

## Ned and Kat's Perfect Wedding

April 24, 2015, Hanalei, Kauai, Hawaii

“So, Em, ummm... your Dad and I were kind of thinking of getting married while we're here...what do you think?”

Silence. Then Emily, Ned's 26 year old daughter, wisely said, “You guys don't really love Hawaii that much, right? And besides, you've been together for ten years, and I already think of you as married. Don't have your wedding here on my account. Go somewhere more fun for you!” She was right. We were only in Hawaii now to celebrate Ned's niece's wedding. Ned and I are desert rats, after all. Hawaii would never have been our first choice. Had being at our wedding been more important to Emily, we would have happily done the deed just to have her with us, but it wasn't.

So, no Hawaiian wedding. After ten years and thousands of miles traveled together, Ned and I had finally decided to tie the knot. But where? How? In the entire fourteen months of driving to the tip of South America in Charlotte, not one place materialized as a fun/unique/romantic place to get hitched, not even our favorite foreign country, Mexico. What could we do, where could we go that would be special in a “Ned and Kat” kind of way?

In the meantime, I had asked Ned to take me out to the Black Rock Desert in northern Nevada to camp at the hot springs in Charlotte for my 55<sup>th</sup> birthday, which was on May 7<sup>th</sup>. So far, we had two couples joining us, Leonard and KC and Segis and Kathy, and I couldn't have been more excited. That's where I belong, where I'm the happiest, the Nevada Desert.

Suddenly, while sitting on the front porch of our lovely rented house there in Hanalei, with the sultry air caressing my skin, the exotic smell of flowers tickling my nose, the surf providing a soothing backdrop (none of which I was appreciating nearly enough), my mind turned to the Black Rock Desert, and I knew.

“Yogi!” I said excitedly. “Let's ask Leonard to get ordained so he can marry us out on the Black Rock! Wouldn't that be perfect?” Ned's eyes lit up. I could see his wheels spinning. And then he said slowly, still thinking, “Yeaahhhh, Boo Boo, that could work!”

I immediately called my friend, KC (Leonard's wife), who became instantly and infectiously elated with the idea. I asked her to speak with Leonard and to text me right back. Ten minutes later the text came...Leonard not only agreed, but was also very enthusiastic. Wow, what a dream. I had visions of wearing my new dress (having bought the blue, flowy, flowery concoction for the wedding we would be attending here on Kauai) right on the “playa” of the Black Rock Desert. White playa (picture an immense, dry alkali lake), blue sky, me in my gypsy dress of gorgeous blues and hints of white. Barefoot. Yes, how perfect would that be?

Arriving back home on April 30<sup>th</sup>, we confirmed our date for the weekend of May 15-17, and began asking other friends to join us. Between the short notice and the rough camping venue, we had no other takers. Then it occurred to Ned that he had his best Porsche buddy, Leonard and his best VW Vanagon buddy, Segis (owner of GoWesty), but he did not have a jeeping buddy. That's when we thought of Jim and Tona. But how could we ask them to drive up all the way from Southern California and then out to the Nevada desert for a three-day event? Well, not only were they totally excited, but they even cancelled other previously arranged plans so they could join us. This was going to be fun. None of the three couples had ever met before, but we knew that all six people were exceptional and that it would be perfect.

With only a week and a half to prepare, the only plans we made were for food to bring for the camping trip/wedding party. We didn't even plan which day to get married, trusting that it would happen when the mood struck us. Would it be Friday, when we first arrived, or Saturday after we'd had time to settle in? We later joked that we put more time and energy into planning jeep events than we put into our own wedding, but I guess that's just who we are. The only thing we decided for sure was that we would have a Mexican taco and tequila feast for the wedding party and steaks for which ever turned out to be the other night.

Then two things happened that put a little damper on my exuberance. First, watching the weather, we could see that it had been raining out in the Gerlach area and that more weather was heading in. That meant not only wet camping, but also that driving on the (usually) dry lake was impossible. No blue skies and white playa to go with that frilly dress. To make matters worse, if we could not cross the playa from Gerlach to the hot springs, it would require an additional three-hour 4-wheel-drive go-around to get there. We prepared everyone for the worse while also informing them that the three-hour detour would pretty much guarantee that we would have the hot springs to ourselves. With Burning Man having taken over the Black Rock Desert for one week a year, the hot springs were no longer a secret. And the go around was a beautiful wheeling trip through the desert. The bad weather just might turn into a blessing in disguise.

The second thing that had me momentarily sobered was that in sharing our upcoming nuptial plans with all of the friends and family that could not be there, it occurred to me how fortunate we are to have such close relationships with so many amazing people. In all of my life, I have been of the odd opinion that any wedding of mine needed to be very private between just the two of us. Even in my twenties when I married the first time, I did not want the 30-people wedding I eventually agreed to. But here I was in my fifties now, finally understanding the importance of community, and I felt a little sad, a little selfish. I also know how Ned and I are, and having a wedding that would be special to us in our own private way was essential. I let the revelation bathe me in gratitude for having such a rich life, full of fantastic people and inspiring experiences and focused on the upcoming wedding weekend. I knew it would be perfect.



Thursday May 14, 2015, JT Basque Restaurant Bar, Minden, Nevada

“Here’s to the bride and groom!” Six glasses clinked merrily as strangers became friends and our “rehearsal dinner” began. We were a lively group, sitting and standing around the JT Bar, drinking our Picons (a traditional Basque cocktail) and chatting excitedly. Our entire wedding party had arrived safely; Segis and Kathy from Los Osos, CA, Jim and Tona from Huntington Beach, CA and Leonard and KC from across the valley. Everyone was hitting it off, and the mood was wonderful. Then it got better.

First, our amazing friend, Renee, floated gracefully through the front door, carrying, of all things, a traditional bride’s bouquet (perfectly designed to go with my wedding dress) and a matching boutonniere for Ned. Who on earth would ever have thought of including a traditional bouquet in a non-traditional camping wedding? Renee, of course! And I was delighted. And then my brother, David, from Roseville, called. “Is it too late to come on the trip?” “Are you kidding? That is fantastic! Meet us in Fernley at 11:00am tomorrow!”

Our Basque dinner was delicious, plentiful and full of laughter and high spirits. The weather was looking really bad, but somehow I still knew our wedding would continue to be perfect.



Friday May 15, 2015, Pilot Gas Station, Fernley, Nevada

The drenching rain fell steadily as we pulled into the gas station and spotted David pumping fuel into his 4WD Ford truck. I jumped out of Charlotte and happily greeted him with a big hug. We made the rounds of introductions there in the parking lot with our hoods pulled up against the wind and wet. Everyone fueled up, and we headed north toward Gerlach. We were all excited about lunch at the (in)famous Bruno's Country Club, renowned for their homemade raviolis (and a great bar).

Gerlach is (normally) a dusty little town (population around 200) on the edge of the vast, 40x60 mile dry alkali lake called The Black Rock. In recent years, Gerlach has become recognized as the gateway to the annual Burning Man Festival, held in the middle of the playa (dry lake). But to local Northern Nevadans, it has always been famous for Bruno's Country Club, bar, restaurant, gas station and motel. Ned's Dad, Ted, even bused 100 of his friends in to celebrate his own 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party back in 1997. The destination had been a surprise. The guests were told one thing only - to pack an overnight bag. From the stories I have heard, it seems Ted's party was a huge success. Bruno's bar is rustic and fun, and that's where we headed first, having driven the hour and a half from Fernley in continuous rain.

Gerlach was not dusty when we arrived, it was a muddy mess! The street sign entering the hamlet proclaimed: "Gerlach, The Center of the Known Universe." We all ran into the bar where we were plied with plenty of Bloody Marys and Tequila Marys. The rain had not drenched our moods one bit. This was turning out to be an intrepid little troop of friends.

The bartender, waitress and local bar flies were all friendly, helpful and enthusiastic about our impending nuptials, even gifting me a bunch of lovely roses (left over from Mother's Day). They were, however, not encouraging with regards to the go around road to the hot springs, shaking their heads gravely and telling us how muddy it would be out there. Nonetheless, I'm pretty sure they found the whole thing amusing, and we were happy to provide their afternoon entertainment. There was even some alcohol-induced talk about having our wedding right there

in the bar at Bruno's. When asked if anyone had ever gotten married here, the bartender, Celia, said, "Not that I know of. Let's do it!" Instead, we opted to enjoy massive plates of gigantic, homemade raviolis.





Somewhere along the way a decision was made to stay the night right there at Bruno's Motel. While Segis and Kathy and Ned and I both have water-tight Vanagons in which to escape the weather, everyone else was either tenting it or staying in the backs of pickups. Having secured dry beds for everyone, we set off on a wheeling excursion in the steady rain, spending the afternoon exploring possible alternative hot springs and enjoying gorgeous scenery and the intoxicating smell of rain-soaked sage brush. We had also heard from the man at Bruno's gas station that there was a guy with a 5<sup>th</sup> wheel stuck out there somewhere, so there was even a possible rescue to undertake!

Everyone drove well on the muddy roads; David in his 4WD Ford, Leonard and KC in their Chevy ¾ ton 4WD truck, Jim and Tona in their Jeep JK, and Segis and Kathy and Ned and I in our 4WD VW Syncro Vanagons.

We did eventually find the guy who had unwisely chosen to pull his 5<sup>th</sup> wheel into a mud bog. Both truck and trailer were buried to the axles. The man was in the process of unhitching when we arrived on the scene, so Ned and Charlotte were able to winch his truck free. There was no hope for the trailer, and it turned out he had a wife and kids in there (none of whom emerged). We offered to take them all back to town, but the man declined. We shrugged and giggled and left them all to their happy camping, the trailer tilting crazily in the boggy mess.



The rain paused briefly as the sun was setting over the playa, and the view was breathtaking. We stopped to bask in the beauty, and Kathy pulled out the clam shells we had found and used in Baja, Mexico for “shell shots!” Ned produced a giant bottle of tequila, filled the shells and passed them out...another toast of well wishes in a spectacular setting with great friends. Coincidentally, Kathy had brought 9 shells, the exact number in our group. Perfect again.







Back at the motel, having deemed the roads passable enough to make our bid for the hot springs tomorrow, we literally circled the Van-agons! The two motel rooms that we rented sat in an L-shape around a dirt parking area, so we positioned the two Vanagons in an opposite L. With the awnings up on the Syncros and virtual “walls” on four sides, we had a perfect little courtyard, sheltered from wind and rain. We were all delighted by the arrangement and started preparing our yummy steak dinner. Suddenly, all four of us girls gasped in horror...as the boys started digging a fire pit! “Yikes! We are so going to get in trouble, you guys!” But we laughed anyway as they pulled firewood off the roofs of the Vanagons, doused it with gasoline and torched it. Whomp!! Flames leapt into the night air, mere inches away from our awnings and glaringly obvious to any and all authority figures in the vicinity. But none came. Our steaks were expertly cooked by Leonard and David on the fire pit coals, and we had yet another fabulously fun, pre-wedding party. Everyone agreed it was perfect.

Feeling a bit tired, I opted to turn in early and crawled into our cozy bed in Charlotte. That’s when they hit me. The butterflies. *“Oh my God, I’m getting married! This is serious!”* Gulp. *“I can’t believe I’m nervous. Ok, just go to sleep!”*

Ned came to bed later, giggling and tickling me back awake. We sighed contentedly, warm and dry, listening to the rain patter on Charlotte’s tin roof. There was nowhere we’d rather be. This was the man I was marrying. Perfect.







At some point during the outrageous evening, my brother, David, picked up a gun-shaped bottle of tequila, and decided that this should be a shotgun wedding!



Saturday May 16, 2015, Bruno's Country Club, Gerlach, NV – On the edge of the Black Rock Desert

I yawned and stretched languorously as the warm sun touched my face. Wait...sun?? It had stopped raining. There were even patches of blue in the desert sky. I turned happily to Ned and said, "Yogi, this is going to be an amazing day, but I do have two requests." I chuckled at his very alarmed, very male facial expression and continued, "Nothing too demanding...uh, it's just that I really want to make every attempt possible to get to the Hot Springs, and...I want us to be sober for our actual ceremony!" Ned answered in the only way possible for him...an eye roll, but laughed with me anyway as we jumped into our clothes and greeted our awakening wedding party.

With a unanimous decision to skip the camp-cooking in favor of Bruno's café, we scampered in to be plied with copious amounts of coffee and huge plates of bacon, eggs and potatoes. The wait staff and locals sent us off with well-wishes and best-of-lucks getting to the hot springs.

We had around ten miles of pavement to drive before reaching the turn off to our "go-around," but eight miles into it, Segis pulled over to the side of the road. His Vanagon was running on only three cylinders. He opened the rear hatch, and all of the guys excitedly huddled around to take a look.



We happened to have stopped at the main access point onto the Back Rock playa, the one used by the Burning Man folks to drive into the annually-temporary Black Rock City. But today it was lonely and beautifully peaceful. Kathy, KC, Tona and I walked down to the edge of the lake to explore. Normally, the playa surface is dry alkali and fabulous for driving or enjoying on foot. We have seen it wet and slippery but never with actual standing water. That was a lot of rain. We girls all took pictures and sighed in unison in the blissful silence. Then I looked around. The surface here was dry and gravelly. There were still a few patches of blue sky. It wasn't raining. The Black Rock Desert provided a perfect backdrop...*we should get married here!!* I shared the inspiration with my friends, and they wholeheartedly agreed.



In the meantime, Segis had driven back to Gerlach in search of a spark plug wire leaving Ned, Leonard, David and Jim hanging out by the side of the road. Unbeknownst to me, Ned then walked off into the sagebrush, looked out over the gorgeous vista, saw the sun peek through the clouds, noticed the dry ground and had the exact same thought as me...*we should get married here!!* Ned was divulging his idea to the guys at the same time I was sharing with the girls.

A moment later, we ladies ran back up to the roadside where boys met girls in an excited jumble of perfectly concurring ideas. Our wedding was on! I jumped into my dressing room (Charlotte) to change into my beautiful dress. There was nothing much to be done for my rained-on,

camped-in hair, but it didn't seem to matter. I was excited and nervous. My entire body buzzed with anticipation, and butterflies danced enthusiastically in my belly.



Segis returned, and we joked and laughed and gathered around Charlotte. There, on the edge of the Black Rock Desert, in the “Center of the Known Universe,” with a cold wind beginning to pick up, a broken down Vanagon, KC as my maid of honor, Kathy, Tona (and Charlotte) as bridesmaids, desert flowers in my hair (that Kathy had found) and a formal bouquet in my hands, we had the funnest, funniest, most informal, most romantic, most perfect wedding.

Ned had picked a blue shirt to match my dress and was the most handsome man in The Known Universe, in my opinion. Jim, Segis and my brother, David, provided warm, caring support, and Reverend Leonard carried out his duties with love and humor. Ned and I declared vows that reached into the deepest part of our connection to each other, and I could have sworn it was all a dream. It was too good, too perfect to be real.

I kept asking if I could kiss Ned yet, because I *needed* to, and finally I could. We had to go back and exchange rings, having forgotten to do so, but we were finally declared husband and wife to the happy sound of Champaign corks popping and wild cheering from our extraordinary wedding party.

In a moment of sheer providence, we were able to connect (way out here) to my mother via Facetime. Mom was waging war against lung cancer, so we were all thrilled to have her join in our celebration.





















*Ned carrying me **over** the threshold!*



Now it was time to make our bid for the hot springs, the perfect place to have our Mexican Wedding Feast! I climbed into the back of Charlotte to change into real clothes while bouncing down the road. I did my time-honored yoga-esque move to slide into the front seat, and Ned, in a rare, but precious, romantic moment, played our favorite Loreena McKennitt song and called me “Wifey.”

The go-around was muddy and challenging, but we made progress. Somewhere along the line, at one of several beer-stops, “Just Married” was inscribed in the mud on Charlotte’s back window, and we forged on. Just three more miles...*oh, how I want to get the hot springs.* More mud, more difficult 4-wheeling. Just two more miles...*we can make it-almost there!* Just one more mile...*there it is!* Three hours later, against all odds (and the advice of the locals), we made it.





Even some of Nevada's wild horses showed up to mark this auspicious day!



The hot springs sit at the base of the famous "Black Rock," itself...almost there!



We made it!



As predicted, the Hot springs were deserted. Who else was crazy enough to be wheeling in this mud and rain? We made camp and jumped into the fabulously hot water. Having partaken of the joys of these hot springs many times, we knew that the water on top was crystal clear, but that the bottom was mucky, alkali mud and silt. We came prepared with plastic lawn chairs for all so that we could sit without offending our delicate sensibilities.





Our Mexican party was incredible. Everyone contributed. We had fresh-made corn tortillas, pork, chicken, carne asada, beans, chips, guacamole, taco fixings, Margaritas, tequila shots, beer, and of course, Mexican music playing from Segis's Sirius XM radio. Ned and I even had colorful Mexican hats to wear...you know the fancy, flashy ones usually found in Mexican parades or hanging on the walls of Mexican restaurants? Segis and Kathy had coerced the *sombreros* from the owner of their favorite taqueria in Los Osos and presented them to us as perfectly appropriate wedding gifts.









Because my parents were not at my wedding, I felt a need to have a part of them with me, so I brought two special items. First was a coffee mug that used to be a favorite of my Dad's. Second was one of my mother's favorite recipes. With a pretty blue foil pinwheel (a picture of Ned and I glued to the center) as decoration, Mom's famous banana bread, covered in whipped cream became our wedding cake.



We did all of the traditional things in the most untraditional way. Ned and I smooshed cake in each-others' faces and danced around a roaring campfire to our favorite Blackmore's Night song, "Loreley." The rain held off for the entire day, and the temperature was amazingly mild. I still felt like I was dreaming. It was the perfect wedding reception.





When we had set out on Friday, we had no idea exactly when (or even where) we would have our wedding. It was bantered around that had we chosen Bruno's Bar in the pouring rain, we would have a nifty 05-15-15 as our wedding date, and I thought that was cool enough to fudge the date on our wedding papers even if we did it the next day. Ah, but it is so very human to never know how we will feel about something until we are actually there. By the time I had a ring on my finger, a belly full of tacos and whipped cream on my nose, today's date was so indelibly precious to me, I would never change it. Jim and Tona, with amazing prescience, had had a beautiful blanket specially embroidered and presented it to us at the party. It reads:

*Ned and Kat  
To Our Favorite Newlyweds!  
Married May 16, 2015  
From: Jim and Tona*

Perfect.



Another romantic gesture of Ned's: Our Champagne corks glued to Charlotte's dashboard...

*I Do, I Do, 5/16/15.*

