

- 3 -

The Wedding (War or Peace?)

If anyone doubts the solvency of the wedding industry, take a look at these figures. The average cost of a wedding in the United States today hovers around \$27,000, not including the cost of the honeymoon, the engagement ring, and a bridal consultant or a wedding planner. If you live in Memphis, Tennessee, that amount increases to almost \$33,000; in the Washington, DC area, the cost creeps to over \$56,000; and if you live in beautiful Malibu, California, the average there spikes to a whopping \$109,000!ⁱ Fortunately, many people get by on much

less, but a wedding still represents one of the major investments a family makes.

Realizing the monetary, time, and emotional investment that goes into that special day, probably one of the first discussions you need to have with your adult child and future child-in-law is to find out what beliefs and expectations **they** hold about the wedding and how **they** see your role and responsibilities. (We'll talk about who pays a little later in this chapter.)

In modern Western society, popular wedding etiquette dictates this is the "Day for the Bride." Almost every popular bridal magazine, chat forum, and wedding planning book exhorts the bride, "This is YOUR day. Do what YOU want to do!" That might sell a lot of products, but, like much of the popular advice so readily available, it needs a reality check.

Weddings have long represented not just a uniting of two people, but a joining of families and sometimes even communities, tribes, and nations. While your adult child's wedding may not influence world affairs, chances are that it may influence family affairs for years to come, and so holds a place of high importance.

When we asked survey participants, only 23% of the daughters-in-law said they had conflict with their future mother-in-law over wedding plans, but

those that reported conflict were also less likely to enjoy a current good relationship with their mother-in-law. Forty-six percent of the daughters-in-law stated they invited their future mother-in-law's participation in the wedding, and those who did were more likely to currently enjoy a good relationship with their mothers-in-law.

Let me note here that the couple may not want to involve family at all in the wedding itself, and instead they may choose to elope or go off to some isolated place, find two witnesses and a minister along the way, and tie the knot. In fact, that's exactly what two friends of mine did.

When Beverly and Terry got married, they went to one of the most beautiful spots in the country, the banks of the Snake River. They wrote their own vows and celebrated that day in a way that was totally unique and meaningful for just the two of them. They called ahead and lined up a judge in town to marry them. He told them, "Your job is to show up and mine is to find the witnesses."

The next afternoon Beverly, carrying the yellow roses her mother had wired to her, drove through the brisk air to a parking area where they met the judge. Terry, a professional photographer, had lined up a local photographer to record the wedding. She was waiting for them, so the judge went on a

search for one more witness. He found a man snapping pictures on a beaver pond and asked him to serve as the second witness. He agreed on the condition they let him take pictures of the wedding too. Two witnesses and both photographers to boot! Beverly said when the ceremony was over she looked around and both photographers were crying. That worked for Beverly and Terry, and both families understood and blessed the ceremony they chose.

Here's another story from a respondent:

"[My mother-in-law] is the type of person who would have probably loved a big wedding and all the trappings that go with it. But because of my family situation, after 6 months of being engaged, we felt eloping was the right choice. My mother-in-law is the only person we told before we eloped. She was initially shocked, and wanted to talk to us and make sure we had really thought it through, etc. Once she understood where we were coming from, she was immediately supportive. We told her our decision on a Monday afternoon, and our plan was to leave town on Tuesday morning to go to Gatlinburg and elope. We went."

However, if the happy couple plans to invite any guests at all, they will have to share the planning

of this day with other people, including their parents and in-laws. A few words about expectations seem in order.

Unrealistic expectations?

Weddings set the stage for disasters to happen. As with the holidays, the popular media paints an unrealistic picture of what a wedding must be. Movies and wedding magazines, urged on by the wedding consulting business, all portray the upcoming wedding taking place on a perfect sunny day, with perfect attendants, perfect parents and in-laws, a perfect groom, and of course, a perfect bride. In fact, all the bride has to do is to slip into her perfect wedding gown and glide down a red carpet to her beloved.

Does that sound like Cinderella or what? No wonder insurance companies now offer wedding insurance where, for pennies on the dollar, you are protected from financial liability against unforeseen problems on or before the wedding day (one more indication of the expectation for perfection). That's not to say it doesn't happen just that way somewhere, sometime, in some galaxy far, far away. Unfortunately, two things work against such a fantasy: 1) stuff happens and things don't always go as planned, and 2) each person may have a different