

# Life *in the* Valley

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PHOTOS BY DANNY KIMSPECIAL TO THE SILVERTON APPEAL

Joanna Champion and Tristan Cooper take to the floor during their wedding reception.

## After many moons, a marriage meant to be

ANNETTE UTZ  
FOR THE STAYTON MAIL

It wasn't a whirlwind or Harlequin romance by any means. Neither was it old-fashioned wooing or a Disney fairy tale. But when Tristan Cooper of Silverton and Joanna Champion of Rochester, N.Y., finally met in person after years of chatting online, they both sensed their cross-country courtship would have a storybook ending.

It began in 2000 when Cooper and Champion, both 14, were introduced by Cooper's online gaming buddy. During the next nine years, their friendly banter became daily musings.

"It sort of became like a habit," Cooper said. "We'd come home and talk about our day, what we did, joke a bit, but it was more than that and it continued to grow. There was a kind of magnetism and attraction there."

Chapter two opened in 2009 when they decided it only made sense to have a face-to-face and met in Seattle, it being neutral ground.

"I was anxious that it would change what we had, if our relationship would be different," Cooper said. "Part of me worried that it would be the end of our story. But once we met, it was clear it would work out."

Champion experienced the same butterflies.

"I was very, very nervous," she admitted. "I didn't know what to expect, whether it would be the same between us, if it would be as easy or would it be awkward. Luckily, we got along as well as ever and it was very comfortable."

It was only at that point that their parents were told of the burgeoning romance.

"Until then, we didn't really know how to describe what was happening -- were we pen pals, friends or what? -- but after so long, once we met and started 'dating' we realized we had to explain what was going on," Champion said.

"My folks were very surprised but happy because I seemed so happy."

For Tristan's parents, Chris and Karen Cooper, the news also came out of the blue, but Chris may have had a hint years before.

"I busted Tristan one day when he was playing hooky from school and on the computer," he said. "I assumed he was playing computer games and left it at that. He was actually chatting with Joanna -- but I had no idea. My own



Tristan Cooper, Silverton, and Joanna Champion, Rochester, exchange vows during their wedding in January.

observation is that they're such a great match. Joanna is very calm, very inclusive of everyone and the two are kind of soulmates."

Karen added: "We were always a little bit suspicious, as Tristan is private and he would always mention his gaming friends going to conventions like Comicon and other similar geeky events. We just assumed it was a bunch of guys. So when we finally knew they were an item, it was more of an 'ooh, yeah.'"

"We were of course very pleased that Tristan met someone who was so good for him and that his devotion was obvious. Joanna's sweet and unassuming nature was an instant hit. It didn't hurt that she was a catalyst for his own coming-of-age and professional focus."

The couple had a trial run for a

more permanent relationship when Champion moved to Portland for the summer following the completion of her MA in Visual Culture from NYU. Several ensuing visits only led to more difficult departures and that cemented Tristan's decision to pull up roots after he finished his English degree at Portland State and join Champion in Manhattan in 2013.

The couple married Jan. 21, 2017, at New York City's Thalassa Restaurant, an elegant site known for hosting family-style weddings. It was a multi-cultural affair, incorporating elements of Tristan's Scottish heritage such as the Cooper tartan and Champion's Jewish traditions with yarmulkes, dancing the hora (a circular dance that involves hoisting the bride and groom on chairs above the crowd) and stomping on a

glass to break down barriers and bring good luck.

"Actually, it was a light bulb wrapped in cloth," Tristan laughed.

The couple is currently living in Manhattan where Champion is the manager of primary research for the USA/Syfy networks and Tristan is a comedy writer for *College Humor's* sister site *Dorkly*, a position held over from his work in Portland.

"We always think about how improbable it was that we met," Tristan said. "I shutter to think about what would have happened if any of elements that led to us being together hadn't happened. I count myself fortunate to be where I am right now and so grateful that we were able to end up together."

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