

Cybercolumn by Berry Simpson: Family wedding_71105

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CYBER COLUMN: Family wedding

By Berry Simpson

Anne Lamott writes: "Building a wedding is a recipe for muddle—the bridal party, the family, the guests, the minister, the vows, the food. You're attempting to make something beautiful out of unruly and unpredictable elements—the weather, the nuttier relatives, the rivalries, disorders and dreams. Out of mostly old neurotic family and friends, you hope to create something harmonious. You do so as an act of faith, hoping that for a brief period of time, the love and commitment of two people will unite everyone; and it will sort of work."

I think her description is pretty good, even if a little dark. Me, I've had great experiences with weddings. Marrying Cyndi was the best thing I've ever done and the greatest blessing God ever gave to me. All my thoughts about weddings are filtered through that rosy lens.

Berry D. Simpson

For many years now, through every wedding I've attended, I've had the same thought: What will it be like when I'm the father of the bride? Will I be able to hold myself together all the way down the aisle? Will I remember my lines, as few as they are, "Her mother and I do"? Will I be happy about

the wedding? Will I be sad? Will I try to talk Katie out of the whole thing as we walk down the aisle, or will I be happy with her decision? And like that.

But then it actually happened—my very own daughter got married. It was my turn as father of the bride, and all I could think about was how Katie radiated joy and confidence, how she was definitely ready for this, how she was so excited, and how I was so excited for her. Much to my surprise, all my thoughts were about her and not about me, not a common experience for an internalizing analytical contemplative like me.

And I made it down the aisle without crying. I didn't cry when the minister went on and on about what great people Drew and Katie are, and I didn't cry when I said my lines (correctly!) and gave Katie away. I didn't cry until I sat down next to Cyndi. Maybe I was finally relaxed enough to let down my guard and happy my part of the ceremony was over. When I sat down, though, I started crying, and I pretty much cried through the rest of the ceremony.

During the reception, I was asked several times if I was feeling broke now that it was over. My stock answer was: "I have no idea how much this cost; Cyndi wrote all the checks; and since she's more of a penny-pincher than I am, I didn't worry about money at all."

The fact was, I didn't care how much we spent. What I cared about was that Katie and Drew would know that Cyndi and I were proud of them, that we were giving our public blessing to their marriage, that we were standing up in front of all our friends and family, people who mean so much to us, and saying, "Check out our kids ... aren't they great!" It costs money to make those public statements, but I was happy to spend it. However much it was.

I have friends who joke that they've offered their own daughters a large handful of cash if they'd simple elope. Not me. To be honest, I never

understood the joke. Weddings are not about cash, but about joy and hope and the future. A wedding is a familywide, churchwide, communitywide celebration, and I want to be there when it happens.

Lamott writes: “That’s what’s so touching about weddings: Two people fall in love, and decide to see if their love might stand up over time, if there might be enough grace and forgiveness and memory lapses to help the whole shebang hang together. Yet there is also much discomfort, and expense, and your hope is that on the big day, energy will run through the lightest elements and the heaviest, the brightest and the dullest, the funniest and the most annoying, and that the whole range will converge in a ring of celebration.”

For all my years of wedding attending, and all my worries about how I would handle things when it was my turn, my daughter’s turn, my family’s turn, I never anticipated having fun. I had a great time watching Katie get married, and I never expected it to be so much fun. As I sat through the ceremony, next to Cyndi, tears rolling down my cheeks, I could only sing in my heart: “You have given me more than I could ever have wanted . . .”

Father of the bride. It was a hoot; I recommend it highly.

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