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'Til DIY Do Us Part

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Abstract: Whether it was a sanctioned soiree or not is beside the point. What matters is that a punk band, some of whose members had, like McNatt and Samson, gone to Foothill High in Tustin, was playing. "We knew of each other in high school, but we never really hung out," explains McNatt of why the two didn't recognize each other. Samson didn't even realize the party she was attending was at the McNatt home. No problem. Samson, 28, had no intention of breaking this guy's heart. In fact, soon the couple was sharing a guest house at his parent's home in North Tustin. Samson worked at a nearby escrow office while plodding toward a degree in elementary education at Cal State Fullerton. McNatt, 30, was employed selling motorcycles. "We had a nice situation. We were not engaged, but living with his parents," Samson said. However, it didn't last. "[Brennan McNatt DIY] had goals. He didn't want to get engaged or married before he owned a home." He's thrifty. One day mom and son went to Costco, ostensibly "just looking" at engagement rings. [Cindy McNatt] steered him toward a setting with a vintage vibe. "He was like, 'Yes, that's perfect. That's the one.' And I was like, 'OK! We'll take it!'"

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Full text: It started with the two simple words any woman wants to hear from her future husband. "You're beautiful," Brennan McNatt said to Nicole Samson. They were at a party at his house - well, the home of his parents, Victor and Cindy McNatt, while the parents vacationed in Hawaii. Whether it was a sanctioned soiree or not is beside the point. What matters is that a punk band, some of whose members had, like McNatt and Samson, gone to Foothill High in Tustin, was playing. "We knew of each other in high school, but we never really hung out," explains McNatt of why the two didn't recognize each other. Samson didn't even realize the party she was attending was at the McNatt home. Months followed, and the two kept running into each other at the band's gigs. Each time, McNatt said something charming - but brief - and vanished. Finally Samson had to ask a mutual friend about this man of mystery. "I guess at about the same time he was also asking about me. All I remember is that our friend said to me, 'You can date him, but do not break his heart.'" The friend was being protective because McNatt had gone through a rough breakup and had had major jaw surgery, all within the past year. No problem. Samson, 28, had no intention of breaking this guy's heart. In fact, soon the couple was sharing a guest house at his parent's home in North Tustin. Samson worked at a nearby escrow office while plodding toward a degree in elementary education at Cal State Fullerton. McNatt, 30, was employed selling motorcycles. "We had a nice situation. We were not engaged, but living with his parents," Samson said. However, it didn't last. "Brennan had goals. He didn't want to get engaged or married before he owned a home." Southern California real estate prices made home ownership doubtful, so they decided to try their luck in Colorado, where Samson has family. McNatt scoured employment ads until he found a motorcycle-sales job just north of Denver; Samson, meanwhile, stayed with his parents until she finished her degree. These committed DIYers couldn't wait to find a "beater" house they could transform. Once Samson graduated and moved to Colorado, they found one in a run-down trilevel. They got to work painting the place - inside and out - with recycled free paint from the Orange County Household Hazardous Waste Recycling Center in Irvine. But Nicole still didn't have a ring. "My son is cautious and methodical - and he tends to drag his feet a bit," observes Cindy McNatt, a Register home and garden staff writer. And he's thrifty. One day mom and son went to Costco, ostensibly "just looking" at engagement rings. Cindy steered him toward a setting with a vintage vibe. "He was

like, 'Yes, that's perfect. That's the one.' And I was like, 'OK! We'll take it!' " What the future groom lacked in impulsiveness, he made up with style. He popped the question in an elaborate setup that involved the full McNatt clan, as well as members of Samson's blended family, including her mother and stepfather as well as her father and stepmother. "We were all supposedly meeting up for this huge family camping trip in the Sierras," Samson says. Just on cue when they got to a high mountain lake, Cindy McNatt suggested they take family photos. First up were Brennan and Nicole. After fiddling with a nearby rock (an excuse to get down on one knee), he proposed amid the entire clan. While Samson was at first "a little overwhelmed," she says, "It was also really cool because everyone got to take part in it. Of course, I said 'yes!' " Cameras started flashing, Champagne materialized, and the families toasted to the newly engaged couple. That was August 13, 2012. When the McNatts finally walked down the aisle on Jan. 26, it was another family affair. "Actually the whole thing really centered on the idea that we wanted to include our friends and family as much as possible," said the bride. The venue: The senior McNatts' home garden. The feel: rustic chic/do-it-yourself dazzling. These highly committed DIYers are also pennywise. "We walked down a burlap aisle and we had mason jars as glasses," says Samson. Burlap also served as table covers, and the cake stands came from wood slabs cut in the high Sierras by the groom's father. The groom's sister supplied hand-painted decorative garden signs. The bride wore an ivory form-fitting Tara Keely lace gown with a sweetheart neckline while the groom gave a nod to his family's Scottish ancestry by wearing a kilt. Though Brennan says the kilt was extremely comfortable, he changed into gray slacks after the ceremony. The backyard garden was doctored by Cindy McNatt. A quick run to the nursery days before the wedding produced pansies, snap dragons and nemesia. "I grabbed whatever happened to be blooming and I just plugged them in," said Cindy, who focused mainly on white flowers. The family also hung lanterns in a big pepper tree, votive candles and a working chandelier. Mosquito netting covered tree trunks and bistro lights twinkled. The bride's stepmother, Peggy, a buyer with TJ Maxx/HomeGoods, bought inexpensive mercury glass candle holders and lanterns for the tables, which friend Hilary Wolf, who runs Bohemian Botanicals, adorned with baby's breath, miniature white and pale pink roses, white dahlias, white hydrangeas and dusty miller. She also put masses of baby's breath in the galvanized steel buckets that lined the aisle. Just hours before the wedding, though, it was raining. So much so that the bride and her attendants dashed to Nordstrom and picked up Hunter rain boots. The other members of the family were left to brainstorm Rustic Chic Wedding Plan B. However, around 11:30 a.m. the clouds parted, the sun came out and the McNatt household scrambled to set up tables and chairs. Plan A would work out after all. But, as any wedding worth its salt has, there was one hitch. Samson's yellow Lab, Kita, outfitted with a fresh flower collar, trotted down the aisle and, muddy paws and all, jumped up on Samson. "There I was at the altar and I felt this hit on my left from behind and heard this 'oohh!' from everyone," said Samson. Kita had also pulled the veil out of her hair. "One of my bridesmaids scooped up my veil and someone brushed off my dress and we just kept going. I was like, 'Whatever!' " wedding Wedding: Family affair "The whole thing really centered on the idea that we wanted to include our friends and family as much as possible." Nicole Samson Nicole Samson and Brennan McNatt DIY their Tustin nuptials Illustration Caption: PHOTOS: Christian Kaysen

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