

SOUNDER

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BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH



A healthy infatuation

Valentine's Day profile with Cat Michalski & Katie Thompkins



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Katie Thompkins (left) and Cat Michalski (right) at their home on Orcas.

BY COLLEEN SMITH
Editor/Publisher

It was love at first sight for Cat Michalski and Katie Thompkins.

The newly married couple says the key ingredient to their happy union is an "ability to be ourselves but still be totally obsessed with each other."

Three years ago, Michalski was at her best friend's wedding at a restaurant in Capitol Hill, Seattle. Thompkins, who had just switched from working in the biotech industry to being a chef, had prepared the meal for the festivities. She was sitting at a nearby table with her friend.

"It was one of her first big parties that she ever cooked for. She kept looking over at the table, looking at me," laughed Michalski.

Thompkins was too shy to speak with the woman she couldn't take her eyes off of — but her friend wasn't.

"She said, 'My friend thinks you're really cute, can she have your number?'" remembers Michalski. "Katie texted that night!"

A week later they went on their first date, which included drinks and rollerskating. The two — whose birthdays are one day apart — have been inseparable since that night.

"I thought you were very mysterious and smelled really good. And confident," Thompkins said. "And you still smell very good! You have a way about you that feels so safe. It was a confidence that turned into a sense of safety that I haven't felt with anyone before."

Michalski was intrigued by Thompkins' enigmatic personality.

"I felt like it was going to take time to get to know Katie," she said. "I thought, 'I'm going to crack this nut.' Even today, Katie is on her own time. We have always had time for each other to open up. Katie still keeps me on my toes. I respect her approach and when she feels ready. She is still mysterious to me. She is still unfolding. In our vows, I said, 'I can't wait to get you know you more.'"

In January 2020, the couple decided to leave the

city for the quiet peace of the San Juans. Both were in the food service industry and "wanted to get out of Seattle." During a visit to the Doe Bay Resort, where their friend had just begun working as a bartender, Michalski and Thompkins landed jobs in the cafe.

"We put our trust in the universe," Michalski said. Then the pandemic began. As the island shut down, the couple quarantined together with their dog B. They returned to work at Doe Bay, only to leave again during another wave of COVID-19 cases.

"During the second shut down, we started doing to-go orders in our pop-up restaurant at Odd Fellows, one day a week," Michalski said. "We always knew we'd work together."

In January, the Sunday Supper Pop-up expanded to Friday through Sunday, serving chicken and waffles, pho and banh mi, to go. Michalski, who was the manager of Darvill's coffee shop, recently joined Thompkins full-time in the restaurant.

"We have a blast. We high-five way too much," she said. "We take our job really seriously. It's an honor to feed our community. Intuitively, we pick up where the other leaves off. What Katie doesn't do, I pick up. Katie is still teaching me how to cook. It's a dance. Katie is a scientist, the way she understands food. I come into work humbled."

The couple is celebrating another achievement: marriage. Early on, they knew their search for love had come to an end. Michalski broached the topic after their first Christmas together.

"We talked about what getting married meant to both of us," she said.

Added Thompkins: "There is so much pressure to put on someone to do the proposing. We wanted to start things off equally and as a partnership."

They chose rings and booked a special dinner at The Willows Inn on Lummi Island. While en route, they received news that Thompkins' father was admitted to the hospital. So they turned around and went back to Seattle. Later that day, they proposed to each other in their backyard, and a few weeks later celebrated a second proposal during a rescheduled

SEE LOVE, PAGE 2

Vikings b-ball brings the heat



COREY WISCOMB PHOTOS

Above: Sofia Mahoney-Jauregui (with Shaye Spinner ready to assist) floats down the lane and into the air. She is now able to play varsity basketball as an eighth-grader since the WIAA rule change. Despite often being the youngest on the court, her hard work and athleticism combine for many highlights. Right: Rising to the challenge, yet again, is Remi Lago. The freshman was called upon to play a larger role in Saturday's playoff game due to COVID illness amongst teammates. He was one of the leading scorers and rebounders in the Vikings' round one playoff win.



BY JEFFERSON FREEMAN AND COREY WISCOMB

The Vikings guaranteed themselves another playoff matchup after two home wins this past Saturday.

The girls took care of business by thrashing Shoreline Christian with a final score of 72-29. They stayed steady on offense all game long, taking a 40-point lead in the second half. Scoring was led by sophomore Bethany Carter, freshman Ava Ashcraft and eighth-grader Sofia Mahoney-Jauregui. Solid defensive play balanced the Vikings out and was highlighted by a tough press that forced many turnovers from Shoreline. It was definitely the kind of aggressive play that a coach wants to see out of the team as they head into the postseason.

The Orcas girls have now qualified for a spot in the Tri-District tournament. In the meantime, they will continue Tuesday, Feb. 8 with another playoff game that will determine seeding for the tournament. They will head to Marysville to take on number two ranked Grace Academy. If they can make a strong showing at districts then they will further qualify to make the final 16 team cut and head to state to play for the championship.

The boys' squad headed into Saturday's matchup with only seven players due to much of the team at home with COVID. They needed everything they could get from those seven as they narrowly escaped a fourth-quarter comeback out of soccer rivals Providence Classical Christian by a score of 59-57. The Vikings did not fold and did not yield to the older Providence team.

Junior Paxton White was not shy about coming out aggressive and helped fire up the team. His rebounding and post play was key to the win. But White would take an early exit due to fouling out, leaving the coaching staff to go deeper to the bench. The lone senior, Odi Salinas Cruz, played one of the best games of his career when his team needed him most. Salinas has always been a dead-eye shooter if left open, and Providence kept leaving him unguarded on the three-point line. In one short stretch of the game, primarily the third quarter, Salinas knocked down five 3-point baskets to grant his team huge momentum.

While only a sophomore, Sam Sutton played like a veteran on the floor. He was the dominant ball-handler and as always a tenacious defender. Sutton's game kept the defense honest because of his balance between scoring and passing. Sophomore Orion Meskeu stepped up big to come in and play a role on the floor for his team with strong defense and rebounding. Sophomore Andrew Garcia saw more minutes in the playoff game than he'd seen in any regular-season game — and he took full use of it. Like a speedster on defense, Garcia led the team in steals, which he then converted into fast break scores. And freshman Remi Lago, who has been a consistent contributor all season long, stayed steady as a scorer, rebounder and defender. Lago just has a way of being involved in so many plays of the game. He's always around the ball, and he's a stat-sheet stuffer because he makes plays.

While the boys did hold a nearly 20-point lead at one time, a passionate and driven Providence team mounted a massive comeback all the way to the end of the fourth quarter where Orcas put the final nail in the coffin as the Orcas boys team won the nailbiter by 2 points.

The Vikings hoping to return more healthy players to the roster before Tuesday's upcoming game against league juggernaut Lummi in the next round of playoffs.

Reasons for high OPALCO bill

Submitted by OPALCO.

There was a perfect storm of compounding factors that made our power bills very high this month. The power bills in January include power usage during a prolonged cold snap where temperatures dipped into the teens between Christmas and New Years. With home heating systems working hard to keep up with the weather, a couple of things happened:

energy usage went up, doubling in many cases, and the demand for power exceeded the normal range resulting in steep demand charges (~\$300k) from Bonneville Power Administration.

The way demand charges appear on your bill is in the Energy Charge Adjustment line item, which trues up revenue variances — mostly due to weather — each month. The ECA appears as a credit on your bill most months. In 2021, the ECA credited a net of \$1,293,579 to members. The OPALCO budget on predicted revenue from the sale of energy is conservative, which mostly results in ECA credits.

After hearing from members who were concerned about their high bills and some discussion with board members, General Manager Foster Hildreth suggested adjusting the formula of the ECA to smooth out the bigger surcharges — and credits — that occur with anomalies in weather and therefore usage. "We can do better," said Hildreth, "and listening to our membership is what makes our co-op better."

Members can listen in on that discussion at the regular meeting of the Board via Zoom on Thursday, Feb. 17. Member comments and questions are taken at the beginning of each meeting.

Another factor contributing to this month's high bill is the timing

of the 2022 rate increase of 4%, and added an average of \$4/mo (based on average residential usage). You can learn more about your household usage in SmartHub with detailed usage charts.

The Member Service Team is available by phone to help with payment plans and there are bill assistance programs available for members who are struggling to pay — this month or anytime. Project PAL provides a grant once each heating season of at least \$150 to qualified members and the Energy Assistance Program provides a bill credit based on household size every month. Apply at www.opalco.com or at the resource center.

It's a good time to get curious about where you could improve the efficiency of your home or business. OPALCO has rebates and on-bill financing to make your building more comfortable while saving money on energy spending. Get started with an energy audit: <https://energysavings.opalco.com/energy-savings/measure-your-energy/home-snapshot-assessments/>.

These high bills illustrate a flaw in how OPALCO — and most utilities — collect revenue: based on sales of energy (kWh). Currently, the service access charge (\$50.35 residential) collects only 43% of fixed operational costs and the Co-op depends on the sale of energy to cover the rest of the cost of the electrical grid.

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Q&A with the Bennetts

Erin and Emily Bennett fell in love quickly after they began dating in the summer of 2014.

They married in July 2018, run their business Orcas Video together and are parents to Emily's two children: Makai, 18 and Malia, 15.

Sounder: How did you two meet?

Erin: I was working and living at a mutual friend's house, and Emily came back to Orcas for her brother's memorial. I was working and her kids were jumping on the trampoline. I got roped into power boosting them, and after a few games they said with excitement that I had to meet their mom. We met in the kitchen.

Sounder: What was your first impression of each other?

Emily: My heart fluttered and I thought Erin was drop-dead gorgeous. He had a bright smile that filled the room. Magnetic.

Erin: My first impression was "here is a beautiful being." She was a confident, calm and beautiful woman playing slack key guitar for her super smart kids. I was in awe, and felt a sense that everything was and will always be okay emanating

from Emily. Safe to say I was smitten and didn't want to leave her side from the start.

Sounder: Describe your marriage proposal.

Erin: I carried a wedding ring around for a year before I proposed. It went to some mountains in Kauai, vineyards in northern California and all over Orcas before the moment felt right. Her birthday was coming up and I thought it might be the right opportunity. We both have massive families, and I wrangled as many of her siblings together to come to Orcas for a surprise party. We were also in the "Rock of Orcas" show, so I invited all the cast members and my parents. I lit a candle for her happy birthday song, but asked her to marry me instead. No one knew I was going to propose. It was a great surprise.

Emily: I, of course, gasped, covered my mouth, started crying, then grabbed his face and kissed him while everyone in the background started singing happy birthday. When the song was over someone said, "what did she say?!" That's when I finally found my words and said "YES"!!!

Sounder: What was one of your favorite moments from the wedding?

Emily: Oh my goodness so many great moments! My daughter sang at our ceremony, we flashed mobbed the crowd for our first dance and my best friend gave the most hilarious, fun-loving roasting of a speech. But I think my favorite moment was looking up from the dance floor and seeing all of our friends and family there dancing the night away. So much happiness everywhere!

Erin: Our dance. We started slow dancing to a Sade song and had Jake pretend like the song cut out, then went into the Taylor Swift song "Delicate" and an awesome choreographed dance that Malia created for us. Dancing together, and playing/listening to music are my favorite memories.

Sounder: Why did you decide to go into business together?

Emily: We accidentally went into business together really. I was a huge fan of Erin's photography and videography and really encouraged him to go for it. His work was more of a hobby for me in the beginning. And then all of a sudden he needed more help and I was joining in on meetings and then operating camera B and C. It is a constantly unfolding



Above: Emily and Erin Bennett at their wedding.

BIANCA COX PHOTO

process. It has been special (sometimes challenging) to work with your spouse, but we somehow do it and push through the rough spots. Let's be honest, we do quarrel! I can't imagine it any other way though, I love that we work together.

Erin: We went into business together because it made sense, and we both wanted to do photography and videography. When we met I was (and still am) interested in 100 different things, and Emily suggested that I was really good at photos/video and pursue it. We have many projects under our belts at this point, and have worked through many

challenges. The fact that we live with each other and are basically always with each other gives us the chance to share ideas and brainstorm as inspiration strikes.

Sounder: How do you show up for each other in the relationship?

Emily: No matter how tired we are Erin always finds energy to rub my feet and he is patient with my shortcomings beyond measure. I've never met someone more kind and patient, even when I'm grumpy.

Erin: Emily has believed in me 100% from the day we met. She removes obstacles from my path. If Ganesh was a girl I would call her my

ganesh. She trusts my vision even when she can't see the finished product in her head and helps however she can.

Sounder: Where do you see yourselves in 10 years?

Emily: I hope we have our own boat and can travel throughout the Puget Sound, filming underwater fauna and flora.

Erin: Here on Orcas, gardening, wood working, making art, walking dogs, petting cats, adventuring around the islands and up the inside passage, traveling abroad and photographing/filming in the winters, and going to Malia's concerts wherever they are.

LOVE FROM 1

meal at The Willows. Their wedding was on

Aug. 28, 2021 at their Orcas home, in their garden. It was a small affair with family and close friends, who

visited for a week leading up to the ceremony. The couple says "everyone is still talking about it."

"We had a rehearsal the night before," Michalski remembers. "It was a procession with siblings and best friends. Katie and I had a moment right before where we said, 'Should we do our vows real quick?' We shared a whiskey and recited our vows to just one another. We had that moment to ourselves during the week of wedding chaos." Their favorite memory

from the wedding was the day after when their guests were still in town.

"We were all sitting on our deck at the table, eating leftovers. Sharing time with our family and friends, people coming and going — it was so magical," Thompkins said.

The two love to travel and spend as much time together as they can. Thompkins' most cherished times are "just waking up and having coffee on the deck as the sun hits our faces."


"One of the things I admire most about Cat is her ability to be present," she said. "It makes for some of the most beautiful moments I've ever had. I have never met anyone like Cat. She is down for anything! She is so much fun."

Michalski says Thompkins is the nicest person she knows, and that they are "two old biddies in young women's bodies" who laugh together every day.

"Katie is very patient and kind. She is just the sweetest. I admire how

even-keeled you are," she said, turning towards her wife. "You bring me back down to earth when I have my head in the clouds. Love will change your whole life if you let it. There are so many benefits to truly being in love."

About the artist



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Our Valentine's Day art this week is brought to you by local artist Jon Spinogatti.

He moved to Orcas full time 3 years ago with his wife, two children and Mini Schnauzer. He has been an actor, real estate investor and for the past couple of years has gone back to studying one of his oldest passions: art.

Learn more at [instagram.com/spino53art](https://www.instagram.com/spino53art).

Spinogatti can be seen on stage at the Orcas Center from time to time as well as the Island Market where he's always muddling around the fruit section.



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