

The secret to a perfect wedding

June is the time of year when a young woman takes center stage and participates in perhaps one of the most exciting days of her life — a glorious wedding and one that she wants perfect in every way. Let's imagine a bride and take a peek into the day of her wedding.

We see her in a white, bejeweled bridal gown that fits her like it was designed especially for her, perhaps one with a princess neckline that proudly displays a strand of lovely white pearls. A veil cascades down her shoulders, cradling her body like a shield to protect her from all the evil in the world.

Soft pink and white flowers are everywhere and their luxurious scent fills the church or place of worship. Her best friends are dressed in pastel gowns and their smiles and eyes are wide with anticipation and happiness. The groom and his men are already there, and it's hard to believe that the always Levi-clad group could look so distinguished and handsome. Even the four o'clock shadow is gone.

After the ceremony, the reception follows and everyone has a terrific time. The food is delicious and the band is a combination of Benny Good-



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man and Bruce Springsteen so everyone joins in when the wedding organizer beckons the couples onto the dance floor. There is always a Polka and at least

one chicken dance.

The toasts are made, the multi-tiered cake is cut, the bride throws the bouquet to the single women waiting to dive, and soon the happy couple is off to a honeymoon in Jamaica.

Sound good? Well, that's the way it's supposed to be. But what leads up to "the day" is often an episode of Bridezillas and for those of you who haven't had the pleasure of seeing the TV version of "brides gone wild," try and catch an episode to really appreciate your next wedding anniversary.

If not behaving like Bridezilla, what's a bride to do when things don't go exactly like she planned? How can she avoid alienating her mother and father, sisters and brothers, and best friends since childhood with

unrealistic demands?

How does she make sure the potential groom isn't somewhere in the corner, scratching his head and wondering what on earth he has gotten himself into?

How can she ensure that her loving mother-in-law doesn't turn into the Wicked Witch of the West because she doesn't agree on the seating plan?

What if the caterer purposely sabotages the wedding by not salting the meat enough?

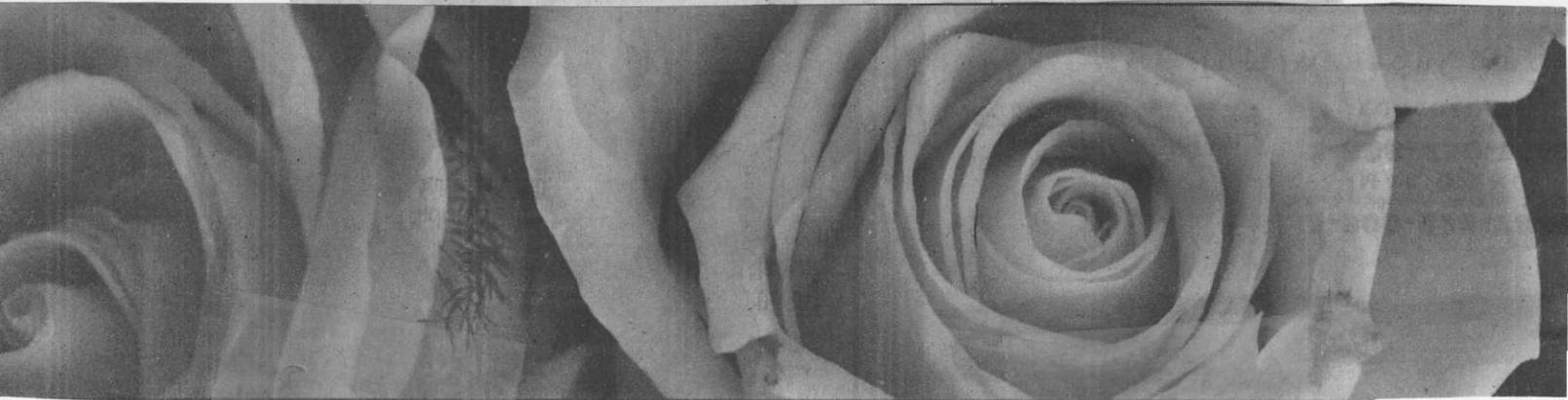
What if the band is tone deaf?

Worst of all: what if suddenly her wedding gown now makes her look fat?

Yes, getting through a wedding can be tough. Did I have problems? You bet. And it wasn't easy to keep the Bridezilla in me in check.

My second wedding was my formal wedding, and I had almost a whole year to plan it. It didn't matter. It was going to try my patience no matter how long in advance I planned for it.

It started, as most weddings do, with the wedding gown. I tried on a few, but nothing thrilled me. Truthfully, I didn't know what I wanted. My first wedding had been in West Africa and



my family had not been there so this wedding was pretty much for them. I wasn't into big poufy dresses, so after around the 30th try on, and a very tired mother at my side through it all, I spotted a mannequin at Macy's dressed in a plain, white gown.

"I'll take that one," I said, pointing my thumb in the mannequin's direction. The salesgirl looked surprised, nodded and retreated to the back of the store. She returned empty-handed with a frown.

"I'm, sorry," she said, fingering the sheer long sleeve of the mannequin's gown. She nonchalantly peeled down the tag in the back. "This gown is discontinued. I'm afraid all we have is this one. It's a size 10."

"Uh-huh," I said, grabbing my handbag. "Wrap it up. I can squeeze myself into it." And that's how I selected my wedding gown.

My sister, cousin and best friend were bridesmaids, and we ordered their dresses with plenty of time to spare. Boutonnieres for the groomsmen were matched to the pretty pastel colors of the dresses, bouquets were ordered, a photographer was selected and the contract to

use the country club for the reception was signed. Menus were chosen without a hitch and the cake was going to be spectacular.

Two weeks before the wedding, the truck drivers carrying the bridesmaids' dresses decided to go on strike. A day or so later, the strike was settled, but somehow the truck carrying the gowns got lost somewhere in Parsippany. The gals and I ran out to a local mall and were able to get decent dresses, but instead of sitting down on the side of the road and crying, we all laughed about it on the way home.

A day or so later, I received a call that for sanitary reasons the board of health had decided to close the country club where I was having my reception. Yes, a bright red "Condemned" sign was posted on the front door.

Luckily, I was working for county government at the time and after a few minutes of begging, my wonderful boss made a quick call to the commissioner of health. A few days later, after extra crews were called in to get the place in tip-top shape, the club got a seal of approval to reopen.

The day of the wedding turned out nice after a week

of torrential rain. The bouquets of flowers arrived and looked good, but the boutonnieres were not the pretty pastel colors I had ordered. Not only were they bright orange and yellow, but there were no pins to pin them on the lapels of the groomsmen. We had to scramble in my grandmother's sewing box for extra large needles and go ahead with the awful colors.

But of course no one really paid attention to the hideous boutonnieres, the store bought bridesmaids' gowns, the bride in her Macy's mannequin gown, or the country club that scrambled to keep up to sanitary code. They were all there to celebrate and someone told me later that it was the best wedding they had been to in a long time.

That's why I don't have any sympathy for Bridezillas making everyone's life miserable. And if someone asked me what the secret was to a perfect wedding, I wouldn't hesitate for a moment. It's got to be keeping a very good sense of humor.

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