



Weddings and Chaos Theory

Tales from the people who know

BY ALEXANDRA ARCH

If the devil is in the details, when it comes to the “big day,” Satan must be living large. Details have never been so important nor so personal as on your wedding day. The music is carefully cued, the colors coordinated. Everything from the type of flowers to the placement of the napkins is planned. Everything is in its place.

Enter the wedding chaos theory. With infinite possibilities of what could go awry, dealing with the unplanned and out of control is as much a part of weddings as all the forethought and planning. From ring bearers to toasts, from cakes to pictures, a wedding becomes unpredictable once set into motion. The keys to survival are flexibility and humor.

“I’ve been to a lot of weddings and I always call it the wedding gremlin,” said Dennis Overlandmiller of Creative Endeavors Photography.

Rowdy Ring Bearers

At one wedding, the wedding gremlin took the form of the 2-year-old selected as the ring bearer. While walking down the aisle, the toddler began swinging the pillow

around and the wedding bands flew into the air, falling among the seated guests. But the show must go on, so the bride and groom faked the ring exchange while they said their vows. After the ceremony the guests searched on their hands and knees for the bands. The prize for the person or persons who found them: first in the buffet line. It was a scramble.

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At another wedding, Overlandmiller was shooting pictures of a couple who married beneath a large oak tree at Wayne Morse Ranch. Their Labrador retriever had performed wonderfully at rehearsals the day before as the ring bearer, dutifully trotting down the aisle. But on the wedding day, the canine spotted a squirrel at the base of the tree and went after it. Fifteen minutes later, the dog was caught and the ceremony continued.

Marlene Hockema, an event coordinator for Weddings Extraordinaire, watched as another young ring bearer decided to strip off

his tuxedo right before walking down the aisle. As the pictures reflect, he wore his underwear to deliver the rings to the bride and groom.

Neither Rain, Nor Snow, Nor ...

On rare 100-degree days, Overlandmiller has seen both cakes and brides melt in the heat. The women wore heavy, multi-layered

dresses at a renaissance-themed wedding and the men clanked around in chain mail re-enacting sword fights. Wearing a heavy gown, the bride parked herself under the shade of an umbrella and put on a brave and sweaty (oops, glowing) face.

Kelly Passmore knows all about more serious wedding disasters. Flash floods and a tornado ripped through the area the day before her wedding in May 2004 in Spokane, Wash. On the big day, Passmore’s ride to the country wedding site picked her up two hours late. Then a bolt of lightning struck

right next to the car on a back country road, and the skies opened up. “It poured the day of the wedding — it was awful,” she said. “We had rented a tent and crammed everybody underneath it.”

Instead of standing near the picturesque gazebo and waterfall as planned, 115 guests huddled in the shelter of the single tent. The pastor stood up front with the couple, rain streaming down his back throughout the ceremony. “If rain on your wedding day means good luck, then that day I got a whole lot of really good luck,” she said. “Everything that could go wrong, did go wrong.”

He’d Rather Be Fishing

“Every wedding has something,” Hockema said. “Some are more severe than others. Some you can cover up and laugh, and some turn the tide of the day.” Minor things, such as a DJ who showed up to a reception down by a river without extension cords, have taught her to carry extras. At another riverside wedding, the groom was missing when the time came to take pictures. Hockema and others found him standing in the middle of the river — fishing.

It wasn’t funny at the time, but now Michelle Urso laughs about her wedding chaos. The UO journalism graduate student was married June 2004 in the coastal town of Yachats. The ceremony ran smoothly, but a dog bit Urso’s ex-boyfriend (hmmm), and the food was two hours late. Someone forgot the sunscreen and the groom was so sunburned, he was an alarming shade of purple from his nose up. Try to fix *that* one in PhotoShop.

But the highlight (or should that be low point?) of her wedding was unknowingly doing a striptease for her prim and proper mother-in-law. The bustier she wore was uncomfortably tight. Thinking she was alone in a hallway outside of the reception, Urso flung her dress over her shoulders and undid the pins one by one, tossing the bustier onto a table. Turning around, she realized her mother-in-law was standing behind her, frowning in disapproval. She flashed the dear lady a grin, spun around and rejoined the festivities.

One More Crisis Narrowly Averted

Let’s not forget the unsung heroes who save the day. Most caterers have countless stories of wedding mishaps. But we rarely hear about their wedding triumphs. For example, a server at one local catering company dove like a baseball player sliding into home to save the cake as the table collapsed. Another caterer opened the cake box to put on the final touches only to discover a melted pile of icing. The baker, trying to save time, transported the cake before it had cooled and the entire structure had collapsed. The caterer called the baker and had another cake delivered immediately. It arrived in time, and as she was putting the final touches on the new one, the bridal party walked in. The bride never even knew.

So brides and grooms, caterers, planners and photographers alike, whether you were spared the knowledge or experienced it first hand, wedding disasters occur in all shapes and sizes. But it’s surviving them that matters. Maintaining a sense of humor helps. A selective memory, too. After all, what’s the first day of a couple’s life together without a few bumps in the road? ♥