive now. I’d like to have tattooed on my wrist: ‘What’s the worst that can happen?’ ”

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Ms. Maynard, 59, has taken many big dives and written about most of them: At 19, she dropped out of Yale to move in with J. D. Salinger, the reclusive novelist. The affair ended in 1973, after nine months, which depressed her for years.

In her 20s, she moved to Manhattan and worked briefly at The New York Times, then moved to a farm in New Hampshire, plunging into a life of growing her own vegetables and chopping wood. She married, had three children (at home) and poured her hummingbirdlike energy into being a perfect mother.

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Cheryl Senter for The New York Times  
Before the ceremony, the bride's sons walked her down the "aisle."

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Cheryl Senter for The New York Times  
The couple said their own vows (the bride's were longer).

"It has been the quest of my life to create a happy family," she said.

She chronicled her life on the farm in a syndicated newspaper column, "Domestic Affairs," in the 1980s and '90s. That life was full of art projects, hikes and homemade meals but it was ultimately unhappy. In one column, she recounted making a bûche de Noël, then shoving it down the garbage disposal after an argument with her husband. They divorced in 1990, angrily.

Friends describe her today as a whirlwind and a live wire, someone who loves traveling to rugged places, dancing to almost any sort of music and wearing clingy dresses, which still look good on her.

"She's like a combination of Susan Sarandon and Goldie Hawn, sexy and funny, older-woman hot," said Andrea Askowitz, a writer and a friend.

Ms. Maynard also gets a lot of work done: her 12th book, a novel titled "After Her," will be published next month. Her last novel, "Labor Day," is being made into a movie starring Josh Brolin and Kate Winslet.

In September 2011, years after her children had left home, which she says unmoored her, she read a profile on

Match.com posted by Jim Barringer. Ever since her divorce, she had searched for love the way someone searches for a lost piece of jewelry. She wanted to find it, badly.

"Only two years ago this summer, I was in Italy and I had two enormous, heavy bags," she said. "I'd gone over to Italy with a man but it hadn't worked out, so there I was with all these outfits and high-heeled shoes and I'm hauling these enormous bags up some steps. This Italian man calls out, 'Where is your husband?' I actually burst into tears. It was just: 'Where is my partner? Where is my teammate?'"

Mr. Barringer, 61, is a lawyer with his own practice in San Francisco, a long-distance runner (with sore knees), a bass player and a divorced father of three who lives on a hilltop in Oakland, Calif. By the time Ms. Maynard read his profile, she was living on a hilltop in nearby Mill Valley, in a colorful and perpetually messy house.

"She has no patience for neatness because it gets in the way of her exuberance," said Becky Tuttle, who grew up with Ms. Maynard in New Hampshire.

Ms. Maynard and Mr. Barringer exchanged messages and soon met for drinks at the Lark Creek Inn in Larkspur, Calif. Mr. Barringer remembers that she burst through the door in a pretty dress and proceeded to ask him lots of questions and also to tell very personal stories about herself. She told him she had adopted two girls from Ethiopia in 2010, partly because she missed motherhood so much. The adoption ultimately failed and the girls joined another family.

"I thought, 'Wow, this is a woman who's not going to hide anything,'" he said. "She's very transparent. She doesn't hold anything back."

Their next few dates were marathon conversations. One lasted 12 hours.

"I've always considered myself a very verbal person but Joyce takes that to a different level, a different species," Mr. Barringer said.

Friends describe him as patient and wry, someone who chooses his words carefully and is difficult to beat at Scrabble.

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“Jim is brilliantly methodical,” said Jay Holan, his fly-fishing partner. “The guy’s got a very strategic mind. He’s always thinking a few steps ahead and not showing his cards.”

Like Ms. Maynard, Mr. Barringer has been divorced since 1990. Since then, he has had one long-term relationship and a plenitude of blind dates, many arranged online, which he refers to as “the wilderness.”

“I sort of wandered around in the wilderness for awhile, bounced around, met some very interesting people, some a little too interesting,” he said.

Ms. Maynard, who cooks the way she lives, with lots of speed and soul, made dinner for him on the night of their first kiss.

“We were sitting out on my deck, and he reached over and very tenderly kissed off some melted cheese or vegetable from my arm,” she remembered. “It was such a totally natural, easy, accepting thing to do. I feel totally accepted by this man.”

It was her idea that they start sleeping outside on her deck, on a squeaky air mattress with a view of Mount Tamalpais. They slept there all fall, until it got too cold.

“She’s full of fun,” Mr. Barringer said. “I may seem a little reserved and stuffy but I really value somebody who’s willing to do things with spontaneity and not according to some rule book, and that’s Joyce.”

Ms. Maynard, who has had plenty of broken hearts and difficult relationships, was uncharacteristically cautious with this one.

“Jim is very funny but he’s also deeply serious,” she said. “I knew this was going to be serious and I didn’t want to do any damage. I wanted to really treasure it and honor it and not say one thing ever that wasn’t true. I wanted to keep our record clean.”

Mr. Barringer also proceeded with great care.

“I feel like I’m really there for this relationship,” he said. “I’m not putting a priority on my golf game; I don’t have one, actually.”

Last summer, he took time off from work and she packed up her laptop, and they spent three months in New England, with two modes of transportation: an old red Chrysler LeBaron convertible they found on Craigslist and his Triumph motorcycle. They climbed several peaks and would drive for hours to swim in one of Ms. Maynard’s favorite ponds or hang out on the porch of a quiet general store — all very different experiences for Mr. Barringer, who said he’s been a workaholic forever.

Back in California, she moved into his place, an austere, modern and very clean house totally unlike hers.

“At first, I assumed he’d come to my space because I was always in charge,” she said. “I was a single parent. It was always my space. But I actually wanted to surrender to another way to be.”

Similarly, she now wears the diamond engagement ring Mr. Barringer gave her, not exactly her usual style of jewelry.

“I’m not a diamond ring type of person and I have the fingernails to prove it,” she said. “I’m a person who puts my hands in the dirt and I make a lot of pies. I get a lot of dough on this ring.”

For both, falling in love has been a wonderful uprooting, one with anti-aging effects.

“I feel like a kid!” he said. “I’ve always kind of felt that way but I haven’t always been in situations where I could deploy my inner child.”

She said: “I have really changed and grown — at a stage in life when we’re sometimes told

we're done growing. I seem to be a kinder and more patient person than I have been in the past. I really like who I am with him."

On July 6, they were married in a meadow at the Cobb Hill Estate, a historic home surrounded by 750 acres of woods in Harrisville, N.H., one of Ms. Maynard's favorite towns. The 150 guests seemed like the sort of people who know poems by heart, dance and sing without inhibition and give more hugs than handshakes.

Ms. Maynard wore a long white sleeveless dress, a blood-red sash, red bangles, cowboy boots, a wreath of flowers and purple ribbons on her head and a huge smile. The couple's combined six children, now in their 20s and 30s, were all there.

Does Ms. Maynard feel that her quest for a happy family is over? Not exactly.

"The ship has sailed for the 'Brady Bunch' thing," she said.

Still, there was a feeling of redemption, if not huge relief, at the wedding.

"One of the things I always wanted to give my children — and you can't make it happen — is the experience of seeing me in a really happy, healthy relationship," she said.

The ceremony was officiated by the Rev. Stephen Hinerman, a Disciples of Christ minister whose sermon was like a discussion in an English class; he read and commented on the long Wendell Berry poem, "The Country of Marriage," which includes lines like, "We are more together than we know, how else could we keep on discovering we are more together than we thought?"

The couple each said their own vows, a combination of compliments and promises. Wearing a tuxedo, a red bow tie and old-school eyeglasses, Mr. Barringer said, "I love how you think, full of reason, like greased lightning, like a quantum computer." And: "I promise to work at bridging the gaps between us. The gaps will come up, like cracks in the ground, because we are very different people."

Before reading her vows, which were considerably longer than his, Ms. Maynard told the guests: "Put your feet up. Stretch a little. I do have a lot to say."

She said she loved the fact that Mr. Barringer woke up early, never complained, never closed his heart to sorrow and once tried to ward off a would-be robber in the middle of the night with a hiking pole, while stark naked.

She also said, "I love it that in your eyes, I am the babe of the universe, although that calls your eyesight into question."

And: "So long as I can walk, I will dance with you. I will bake you apple pies and never wear flannel nightgowns."

#### ON THIS DAY

**WHEN** July 6, 2013.

**WHERE** Cobb Hill Estate, Harrisville, N.H.

**DETAILS** The bride wrote biographies for all 150 guests and had them bound into books that were given to them. During the ceremony, her three children sang an a cappella rendition of "If I Needed You" by Townes Van Zandt. The couple chose not to hire a wedding photographer. At the reception, after a meal served buffet style, the guests had pie, not wedding cake.


*Jess Bidgood contributed reporting from Harrisville, N.H.*

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