

## A Shared Passion: Whitney (Engel) Brammer, Class of 2007 Jackson Brammer, Class of 2008

By Dani Erickson '09



It isn't uncommon for Whitney to return home from work to a house echoing with screaming music. Maybe that is not the most welcoming sound, but she knows it is only her husband, Jackson, studying the day's heavy science and medical content.

"Music is my fuel for studying," says Jackson. "I need to keep my brain entertained enough that I can focus on studying." And finding himself in

the midst of his third year of medical school and diagnosed with ADHD just the year before, Jackson plays whatever music he needs in order to achieve the hyper-focused attention he requires. "I like the way I learn, the way my brain works; I see things other people don't."

It is the unique things he picks up on, this hyper-focus, that Whitney says makes Jackson who he is. "Sometimes he has a hard time filtering all the information," she said. "But when he's there with someone who's hurting—not just physically, but emotionally, too—it's a beautiful thing."

"I don't think the last 'D' in ADHD is accurate," Jackson says. "It isn't a disorder or a crutch; it's just a label for what I am experiencing." Jackson studies medicine at Loma Linda University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution whose mission is "to make man whole." It is here that he was introduced to his "ADHD superpowers" and where he pursues the skills to, in turn, aid others. "There isn't anything much more cool than helping someone through a hard time," he says.

The Loma Linda mission statement aligns with Jackson's motivation, and it is clear that he and Whitney are also matched in that way. Whitney discovered her passion for healing during her undergraduate years at the University of Washington, where she also earned her master's in occupational therapy. She now works at Arlington Gardens Care Center in Riverside, helping

people regain their skills and abilities to be as independent as possible in everyday life.

"I like seeing people make progress," she says. "I like seeing their excitement when they realize what they can do." She loves the look on a man's face when he can finally grasp a ball after his stroke. She loves the relationships she develops there: meeting a woman in incredible pain from a broken hip, working with her, earning her trust, building a mutual comfort, and finally seeing her rehearse how to safely get up off the floor on her own just months after her previous fall.

Another thing Whitney and Jackson have in common is their mutual desire to be seen humbly and transparently for who they really are. Jackson used medical school as an example. He described how our culture holds doctors in such esteem, but no doctor or medical student, himself included, leads a perfect life. He cautioned against thinking successful people do not have problems; everybody has troubles, and no one is alone in that.

Similarly, the Brammers shared that they do not want their relationship to be mistaken as perfect, either. They have faced times of diagnoses, depressions, anxieties, and divorce statistics, both for getting married young and for going through the pressure cooker of medical school. The two met and started dating while students at Bear Creek, took a short break after Whitney graduated, then got back together at UW where they both lived in Vision 16, a men's and woman's Christian housing community. They married the summer before Jackson's senior year of undergraduate studies and Whitney's final year of graduate school in order to get a solid year of marriage under their belts before Jackson began medical school. Having been together for so long, Whitney admitted to thinking their marriage would be easy, "But it's not," she said. "You think you know [someone], but there are always surprises."

Nevertheless, it is their commitment to each other that binds them, and they celebrate that. "I get to see how he's struggling, what he's working for, just as he witnessed me as I worked my degree in occupational therapy," Whitney said. They have designated Friday nights as "date night," and work to spend time together and outdoors despite the constant pressure to study. And they continue to get closer to each other—tighter as a team—every day.