

The Cast of Characters...



THE WEDDING

A wedding is all about people. We start with the Bride and Groom. Their union is the entire reason for all these festivities. They are two individuals who have grown to know, like, and love one another enough to choose to spend their lives together. A wedding is also about their parents. These four (and sometimes more) people are the ones who have borne and raised the young adults who stand before us now. They have invested far more than money in this process. They have invested of themselves. As they see their children about to wed, they are reminded of their own courtships and weddings. The approaching rite of passage will also trigger many thoughts of the past, the growing up years. There will be lots of reminiscing during the betrothal period.

A wedding is also about all the other family members. It is about siblings and grandparents; about aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins; about children, and Godparents. They too will be filled with memories and suffused with good wishes for the future of the couple.

A wedding is also about friends. It includes friends who are so close they are selected to be part of the wedding party. Of course some of the wedding party are relatives, but the very reason they are chosen to be included in the wedding party is because of the friendship they share with the Bride and the Groom. These friends share a very special place with the Bride and Groom on the festive day. They provide the official witnesses for the ceremony and also lend support and guidance throughout the betrothal period. There are, of course, other friends as well. These are all the guests who have been selected to witness the ceremony and join the merry making afterwards. These people are friends of the family, the wedding party and most importantly, the Bride and Groom themselves.

Since a wedding is all about people, the next section of our guide will look a bit more closely at these people, their roles and responsibilities.



THE BRIDE

You're the star today and all eyes will be focused on you. No matter how modern or liberated, when the average woman marries, there is a bit of "Cinderella" about

her. You will probably be no exception. You will wear your fancy gown to go the magical ball. And there will be your Prince Charming! It happens just as in your dreams. A multitude of customs, traditions and superstitions attend all the fairy tale magic about getting married. You may not even know where some of these traditions originated even though it is likely you will be reenacting them yourself. You will be reading about them in another later in this section. But a wedding is not all magic. There is a lot of behind the scenes work to ensure that the wedding day actually happens as planned. No matter how much wedding planning and preparation you are able to enlist others to do, the wedding remains a ceremony and party planned and coordinated primarily by the Bride. Allow yourself enough time.

Start out by being organized and stay that way. Call on reliable family and friends to help and delegate as much as you can. Hiring professionals whenever possible will help provide you with competent support people for your plans. It's easy for us to say and not so easy for you to do, but do all you can to avoid becoming "frazzled." If you remain happy, serene and confident that mood will transfer itself to the people you are dealing with who will then be pleasant and cooperative. This will ensure a smooth running and perfect wedding day.



THE GROOM

How does the Groom fit into all this wedding business? In the past, the Groom had little to do with the planning and organizing of his wedding. Some Grooms later felt that they were little more than a "prop" in the affair. But things have changed. Most often, the Bride is working or in school - making her just as busy as the Groom. She needs his help to accomplish all the details. Many couples are already living together. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should wish to consult each other about the details and share the work for many of the tasks.

In addition, men today see their wedding as an important day for **THEM**. They want to ensure that the ceremony and reception satisfy their wishes as well as those of the Bride. They assertively participate in the process throughout. During the last few weeks of bachelorhood, you may secretly have "cold feet" about the commitment you will make during your wedding. Relax, every Groom (and Bride, too) has the same emotions - it shows you are taking this step seriously, in full recognition of the responsibilities it entails, but also eager to share a lifetime with your chosen love.

Once the wedding ceremony is complete, you will probably feel quite relieved and ready to enjoy the rest of the day. Late partying and the consumption of alcohol the night before your wedding are wisely avoided. You have a long busy day ahead of you on your wedding day you will not want to begin your day tired. Review your

attendants' duties with them, check documents, the ring, the honeymoon plans, and then retire, satisfied that yours will be a wonderful wedding day. Eat properly during the day. Keep any appointments - shoe shine, manicure, etc. — exactly on time and then arrive at the church on schedule. You will always remember your wedding day as a unique, perfect occasion.



THE BRIDE'S PARENTS

As the parents of the Bride, you are probably faced with a multitude of emotions as your daughter shares her engagement status with you. Her engagement indicates she is about to undertake a rite of passage. You are thrilled to hear of her happy new status. You are a bit nostalgic to realize that your little girl has grown up. Being involved in the planning for a wedding, of any size, is a major undertaking. You are perhaps feeling a bit overwhelmed about the amount of work and ensuring the success of the party. It is important to begin discussions immediately with your daughter regarding the size of the wedding, who will pay for what, and other details. This will include discussions with your future son-in-law and his family as well. As parents, seeing your daughters wedding from a more mature perspective, you may be tempted to make lots of decisions about the wedding for her. It may be hard to allow her to do the planning. It is only natural that you will want to have input into the process, especially if you will be paying part or all of the expenses. Negotiation is critical. A willingness to trust her good judgment about what will be right for her and her new husband will strengthen the bonds between you.

Although traditionally the Brides parents have been responsible for organizing and financing the entire wedding, that situation is rarely true any longer. Today the Groom's parents normally participate in the planning and organizing and share part of the costs. The Bride and Groom contribute from their own money as well. It will be up to you and the other principals to decide how responsibilities and costs will be shared in your particular circumstances. In the event that you are separated or divorced, your daughter's wedding puts additional stress on you. Her upcoming marriage will perhaps remind you of your own marital difficulties. Your relationship with your former husband (or wife) may be strained and the necessary prenuptial planning as well as the wedding day itself may be tense. During the difficult times, remember that you are both her PARENTS although you are no longer together. She cares for and needs both of you during this time of transition for her. As well, there may be new parents on the scene - a step-mother and/or step-father. The roles of these people at the wedding vary considerably, depending on the longevity of those relationships, who the Bride lived with during her growing up years, the level of comfort all the principals have with each other, etc. Sensitivity regarding feelings on everyone's part and a willingness to facilitate the smooth flow of the wedding of the new couple will pay dividends long after the wedding day.

Communicating clearly and directly with all concerned is vital. That way, no one will be in for an unpleasant surprise on the wedding day itself. Also, if one of you or the step-parents is uncomfortable with some of the arrangements, there will be time to discuss it and compromise where possible.



THE MOTHER OF THE BRIDE

As the mother of the Bride, you normally select your outfit once the color scheme has been chosen and the Groom's mother selects her outfit to be a different but coordinating color. Traditionally, you are the last to be seated before the ceremony (in the front left pew) and the first to rise as your daughter and her husband start down the aisle. You are also the first to be ushered out after the ceremony. You are normally the first person in the receiving line. You may wish to arrange a few minutes alone with your daughter, perhaps near the end of the reception when she is changing into her going away outfit or near the time of the last dance. This will be an opportunity to share good wishes and special feelings before she and her husband head out into their new life together.



THE FATHER OF THE BRIDE

You are normally expected to make a toast to the Bride or to the couple at the engagement and/or rehearsal parties. It is your role to escort your daughter to the church and to walk her down the aisle. After escorting your daughter down the aisle, you will sit next to your wife in the first pew. Should you be separated or divorced from the mother of the Bride. You would normally sit in the third pew. You are the official host at the reception and are expected to mingle with the guests. If the clergy member is not available to say grace for the reception meal, you may elect to do this. You may wish to make a speech or toast at the reception. Traditionally you are the last to leave the reception after bidding the other guests' good bye.



YOUR ATTENDANTS

The people you select to be in your Bridal Party receive a very special honor, indeed. They have been chosen because of their friendship to you, the Bride and Groom. They have also been selected because they will be able perform the various tasks expected of them both during the engagement period and on the wedding day itself. They will be asked to lend support, a shoulder to cry on and a sense of humor to keep everything in perspective during the hectic betrothal period.

On the wedding day, you will want them to be calm and organized. They will be dressed in clothing to suit that worn by the Bride and Groom. Consequently they will add color and elegance to the wedding party. It is not true that the number of maids and groomsmen must be equal. The number of ushers is partly dependent on the size of your guest list. Even with a large guest list, you may wish to have a smaller number of maids. On the other hand, only under very unusual circumstances would a Bride have more than twelve bridesmaids. Is it possible to have bride's men?? Well, sure. It is not common, but if you, the Bride, wish to have one or more men in the bridal party, it is not unheard of. His attire would correspond to that worn by the groomsmen or ushers. And while we're re at it, some Grooms have grooms women as well as groomsmen. Mind you, again, it is not common and it will certainly spark some interesting comments at your wedding. But it is, after all, your wedding. You can do as you wish. For our guide, we will assume that all the Bride's attendants are female and all of the Usher's are male, as that is the most common. If you have selected some of your attendants otherwise, adjust our comments to fit your situation.



THE BRIDESMAIDS

The attendants you select for your Bridal party serve a largely honorary role. It is customary to select sisters of the Bride or Groom, other relatives such as cousins or close friends. The number of bridesmaids is up to you; but, in general, smaller weddings have a smaller number of maids.

The maids attend the majority of social functions, such as showers, bridesmaids' luncheon, trousseau tea, champagne tasting, rehearsal and rehearsal party. They are not normally expected to purchase a gift for each shower attended. Sometimes the maids will pool their gift money and select a large item as a shower gift. In

addition to other duties, they may be asked to stand in the receiving line following the wedding.

In Canadian society, it is traditional for the bridesmaids to pay for the purchase or rental of their own wedding day attire. In some other cultures, however, this is normally the responsibility of the Bride's family. Be clear regarding expectations from the beginning to avoid awkwardness.

As the Bride, it is important to be aware of possible financial limitations in your bridal party members and so do not expect them to pay more than they can reasonably afford. You are selecting them to join your wedding party in order to have their advice and help during your engagement period and to have them at your side during your wedding day. Selecting someone for this role should not result in hardship.

It is ultimately your decision regarding bridesmaids' gowns, shoes, etc. but it is nice to have them involved in the process. Some colors and styles work better for some than others. The maids may have valuable opinions regarding fabric choice, styling details such as sleeve length or neckline, ready made or custom designed, and cost. Listen to their ideas. Remember, the final choice still does rest with you.

Commonly the bridesmaids run errands and help with chores such as addressing invitations, wrapping cake or decorating the hall. It is wise to delegate tasks equally and according to talent. Try not to overwhelm any one particular person because they're extremely capable. Of course, if one of the maids lives out of town or there are other special circumstances, you might decide to alter the balance of work.



THE MAID OF HONOR

The Bride's honor attendant is called the Maid of Honor if she is an unmarried woman, Matron of Honor if she is or has been a married woman, and if you happen to select a male you may refer to him as your Best Person or Man of Honor. It is important that you have someone of legal age to sign the wedding documents.

The role of the maid of honor before and during the wedding day is to help and support the Bride. It is important to select someone dependable. They may be a sister or a very close friend. They could of course be another relative such as a cousin or niece or even mother or daughter of the Bride. Your honor attendant may certainly be someone who lives out of town, but remember that they will not be able to help with as many pre-wedding details.

It is traditional for the person selected as the maid of honor to be indicated by a dress of a slightly different style or color, a somewhat different headpiece, or to carry a slightly different bouquet.

The traditional responsibilities and duties for the maid of honor:

BEFORE THE WEDDING DAY:

- **Helps Bride select her wedding day attire**
- **Helps select the costumes for the Bridal Party**
- **Assists in addressing invitations and announcements**
- **Attends pre-wedding parties**
- **Plans and hosts a shower or party for the Bride or couple**
- **Attends rehearsal and rehearsal party**
- **Assists Bride with going away clothing and luggage**
- **Coordinates the bridesmaids and their tasks. Including fittings for dresses**
- **Helps keep track of gifts received and thank you notes written**
- **Normally pays for all wedding day attire with the exception of floral accessories**
- **Helps with the decorations**
- **Supplies "Something borrowed" and "Something blue" if requested**

ON THE WEDDING DAY:

- **Coordinates with the best man regarding details**
- **Helps Bride dress**
- **Reminds Bride to transfer her engagement ring to right hand**
- **Ensures that bridesmaids are carrying their bouquets properly**
- **Arranges Bride's train before processional**
- **Holds Groom's ring during the ceremony**
- **Holds Bride's bouquet during the ceremony**
- **Turns back bride's veil for the kiss**
- **Acts as a legal witness to the ceremony and signs documents**
- **Arranges Bride's train for recessional**
- **Returns bridal bouquet before recessional**
- **Participates in the receiving line**
- **Assists the Bride's mother at the reception**
- **Makes sure that best man has placed all Bride's luggage and other incidentals in the going away car**
- **Socializes with guests at the reception and ensures that guest book has been signed**
- **Makes a toast at the reception**
- **Helps Bride change into going away outfit**



THE USHERS

The ushers serve a largely ceremonial function. They are usually close friends or relatives of the Groom or Bride. Although being in a wedding party is a lot of fun, there are important responsibilities for ushers.

Often the Groom's attendants (with the exception of the best man) double as the ushers. If there is a large guest list, it is a better idea to have at least two full time ushers. In addition to seating guests, they can look after late arrivals and assist with the Bride's train before she proceeds up the aisle.

Before the wedding day, the ushers need to be available to help the Groom and best man with any details that they can. They especially must be available for formal wear fittings. Ushers attend necessary social functions such as the bachelor party, the rehearsal, and the rehearsal party.

Some of the social occasions involve gift giving. It is wise for the Groom to remember that he has selected these men to be in the wedding party because he wants their support and wants them to share his special day. It should not be a financial hardship for someone to participate. The Groom needs to make it clear to members of the wedding party that a gift is not expected at each of the social events.

As might be expected, the ushers' primary responsibilities center on the wedding day itself. It is the obligation of the ushers to attend the wedding rehearsal and to pay attention to the details of the upcoming ceremony as well as the specifics of their responsibilities.

On the day of the ceremony, the ushers need to be at the ceremony site approximately one hour before the time of the ceremony. If any guests are to be seated in reserved seats, the ushers **MUST know where those reserved seats are and who is to be sitting where. Make sure the ushers boutonnières are at the ceremony site and that the ushers are wearing them correctly on their left lapel.**

The ushers welcome guests to the ceremony as they arrive and escort female guests, by offering their right arm, to their seats. Guests of the Bride are normally seated on the left side (facing forward) and guests of the Groom on the right. If someone happens to be a close friend (or relative) of both sides, they are usually seated on the side with the fewer number of guests. At some weddings the number of guests for either Bride or Groom is markedly different than the other. In this case, the Bride and Groom may prefer to have guests seated randomly on either side.

The last guests to be seated before the ceremony begins are the mother of the Groom then the mother of the Bride. The seating of the mothers is actually part of the processional and, therefore, **NO GUESTS ARE TO BE SEATED UNTIL AFTER THE WEDDING PARTY HAS COMPLETED ITS PROCESSIONAL.** Tardy guests are to be kept waiting at the back of the church until after the completion of the processional and then are directed to pews at the back of the church.

At some weddings, the ushers may escort the mothers of the Bride and Groom out of the church following the ceremony. The ushers may also control the flow of guests exiting the church by moving from pew to pew. This is especially helpful if the wedding guest list is large and would crowd the aisle if all guests tried to exit at once.



THE BEST MAN

The best man has the most duties to perform on the day of the wedding. Prior to the wedding he will have been busy with formal wear fittings, helping the Groom and coordinating the rest of the groomsmen and ushers. He will likely have planned the bachelor party or at least been involved in its planning and successful execution.

The Best Man is most often your brother or best friend. Likewise, it can be another close relative or friend, the Groom's father - or - In the case of a second marriage, his son. Due to the responsibilities of this position, it is important for the Groom to select someone dependable.

The best man's duties include:

BEFORE THE WEDDING DAY:

- Organizes or helps organize the stag party
- Attends any pre-nuptial parties in the couple's honor
- Helps select formal wear
- Attends formal wear fittings
- Pays for own wedding attire
- Confirms honeymoon reservations and ensures that Groom has tickets. Traveler's checks, etc.
- Confirms in town hotel reservation for the wedding night. registers the couple, and makes sure the groom gets the keys
- Runs errands as necessary
- Coordinates reservations, keys and travel arrangements for the out of town guests

- **Attends rehearsal and rehearsal dinner**

ON THE WEDDING DAY:

- **Gets up early and has a good breakfast**
- **Is on time for any appointments such as manicure or shoe shine**
- **Is on time for getting dressed (at the Groom's home or elsewhere)**
- **Arrives early to help the Groom dress and finish packing**
- **Gets payment envelopes from Groom for clergy member (a check is made out in the clergy member's name, not the church), organist. etc.**
- **Holds the marriage license**
- **Gets Bride's ring and keeps in a secure place, or if there is a ring bearer, attaches the rings securely to the pillow**
- **Provides early - on time transportation for the Groom to the ceremony site**
- **Keeps the Groom calm in the minutes just preceding the ceremony**
- **Coordinates the ushers**
- **Signs marriage documents as an official witness**
- **Delivers all payment envelopes to correct recipients**
- **Helps Bride and Groom into the car leaving the ceremony**
- **Ensures the wedding party and principal family members are in correct cars leaving the church and that ALL drivers know exactly where they are going**
- **Possibly drives Bride and Groom to the photography site or reception**
- **Participates in photography sessions**
- **Sees that Bride's and Groom's luggage is in get-away car**
- **Ensures that Groom has all the tickets, passports, travelers check, itinerary, baggage checks, etc. that he will need for the honeymoon**
- **Makes sure get-away car is in a convenient location and has a working engine (it's fun to decorate their car with balloons and confetti - but not to spend time under the hood re-arranging wires)**
- **Participates in the receiving line**
- **Offers the first toast at the reception**
- **Dances with Bride, maid of honor, bridesmaids, mothers of the Bride and Groom and other guests**
- **Helps Groom change into going away clothes**
- **Facilitates Bride and Groom getting away from the reception**

AFTER THE WEDDING:

- **Returns Groom's and personal formal wear if rented or takes to cleaners and picks up when ready**



CHILD ATTENDANTS

A variety of reasons lead us to select children for our wedding party. We treasure the charm they lend to the occasion. Siblings or close friends of the Bride or Groom with children are honored to have their children picked as wedding attendants.

At what ages should children be part of a wedding ceremony? Younger children are very cute, but their behavior is often unpredictable. They may develop "stage fright" or begin to cry at an awkward moment. Use your judgment. Older children who are able to understand a bit more usually work out better. Children get bored during long ceremonies, receiving lines, photography sessions, delayed lunches, etc. It is better to schedule their hours around their tolerance level, even if it means they will not be available for the whole day.

It is very important to have all child attendants at the rehearsal. It will help them understand the "flow" of the ceremony and your expectations of them. It will also give you an idea if their assigned task may be too much for them. It is better to find out now rather than in the middle of the ceremony itself.

Flower girls certainly add a touch of charm to any wedding. They are normally between the ages of 4 and 8. Check with your clergy member about whether the flower girl will be permitted to strew your path with rose petals. Many churches now have restrictions because of the clean up problem later and she may be required to keep all her flowers in her basket. Make sure your florist knows. The flower girl's attire is usually a white or pastel dress that coordinates with the costumes of the Bride and other bridal party members. Flower girls are normally sisters of the Bride or Groom, younger cousins, nieces, perhaps a neighbor or someone you looked after as a baby-sitter. The flower girl might also be the daughter of the Bride or Groom in the case of a second marriage. It is not necessary to have a flower girl and occasionally a wedding has two.

The ring bearer is usually a little boy between the ages of about 4 and 8. The ring bearer carries the rings in the processional. The rings are normally attached to a satin or lace pillow and are tied on with a ribbon secured to the pillow. Be sure the ring bearer understands exactly what will be happening. We have seen occasions where the ring bearer objected to having HIS rings removed during the ceremony!

The train bearer is also usually a little boy aged 4 to 8. It is also acceptable to have a pair of train bearers. If there are two have them approximately the same size as they will be walking side by side. The train bearer follows the Bride during the processional (and sometimes recessional) and carries her gown's train. The train bearers are also sometimes called Pages.

What other tasks may be assumed by special children in your lives? A child may say a prayer or do a reading during the ceremony. A musically talented child who is accustomed to public performances may be asked to play or sing. A child may be put in charge of the guest book at the reception. Teenage young men can certainly fill the role of seating ushers at the ceremony. Young boys might distribute mass books or Yarmulkes or give out packets of rice. Children of either sex might be candle lighters for the ceremony. As you can see, there area number of tasks that children of various ages may be involved with for your wedding.