

LOCAL

Couple says 'I do' at Kings Mountain Hospital

EMILY WEAVER

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A little before 5 p.m. on Saturday, dozens of hospital staff members, family and friends lined a hallway inside of Kings Mountain Hospital, anxiously awaiting the arrival of a very special bride and groom.

It would be the first wedding to christen the hospital's small chapel and a day many will not soon forget.

The groom, James Fletcher, came out first, surprised and a little nervous by the assembled crowd and flashing cameras. The bride, Mary Carpenter, was being brought down from her room. Respecting traditions and superstitions of the two not seeing each other before it was time, the groom, who had been sequestered outside while the bride was made ready, was led into the chapel.

Mary and James met a little over a year ago, while they were both working at Parkdale mill. She was working with a temporary service at Parkdale's plant 8 and he was working at plant 9. Part of Parkdale's operation was going overseas so workers were busy moving items from plant 9 into 8 for storage.

Mary was sitting in the office one day, during lunch time, when everyone but James seemed to have taken a break. "He came by the office and just started talking to me...like we had been friends forever," she said. "It took him a long time to



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Saturday was a happy day for Mary Carpenter and James Fletcher as they wed inside of Kings Mountain Hospital's chapel with Pastor Jeff Hensley officiating.

get up the nerve to ask me to go out."

Their first official date was August 25, 2007. They watched movies and ate pizza. The friendship bloomed into a love affair between familiar souls. "It was just like it was meant to be," she said.

But another "meant-to-be" was a little harder to swallow. For two years, Mary had been suffering from occasional stomach cramps. She said that, at first, she thought it may just be indigestion.

"Thursday, two weeks ago, I was hurting real bad and was bent over double," Mary said.

She went to the hospital and her blood count was low. "They

put me back in ICU and had to give me blood because I was bleeding internally," she said. "They gave me five pints of blood and came to check on my hemoglobin."

Doctors performed a colonoscopy and found a growth. They did a biopsy, she said, and it came back cancerous. "It was just so heartbreaking," Mary added. "It was like I knew. Every time somebody told me 'you need to go to the doctor and find out what's wrong with your stomach,' I would say, 'I don't want to go because I don't want to find out that I got cancer.'"

The last time James told her to go to the hospital, she replied that she didn't want to go and "get bad news." "I don't know what made me think that, I just did. It was odd too because when I was in the ICU, I kept having these dreams that I was losing some of my hair. Then after they did the colonoscopy and first moved me back out here on the floor, they came in and told me," she said on Sunday. "It was like my dreams (had) already told me."

Mary was alone when she got the news and worried about how James would take it. "Most men, when they find out something like that, they would just leave," she said. "But he's been right here, everyday by my side."

They were supposed to be wed on September 19. But with chemo treatments around the corner, she said, she didn't want to be sick at her wedding. Before she even mentioned having the wedding a little sooner,



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James Fletcher kisses his new bride, Mary Carpenter, as they are pronounced "husband and wife" in front of a packed chapel at Kings Mountain Hospital.

however, James was already checking on the procedures for having a hospital wedding and getting their marriage license in order. "It was like he read my mind," Mary said. "He's my soulmate."

When they asked the hospital if they could wed in the chapel, a team of nurses, staff and others quickly went to work to answer a call beyond their duties. In three days, Mary's little helpers, assembled a wedding and reception that grandly exceeded the lovers' expectations.

"All of the nurses and staff up here have just been so wonderful," Mary said. "I thought I

was just going to go downstairs and we were going to get married in the chapel."

Thinking that they would say "I do" in a small, simple service, she had planned to wear a gown and blue housecoat. But the nurses had other plans. They pooled their money and bought her a beautiful pink wedding dress to wear. Two nurses did her hair. One went to work on her nails. Three of her friends fixed her make-up, which the nurses also purchased. Mary's friends made her a veil, but so did the nurses. The two were intertwined and

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Mary Carpenter, heads to the chapel at Kings Mountain Hospital to say "I do" in front of family, friends and hospital staff.

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