

## My parents arranged my marriage, and I'm cool with that

Judilee King  
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*Glenn Haider and Judilee King during a gala in Northern New Jersey in November, 2013. Photo courtesy of Judilee King This image is available for Web and print publication. For questions, contact Sally Morrow.*

Editor's note: Judilee King, 22, and Glenn Haider, 23, both grew up in the Unification Church, which is perhaps best known for its arranged marriages and mass wedding ceremonies. The couple will be married at a mass religious wedding in South Korea on Feb. 12. Judilee, who grew up in Nova Scotia, plans to enroll in college in the fall. Glenn, who grew up in New Jersey, is a student at Montclair State University.

(RNS) Glenn Haider and I first met on Facebook. I was attending community college in Seattle and he was in New Jersey, and while we had a lot of mutual friends through our church, we had never met. His status updates kept popping up on my news feed and one day, mostly out of boredom, I decided to chat him up to see what he was like.

We hit it off and started talking more. Eventually he asked for my number and we started texting. I thought of it as a friendship. We kept talking for a couple of weeks, until it got to a point where I was wondering if he was thinking I wanted something more than a friendship.

I confronted Glenn to make sure we were just friends. He agreed that we were just friends, and then stopped talking to me. After about two weeks of silence, his mom emailed my parents out of the blue. She wrote that she found my family on a church directory online, and saw that they had a daughter her son's age. She asked if we wanted to start a matching process with her son.

My parents and Glenn's parents are members of the Unification Church. They brought us together, and on Sunday (Feb. 9), we will travel to Gapyeong, South Korea, for the international "Marriage Blessing," a religious ceremony for about 2,500 Unification couples (with satellite ceremonies around the world). In other words, we're getting married through an arranged match by our parents. And we're totally cool with that.

Growing up, it was hard not to date. All my friends had boyfriends, but not dating really made me think about what is temporary and what kind of relationship I want to have. I've seen a lot of terrible relationships in a country where dating young is considered the norm. Nobody really knows who they are in middle school, and I think the dating culture can really affect you emotionally, physically and mentally.

I had already told my parents a month earlier that I was ready to start the matching process with someone and we could start looking. At first I was hesitant, not sure that I would be ready to make a commitment. I felt mature enough to deal with it not working out, and I felt I was ready for a committed relationship. It was just the idea that everything would change as soon as I said yes.

When Glenn's mom approached my parents, I felt a kind of shock. I wondered if Glenn had told his mom about me rather than her finding a family from a small town in Nova Scotia in a church directory. Then I wondered why Glenn would even tell his mother about me since we were supposedly just friends.

I was going to say no. But I realized I would never know if I could really like Glenn if I never tried to get to know him. If I was ever going to do this, I needed to try. I felt like I might be blocking a blessing God could be offering me if I wasn't open to it. I decided I was willing to start the process.

Our parents continued emailing back and forth, and then Glenn and I were allowed to start talking. I was nervous at first, and was looking at him differently than before. I was prepared for it to not work out. The first day we talked he told me his goal wasn't to get married. He wanted us to become best friends first. After about a week, I felt like I was falling for Glenn.

Every "first" was really scary and exciting — the first compliments, the first Skype conversation, the first time I visited him three months later. We decided before I arrived that we would leave the option of being matched open for discussion. I felt like all of it could be thrown out the window if we met and he didn't like me or I didn't like him. I was afraid I wouldn't be attracted to him. We both agreed that if we didn't like each other, we'd be honest.

When I saw him at baggage claim, I was instantly relieved. We were both so nervous when we hugged that we almost forgot to pick up my bags. The first thing he said to me was, "Wow, you're actually pretty." "Greaaaatt," I thought to myself.

But by the third day, we decided we wanted to get matched. It felt right, his personality seemed to complement mine and we had similar values. Glenn and I prayed about the decision. Every prayer felt like an affirmation.

Our marriage is based on our personal beliefs in God and our shared morals and values. Of course I'm attracted to Glenn and I wanted to get along before I agreed to the match. But we've got a foundation that many other engaged couples don't have.

Eight months ago, we had the matching ceremony with his family and my family over Skype. I recently moved to New Jersey and I am living in his parents' basement while Glenn lives upstairs. It's nice to finally be together, and every day it feels like I get to know Glenn better. We always try to remember that this isn't about us — we are engaged to do something great for God as a couple.