

Weddings Then and Now

By Bob Dylak
NC News Service

Once upon a time most people were married in the bride's church on Saturday morning.

Family and friends of the bride sat on one side of the church; the groom's on the other. I never knew why.

Grooms wore dark suits. If the wedding was formal he wore a white tuxedo in the summer, a black one in other seasons. Grooms usually looked nervous.

Brides wore long white gowns with white veils and carried flowers. They threw the flowers away shortly after the ceremony. Brides looked beautiful — and nervous.

Both bride and groom were confident they would "live happily ever after."

During that time you could have gone to a wedding in Cleveland on one weekend and traveled the next weekend to a wedding in San Francisco or New York. The ceremonies would have remained the same.

One reason I'm happy to have been married for about 22 years is that our wedding took place in the "old days." We didn't have to worry too much about the ceremony. We set the date, met with the pastor a few times, talked a little bit about music and the fact that a lot of non-Catholics would be at the Mass. It was easy.

When my fiance walked up the aisle, I knew she'd follow the white carpet and I'd take

her hand and walk to the altar. Mass would be celebrated, vows exchanged and rings given as signs of our pledge. The whole procedure was as predictable as our parents' and grandparents' weddings, and as beautiful.

After the middle 1960s things changed.

Organs often were replaced by guitars, sometimes of the electric variety. Grooms sported tuxedos of all styles and hues. At times the groom didn't bother with coat and tie.

Brides didn't think they had to wear white; some didn't even wear a veil, opting for a little hat or a garland of flowers.

Throughout the next decade, many people in society at large used a wedding to express more than their faith and committed love for each other. People married while parachuting out of planes or swimming under water. They married in parks, on beaches and in fields.

During this era I attended a ceremony in a wooded grove along an Iowa river. Two young people declared themselves husband and wife in front of an Indian teepee, a minister dressed in buckskin performed the ceremony and the only music was the beat of a drum as twilight slipped into darkness.

The couple brought sincerity and seriousness to the ceremony that gave it dignity.

But things seemed to mellow out after the mid-1970s.

In church weddings, couples learned to work with priests and ministers and vice versa in planning liturgical celebrations. Couples wanted a ceremony meaningful to themselves but became more aware of the communal nature of weddings.

But some other things changed too.

Pastors and parents came to appreciate that marriages involved a lot more than a ceremony. Many dioceses adopted policies aimed at helping couples become more aware of some of the fuller dimensions of a sacramental marriage.

We all learned that, in accordance with Church teaching and tradition, the couple is key to the sacrament.

We've learned there are important aspects of the marriage that endure over the decades.

Faith.

The man and woman come to pledge their faith in each other and in God. They announce their love and respect for each other through their Church and to the community. They ask the blessings of their Church and the prayers of their community for the times ahead.

That faith hasn't changed. Neither has another important aspect of wedding — one that couples have shared since the first wedding.

Everyone joins in the hope that the newlyweds will live happily ever after!



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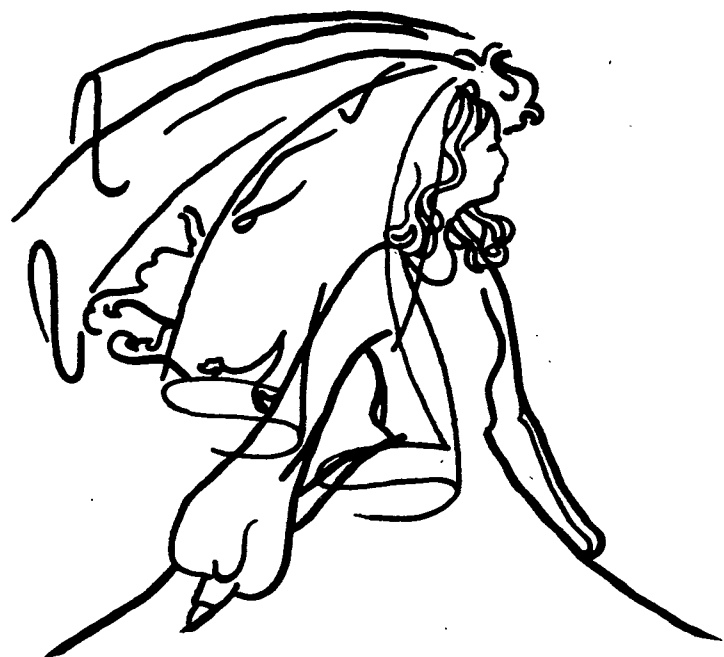
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