

# Nina Planck and Rob Kaufelt



Ryan Collard for The New York Times

The couple with their son Julian.

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**SOME** men have the word “inappropriate” scrawled all over their faces in indelible ink. Women know this. Nevertheless, many ignore the warning signals and go with their hearts. And sometimes love prevails.

So it was in April 2002 when Nina Planck, then 31 and the owner of more than a dozen London Farmers’ Markets in England, first encountered Rob Kaufelt while traveling to an Irish Food Board conference in the fishing village of Kinsale, Ireland.

On the shuttle from the airport, Ms. Planck, who was scheduled to speak at the event, recalled thinking that Mr. Kaufelt, with what appeared to her as a broad, Cheshire cat smile and deep Florida tan, seemed a little too charming for her. Mr. Kaufelt, meanwhile, thought Ms. Planck’s blasé expression and sensible black trousers suggested a country-club conservative.

Still, as Ms. Planck stood before the conference and laid out her thoughts on why butter is good for you, Mr. Kaufelt, then 55, the owner of two Murray’s Cheese Shops

in Manhattan, grinned up at her from the front row, correcting her on the finer points of regulations governing raw milk cheeses.

Later, at dinner, they bumped into each other again. By this time Ms. Planck, who is in fact the product of a hardscrabble childhood on a vegetable farm in Loudoun County in Virginia, had decided that Mr. Kaufelt “was incredibly handsome” and had rearranged the seating to move him to her table.

Late that night, Mr. Kaufelt walked Ms. Planck along a rainy pier and kissed her before returning her to her inn.

The next morning they both assumed it was already over. He was married (but separated from his second wife) and living in New York; she had moved from London to Washington, and wanted a mate of her own.

“I’ve been looking for a serious relationship since age 18,” said Ms. Planck, now 39. She couldn’t stop thinking about this charming [cheese](#)-monger/songwriter who had given her his album of catchy original songs.

Once back in Washington, Ms. Planck invited Mr. Kaufelt on a food tour of Rappahannock County in Virginia. Soon they were dating, but not exclusively.

“He’s incredibly inventive and has way more ideas than any man has the right to — a daily cascade of ideas about business, novels, stories, kids’ books, architecture, design, food, clothes,” she said. “His ideas are like frogs’ eggs — hundreds of thousands of frogs’ eggs that you can pick up in huge clusters. “

Ms. Planck, the author of “Real Food: What to Eat and Why,” recalled that she and Mr. Kaufelt “circled around each other for some time.” In July 2003, she moved to Manhattan to direct, briefly, the New York City Greenmarkets, but by then things had cooled off between them, and Mr. Kaufelt was in another serious relationship.

Yet something always pulled him back, he said. “Nina would periodically tell me to get lost, and I would, and then I’d come sniffing around.”

She was not always quick to respond; he was, after all, a peripatetic cheese-monger, nearly a quarter-century older than her and someone whose second marriage was still wending its way through divorce court.

Mr. Kaufelt brought the age issue up with Nicolette Niman, who is married to his friend Bill Niman. “There are a lot of advantages, especially if the woman is successful on her own,” Mrs. Niman, 22 years younger than her rancher husband, recalled telling Mr. Kaufelt. “A lot of men your own age are threatened; older men are very appreciative.”

Mr. Kaufelt certainly appreciated Ms. Planck. “Nina’s a truly independent woman, a post-post-modern woman,” he said. “I lusted after Nina, and still do, in a very primal way.”

What’s more, neither had children but now wanted them. “I was made for being a wife and mother,” Ms. Planck said. They settled into a steady relationship that would soon include children, but not marriage. Julian, born in October 2006, was first, followed by Rose and Jacob — twins — in August 2009.

Still, Ms. Planck was never quite sure of the long-term outlook. “I was fully prepared to be a single mother,” she said. She would often say to him, “Promise me we’ll never get married and never split up.”

She added, “I was madly in love with him, but I thought it was a lost cause.”

Mr. Kaufelt did promise. But then, when the twins were 5 days old, he glanced at Ms. Planck and blurted out, “Will you marry me?” Julian looked up from his lunch as Ms. Planck said, “Of course, I’ll marry you.”

What had changed for him? “When Julian was born, I fell in love with both of them at the same time,” he said. “She’s passionate. Loyal to the point of tribally loyal, with a huge generosity of spirit.”

And there was a void in his life, which he thinks, in large part, had something to do with the sudden death of his sister last year. “He thought, If I don’t move now I’ll miss this, and I’ll regret it for the rest of my life,” said Liz Thorpe, a colleague of Mr. Kaufelt’s.

Ms. Planck and Mr. Kaufelt were married on Aug. 14 at the 300-year-old country house they share in Stockton, N.J., under a huppah made from vintage pickle barrels. Beneath it stood their son Julian, serving as both ring bearer and Mr. Kaufelt’s best man. As their 115 guests watched, the bride glided down the aisle in a gauzy Morgane Le Fay dress, a garland of flowers around her head.

“Each of you comes from a world where nourishment is essential,” Rabbi Nancy Epstein said. (As if to underscore the rabbi’s point, the couple had prepared a menu that included grass-fed beef tenderloin from Mr. Niman’s California ranch; special cave-aged American and European cheeses from Mr. Kaufelt’s shop, and fresh fruit and vegetables from the Virginia farm owned by the bride’s parents, Susan and Charles Planck.)

Crickets chirped; weeping cherry, redbud and dogwood trees gently swayed in the breeze. And then, as the couple kissed, the band broke into “When I’m Sixty-Four.”