



## Blog

### April and Joe: Partners and Parents through the Challenges

Posted on January 31, 2012



*Joe and April scuba diving off Great Barrier Reef*

April and Joe Niamtu are a beautiful portrait of a couple. Smart, polished, successful, fun... and that isn't even what is most remarkable about them. Many folks *think* they know the Niamtus based on seeing them in public or on television; they don't.

I have had the great fortune of working with April and Joe for many years. They are generous with their time and resources. They smile so much. Joe even breaks out his guitar sometimes when you are with them. April can decorate a Christmas tree like few can (she helped with our [Miller & Rhoads Christmas Tree Contest](#) entry). They radiate positivity and their love for one another is evident to anyone present. And, they are just so much fun!

April and Joe have dated since 1995 and were married in



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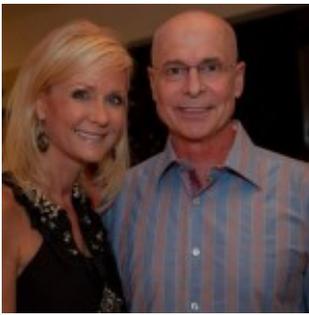
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*April and Joe Niamtu*

1998 after a romantic proposal in front of their best friends at the couple's annual 4th of July party. Six months later, the couple learned they were pregnant with their first child.

After a largely uneventful pregnancy, April learned during a routine 34 week appointment that she was in labor. Joey was born early and spent some time in the

NICU. When April and Joe brought him home, they were assured he would outgrow the difficulties he was having. At three months old, he had a seizure and was rushed to the hospital where he stayed five days and underwent multiple tests. At that time, the couple was told that Joey's brain did not fully develop and he would most likely need care the rest of his life. They were also told it was virtually impossible that another child born to them would have the same special challenges.

Twenty-seven months later, Evan was born. At four months old, the couple realized Evan's development was much like Joey's had been. Somehow, they had another child born with similar challenges.

Those first years of the boys' lives were challenging. They were in so much pain. April and Joe persevered together on little sleep and with significant emotional pain. Watching your children suffer, especially when you cannot comfort them, is a parent's nightmare.

Joe and April were forced to make difficult decisions about the boys' care all the time. They *had* to make it work. They saw no other option. And they did.

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“ *Our biggest joys are to see them smile and laugh. That is our goal everyday to see that on their beautiful faces.* ”

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HealthyLoveRVA:

Last Father's Day, Joe wrote a beautiful essay in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* on parenting two children with special needs. Click [here](#) to read it. Warning: you'll want some tissues.



*April and Joe on a skiing  
adventure*

It's often said that parenting is a marathon, not a sprint. Parenting children with special needs must be an Ironman marathon. Joe and April run that race side-by-side, smiling and laughing through it all.

Throughout their race, April and Joe know they married their best friend. Joe is quick to make April laugh after a hard day with the boys. They rely on one another and grow closer as they navigate their daily challenges. They are an inspiration.



*Alice and  
Calvin Gay*

Our next Hot Healthy Couple story will run Monday, February 6:

Alice and Calvin — From Lab Partners to Partners for Life

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## 2 Responses to April and Joe: Partners and Parents through the Challenges

1.



Jodi Ottaviano says:

February 1, 2012 at 9:39 am

April & Joe are a true love story. I am honored to know them and enjoy working with them. Thank you both for sharing your 'specialness' and supporting our efforts to promote healthy relationships for all!

Jodi Ottaviano

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2.



Angela Bridgeforth says:

February 1, 2012 at 9:04 pm

I think the title of this piece says it all, partners and parents through the challenges. You both really are an inspiration.

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