

CELEBRATIONS

Heaven-sent

Couple never would have found one another if not for their friend.

Bob Baghai always told his best friend, Geoff Schmitzer, that he should meet this girl named Erika Chavez from Escondido. She was beautiful, she was smart, she was always going out of her way to help others. Bob had met her at one of the many parties he threw on the weekends at a condo Geoff owned in San Diego. Geoff himself was never there because he was with his son on the weekends.

This girl, Erika, she had a boyfriend, but Bob didn't really think that relationship was meant to be. "Trust me, if you just talk to her it won't be a problem," Bob told Geoff. "I think you guys are perfect for each other."

Geoff wasn't so sure. He'd just been through a painful divorce and was a little bit shy to say the least. Plus, what did he need a girlfriend for? He had Bob.

"Bob was like my 'rock' with my partner," says the 30-year-old founder of Image One Graphics in San Clemente. "If



Chavez wore jewelry from Macy's. Her dress and veil are from designer Alfred Angelo. She wouldn't have had a wedding day without the insistence of her and husband Geoff Schmitzer's friend Bob that the two should not see each other.

SEE HEAVEN-SENT PAGE 2

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Brienne is a photographer based out of Southern California, available for local and international travel. With a modern, editorial style, and nearly eight years of experience, she is the right choice for couples looking for fresh photographic creativity. Blessed to have discovered what she is made to do, Brienne lives during her passion with others as they strive for it to their love to create images worthy of publishing in "Style Me Pretty", "Groom's Journal", "Destination BOD", "Over Lined Wedding". The professional, experienced Brienne receives a client-to-client referral asks her to continue capturing all their important moments in life, not just ones. Brienne is talented with weddings, brides and family photography. And don't worry, she takes digital negatives and always prints to keep.

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Bob Baghai always told his best friend, Geoff Schnitzer, that he should meet this girl named Erika Chavez from Escondido. She was beautiful, she was smart, she was always going out of her way to help others. Bob had met her at one of the many parties he threw on the weekends at a condo Geoff owned in San Diego. Geoff himself was never there because he was with his son on the weekends.

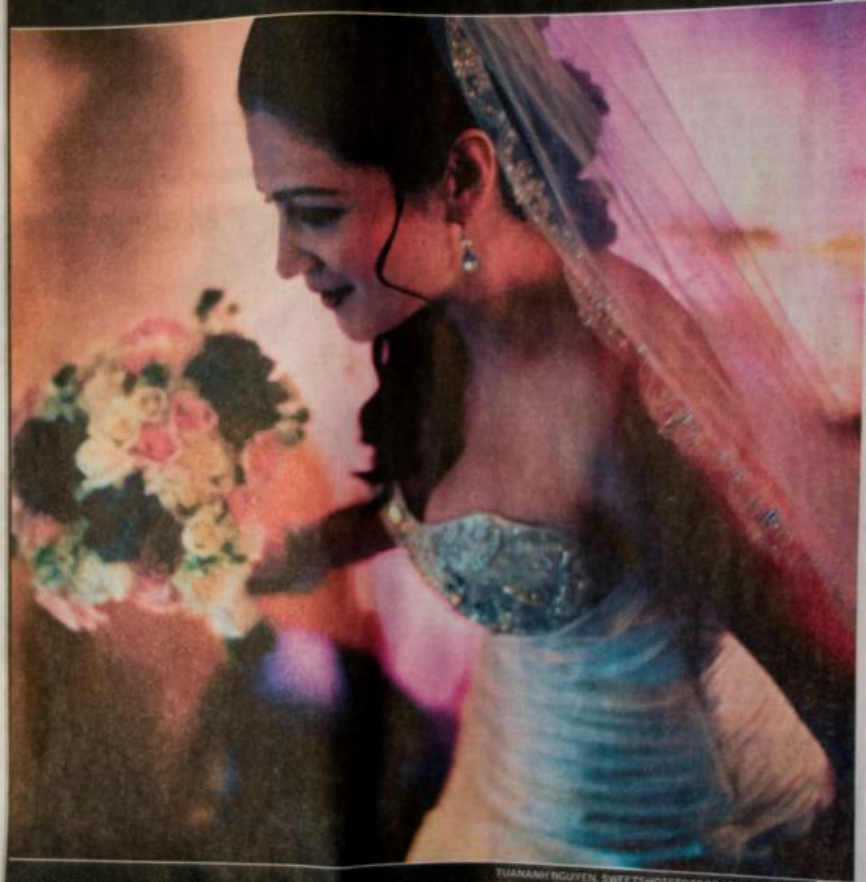


SAMANTHA DUNN
REGISTER WRITER

This girl, Erika, she had a boyfriend, but Bob didn't really think that relationship was meant to be. "Trust me, if you just talk to her, it won't be a problem," Bob told Geoff. "I think you guys are perfect for each other."

Geoff wasn't so sure. He'd just been through a painful divorce and was a little gun shy, to say the least. Plus, what did he need a girlfriend for? He had Bob.

"Bob was like my 'work wife,' my partner," says the 30-year-old founder of Image One Graphics in San Clemente. "If



Chavez wore jewelry from Macy's. Her dress and veil are from designer Alfred Angelo. She wouldn't have had a wedding day without the insistence of her and husband Geoff Schnitzer's friend Bob that the two should see one another.

SEE HEAVEN-SENT PAGE 2

Heaven-sent

FROM PAGE 1

...went on vacation, he would...
...the vacation, they would go...
...dinner and just have fun...
...time? If you ever saw that...
...Bob and Fig, it was the...
...He was the big dude, I was...
...the little guy. We just had fun...
...hanging out together."

The DJ's always helped each...
...out - when Geoff was going...
...through his breakup, Bob was the...
...he needed in. When Bob de...
...ed to lose weight - he was a...
...of a man, at one point he...
...the scales at 400 pounds - Ge...
...off was there to encourage him...
...to stick to his eating plan and...
...work out with his trainer. Suc...
...cess! Bob lost 300 pounds - heck...
...his cholesterol level was better...
...than Geoff's. Life was good.

That's why it was so strange...
...one Erika when Geoff didn't get...
...a call back from his friend. All day...
...Thursday, he had no messages. "I...
...just had a weird feeling," says Ge...
...off.

He had plans to take his son...
...Dylan to an Agave game, but...
...that weird feeling wouldn't go...
...away. He told his ex-wife he'd be...
...a little late to pick up Dylan be...
...cause he was going to swing by...
...their house to check on him.

When Geoff got to the house...
...nobody said Bob's car hadn't...
...left the driveway in days. Weird...
...He rang the doorbell, he sent...
...texts.

Nothing. Weirder still...
...He went around the back of the...
...house, and that's when he saw his...
...friend through the bedroom win...
...dow, face-down on the bed.

Geoff rolled his head and frantically...
...tried to help his best friend, but it...
...was far too late. The big man's...
...heart had just stopped. Bob was...
...gone at age 34.

Geoff gave the obituary at the fi...
...nal. All Bob's friends and fami...
...ly came up to thank him for his...
...support, including Erika Chavez...
...He recognized her from the pic...
...ture Bob had once shown him...
...She told him she was sorry for his...
...loss, and then she was gone. And...
...that was the end of it. Or so Geoff...
...thought.

But a few months later, a group...
...of Bob's friends decided to get...
...together to go see a Padres game...
...as a way to honor Bob. Everybody...
...missed him. He had always been...
...the life of the party, the center of...
...a constellation of friends, like...
...a great big shining sun who held...
...everyone in his orbit.

So Geoff went, and who should...
...be there but Erika. She was sin...
...gle now - Bob had been right...
...about that relationship. She has...
...beautiful eyes. Geoff couldn't...
...forget those. And then they started...
...talking. And talking some more...
...Who won the game? Who knows?

For her part, Erika - who by...
...the way had absolutely no idea...
...Bob had talked about her to Geoff...
...- thought Geoff was a nice guy...
...Cute, even. But boyfriend materi...



PHOTO: THOMAS HUYER, GETTY IMAGES/PHOTOGRAPHER

Schnitzer remembers thinking "whoa" when he laid eyes on his bride.



The couple stands with the family of Bob Baghal, the friend who brought them together. From left: his brother Brian Bahdad Baghal, Chavez and Schnitzer, mother Manigah Haeri and father Alexza Baghal.



The groom gets a kiss from his son and best man, Dylan Schnitzer, 9.

all? He was divorced, he had a son...
...to see nine years older, he lived...
...in a mansion away. Plus, he was...
...Jewish and she was Christian. "I...
...was like, this would never work,"...
...says Erika, 30. "Even though we...
...had a lot, I could see never just...
...going to be good friends."

He was indeed a man with impu...
...gence. A whole Renaissance colle...
...ction's worth. "He told me he had...
...to leave because it was his turn to...
...pick up the dogs from his ex-wife...
...Split evenly of the dogs? How...
...much more can a girl take?"

She was sure such hard...
...would be insurmountable, but...
...somehow it never was. Her son...
...loved her, his family loved her, she...
...and Geoff's ex-wife got along...
...great - heck, even Geoff's ex-wi...
...fere loved her.

It was almost like Bob was...
...there, making it all work - in fact...
...Erika and Geoff thought, maybe...
...he was. Bob had always joked...
...that the number 808 was "Bob...
...time," because the numerals sort...
...of resembled his name. Sure...
...enough, when they were together...
...- which was practically all the...
...time - the number 808 showed up...
...everywhere, randomly. On ad...
...dresses, license plates, price tags...
...- everywhere. Erika was begin...
...ning to think she'd be that old be...
...fore Geoff got around to asking...
...her to marry him.

There went by Thru, in fact...
...One Thursday Geoff and Erika...
...took Bob's mom, Manigah Haeri...
...out for dinner to celebrate Bob's...
...birthday.

"It was just a normal day, a ran...
...dom day of the week," remem...
...bers Erika. They picked Dylan up...
...from football, Geoff wanted to get...
...from yogurt, the usual. "We...
...were walking back to the car, and...
...Geoff opens up the trunk. He has...
...a little box wrapped all silly in...
...Christmas paper. Dylan said...
..."Thanks for volunteering on my...
...football team" - and it looked like...
...Dylan had wrapped it. So I open...
...it, and inside was a box for a...
...clock, and the clock said 808."

But when she opened it, there...
...was no actual clock, only a mantle...
...envelop with a ring in it. And then...
...Geoff was down on one knee in...
...the parking lot, asking her to be...
...his bride and Dylan's stepmum...
...my. Bob's mom was crying, and...
...Erika realized then that Geoff...
...had been stalling all day to arrive...
...at this perfect time, 8:08 in the...
...evening, on Bob's birthday.

Little, her ring was engraved...
..."808, HFE." Geoff turned to Bob's...
...mom and told her, "It's wasn't for...
...your son, we would have never...
...met."

And when they married this...
...past Feb. 22 at Casino San Cleme...
...nte, says Erika, "We had Bob's...
...mother and father with us, to see...
...what their son had done from...
...heaven."

CONTACT THE WRITER:
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714-796-6882



On the road to wedded bliss, Schnitzer and Chavez stand with their wedding party.

CORRECTION

The story "All in the Family" was written by Amanda Fletcher because of a designer's error, the byline for the story on Page 1 of the Celebrations section in the May 4 edition of the Register was incorrect.

We will promptly correct factual errors. Call 714-796-7951 or e-mail corrections@ocregister.com. Legal demands for correction must be in writing and sent to the publisher at P.O. Box 10428, Santa Ana, CA 92711-0428.

Heaven-sent

FROM PAGE 1

When Geoff went on vacation, he would plan the vacation. We would go on double dates and just have fun, you know? If you ever saw that show 'Rob and Big,' it was like that. He was the big dude, I was the little guy. We just had fun hanging out together."

The BFFs always helped each other out - when Geoff was going through his breakup, Bob was the one he confided in. When Bob decided to lose weight - he was a bear of a man, at one point tipping the scales at 400 pounds - Geoff was there to encourage him to stick to his eating plan and work out with his trainer. Success! Bob lost 100 pounds - heck, his cholesterol level was better than Geoff's. Life was good.

That's why it was so strange one Friday when Geoff didn't get a call back from his friend. All day Saturday, no text, no messages. "I just had a weird feeling," says Geoff.

He had plans to take his son Dylan to an Angels game, but that weird feeling wouldn't go away. He told his ex-wife he'd be a little late to pick up Dylan because he was going to swing by Bob's house to check on him.

When Geoff got to the house, neighbors said Bob's car hadn't left the driveway in days. Weird. He rang the doorbell, he sent texts.

Nothing. Weirder still.

He went around the back of the house, and that's when he saw his friend through the bedroom window, facedown on the bed.

Geoff called 911 and frantically tried to help his best friend, but it was far too late. The big man's heart had just stopped. Bob was gone at age 34.

Geoff gave the eulogy at the funeral. All Bob's friends and family came up to thank him for his words, including Erika Chavez. He recognized her from the picture Bob had once shown him. She told him she was sorry for his loss, and then she was gone. And that was the end of it. Or so Geoff thought.

But a few months later, a group of Bob's friends decided to get to-

gether. He was divorced, he had a son, he was nine years older, he lived 45 minutes away. Plus, he was Jewish and she was Christian. "I was like, this would never work," says Erika, 30. "Even though we hit it off, I said we were just going to be good friends."

He was indeed a man with baggage. A whole Samsonite collection's worth. "He told me he had to leave because it was his turn to pick up the dogs from his ex-wife. Split custody of the dogs? How much more can a girl take?"

She was sure each hurdle would be insurmountable, but somehow it never was. His son loved her, his family loved her, she and Geoff's ex-wife got along great - heck, even Geoff's ex-in-laws liked her.

It was almost like Bob was there, making it all work - in fact, Erika and Geoff thought, maybe he was. Bob had always joked that the number 808 was "Bob time," because the numerals sort of resembled his name. Sure enough, when they were together - which was practically all the time - the number 808 showed up everywhere, randomly. On addresses, license plates, price tags - everywhere. Erika was beginning to think she'd be that old before Geoff got around to asking her to marry him.

Years went by. Three, in fact. One Thursday Geoff and Erika took Bob's mom, Manigeh Haeri, out for dinner to celebrate Bob's birthday.

"It was just a normal day, a random day of the week," remembers Erika. They picked Dylan up from football, Geoff wanted to get frozen yogurt, the usual. "We were walking back to the car, and Geoff opens up the trunk. He has a little box wrapped all silly in Christmas paper. Dylan said 'Thanks for volunteering on my football team' - and it looked like Dylan had wrapped it. So I open it, and inside was a box for a clock, and the clock said 808."

But when she opened it, there was no actual clock, only a manila envelop with a ring in it. And then Geoff was down on one knee in the parking lot, asking her to be his bride and Dylan's stepmom-



PHOTOS: TUANANH NGUYEN, SWEETSHOTSFOTOGRAFIE.COM

Schnitzer remembers thinking "whoa!" when he laid eyes on his bride.

gether to go see a Padres game as a way to honor Bob. Everybody missed him. He had always been the life of the party, the center of a constellation of friends, like a great big shining sun who held everyone in his orbit.

So Geoff went, and who should be there but Erika. She was single now - Bob had been right about that relationship. She has beautiful eyes; Geoff couldn't forget those. And then they started talking. And talking some more. Who won the game? Who knows? For her part, Erika - who by the way had absolutely no idea Bob had talked about her to Geoff - thought Geoff was a nice guy. Cute, even. But boyfriend materi-



The couple stands with the family of Bob Baghal, the friend who brought them together. From left: His brother Brian Behdad Baghal, Chavez and Schnitzer, mother Maniqeh Haeri and father Alireza Baghal.



The groom gets a kiss from his son and best man, Dylan Schnitzer, 9.

my. Bob's mom was crying, and Erika realized then that Geoff had been stalling all day to arrive at this perfect time, 8:08 in the evening, on Bob's birthday.

Inside, her ring was engraved "808, BFF." Geoff turned to Bob's mom and told her, "If it wasn't for your son, we would have never met."

And when they married this past Feb. 22 at Casino San Clemente, says Erika, "We had Bob's mother and father with us, to see what their son had done from heaven."

CONTACT THE WRITER:
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