

The Wedding Issue

Now that we are entering the season of weddings, several memorable ones come to mind. There was the one where the wedding party wore black formal attire with Converse shoes and their dog was the guest of honor. In fact he was everywhere: on the napkins, at the top of the cake and embellished into the favors. I mention this only because during the toasts, the bride and groom made a point of thanking their respective parents for allowing them to have the wedding of their dreams. Obviously, everybody's dream is different. In this case it seemed that the terrible trauma of controlling relatives that usually accompanies a family event was notably absent. I applaud the open minds and hearts that allowed this to happen.

My own wedding was remarkable in that I was upstaged by my soon-to-be sister-in-law. Miffed that she wasn't chosen to be one of my bridesmaids, she appeared in an ivory ensemble that flowed from head to toe and included an ivory hat and veil. Regretfully, I had chosen a simple country look with a wreath of flowers on my head. We have since repaired this "gaffe" but it took nephews to do it (she loves being an aunt more than a bridesmaid).

Each wedding seems to have its own "story" and my hope is that it is full of happiness and family connection, not family dysfunction. Planning a wedding is an arduous task but it really should be left up to the bride and groom. It's their day to shine. It's their day to declare their new identity as a couple, separate from each family-of-origin in an important way. All the future hopes and dreams of each respective family rest on the success of this union. However, it is a fragile new bond that requires tremendous support from within and without.

How can we be wedding supporters and advocates instead of "the issue"? It begins with a recognition within each family that someday our sons and daughters will be able to take their adult place in the world and we need to do everything we can to nurture their growth, aka "good parenting". We also need to step aside when the time comes for this to happen, probably way before they say their vows. We need to let them make all those relational bad choices in the hope that someone good will eventually come along. Fortunately, they do, but even if we don't fully approve, it's their choice. As parents, our job is to welcome this new member as someone to get to know and include and hopefully, love. Our job changes from supporting an individual to supporting a couple and the wedding process is an excellent time to demonstrate that.

One last wedding story is one where a minister, after having the couple recite the vows, had them pledge never to divorce one another. While this is a worthy commitment, unless it is backed by good relational “hygiene” and much training and experience, it is doomed to fail. Today’s couples need more than promises. They need models, mentors, programs and counseling to stay on track. Many churches offer marriage ministries for couples; Family Life is a Christian nonprofit organization that has organized highly successful educational weekends for couples in major U.S. cities. Other programs use marriage mentors, home study groups and marital research findings to support healthy relationships. Many engaged couples utilize pre-marital counseling to enhance their relational knowledge and trouble-shoot for future problem areas. Later counseling can be called upon to address these issues more in depth and as inevitable life crises impact the marriage. Let’s use all the tools we have available, both within our respective families and in the larger community, to keep marriage and family life healthy. In short, it may begin with a wedding but it takes a village to support a marriage.

[Note to Parents: Let your children have the kind of wedding they want. You may even enjoy it yourselves.]

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