



UNIQUE WEDDINGS

**Make YOUR Wedding Day
Truly Unique!**

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Introduction

Weddings are the cause for a celebration in every society on earth and have been so for centuries. The first miracle that Jesus performed according to the New Testament was to change water into wine at a wedding. History is filled with tales of weddings and wedding celebrations.

All good fairy tales begin, "Once upon a time" and end with, "They lived happily ever after". Almost every little girl begins to plan for her 'special day' by the time she can string that many words together in a sentence. At the risk of sounding sexist, while little boys are playing cowboys and Indians or conquering outer space, little girls are trying to decide which one of them would clean up well enough to participate in her wedding.

In many societies the wedding and the wedding celebrations still follow age-old traditions. They are done the same way today that they were done hundreds of years ago. In America and some other countries, however, tradition has turned into just one choice among many and couples are opting for unique weddings that are planned around the things they love to do the most or they have themes that reflect the couple's planned life style.

Some couples, of course, stick with the traditional wedding and the traditional wedding vows and wedding celebrations, and these weddings take place in the traditional church or synagogue setting. The bride is escorted down the aisle by her father and 'given away'. The bride wears white, the groom wears a tuxedo, the bridesmaids and groomsmen are all traditionally attired. The music is traditional, the flowers are traditional, and the whole wedding and the reception that follows is traditional.

Other couples opt for 'doing their own thing' and throw tradition to the wind. They want their wedding to be totally unique. These 'unique' weddings are sometimes very beautiful and sometimes they are just plain weird or downright whacky.

These unique weddings can take place in any setting imaginable from beneath the ocean while scuba diving to on top of a mountain that is only accessible by helicopter. They have even taken place in mid-air while the couple was sky diving.

Many couples today write their own vows. The old, 'Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife' has been replaced with words of the couples own choosing.

Chapter I

Traditional and Modified Traditional Weddings

The planning and execution of the most traditional of weddings is fraught with pitfalls. It is a time when the tensions and frustrations of planning such a once-in-a-lifetime event can be really hard on the nerves...not to mention relationships....and bank accounts.

Weddings and the planning of weddings has been the subject of many movies and stage plays through the years. The movie that comes to mind is "Father of the Bride". We have all laughed our way through that one more than once.

The Traditional Wedding

What is considered a 'traditional wedding' is determined by where you are in the world, what religious requirements are deemed acceptable, and, most importantly, what the traditions are for your ethnic and religious background. The traditional American wedding and the preparations for it may have a few variations but generally the traditional American wedding follows certain guidelines.

The couple or more often the bride-to-be's parents announce the engagement and approaching marriage of their daughter in the local newspaper or at a party that they host. At least, that used to be considered very traditional. It doesn't happen very often today except, perhaps, in very high society settings.

The bride's parents (read mother) hires a wedding planner who attends to all of the details of the wedding event. The wedding planner arranges for the church or synagogue and the person who will preside over the wedding ceremony. They will do this in keeping with the wishes of the bride and her family most often. The wedding planner will determine the wishes of the bride and assist in choosing, buying and alternations of dresses and tuxedos for the bridesmaids and the groomsmen.

The first thing on the wedding planner's list is to help the bride and her mother choose the wedding invitations that will be mailed and assist in making the list of people who will be invited.

The wedding planner will make all of the arrangements for the music and musicians needed for the wedding ceremony itself, as well as, the music and musicians needed for the reception that follows the ceremony.

The flowers for the church and the corsages for the women and boutonnieres for the men will also be ordered by the wedding planner.

The wedding planner will, in addition, arrange for a place where the wedding reception will be held and for all of the food and drinks that will be served at the reception.

The wedding begins with the traditional "Bridal Chorus from Lohengrin" (Richard Wagner) (also known as "Here Comes the Bride") being played on an organ.

The flower girl walks down the aisle first scattering rose petals. She is followed by the bridesmaids escorted by the groomsmen. The minister or other officiating person and the groom are waiting at the altar. The maid of honor and the best man are the last down the aisle. Sometimes the groom and groomsmen come in with the groom rather than escorting the bridesmaids down the aisle. Both methods are considered 'traditional'.

The bride, who is dressed in a white gown and veil, is the last to walk down the aisle on the arm of her father. The minister then starts the traditional ceremony with the words, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony. Who gives this woman in marriage?"

The bride's father responds with either, "I do" or "Her mother and I do". Both responses are considered 'traditional'.

The wedding ceremony proceeds along absolutely traditional lines. The traditional vows are made and rings are exchanged.

Finally, the minister says, "I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride."

The couple goes up the aisle together and the ceremony is complete.

The guests are then usually kept waiting while the photographer takes all of the traditional pictures of the wedding party.

The traditional reception follows the traditional wedding ceremony. Receptions can consist only of wedding cake and punch or be sit-down dinners and include an orchestra.

The cost of a traditional wedding can range anywhere from a few hundred dollars to many thousands of dollars. Traditionally the bride's family pays the entire cost of the wedding.

The groom or his family pays for the rehearsal dinner. The entire wedding party is provided with a meal after the rehearsal. This can be as elaborate of as simple as is deemed acceptable...by the bride's family.

The Modified Traditional Wedding

Pulling off a very traditional wedding and wedding celebration is harder today than it once was. There aren't even all that many traditional families to try to pull them off anymore. More and more often the parents of the bride, the groom or both are divorced and those relationships are less than cordial to say the least. Just having the divorced parents in the same room could be disastrous. War could be declared....there could be food fights! :) Just kidding...most people behave in a reasonable manner in social situations.

Even if a couple is planning a very traditional wedding ceremony and celebration sometimes modifications are necessary. The traditional version of the bride's father escorting her down the aisle and responding, "I do" when the minister asks, "Who gives this woman in marriage?" isn't even possible sometimes so her step-father, her uncle, her brother, or some other significant male figure in her life escorts her down the aisle and the question, "Who gives this woman in marriage?" has been eliminated from the ceremony.

Sometimes the wedding itself may be very traditional except that the couple choose to write their own vows or choose to have a ceremony of their own creation rather than have the traditional ceremony performed. This is one of the most common variations of the traditional wedding today. When couples write their own vows they most often use the traditional wedding vows as a guide but not always. These vows can:

1. Include statements concerning what marriage means to the individual.
2. Include quotes or passages of scripture that have been meaningful in the relationship.
3. Be simple statements of love and devotion.
4. Be in the form of a poem or even in song.

The music chosen for an otherwise traditional wedding can be of the couple's own choosing, as well. Every other tradition might be adhered to except for the music that is played when the bride is escorted down the aisle or when the couple leaves the altar together after the ceremony has been performed.

The couple might choose to replace the traditional "Bridal Chorus from Lohengrin" (Richard Wagner) (also known as "Here Comes the Bride") with anything from "The Vow" (Jeremy Lubbock) to "When I'm Sixty-Four" (The Beatles), for example.

Traditional wedding ceremonies have been changed through the years simply as a reflection of changing social standards. The word 'obey' was deemed optional in the mid fifties and is almost never used in today's wedding ceremonies. The old version was that the bride swore to, 'love, honor and obey' her husband-to-be. Thankfully, that was changed to, "love, honor and cherish". Women rarely 'obey' anyway and they never did.

The traditional wedding ceremony is sometimes modified because it is not the bride's first marriage. In these circumstances the bride comes down the aisle unescorted which is a variation from the traditional ceremony and, of course, the "Who gives this woman in marriage?" question is eliminated as well.

Traditional marriage ceremonies for those who are marrying for the second or third time can also be modified to include the children from previous marriages. Sometimes the children are even asked to make vows by the minister performing the ceremony. The minister might turn to the child and ask, "Do you take this man to be your step father?", for example.

Couples may opt for a very traditional wedding ceremony and celebration and add to it such things as a candle lighting ceremony or a communion ritual or they may choose to subtract things from it, including the giving and receiving of rings and the wedding ceremony will be considered 'modified traditional' but yet be uniquely their own.

The absolutely traditional wedding happens less and less frequently in today's modern, mobile society. It makes one wonder whether 'traditional' might even become an obsolete word when linked with the word 'weddings'. Maybe there isn't even such a thing as a 'traditional wedding' any longer.

The modified traditional wedding is much more common today than the true traditional wedding.

Chapter II

Theme Weddings

When you think of a theme wedding, Elvis and Las Vegas immediately come to mind. Las Vegas, Nevada, is, of course, the world capital of whatever is wild, weird and whacky no matter what you are talking about and weddings are not the exception...they may, in fact, be the centerpiece of everything strange that happens in Las Vegas.

In Las Vegas, as couple can have a wedding where “Elvis” walks the bride down the aisle or where he performs the ceremony or both. Anything and everything is possible in Las Vegas. “They”....whoever ‘they’ are say that, “What happens in Las Vegas, stays in Las Vegas”.....well, maybe....maybe not. Themed weird and crazy weddings don’t stay in Las Vegas...they seem to be popping out everywhere. But, you must admit, that Las Vegas is where they started.

The Alternative Wedding...Las Vegas Style

The couple doesn’t need to consist of a man and a woman....it can consist of two men or two women in Las Vegas. Of course, the ceremony isn’t a legal marriage ceremony rather it is called a ‘Commitment’ ceremony. There won’t be a marriage license issued but the many chapels that perform these commitment ceremonies issue a ‘Certificate of Commemoration’.

There is even a chapel named the Gay Chapel of Las Vegas where gay and lesbian couples are offered all of the same choices and amenities offered to straight couples. The can choose from wedding packages that include choices like the beach party, disco, Egyptian, Gothic or Elvis Blue Hawaii wedding. Limousines, flowers, photography and video services are offered as well.

There were, at last count five chapels that offer such Alternative weddings in Las Vegas. They are: Cupid's Wedding Chapel, Silver Bell Wedding Chapel, Distinctive Weddings of Las Vegas, Gay Chapel of Las Vegas, Eternal Hope Ministry.

The Eiffel Tower Las Vegas Wedding

The Paris Las Vegas is a scaled down version of Paris, France, complete with the Eiffel Tower. The Paris Las Vegas is huge...over 85,000 square feet and the legs of the Eiffel Tower are a part of the decor of the casino.

The wedding ceremony is performed on fiftieth floor observation deck. The video camera starts rolling the moment the couple enter the glass elevator and continues through the ride back down.

The Elvis Themed Las Vegas Wedding

Elvis Presley himself married Pricilla in Las Vegas in 1967 at the Aladdin. Elvis and Las Vegas are linked forever in the hearts and minds of Elvis fans all over the world so, it stands to reason that Elvis Themed Weddings are the first and foremost choice of couples who marry in Las Vegas. There are many variations on an Elvis themed wedding and wedding packages offered.

The Elvis impersonators who participate in these Elvis themed weddings all, of course, sing but some of them do other things, as well, like drive the limo that picks the couple up, walk the bride down the aisle or even perform the marriage ceremony itself.

At the Viva Las Vegas Chapel there is even a Pricilla impersonator for their Blue Hawaii package that includes Hawaiian sets and props and Elvis memorabilia.

Some Elvis Themed wedding packages include Elvis performing the ceremony or walking the bride down the aisle. Some have Elvis singing three songs while others include Elvis entertaining for a full hour at the reception.

There is one chapel that is decorated to look like Graceland. The name of it is....you guessed it....The Graceland Wedding Chapel.

The Las Vegas Gondola Wedding Package

The Venetian Resort in Las Vegas is built around an Italian theme complete with frescos, gourmet food, canals, strolling performers and gondolas that are available for weddings.

The Cerimonia Sul'Aqua weddings are performed in a gondola that is only large enough to hold the bride, groom, minister, a witness and, of course, the gondolier who sings. The bride's bouquet, the groom's boutonniere and photographs are included in the Gondola wedding package.

The gondola transports the bride, groom, minister and witness out onto the breathtakingly beautiful Lake Las Vegas to a party boat that will accommodate up to twelve people.

It is considered good luck to steal a kiss under the Ritz's Pontevecchio Bridge.

The Las Vegas Pirate Ship Wedding

If you are really into pirates and pirate ships, you can have your wedding ceremony performed on one at the Treasure Island Resort. The Treasure Island used to be considered a kid friendly place but it has been transformed into an

'adults only' resort now and is usually referred to as TI rather than Treasure Island. The advertisement reads like this:

"The Enchantment package features a wedding on board Treasure Island's pirate ship. Guests are seated along an outdoor patio overlooking Sirens' Cove. The groom, best man and ship's captain board a pirate ship and wait for the bride's entrance along a rose-covered walkway. For the right amount of gold, rogue pirates will serve as witnesses and a pirate may even swing down from the crow's nest to deliver the wedding rings."

Now that sounds like an exciting way to begin married life!

The Las Vegas Star Trek Wedding

If the couple are both 'Trekies'....devout Star Trek fans.... they might opt for a Star Trek Theme Wedding. Star Trek Theme weddings are one of the wedding packages offered at the Las Vegas Hilton Hotel Resort. Depending upon the package chosen, two to four Star Trek characters are included along with the wedding photography, floral bouquet and intergalactic music.

The choice of Star Trek wedding packages range from the basic Junior Officer's wedding to the Admiral's wedding which in addition to the basics adds wedding video, a choice of four Star Trek characters, a wedding certificate, a brass plaque recognizing the wedding date on display in Quark's Bar and Restaurant and tickets for the Klingon Encounter and Borg Invasion 4D attractions for the wedding party (up to 30).

Opting for the Admirals wedding is for the truly devout Trekkies only as it is a rather expensive package.

A Helicopter Wedding a la Las Vegas

Hotels and resorts aren't the only industry in Las Vegas that manages to cash in on themed weddings. At least one company that provides helicopter tours of the Las Vegas area has jumped on the band wagon as well. Maverick Helicopter Tours offers the Dream Catcher Wedding package. The description printed in their brochure says:

"The Dream Catcher wedding begins with a flight out of Las Vegas to Hidden Valley to see the arches. Continue your journey to the Valley of Fire, where you will see red rock formations and some of the most remote, desolate and fascinating desert landscape. After you fly through the Valley of Fire, your journey will take you to the Grand Canyon. Land on the canyon floor, located just above the mighty Colorado River. Have your romantic wedding here, overlooking the water. Maverick can accommodate large wedding parties or a private

ceremony for two and provide helicopter transportation to the Mount Charleston Lodge and major surrounding golf courses in the Las Vegas valley.”

Wow! How romantic can you get! Phooey on tradition...give me that helicopter ride and getting married on the floor of the Grand Canyon!

Las Vegas very well be the capital of the wild and weird but it certainly doesn't have the market cornered. Not by a long shot! Consider these themed weddings that are no longer even considered “far out” even in very conservative areas of America.

The Western Themed Wedding

Since everybody who isn't too broad in the beam (and unfortunately some who are) wear jeans now days. They may dress up to go to work or to church but for everyday wear everybody wears jeans. Maybe that's the main attraction for having a western themed wedding....nobody has to buy new clothes...not even the bride and groom.

Western themed weddings are especially popular in states like Texas and Wyoming but they certainly aren't limited to those states. A western themed wedding is often held right in the middle of New York City.

A western themed wedding is easy to plan and a lot less expensive than a traditional, modified traditional or other themed weddings.

The color scheme must obviously start with blue (as in blue jeans) and can be paired with yellow (the Yellow Rose of Texas) or green (the color of grass) or orange (the predominate color of a Western sunset).

No 20 piece orchestra will be required....a local country and western band will be able to supply just the right music.

The food? Why barbeque, of course....maybe some macaroni and cheese, potato salad, baked beans chips and dips....and not Champaign...BEER!

The decorations could be bales of hay and saddles. Centerpieces can be potted cacti on checked table cloths, of course.

Even the favors that are given to the guests can be miniature horse shoes or chocolate cowboys or boots.

Yup! Western themed weddings are popular for many reasons. They are far less formal and expensive, they are easy to plan, and on top of everything else...they are just plain FUN!

The Disney Theme Wedding

There can be as many Disney Themed weddings as there are Disney couples. The first and, of course, most obvious thing to do is to choose which Disney couple you will base your wedding on. Will it Beauty and the Beast or Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming or, maybe Aladdin and Jasmine? But you don't have to choose a particular story if you don't want to. You can just use the general Disney theme.

You can choose a very romantic location like a castle for your wedding location. Yes, castles are rented out for weddings. There are about 50 different ones in England, Ireland and Scotland that can be rented.

Imagine the possibilities for the bride's and groom's wedding attire! The traditional white wedding gown and a tuxedo are a choice but the bride and groom could be dressed as Snow White and Prince Charming as well.

The color scheme for the Disney theme wedding could be bright primary colors and the flowers could be placed in glass slippers! How romantic!

Oh, and just picture the possibilities for the wedding cake! It could be shaped like a magical castle.

Choosing the music might be difficult. There are so many wonderful Disney songs out there to choose from. Maybe you could choose "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" from The Lion King but then there is "I Can Show you the World" from Aladdin, too....and so many more!

Sunflowers in reds, yellows, oranges, and blues or carnations, roses and tulips in bright vivid colors would all be excellent choices for the flowers.

A Disney theme wedding could allow you to live out your little girl fantasy for real on your special day!

A Wedding with a Nautical Theme

Whether the wedding is to be a beach wedding or to be held on dry land, a nautical theme can be very romantic. If you or your intended are into all things nautical....sailing, scuba diving, or just laying on the beach....a nautical wedding theme might be the very thing for you.

Carrying out a nautical theme wedding plan can be easy and a lot of fun. You can start with the invitations. Maybe you could choose ones with two sailboats silhouetted against the setting sun sailing away together. Of course, wedding invitations that are embossed with pale seashells would also be very suitable.

Invitations of all varieties and with all themes can be found at major invitation retail stores and online. You could even print the invitations and programs from your own computer, if you choose to. Nautical theme paper is available at most card and scrap booking stores.

Planning the nautical themed reception is where you can really get creative. First you could hire a local band that specializes in beach music or you could hire a DJ and have him play songs by Jimmy Buffett or The Beach Boys.

The color scheme needs to bright and summery feeling. Consider colors like blue, turquoise, light green, silver or purple. Candles in shell shaped bowls filled with sand would be a nice touch. They would make nice center pieces for tables at the reception, as well.

The flowers in the church could be potted palm trees and blooming tropical plants. They could all be moved to the reception and that would save a few dollars.

Even the wedding cake can get into the nautical theme act. Have it decorated with seashell shaped candies.

A nautical themed wedding can be as simple or as elaborate as you (and your budget) would like for it to be. It can be fun to plan and easy to carry out.

The Mardi Gras Themed Wedding

Hurricane Katrina really did a number on New Orleans so if you would like to have a Mardi Gras themed wedding, it should probably be planned for a location other than in New Orleans. A Mardi Gras themed wedding is still possible, though, and with some planning it can be done rather inexpensively.

Mardi Gras and weddings have a lot in common. Mardi Gras symbolizes the last party and good time before the harshness of the Lenten season begins. A wedding symbolizes the last party and good time before the couple settles down into their new married life and starting a family together.

Most likely you won't want to carry the Mardi Gras theme into the wedding ceremony itself but you can have a ball with the reception planning.

First, think food. Mardi Gras is big on food....the rich and spicy variety. There won't be a broiled chicken breast in sight. Louisiana crab cakes and boiled crawfish would start the meal out just right as the appetizers. Swamp punch is fun if it complete with gummy worms and toy boats. No matter what you choose as the main course be sure to have cayenne pepper and Louisiana Red Hot on every table so your guests can 'spice it up' as much as they would like.

The decorations are where you can really let your creativity shine through. Large pillar candles with theater masks propped against them will be stunning as a center piece. Preserved Alligator heads are a big favorite for Mardi Gras themed wedding receptions....a little shocking but very appropriate. Dress the heads up with streamers and candles for a wonderful effect. Don't forget about the Mari Gras beads. They can add a lot of fun to the reception.

The music and the entertainment options for the Mari Gras themed reception are wide and varied. You can choose to have a Jazz band or a DJ playing Jazz music. You might even have the trumpet player do a "When the Saints Come Marching In" solo when the wedding party arrives at the reception. Jazz music makes the heart beat faster and denotes a happy occasion is being celebrated. Think about having a close-up magician going from table to table performing magic tricks and a voodoo priestess or a fortune teller to entertain your guests.

Mardi Gras is a time for dressing up in costumes. You might invite your guests to come dressed in Mardi Gras style costumes to add even more flavor to your Mardi Gras themed wedding and reception.

The Country Themed Wedding

The country themed wedding is not to be confused with the western themed wedding. The western themed wedding is all about the west...cowboys, horses, hay, while the country themed wedding is all about the pastoral setting of the country....white picket fences, wild flowers and simplicity.

In many small towns in America you will find a real version of the white church with a steeple that is depicted on many country items. If you can find such a church near your home or the place where your wedding is to be held, they can be rented. If that option turns out to be impossible, you can still easily carry out a country themed wedding where ever you are. Just 'think' country and whatever that means to you.

When you 'think' country what comes to mind.....white picket fences, Mason jars, wild flowers.....maybe Daisies....., baskets, fresh air, sunshine?

It is very tempting to choose an outdoor setting for a country themed wedding....in the middle of a field of wild flowers if the season is right, for example. Just remember that if you plan your wedding outdoors, you should always have an alternate location prepared. Mother Nature has been known to be less than cooperative when outdoor events of any kind are planned. At the very least you should have a tent large enough to accommodate your guests just in case Mother Nature decides a rain shower would be nice.

The decorations for a country themed wedding can be beautiful. A vine covered archway would be a lovely addition. The decorations need to be kept simple but

beautiful. White picket fence sections and gates can be rented, as well. Terra cotta pots with filled with geraniums would make nice country center pieces. Mason jars can be used as candle holders or used to hold fresh wild flowers. Let your imagination take you to the country and what your version of the country is when planning your country themed wedding.

The Christmas Wedding Theme

If your wedding is planned during the Christmas season, a Christmas themed wedding is an obvious choice and one that is easy to do. The very Christmas season itself is one of love, hope and promise so Christmas and Weddings seem to be made for each other.

You can start with the wedding gown. There are many designers who do wedding gowns in red or green fabrics. Maybe a lovely velvet cape would add some pizzazz to the occasion. If you prefer the traditional white wedding gown for yourself, you can still have your bridesmaids and flower girl carry out the red and green Christmas theme. Velvet bridesmaids dresses made in an A-line style would be elegant...and ones that your bridesmaids might even find useful for other occasions. The A-line style dress flatters all body types and is an excellent choice no matter what fabric you choose.

Your bridesmaids can carry traditional Poinsettias and evergreens as bouquets, or course, but you might want to consider them carrying white muffs instead. Your bridesmaids could carry a single candle with evergreens around it, as well. They could also carry wreaths. Any of these are excellent choices.

A Christmas theme using red and green is not the only choice. You might like going with a blue and silver based Christmas theme.

Your wedding gown could be made of a shiny silver fabric. That would look very elegant and yet stay with the Christmas theme.

Your bridesmaid's dresses could be made in the A-line style of a blue fabric and they could carry wreaths in the silver and blue theme. Silver bells would make lovely decorations.

The Renaissance Theme Wedding

Sometimes brides will confuse a Renaissance theme wedding with a Medieval theme wedding. These are two very distinct periods of history and they don't overlap. There is a thousand year gap between them. Here we will discuss the Renaissance theme wedding...a very romantic theme, indeed.

When you do your research about this historic period on which to base your wedding, you will find that the Renaissance period began in Italy in during the

1400's and moved through Europe over the next two centuries. Camelot is not included.

The questions you should be looking for answers to as your research your Renaissance wedding are: What were the wedding customs for the period? What was the style of wedding dresses during the period? A great place to begin your research is online where you will find a wealth of information. The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) website can help you a lot and members do answer questions.

There are many areas of the country where Renaissance Festivals are held particularly in California, Maryland, New York and Pennsylvania. These festivals are not always historically accurate of course but you will be able to find such wonderful things as dragon heart champagne flutes or Celtic knot wedding rings.

The nine through twelve numbered back issues of the Renaissance Magazine might be the very best place to find the information that you are looking for. In these particular issues can give you the details of many traditions that you will want to include in your Renaissance themed wedding. You will find that wedding cakes weren't a part of the Renaissance wedding but unless your guests are all history buffs nobody will notice. You can have your cake and eat it too.

Other Popular Wedding Themes

There are many other wedding themes that we have not even touched on here. Some of them are:

The Seasonal Wedding Theme: Summer, Winter, Spring or Fall....they all lend themselves as themes for weddings. The decorations, wedding attire, flowers, music, and food are all centered on the particular season that has been chosen as the wedding theme.

The Ethnic Wedding: Many times couples who are proud of their ethnic backgrounds choose an ethnic theme for their weddings. African-American themes are very popular with their colorful costumes.

The Period Wedding Theme: The traditions, customs, costumes, food and music are used as the centerpiece of a period wedding theme. Colonial America, Victorian England or the roaring 20's, are just a few of the periods that are popular to use as a period wedding theme.

The All-Night-Long Wedding Theme: This theme is particularly popular in south Louisiana but it is used often in other parts of the country as well. The wedding and the reception are usually traditional but then the party moves to either another rented hall or to a private home and continues until morning. When breakfast is served, the wedding is over. Variations on the all-night-long wedding

theme are the **whole-weekend-long wedding theme** and the **honeymoon-wedding theme**. The weekend wedding lasts from Friday night through Sunday afternoon and the honeymoon wedding theme can have guests invited to a resort for a romantic location and invited to stay for the weekend or longer.

The Progressive Wedding: This theme should be carried out only by those who are well-heeled or love to travel very cheap. Now days with families so mobile and far-flung, the progressive wedding is gaining in popularity. A pre-reception might start at a location on the East Coast, the marriage ceremony might be performed somewhere in the mid west and the reception might be held in California. The purpose is, of course, to include as many family and friends as possible.

The Surprise-Surprise Wedding: Now this one is just plain fun....not to mention easy on the pocketbook. You invite friends and family to a party without a mention of a wedding. When all are assembled you pull off your surprise-surprise wedding. It's a little tricky to get everybody you want in one place at one time without telling them it's your wedding day but the surprise is worth the effort.

The Stroll Down Memory Lane Wedding: Couples, particularly those with long histories together, sometimes like to base their weddings on a stroll down memory lane theme. Mentions of special events in their lives are woven into the ceremony and the reception and decorations are based on their shared history together.

The Holiday Wedding Theme: We discussed the Christmas wedding theme earlier but other holidays lend themselves well to themes for weddings, as well. Valentines Day weddings are very popular with cupids and hearts as decorations. The beautiful fall colors add greatly to a Thanksgiving themed wedding with Pilgrims and turkeys added into the mix.

Truly the only limit on what a theme for your wedding can be is your own imagination. Your wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime event and it should be everything you want (and can afford) for it to be.

Chapter III

Sports Based Weddings

Some otherwise perfectly sane people can be completely irrational when it comes to their favorite sports team. You can tell them by the way everything they own seems to be related to “their team”. Every gift he receives for every occasion is emblazoned with “THE” team logo. They aren’t about to abandon their fervor when it comes to planning their weddings.

The fervent fan is common to all sports....baseball, football, basketball, soccer, sky diving, scuba diving, car racing, and all others that you can name.

Sometimes a couple’s relationship begins with the commonality of being fans of a sports team. Their entire dating experience has been centered on ‘their’ team. Their fanship (is that a word or did I just make it up?) is the basis for them falling in love and deciding to get married so it stands to reason that their wedding will be themed around their team, the sport and team colors. Well....that saves a lot of decision making, if nothing else.

The Baseball Fan’s Wedding

Many baseball stadiums allow couples to have their wedding ceremonies performed at home plate following a home game. Check with the main office of your favorite team to see if they offer that option. If they do, you can be married not only with your family and friends present but your fellow fans as well.

If the stadium of your choice doesn’t offer that option, you can still have a wedding based on your mutual love of your team. Simply use your team’s colors as the color scheme of your wedding. Have the bridesmaid’s dresses be one of the colors and the bouquets they carry the other.

The reception is where you can really get ‘into’ your baseball team theme. Use player’s numbers or names to denote seating arrangements.

The food can be your favorite tailgate fare.....barbeque ribs, pigs-in-a-blanket, burgers, chips and beer.

Inform your guests when you invite them that they will be participating in a baseball game at the reception so they can come dressed for the occasion.

As favors, give your guests a baseball with your names and the date of your wedding or a miniature bat with your pictures on it.

The Football Fan's Wedding

Some professional team's football stadiums will allow couples to be married at mid-field after a game or at times when games are not scheduled. Some stadiums have facilities to accommodate receptions, as well. For the ardent football fan this would be a dream wedding come true.

Most colleges allow weddings to take place on their football fields if adequate notice is provided. All high schools allow this to the best of my knowledge. If the groom was the star quarterback for the high school team and the bride was the head cheerleader, what better place for them to be married than at mid field where their stars shone the brightest.

The football fan wedding theme would, of course, have the team colors as the color scheme for the wedding. The decorations would include footballs, yellow flags, and goal posts.

The food just has to be of the tailgate variety...nothing else would be appropriate. You might even be able to find some tailgates to use as serving tables for the event.

The favors for your guests could be miniature footballs with your names and the date on them. The napkins, plates and cups should all have the team logo emblazoned on them, of course.

The Basketball Fan's Wedding

The hard core basketball fan's dream wedding would be held at center court of his favorite team's home arena. Many professional and semi-professional teams allow wedding to be held after games. Be aware, however, that high-heel shoes will not be permitted so plan accordingly.

The bride and groom can both wear the jerseys with the numbers of their favorite players and the minister can be dressed as a referee even if the wedding isn't being conducted at center court or under a goal of a basketball arena.

Sometimes a couple found each other because they were both ardent fans of a basketball team and they can't imagine their wedding not including any reference to the team that brought them together in the first place.

There are dozens of online sources for finding basketball related items for parties and weddings.

The favors that you give to your guests might include a miniature basketball with your names and the date with a small display stand included.

Chapter IV

Weddings in Strange Places

Modern day couples are opting for their weddings to be held in places other than the traditional church, synagogue or even city hall more and more frequently. These couples want the place that their wedding ceremony is performed, whether it is a very traditional ceremony or not, to be a place that is meaningful to them as a couple in some way.

Brides-to-be (and grooms as well) sometimes deliver a real shock to their family and friends when they announce that they are getting married. Not that the fact that they are getting married is such a shock but the fact that they are planning on doing the deed while they are riding a roller coaster in Las Vegas, sky diving in Nevada or scuba diving in Bermuda, holding the ceremony in a castle in Switzerland or on the 50 yard line of Mile-High Stadium might be a little shocking to say the least.

Many of those of an older generation think that weddings held in strange places are an affront to the seriousness of the sacrament of marriage and strongly object to the idea. Of course, it isn't an affront at all but it takes some strong and convincing arguments to change the minds of those who believe it is. Sometimes they warm up to the idea given time, sometimes they don't.

The truth is that the marriage that is being planned is about the two people who are joining their lives together and not about 'what the neighbors will think' or what others believe to be an appropriate venue.

Nobody asked for advice but here is some anyway. Do what you want to do. Make your wedding a memorable event that you will look back on in 50 years and be glad you did it your way. Get the pictures that will prove to your grandchildren that you were once wild and crazy kids that were madly in love and had a strong sense of adventure. Just take the vows seriously and mean them with all your heart no matter where the wedding ceremony is performed.

Get Married in a Castle

Can there be a more romantic setting than an ancient castle that has witnessed generations of history? Probably not. Visions of Snow White and Cinderella come to mind.

There are castles in England, Italy, Switzerland and other countries that can be rented and used as the site for a romantic wedding. The prices vary and they are in great demand so a very early reservation must be made. Many of the towns and villages near the castles cater to weddings and wedding parties.

Get Married at Home Plate

If you and your intended are both avid baseball fans and a lot of your dating history revolves around your mutual love of baseball and a particular team, there is no reason that your wedding being held on home plate of your favorite team is in any way not appropriate. If it feels appropriate to you, then it is.

Many major league teams and minor league teams allow marriage ceremonies to be performed either after a game or when the stadium isn't in use. Some baseball stadiums even have facilities for wedding receptions that they will rent.

Get Married on a Landing Field

More than a few couples who enjoy the sport of sky diving together have jumped into marriage out of a perfectly good airplane flying at 13,000 feet and have been glad they did it their way.

One couple did exactly that. The band that they had hired played "The Wind Beneath my Wings" as they fell through the sky. Within moments of landing, they were saying, "I do" with both of them dressed in their jumpsuits. The bride's veil was held firmly on by a chin strap and the groom's only concession to bridal attire was a bow tie. It was a beautiful and memorable event. One that will be remembered in detail much longer than a traditional wedding in a church.

Get Married on the Beach

Many modern day couples love the beach. The beach may have been the place where a lot of their dating occurred or where they have had their heart to heart conversations. There can be no more romantic setting than a beautiful wind swept beach at sundown. There is a feeling of peacefulness and hopefulness on the beach at that time of day. It makes for a beautiful setting for a wedding.

Planning an outdoor event of any kind including a wedding is always subject to weather of course. It's a good idea to have an alternate location for the ceremony to take place in case Mother Nature decides to throw a fit and rain on your wedding day.

If you are both **scuba diving** enthusiasts, you could wade out of the ocean hand in hand in your wetsuits. When the ceremony is over, you could wade back into the ocean and swim away together. That would be a very symbolic gesture and one that you and your family and friends would never forget.

Get Married in a Field of Wildflowers

A friend of mine in Texas had a field her father owned seeded with a wide variety of wild flowers that are indigenous to the State and that all bloom in the Spring at about the same time. She scheduled her wedding for early May. The wedding could not have been more beautiful. There is nothing a florist can do that can compare with Mother Nature at her best. Of course, everybody can't have a field seeded with wild flowers. But you know where and when in your area wild flowers bloom and you could make arrangements with the people who own the property to allow you to have your wedding there.

Get Married at the top of the Eiffel Tower

It's true. You can get married at the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France. Marriage ceremonies are performed there all the time. It's a very popular wedding location for couples who live in France. If the price of going to France and getting married atop the real Eiffel Tower is a little more than your budget can bare, you can go to Las Vegas and get married in the Eiffel Tower replica that is located at the Paris Las Vegas Resort. Wedding ceremonies are performed on the fiftieth floor observation deck. The view is spectacular and memories of the experience will last a lifetime.

Get Married in a Gondola

In Italy you can in fact get married in a Gondola while traversing the canals of Venice. Could there be anything more romantic? Of course, actually getting yourselves and your friends and families could prove to be a little costly. Ok...maybe a LOT costly but there is another alternative to actually going to Italy.

The Venetian Resort in Las Vegas specializes in weddings performed in gondolas. The gondolas are only large enough to hold the bride, groom, one attendant, the minister and the singing gondolier.

You are taken by gondola out on Lake Las Vegas to a party boat that can accommodate at least twelve people. The scenery is beautiful and the experience is a once-in-a-lifetime one.

There are many venues to hold a wedding other than the traditional ones. If you and your husband or wife to be have your hearts set on a wedding being held in a romantic and unusual place, you should have what you want.

Chapter V

Wedding Receptions with a Twist

When we envision a 'wedding reception' what comes to mind are men in suits or tuxedos and women dressed to the nines standing about talking in subdued tones and holding little punch cups or wine glasses. What we picture is a very staid affair and it is an accurate picture (maybe memory) of what the usual wedding reception looked like in years gone by. A few such affairs still exist today but they are quickly becoming extinct.

The old fashioned wedding reception was held at a rented hall, in the ball room of a hotel or in 'Fellowship hall' or the basement of a church or synagogue. There was a receiving line with a dictated order that was never departed from. The order was: The father of the bride, the mother of the bride, the bride, the groom the mother of the groom, the father of the groom and sometimes the bridesmaids and groomsmen were also included. Protocol ruled!

Many modern day brides and grooms opt for wedding receptions that could hardly be described as staid affairs. While mothers and grandmothers are having 'vapors', young people are insisting on 'doing their own thing' when it comes to their weddings and the receptions that follow.

The venue for a modern day wedding is far more likely to be at the beach than it is to be in a church or synagogue. Wedding receptions are held in back yards, open fields and Las Vegas casinos. Receptions, that in earlier times would have been considered 'in poor taste....an affront to protocol....and even (gasp) TACKY, are now more the norm than the exception.

As weddings have evolved into individualized events that reflect the tastes and desires of the wedding couple, so, too, have the receptions that follow them. The most popular of wedding and reception venues today is, by far, the beach but there are many others that are nearly as popular.

The Beach Wedding Reception

Weather permitting, the reception for a beach wedding is held on the beach. The wedding ceremony is most often held just before sundown and as the sky darkens, somebody will build a bonfire.

Underneath their wedding garb most all of the young people that attended the wedding will be wearing bathing suits. They strip off their wedding finery and the reception begins in earnest. Barbeque pits appear. Wieners are roasted. Ice chests full of beer have replaced the tired old punch bowls and fluted wine glasses.

Beach blankets and beach towels are spread out on the sand. Rock and roll music blares and the beach wedding reception is in full swing.

Themed Wedding Receptions

The theme of the wedding, and themed weddings are big today, determines where and what the wedding reception will be. Many times the receptions for themed weddings are held in rented halls or hotel ballrooms (rarely in the fellowship hall or the basement of a church, however) but the place is all that remains unchanged between the old fashioned wedding reception and the themed wedding reception.

Nautical Theme Wedding Reception: The tip-off that it wasn't going to be the old-fashioned wedding reception probably came with the invitation. The food that will be served will, no doubt, come from the sea. The music that will be played will have a nautical theme, throughout the reception. Jimmy Buffett tunes and Beach Boy selections will dominate. There will likely be hanging fishnets and seashells everywhere.

Mardi Gras Themed Wedding Reception: The reception for this themed wedding will come closer to looking and feeling like a Mari Gras party than like a wedding reception of old. The food will be more that a little spicy. The music will be jazz most likely. It will be a loud and rowdy affair where the guests will have a lot of fun....they may even been asked to come dressed in Mardi Gras style costumes just to add color and fun to the celebration. There will be a lot of beads and streamers everywhere and you might even see a few alligator heads all dressed up.

Country Themed Wedding Reception: The reception for the country themed wedding will most likely not be held in a rented hall or hotel ballroom. Think tent. The wedding ceremony will have been performed in a field of wild flowers and the reception will most likely take place either in the same field or one that is close by under a tent that has been erected for the purpose. The tables and chairs will be of the folding variety. The decorations will consist of white picket fence sections....some with gates. The food will be simple country dishes. There will be no fluted wine glasses. The scene will be pastoral....the music will match.

Western Themed Wedding Reception: The wedding for the western themed wedding may well be held in a barn or a hall decorated to look like a barn. There will be bales of hay and lanterns hung from the ceiling. The food will likely be barbeque and the music will be country and western. The bride, groom and the guests will probably be wearing jeans western shirts and boots. The bride and groom may have both arrived for the ceremony on horseback so there will be horses and maybe a few cows thrown in for good measure. There will be no fruit punch or wine to be found...beer, soft drinks, coffee and tea will be the beverages that are offered.

Renaissance Themed Wedding Reception: The wedding reception following a Renaissance themed wedding may be at a castle in England or Switzerland where the ceremony took place. The food might be a little startling....a whole roasted pig, for example. The entire Renaissance theme is reflected in the music and the decorations for the occasion. You may see suits of armor and real live 'wenches' may serve the food and drink. The bride will have researched the period well and the all aspects of the reception will reflect that research.

Themed Wedding Receptions Las Vegas Style: Las Vegas is the place where so many themed weddings take place. The resorts and hotels are all well equipped to handle even the most bizarre wedding and wedding reception requests.

1. You might choose to have a Hawaiian Luau following your Elvis Blue Hawaii wedding. This would, of course, include an Elvis Impersonator. Could there be a whole roasted pig with an apple in its mouth?
2. A reception might be held on a 'Pirate Ship' following your Pirate themed wedding. There are boats available that will accommodate up to 30 people and the food and beverages included are in keeping with the pirate theme.
3. The wedding reception following a wedding ceremony performed at the top of the Eiffel Tower replica at the Paris Las Vegas Resort might be held in the casino of the resort with the legs of the Eiffel Tower protruding into it.
4. The Venetian Resort offers a Gondola wedding package that includes a reception with all the flavor of the real Italy. The food, the music, the very atmosphere feels like Venice. These receptions are held on a party boat docked out in Lake Las Vegas.

There are, of course, many other themed wedding packages available that include receptions that are reflective of the theme. Some of these packages can cost many thousands of dollars while others are far less expensive. What a couple chooses is dependent upon how well heeled they are and just how far they are willing to go to make their wedding and wedding reception a totally unique experience for them and for their guests.

The Sports Based Wedding Reception: Couples, who have met and fallen in love while supporting their favorite sports team, can't imagine that their wedding and reception wouldn't be based upon the sport they love. There are as many sports based wedding and receptions as there are sports and the fans that support them.

The Baseball Fan Wedding Reception: Those who are devout fans of baseball in general or of a specific baseball team might opt to be married at home plate of their favorite team's park and have their reception in an restaurant within the baseball park. Others might choose to have their wedding at a public baseball diamond and have a baseball game as a part of their wedding reception with their guests as the players. The food will most likely include hotdogs and beer if it isn't exclusively hotdogs and beer.

The Football Fan Wedding Reception: If they can swing it, the first choice of an avid football fan couple is to have their wedding ceremony performed on the fifty yard line of 'their' team's home field with the wedding reception held in facilities within the park. If they can't pull that off, they settle for a football themed wedding and reception. The food is likely to be or the tail gate party variety and they often choose to make a touch football game using their guests as players a big part of the reception. These receptions are usually held in open fields or at public parks.

The Basketball Fan Wedding Reception: Those couples, whose whole relationship has been centered on their love of basketball and usually a specific basketball team, often choose to have a basketball themed wedding and reception. The first choice, of course, is to be married at center court of their favorite team's home arena with the reception held within the arena itself. They love to have their weddings and wedding receptions revolve around a basketball theme. A formal reception that includes men in tuxedos and women in formal gowns isn't for the avid basketball fan wedding couple.

Those couples, who love a sport almost as much as they love each other, choose to have their wedding and receptions reflect that devotion. It's a good bet that avid sports fans weddings and receptions will be a lot of fun and a far cry from the traditional wedding reception idea.

Couples who are into **sky diving** might have their wedding, as well as, their wedding reception on a landing field while couples who are into **scuba diving** might have their wedding and reception on a beach or on the shore of a favorite lake where they dive regularly.

Most wedding receptions last a couple of hours but some can continue many hours like the ones for the **all-night-long weddings**. Some even last a lot longer...even as long as a week and are held either in private homes or at romantic get away spots around the globe.

Rules for wedding receptions have been thrown to the wind. Whatever makes the bride and groom happy is what is acceptable for a wedding reception today.

Chapter VII

Religious Wedding Traditions

Some things never change and suggestions for changes are met with firm opposition by the powers-that-be. Religious wedding ceremonies and the traditions that surround them fall into the 'some-things-never-change' category.

The main change that has taken place over the years is that the religious wedding ceremony is being performed in places other than the churches, synagogues, and temples for which they were planned but, although the site of the ceremony may be different, the ceremony itself remains mostly unchanged.

The religious wedding ceremonies covered here are in alphabetical order so as not to offend anyone.

The Catholic Wedding Ceremony

Notice that a Nuptial Mass is to be held must be given a minimum of six months in advance and sometimes the advance notice requirement may be as much as a year. The Nuptial Mass may last as long as an hour with the wedding ceremony itself lasting about 20 minutes. The bride and her attendants come down the aisle to the alter where the priest, the groom and the groomsmen await them. The wedding ceremony is steeped in tradition and has varied little over many centuries.

There is, however, some leeway given in parts of the mass other than the actual ceremony. The bride, for example, may lay her wedding bouquet at the feet of the Virgin Mary or members of the families may read scripture, recite poetry or sing. The bride and groom remain at the alter throughout the mass standing, sitting or kneeling.

Even if the ceremony is held in a location other than the church, the ceremony will not be modified or changed in any way.

The Protestant Wedding Ceremony

Protestant wedding ceremonies vary between different protestant denominations. There are many different protestant denominations. They include, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Lutheran and many others. Each denomination has its own rules and requirements regarding marriage and marriage ceremonies. Some denominations require pre-marital counseling while others do not. In general, a protestant wedding ceremony is not a part of an entire protestant church service but is, rather, a stand alone event.

There is usually a lot more leeway allowed in a protestant wedding ceremony than in a Catholic wedding ceremony and Protestant ministers have been known to conduct wedding ceremonies in many different places and under many different sets of circumstances.

The common thread among protestant wedding ceremonies is that Jesus is the Son of God and that the relationship of Jesus to the church is like that of a the relationship between a husband and wife.

The Jewish Wedding Ceremony

The finer points of the Jewish wedding ceremony vary between the orthodox, conservative and reform branches of Judaism but all marriage ceremonies are characterized by joy and symbolism.

The bride and groom are each escorted by their families along with their attendants to the chuppah where the Rabbi waits. The couple first each take a sip of wine and the Rabbi blesses them. The groom then gives the bride a plain gold wedding band...nothing more is allowed. The groom then reads aloud the ketubah, or marriage contract and gives it to the bride. Next the Seven Blessings are given by a special guest or a family member then there is another symbolic sip of wine by the bride and groom. The end of the wedding ceremony is with the symbolic stomping of a glass by the groom and those gather shout, "Mazel tov!" The ceremony usually takes about 20 minutes.

The bride and groom then go to a private room and spend about 20 minutes there before joining the wedding reception. This symbolizes the consummation of the wedding. The wedding feast begins with a blessing of the challah which is a loaf of braided bread, to signify the sharing of families and friends.

It is not required that a Jewish wedding ceremony take place in a synagogue and more and more often today, they do not. Each rabbi, however, determines what is appropriate for the bride and groom to wear, and the choices of music and flowers whether the wedding is conducted in a synagogue or not. Any words added to or taken from the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony is done at the discretion of the rabbi who is performing the ceremony.

The Hindu Wedding Ceremony

In India a Hindu wedding ceremony can last an entire day, however, in America it has been modified and only lasts about one and one-half hours. Cultural traditions and pre and post wedding customs can go on for several days, though.

The wedding itself is designed to symbolically educate the wedding couple in the lessons of married life. Mantras or prayers are chanted to call for blessing on the marriage. A Hindu wedding ceremony does not have to be done in a temple but it is most often done there.

The bride usually wears a sari in red and gold colors that is decorated with jewels. She is the one who welcomes the groom and the two exchange flower garlands. Protective amulets are tied to the couple's wrists and prayers are chanted. A member of the bride's family and then a member of the groom's family read the lineages of each family. The groom then ties a pendent around the neck of the bride to symbolize his acceptance of the lineage and as a sign of happiness and fidelity.

The couple then makes offerings to each other and sacrifices to the ceremonial fire. They link themselves together with a sash and circle the fire seven times.

The groom puts vermilion powder into the part in the bride's hair to symbolize that she is a married woman. The priest pronounces a blessing and the couple is showered with tumeric rice.

The Muslim Wedding Ceremony

There are several ceremonies that preceded the actual Muslim wedding ceremony itself. First it is always the groom who searches for a suitable wife. The engagement ceremony, the Mangni, is the exchange of rings between the bride and groom. The bride's clothing for this ceremony is provided by the groom's family. Next comes the Manjha Ceremony. The bride is anointed with a paste made of turmeric, sandalwood and chameli oil all of which are provided by the groom's family. The bride is then confined to her home for two days prior to the wedding.

During the Muslim wedding ceremony men and women are in different rooms or are separated by a curtain...but not always. The meher, (a compulsory amount of money given to the bride's family by the groom's family) is presented. The bride and groom are both asked if they agree to the marriage then a selected piece from the Koran is read.

The marriage is then registered (nikaahnama). The groom and two male witnesses sign it. The bride will sign at a later time. The groom is then escorted to the women's section. He presents gifts to the bride's sisters and receives blessing from the bride's older female relatives.

The first meal is then served to men and women separately and to the groom's family in a different room. After this first meal the bride and groom are seated together with a long scarf over their heads. The Koran is placed between them and they can see each others reflections in strategically placed mirrors but they are not allowed to look at each other. The Koran is placed between them and they read prayers directed by the priest.

The bride and groom are then escorted to the house of the bride's father where they spend the night in separate rooms. The groom is required to sleep in the room with the bride's younger brothers.

The next morning, the Rukhsat Ceremony which is considered a part of the wedding ceremony is performed. It is a farewell ceremony. The father of the bride places her hand into the hand of the groom and asks that the groom protect her always. The couple then departs for their own home.

The Quaker Wedding Ceremony

Although some congregations do have appointed pastors, most Quakers do not have ministers or priests. They believe that each person is their own minister. In a Quaker wedding the wedding couple actually marries themselves not, however, before they have satisfied all of the conditions of the community.

There is a monthly business meeting of the Committee for Ministry and Council to which the couple desiring to be married at the meeting house must apply at least two or three months in advance. The committee will then appoint a Clearance Committee to oversee the planned wedding. This Clearance Committee will interview the couple together and separately several times over the course of at least two months to determine the clarity of their intention and their freedom to marry. The Clearance Committee will then give permission for the wedding to take place.

The entire Quaker culture is based upon the idea of simplicity and the wedding ceremony is no different. The couple enters the meeting house and takes their places among the Circle of Friends with no fanfare attached. There will be no music. After a time and when the couple is ready they rise, join hands and make their vows to each other.

After the vows have been spoken, the bride, groom, clerk, and overseers sign the certificate of marriage. Before they leave, every member present at the marriage will sign the certificate as well.

In some religions there is some wiggle room where a couple's personal desires for their wedding can be accommodated while in other religions there is none at all. Sometimes a couple must choose between a religious ceremony and a civil ceremony in order to 'do their own thing'.

Chapter VII

Wedding Superstitions

Like many important life occasions the wedding day is steeped in superstitions and old-wives tales. We are rational human beings and therefore do not hold with superstition and old-wives tales.....except that when we spill salt we still throw some over our left shoulder, avoid walking under ladders and take a sharp right or left turn when a black cat walks across our path.....but we don't really BELIEVE that bad luck will fall upon us if we don't do these things, do we?

Hmmm....I'm not sure so just to be on the safe side, consider these superstitions associated with one's wedding day. There are some, of course, that everybody knows:

1. A groom should not see the bride on the wedding day until she walks down the aisle.
2. For luck a bride should wear 'something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue'.
3. A bride should have a penny in her right shoe when she walks down the aisle for good luck.

Others superstitions and old wives tales can be found in poems handed down through the ages:

Concerning the day of the week a wedding should be held:

"Monday for health,
Tuesday for wealth,
Wednesday best of all,
Thursday for losses,
Friday for crosses,
Saturday for no luck at all."

Concerning the month of the wedding:

"Married when the year is new, he'll be loving, kind & true,
When February birds do mate, you wed nor dread your fate.
If you wed when March winds blow, joy and sorrow both you'll know.
Marry in April when you can, Joy for Maiden & for Man.
Marry in the month of May, and you'll surely rue the day.
Marry when June roses grow, over land and sea you'll go.
Those who in July do wed, must labor for their daily bread.
Whoever wed in August be, many a change is sure to see
Marry in September's shrine, your living will be rich and fine.
If in October you do marry, love will come but riches tarry."

If you wed in bleak November, only joys will come, remember.
When December snows fall fast, marry and true love will last."

Ok, let's recap. The 'luckiest' time to get married is on a Wednesday in January, April, September, November or December.....at least according to these old poems. And according to this little ditty, you'd better wear either white or blue:

"Married in White, you have chosen right
Married in Grey, you will go far away,
Married in Black, you will wish yourself back,
Married in Red, you will wish yourself dead,
Married in Green, ashamed to be seen,
Married in Blue, you will always be true,
Married in Pearl, you will live in a whirl,
Married in Yellow, ashamed of your fellow,
Married in Brown, you will live in the town,
Married in Pink, your spirit will sink."

Now that you have the month of the year, the day of the week and the color of your dress down, what else could go wrong?

Well if you should see a pig, a monk or nun, that doesn't bode well for you and if the groom should drop the ring the marriage will be doomed from the start.

The bride entering her new home by any way except the main entrance is very bad luck and if she should trip and fall, that would be even worse luck....that's where carrying a bride over the threshold came from, maybe?

A bride can court good luck by:

1. Letting a cat eat out of her left shoe exactly one week before her wedding.
2. Making her own wedding dress.
3. Find a spider in her wedding gown.
4. Look only once at herself in a mirror after she is dressed for her wedding and not look back.
5. Wear earrings at her wedding.
6. Cry on her wedding day to insure that she will never cry again.
7. Step into the church with her right foot first.
8. Step into her new home with her left foot first.
9. Be certain that wedding vows are not said at the bottom of the hour.
10. Do not carry a red and white bouquet....it symbolizes blood and bandages.

This certainly doesn't cover all of the superstitions and old-wives tales concerning the wedding and wedding day...but it's a start. Better safe than sorry.
:)

Chapter VIII

Weddings in Other Countries

People get married all over the world every day and each country has its own traditions and superstitions that surround weddings. Young couples in many countries are now tending to break away from the traditional weddings that their parents, grandparents and earlier generations adhered to. America doesn't have the market cornered on young people deciding to do things their own way and throw tradition to the wind.

In some cultures and in some religions it is much more difficult for young couples to break with the traditions that are deeply ingrained in their way of life than it is in America. Some of these foreign traditions are so interesting that young American couples adopt them for use in their own weddings in an effort to 'do their own thing'.

Consider adding one or two of these wedding traditions that are common in other countries to your wedding ceremony or celebration to give it a little flair or to acknowledge your own ethnic heritage.

Weddings in Italy

Italy is a mostly Catholic country so the weddings and wedding traditions are commonly centered around that Catholic heritage.

Italians as a group love to eat and drink so many of the wedding traditions concern food and beverages. The typical wedding day begins with early Mass followed by a large breakfast for the wedding party. The wedding day ends with dancing and a lot of food and drink well into the early morning hours of the following day.

Here are some of the beliefs and traditions of an Italian wedding:

1. May and August are considered a bad luck months to get married in Italy.
2. Sunday is considered the luckiest day of the week for a wedding to be held.
3. The Italians say, "Sposa bagnata, sposa fortunata." The literal translation is, "Bathed spouse, spouse fortunate" which all means that it is considered lucky for it to rain on a wedding day.
4. To ward off the evil eye, the groom is supposed to carry a piece of iron in his pocket.

5. The bride's veil is worn to hide her from jealous spirits and if the veil is torn it is considered a piece of good luck.
6. All of the invited male guests are supposed to kiss the bride at the reception to bring good luck for the couple.
7. The cookie dance is a part of most wedding receptions. The bride and groom lead a line of dancing guests over to the cookie table where each guest takes a cookie.
8. The best man cuts the tie of the groom into pieces and sells the pieces to wedding guests. In past times this was done for 'real' but today it is just done as a part of tradition.
9. At the end of a wedding, a vase is broken. The number of pieces the vase breaks into determines the number of years the bride and groom will be married.
10. The bride and groom never open presents before leaving the reception. It's considered bad luck.

Weddings in France

If you have a French branch on your family tree, you might consider incorporating some of these French wedding traditions into your wedding or the preparations for your wedding:

1. Remember the 'Hope Chest' of old? That whole notion was based on the French word, trousseau, which translates as 'bundle'. It refers to the small bundle of clothing that the bride took with her to her new home after she married. Today it means a collection of personal and household items that the bride has collected to begin married life. Trousseau can also mean the clothing that the bride will take with her on her honeymoon.
2. When a bride wears orange blossoms in France it is considered a sign of virginity.
3. During the wedding ceremony the bride and groom stand beneath a silk canopy called a 'carre' for the purpose of protecting them from bad luck.
4. As the wedding couple leaves the church, Laurel leaves are scattered before them to insure they will have children.
5. A two handled cup called a 'Coupe De Mariage' is used as a toasting cup by the newly married couple at the reception.

6. On the couple's wedding night, their young and rowdy friends congregate outside window and bang pots and pans together until they are invited in for another few drinks.

The German Wedding

Those of German decent know that the Germans have always had a way of doing things a bit differently and weddings are no exception. Consider incorporating some of these German traditions into your wedding if you are of German decent and plan to stay awhile:

1. The traditional German wedding lasts three days. On the first day the wedding couple is married in a civil ceremony that is attended only by their families and closest friends. On the second day, there is a huge but informal party that starts early and ends late at which the community at large celebrates the wedding. The third day of the wedding is when the religious ceremony is performed and a formal reception is held.
2. One of the traditions at the big party that is held on the second day of the wedding is that dishes are smashed...a lot of them. The couple is required to clean up the broken dishes as a symbol that nothing else will ever be broken in their home.
3. The German version of the bachelor party is called the 'junggesellenabschied'. The groom and his friends go out to a local pub to drink the night away a few days before the wedding.
4. Another German wedding custom is for the Bride to carry salt and bread as an omen of good harvest.
5. The groom is supposed to carry some grain to insure good luck and wealth.
6. When the couple is kneeling during the wedding ceremony, the groom kneels on the brides wedding dress to show the world that he will be wearing the pants in the family. After they rise from their kneeling positions, the bride will step on the groom's foot to assure the world that he is wrong.
7. As the newlyweds leave on their honeymoon they toss coins to the children who attended the wedding for good luck.
8. After the ceremony, the best man kidnaps the bride and takes her to a local pub. The groom must search for them and when he finds them, he is required to pay for all of their drinks in order to get her back.

9. The veil dance or sometimes called the money dance, wedding guests pin money to the bride's veil to get her to dance with them at the reception.
10. Friends of the newlyweds block the exit so that when the couple leaves they are required to pay a toll. Most often this 'toll' is the promise of another party.
11. Friends of the couple go to great lengths to insure that the wedding night will be fraught with problems. They will loosen the headboard of the bed, for example, or hide strange things in the room that have strange smells.

The Mexican Wedding

The Mexican wedding has many traditions. Some are based on superstition while others are rooted in tradition only. They vary from region to region in the country but if you are of Mexican heritage or if you just want to use a Mexican theme for your wedding here are some common traditions:

1. The first step is the religious ceremony...most often Catholic. Then there is a party or fiesta that is followed by a short civil ceremony.
2. Brides should not wear pearls...they signify tear drops and grief in her marriage and are considered very bad luck.
3. A bride that wears her mother's or grandmother's wedding dress is assured of good fortune and it is a status symbol as well.
4. To ensure food, money and passion in their marriage, the bride sews a yellow, a blue and a red ribbon, respectively, onto her lingerie.
5. The padrinos (Godparents) selection ceremony is held before the wedding. These honored people play a large roll in the wedding and in the following reception. The padrinos are chosen because of their own successful marriage and high moral standards. The padrinos need to be financially stable because they are expected to provide a substantial gift to the newlyweds and to assist them financially after they are married if needed. More than one set of padrinos may be chosen. The first are called 'major' padrinos and others are called 'minor' padrinos.
6. Since the Mexican wedding is a very family oriented affair, often a heart shaped piñata is provided at the reception for the children who attend to break.
7. At the beginning of the reception (fiesta) following the wedding ceremony, the father of the bride makes a short speech and then the band plays a

- waltz for the 'money dance'. The guests, in descending order of importance or kinship and according to gender, dance with the bride and the groom and pin money to their clothing. The money dance is called the 'aguinaldo'.
8. The groom is assaulted by his male friends. An apron is tied around his waist and he is given a broom. He is insulted by being called 'henpecked'.
 9. The bride stands on a chair while the unmarried women, holding onto each others waists, dance around her. The bride then tosses her wedding bouquet over her shoulder and the girl who catches it will be the next bride.
 10. The groom stands on a chair while the unmarried men dance around him and he tosses the apron over his shoulder. The first man it touches will be the next henpecked husband.
 11. The wedding cake consists of five to seven layers and is usually cut with a sword. It is not, however, served to the wedding guests. It is taken home by the parents of the bride to symbolize that this is the last time the bride and groom will be the center of attention.

The Vietnamese Wedding (Westernized)

Those who have a Vietnamese ethnic background often have a traditional Vietnamese wedding that precedes their legally recognized marriage before a judge or minister. The customs and traditions of a Vietnamese wedding are so beautiful and meaningful that many who have no Vietnamese background at all like to incorporate some of the traditions into their weddings.

The morning of the wedding the mother of the groom visits the family of the bride bearing two gifts. The first gift is a plant that represents respect and the second is pink chalk. Pink represents the color of happiness.

In the traditional Vietnamese wedding the bride wears Ao Dai....this is a long dress that is red in color. The Vietnamese consider red to be the color of good luck while white is used only for mourning. The bride waits at her home with her family and friends for the groom.

Along his way to the home of the bride, the groom picks up his family and friends. He arrives at the bride's home bearing gifts of money, jewelry and clothing. The wealthiest couple will lead the procession to the bride's home to provide good fortune and wealth for the couple.

The gifts that the groom and his family bring to the bride at her home will be wrapped in red paper or be in red boxes or boxes lined with red paper. The gifts will include betel leaves, areca nuts, wines, fruits, cakes, and jewelry.

The leading couple (the wealthiest) enters the home first and offers a bottle of wine to the parents of the bride. With their acceptance of the wine, the bride's parents are accepting the groom into their family.

The wedding ceremony takes place at an altar in the home of the bride. The wedding couple kneel at the altar and ask the blessings of their ancestors on their union. The couple then rises and facing their parents, they both bow and thank their parents for raising them and protecting them. The couple then faces each other and bow to signify mutual respect.

Each of the four parents then gives advice to the couple about the responsibilities of marriage and family. Then there is a candle ceremony that signifies the unifying of their two lives.

The red gift box that contains jewelry will be opened by the mother of the bride and she puts each piece on the bride to insure good luck for her.

The couple then exchange rings that symbolize their commitment to one another. The couple then signs their marriage certificate and is given red envelopes containing money with which to start their new life together.

At this point they are considered officially married in the eyes of their families and their ancestors but not in the eyes of American law. Often the bride changes out of her Ao Dai into a traditional white wedding gown and the couple are married in a ceremony that is legal in America.

A Vietnamese friend explained to me like this. "We succeed the tradition of our ancestors and look forward to our ancestors for help and protection. Every spouse must be respectful not only to the other but also to the other's parents and consider the other's family as his or hers."

Whatever your heritage is, you can find out what the customs and traditions for wedding are. All you really need to do is perform a Google search...or you can just ask your mother or your grandmother about traditional ceremonies. Including such traditions and customs in your own wedding will add special memories for you.

Chapter IX

Pagan Weddings

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines 'pagan' as: "a follower of a polytheistic religion (as in ancient Rome). Or as: one who has little or no religion and who delights in sensual pleasures and material goods: an irreligious or hedonistic person"

It is thought by pagans that a ceremony performed by a pagan priest or priestess at the moment of a total eclipse of the sun is the best and most fortuitous time for a pagan wedding ceremony. They believe that this is a union between dark and light.

The pagan wedding ceremony (if it can be called that) is called 'handfasting'. Handfasting can last for a year and a day, a lifetime, or for all eternity. Handfasting ceremonies can be performed for heterosexual or homosexual couples.

A handfasting can be done tying the knots loosely to denote a trial marriage. The couple will live together one year and one day and then decide if they want to continue together or not. If they choose to continue, another handfasting ceremony is done with the knots being tied more securely. Couples may choose whether the knots are intended for a lifetime or for all eternity. If all eternity is the choice, then if one dies the other may not have another handfasting with someone else, but must wait to be reunited with their mate through reincarnation.

If the proper steps are taken a handfasting can be a legal marriage in the eyes of the law.

Preparations for a handfasting ceremony begin from one to four hours prior to the ceremony. Previously there will have been rehearsals to direct the participants of their roles and positions during the ceremony. One to four hours before the ceremony the alter must be prepared. This is done by the pagan priest or priestess and their assistants. The alter is consecrated using specific rituals.

There is a group processional as they enter the alter area. This is directed by designated ushers. Next the couple acknowledges special guests, family and ancestors.

Attunement is accessed through silence, toning (chanting) and/or imagery in preparation for the circle casting ceremony that follows.

The items used in the circle ceremony are: a hawk' wing, a blade, two candles, incense, and a bowl of water with a lavender blossom floating in it. The ceremony

is supposed to summon the elements and the points of the compass. Simple gifts are exchanged and the circle is closed with a kiss.

The priest or priestess escorts the couples to the four points of the compass and to the center of the circle where they receive the blessing of the direction and the element that is associated with it.

The five points and their purposes are:

North: Earth, the Physical Realm

Tools: a pentacle of salt, a dish of fertile soil, or a platter with a round loaf bread

qualities: good health, a happy home, and fertility

East: Air the Mental Realm

tools: incense, feather, or bell

qualities: wisdom, good communication, learning, and intellectual growth

South: Fire the Action Realm

tools: candle or wand

qualities: creativity, harmony, sensuality, and vitality

West: Water the Emotional Realm

tools: water from a chalice or bowl

qualities: understanding, emotional support, intuition, and friendship

Center: Spirit the Spiritual Realm

tools: anointing oil, crystal, or other Spirit symbol

qualities: balance, wholeness, integrity, and spiritual growth.

After the circle ceremony the rings are blessed and exchanged. The couple then say their vows to one another.

At this point is when the bride and groom each give the priest or priestess their cords. The priest or priestess ties the cords together and then binds the bride's and groom's hands together.

The priest or priestess then invokes a blessing and pronounces that the couple are married.

The newlyweds, with their hands still bound together, must then jump over a broom together as a symbol of leaping into a new way of life together.

Conclusion

Marriage is a sacred commitment that should never be entered into lightly or on a whim or, even worse, on a dare. By pledging your love and loyalty to another human being you are assuming the responsibility of that person's life as they are assuming the responsibility for yours. But that doesn't mean that a wedding has to be done according to anybody else's wishes and desires but those of the bride and groom.

A wedding day should be one of the days that will stand out forever in a bride's and groom's memories as a day of joy and happiness and one that belongs uniquely to the bridal couple. It should be **THEIR** day...and not just on the day of the wedding but for their lifetime together.

The marriage ceremony, whether it is a first wedding or a subsequent wedding, really does signify the leaving behind of the old life and the beginning of a new life as a couple so it should incorporate everything that makes that change seem real and valid to the couple that is marrying. What others think doesn't really matter. The mother and the father of both the bride and the groom are about to become in-laws. Disagreements about the details of the wedding can start those relationships off on the wrong foot and be the basis for a thousand other little problems for many years to come.

At a 50th wedding anniversary celebration that I attended recently, I had the opportunity to ask the long-married couple what the secret was to their long and obviously successful relationship.

The gentleman looked me in the eye and told me that I wasn't the first person to ask that question and that he had been giving it some serious thought. He said that he might have a few answers.

He said, "When we got married back in '56 the world was a lot different. We expected that we would stay married all of our lives. Getting divorced was a shameful thing. So we talked it over and we agreed that we would never let the sun set on hurt feelings or anger between us. It's a lot easier to make up at night than it is over the breakfast table. And we agreed to never raise our voices to each other unless the house was on fire. I guess that's about it", he continued, "except that we just deal with all the little things as they come up and don't let mole hills get as big as mountains before we talk them over."

Maybe that's the secret of a long and happy marriage...talk it over....agree to agree....starting with the wedding plans.