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**High school sweethearts tie the knot in style ... and on a budget**

Young couple's wedding planning reflects their priorities: friends, family, setting, food and wine

By Rebecca Juretic | Photographs by Katie DiSimone Photography

On the day Keith Jones proposed to Megan Edgar, they were hiking in Sequoia National Park. Pausing at an outcropping to take in a vista of snow-dusted peaks, Keith slipped a small white box from his pocket.

From the moment Megan accepted that ring, the couple found themselves traversing uncharted terrain in their young lives together.

But getting to that point was a journey in itself. Six years before, they had met as students at Ventura High School. Keith was a senior, and Megan was a junior.

"We started dating by purposefully running into each other at parties, so our relationship as a couple happened kind of organically," Megan recalled.

"But once it did, we knew pretty quickly that we would be together forever."

Keith agrees: "We just clicked and became really good friends. I fell for her pretty quick."

Keith graduated in 2000 and Megan in 2001. Unlike many high-school romances which grow distant once the mortarboards are tossed, the two vowed to stay together, wherever life might take them.

For Megan, life took her out of state to the University of Oregon in Eugene, where she studied environmental studies and geography. Keith stayed in California to attend junior college.

"We did the long-distance relationship thing," said Megan. "It was hard, but it was a good thing since we got together so young. It gave us time to become our own people as well as grow together."

After college, Megan returned to California and landed a job with Rincon Consultants, a San Luis Obispo environmental consulting firm. The couple moved to Morro Bay in 2005. Keith continued his studies at Cuesta College, found a job working at Perry Ford in San Luis Obispo and began looking at universities.

By February 2006, the sixth anniversary of their first date, Megan knew a marriage proposal was in the works, but Keith still kept her guessing. Two days into their Sequoia camping trip, he still hadn't popped the question.

"I didn't really have a plan. I just had the ring with me and waited until the timing felt right," said Keith.

When Keith finally proposed, Megan was surprised at her reaction. "Considering we had been together for six years at that point and already knew we were going to get married some day, you wouldn't think it would take your breath away. But it did," she said.

The couple took a leisurely approach to wedding planning and opted for a long engagement to carefully weigh their options. They set the wedding date for July 12, 2008.

One thing they were sure about: They wanted their wedding to be personal rather than predictable. Even when selecting their wedding site, they went against convention. Instead of their hometown of Ventura, they chose to commemorate the happy

weekends they spent wine tasting in Paso Robles. After touring Zenaida Cellars, on Highway 46 West, they knew they'd found the right spot.

"It was just the right size and beautiful but not too fancy or pretentious," said Megan. The couple has a strong connection with nature. Megan's field of work deals with the environment, and they both enjoy camping, hiking and outdoor recreation. So the couple opted to have their 5 p.m. ceremony outdoors on the winery's oak-shaded lawn.

The dinner reception would be held in the winery's barrel room, with dancing and cake outside on the lawn and patio.

Keith and Megan split the cost of the wedding with their parents. The total price tag for the event came to \$18,500. To keep costs down, they gave a great deal of thought to which items were worth a splurge.

"We spent money on the most important things — the location, the food and the wine, because we enjoy good food and wine," Megan explained.

And so they hired Two Cooks Catering of San Luis Obispo to create an Italian-influenced menu featuring seared ahi, chicken and locally grown vegetables. The wine would be provided by Zenaida Cellars.

The couple was more than willing to economize on most other things. For the rehearsal dinner, they opted for a casual get-together at Megan's family's beach rental. They feasted on takeout from San Luis Obispo restaurant Mama's Meatball.

They hired a classical guitarist for the ceremony, but instead of hiring a disc jockey for the reception, they loaded their favorite songs onto an iPod and amplified the music for their guests. They passed on the traditional (expensive) wedding cake and had a friend bake mini-cupcakes. They also hand-made many of their reception decorations with the help of family members. Megan's mom sewed tablecloths, and the couple created their own place card holders out of wine corks.

For Keith and Megan, personal touches were what made the wedding memorable. As wedding favors, they commemorated their new shared surname by ordering customized Jones soda bottles with labels bearing their engagement picture. The sodas were orange cream (to coordinate with their wedding colors of orange and brown). Tables were designated by the word "love" in different languages. Instead of a traditional guest book, they prepared an album of photos depicting themselves from childhood through engagement. Guests signed the album like a yearbook.

Keith and Megan were laid-back enough to let family members contribute their own surprises to the event. Megan's aunt is a Danish expatriate. When she toasted the couple, she asked them to participate in a Danish tradition in which the bride and groom stand on chairs and kiss. Keith's mother and siblings play the ukulele, so they regaled the newlyweds with a ukulele serenade that left guests in stitches.

About 75 guests witnessed Keith and Megan's exchange of vows that evening, and feasted with them well into the night. The Joneses then departed for their honeymoon trip to Costa Rica, Belize and Mexico.

Currently, they are making plans to move again as Keith will be attending CSU Monterey Bay this fall, majoring in global studies. If the couple could have done one thing differently, they acknowledge that they would have hired a wedding planner. As it was, Megan handled most of the planning. "There are so many details. I even had to run my own wedding rehearsal," she said. "I would have preferred to let it go and not be in charge all the time."

For Keith, the day was a blur of emotions. "I was really nervous, but it ended up I was kind of a wreck – I didn't think I would tear up like that," he said. "But I loved it, loved how intimate it was."

And even with the pressures of planning her own wedding, Megan was able to enjoy the day. "When it came down to it, none of the details mattered," she concluded. "Once family and friends got there, it was a great celebration — and way too short."