



## Jesse & Kendal

Graduate school and careers had forced them to live in separate cities, but Kendal Jamal Thomas still knew that Jesse Sutton Smith was the woman he wanted to marry. So when he was in New Orleans for his brother's wedding, he planned an elaborate scheme to propose to Jesse at the Palace Cafe.

Before popping the question, though, Kendal enlisted some help from restaurant owner Dickie Brennan, a friend of Jesse's family. Together, they made sure Kendal's plan went off without a hitch.

To lure her to the restaurant, they told Jesse there would be a photo shoot for a magazine at Palace Cafe, and her family was needed to be the models.

Brennan set the proposal scene in the restaurant's wine room, and Jesse's parents, grandfather, her aunt, a photographer and a musician were all there

waiting.

After being seated at the restaurant for about 20 minutes, Kendal pulled out a diamond ring and proposed. Up until that moment, "I still suspected nothing," Jesse said.

Her answer was an instant, "Yes!" The couple had been dating for 6 ½ years, having met in Atlanta, where they both went to college. (Morehouse for Kendal and Spelman for Jesse).

After graduation, they had moved to New Orleans. But then Kendal got accepted into a fellowship program in healthcare administration in Greenville, N.C., and Jesse was accepted into a master's degree program in strategic communications with a concentration in health at American University in Washington, D.C.

Fortunately, it was an accelerated, one-year program, since, as Jesse said, "planning a wedding from afar is an interesting exercise in sanity."

They reunited on June 17 with the wedding at Holy Name of Jesus Church and the reception at

Audubon Tea Room. The day was special for all, but one moment that stood out were Jesse's dances with her father to "How Sweet It Is" by James Taylor and "24K Magic" by Bruno Mars.

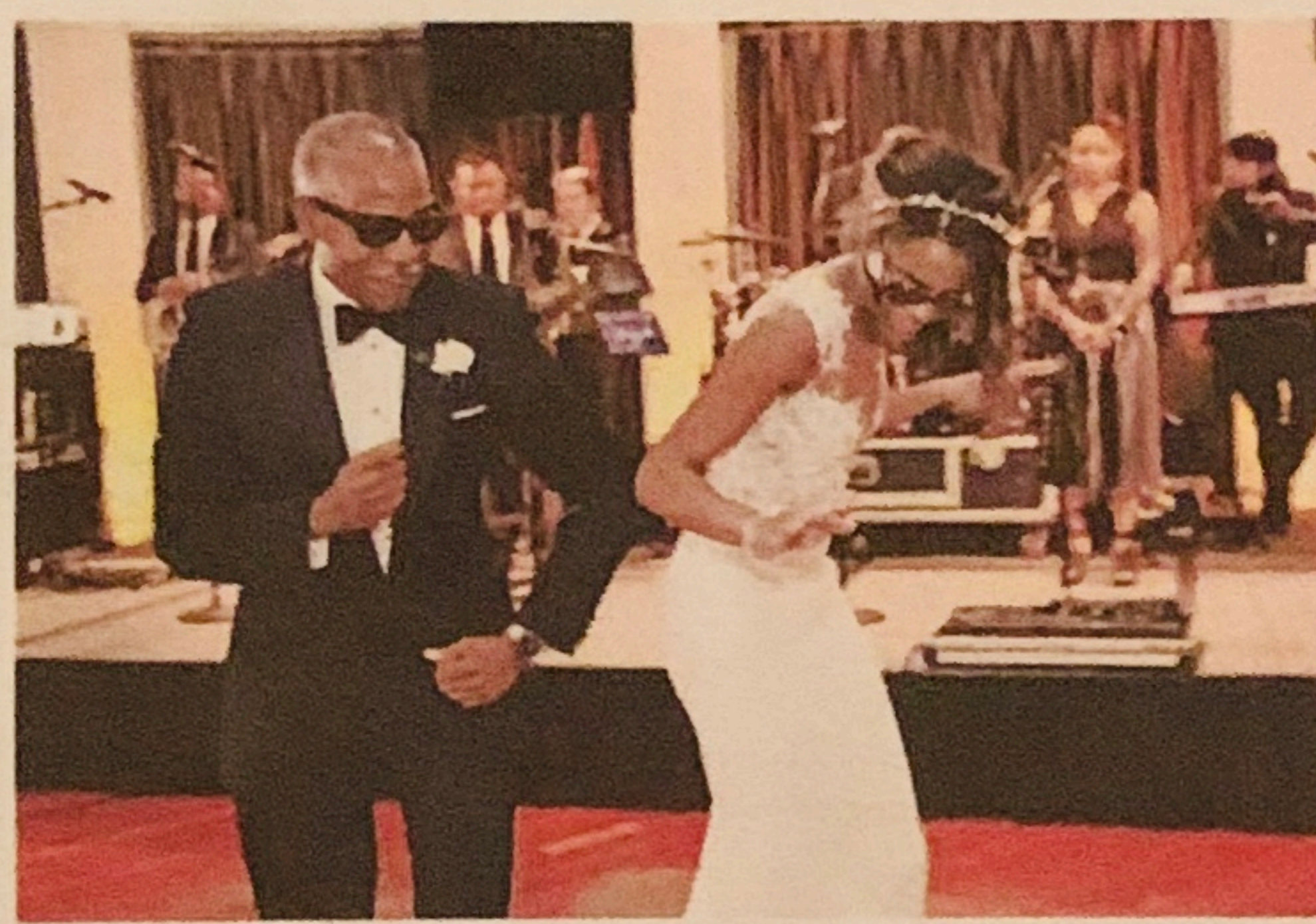
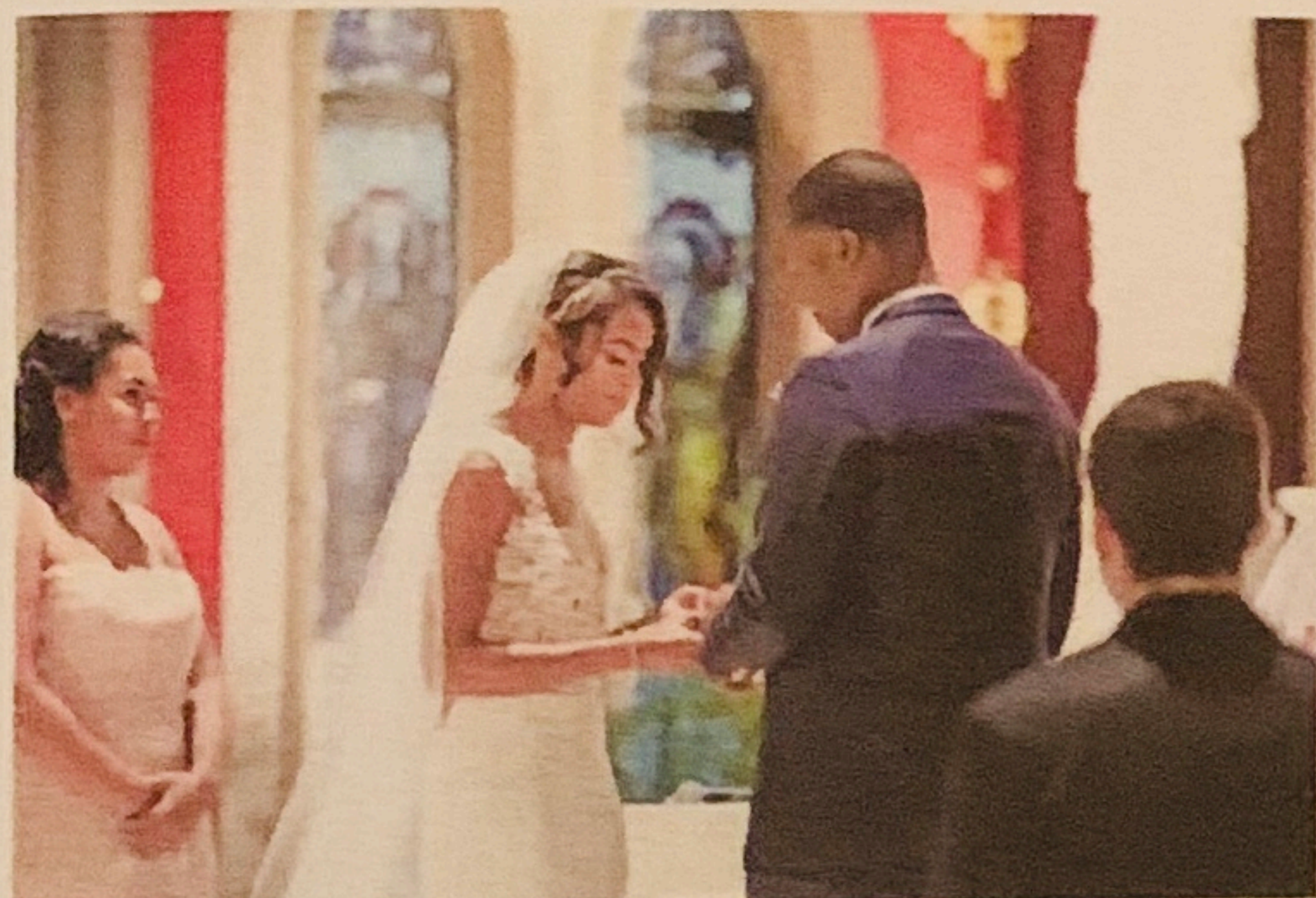
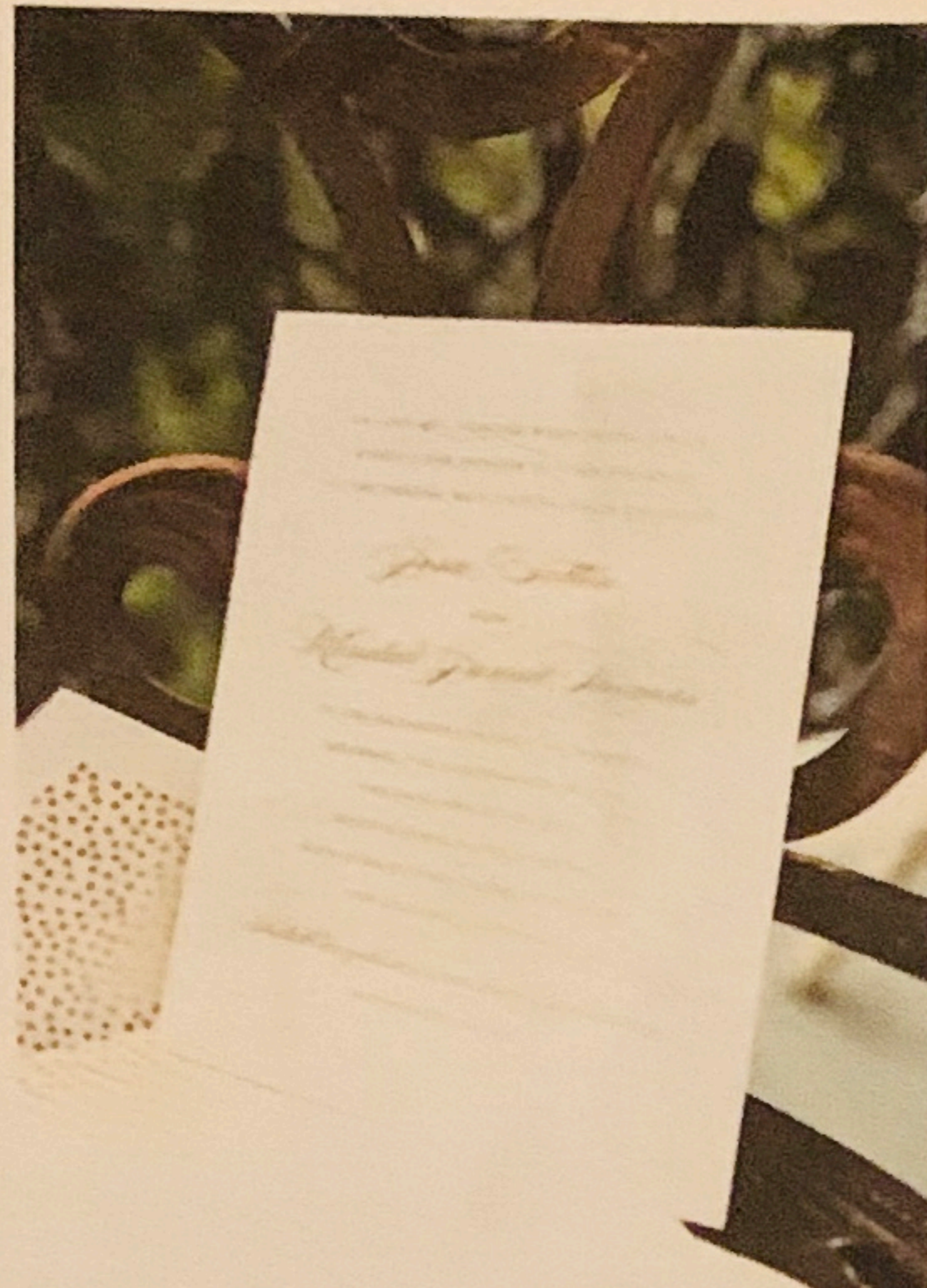
The videographer, B. Bryant Cinematic Productions, posted the video of their dance on Twitter, which then went viral.

Jesse's brother, author Clint Smith, also reposted the video on Twitter, framing it in the context of healthcare: their father has had two kidney transplants (one had failed, necessitating the second surgery). Without health insurance, Jesse's brother said, their father wouldn't be dancing with his daughter on her wedding day. The video went viral again with BuzzFeed and ABC, among other media companies asking for it.

"It was an interesting narrative, post wedding," Jesse said.

Now the couple, who both work in the health care industry, are firmly based in New Orleans.

— Sue Strachan, *Social Scene* columnist



**INVITATION**  
Paper N'Things,  
Baton Rouge

**WEDDING DRESS**  
Pronovias, Town & Coun-  
try | Blanc Bridal Couture

**BRIDESMAIDS'  
DRESSES**  
Adrianna Papell, Theia,  
and Jenny Yoo, Bella  
Bridesmaids

**GROOM'S TUXEDO**  
Ike Behar,  
John's Tuxedos

**GROOMSMEN'S  
TUXEDOS**  
Michael Kors,  
John's Tuxedos

**RINGS**  
**Engagement:** gold,  
vintage-inspired  
oval-cut center diamond  
with halo, "Rachel" Ken  
and Dana Designs,  
New York, N.Y.  
**Wedding bands:** bride:  
"Natali," Ken and Dana  
Designs, New York, N.Y.;  
groom: classic gold,  
Adler's

**FLOWER GIRL'S  
ENSEMBLE**  
Joan Calabrese (vintage),  
the dress Jesse Smith  
wore 23 years ago as a  
flower girl

**RING BEARER &  
JUNIOR GROOMSMEN'S  
ATTIRE**  
John's Tuxedos

**FLOWERS**  
Fat Cat Flowers

**WEDDING CAKE**  
Royal Cakery

**CEREMONY**  
Holy Name  
of Jesus Church

**OFFICIANT**  
The Rev. R. Tony Ricard

**RECEPTION**  
Audubon Tea Room

**BAND**  
Phunky Monkeys  
(reception); Kentay  
Brass Band (second line)

**MARDI GRAS INDIANS**  
Ninth Ward Black  
Hatchet

**EVENT PLANNER/  
COORDINATOR**  
Tenishia Keller

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Eric Bordelon/Studio  
Tran Photography

**VIDEOGRAPHER**  
B. Bryant Cinematic  
Productions