

Framingham's Daniel Lussier was 'an incredible young man'

By Jeff Malachowski/Daily News staff

MetroWest Daily News

Posted Oct 04, 2009 @ 12:55 AM

FRAMINGHAM —

Like many men, Daniel Lussier was nervous when it came time to pop the question to his longtime girlfriend.

Lussier brainstormed different ways to propose to Betsy Rotberg, including bringing home a new puppy with a ring tied around its collar, but eventually decided on asking Rotberg to marry him at a simple and quiet dinner two days after Christmas last year.



Contributed photo

Dan Lussier, with Stewie, died unexpectedly Thursday, Oct. 1. He was engaged to be married Nov. 14. This picture was taken about 2 years ago.

"He told me he was going shopping with his sister," said a tearful Rotberg. "In the three years I knew him he never went shopping with his sister. I suspected something was going on that day. He was so nervous."

The couple was in the midst of planning their Nov. 14 wedding when Lussier unexpectedly died Thursday night of an undetermined medical problem. He was 35.

A former Natick High School athletic trainer, Lussier was described by friends and relatives yesterday as loyal, unassuming, sincere and a gentleman.

"He was just a great kid," said Lussier's mother, Janet. "He was an incredible young man."

"I adored this young man," said Rotberg's mother, Phyllis.

"He was a son to my husband and myself."

The two met while working together at Fitness Prescription in Natick in May 2005, and it was not love at first sight.

"We didn't get along," she said. "I literally had to play 20 questions to get him to talk."

They eventually began socializing outside work and began dating two months later. The couple moved into their Framingham home two years later.

Lussier, who grew up in East Brookfield, graduated from St. John's High School in Shrewsbury and Colby Sawyer College. He'd wanted to play sports growing up, but injuries kept from the playing field.

As a trainer at Natick High, he helped student-athletes stay on the field by teaching them how to take care of their bodies.

"He always wanted to be part of the sports world," said Janet Lussier.

After serving as head athletic trainer at Natick High School for seven years, Lussier became a clinical athletic trainer at the Children's Hospital in Boston.

"He touched more lives than I ever thought," said Janet Lussier. "He loved the people he worked with."

While dedicated to his duties at Children's Hospital in Boston, Lussier also served as a part-time athletic trainer at Wentworth Institute of Technology and at Fitness Prescription, where he first met Rotberg.

"A lot of people do their job to do their job. Dan did it because he loved the job," said Wentworth Institute of Technology athletic trainer Lauren Eck. "He truly cared about his athletes."

"I knew what a diamond he was," said Meryl Lemeshow, the owner of Fitness Prescription and Rotberg's aunt. "He was one of a kind. That's why I wanted him to take care of (Rotberg)."

Despite a busy schedule of working at the Children's Hospital and training athletes, Lussier loved driving his Jeep, watching the Red Sox, feeding and playing with his nephew Noah and spending time with his 2-year old bulldog, Stewie, named after a character of one of Lussier's favorite shows, "Family Guy."

"He needed to have a manly dog," said Rotberg. "He adored him and was really good with him. It was indicative of what kind of father he would be. Stewie was our baby."

Growing up, Janet Lussier said Daniel and his younger sister Kate were often at odds, but still enjoyed playing with each other's Star Wars and Strawberry Shortcake action figures.

"He was very hard to stay mad at," said Kate Lussier. "He knew how to light up a room."

After his younger brother Andrew suffered a traumatic brain injury nearly seven years ago, Lussier stayed at the hospital with him every night to help him feel comfortable and to take care of him.

"He would not leave him," said Janet Lussier. "He was just incredible."

An Eagle Scout and lacrosse player, Lussier celebrated his 35th birthday last Sunday.

Lussier's family is organizing a scholarship fund in his name, and funeral arrangements are being finalized.

"Our love was unconditional," said an emotional Rotberg. "He had a heart of gold. We were supposed to be planning a wedding, not a funeral. It is unthinkable."