

# Being mother of the bride brings new role



**Constance Johannessen**

It was a late Friday afternoon and I was looking at my daughter's wedding pictures for yet another time. At that moment she called and interrupted

my peaceful reminiscing. I immediately shared that a colleague, who attended her wedding, left a lengthy message in my work voice mailbox that day saying, "How lovely she is" and what a "great time" he and his wife had at the event.

Excitedly she revealed that she frequently hears from her friends about the wedding and how meaningful a day it was for many of them.

After reliving many of the wedding highlights, she inquired into my weekend plans. I disclosed that I was writing an article. As she walked through the streets of New York City amidst sirens screeching and people shouting, she suggested the following topic, "How to Deal with Pushy People and Still Get Your Way." Catchy, I thought. "But, what examples or stories do I have?" I asked her.

Her response as she chuckled was: "Mom, you always draw from family situations."

After hanging up, I continued to obsess about the perfect topic, only to realize that the wedding album resting on my lap held the intended subject.

Reviewing, reliving her wedding brought me closer to embracing the meaning and reality of the day. The ceremony suggests the final parental "letting go." According to Deborah Tannen, "in the course of a woman's life, the culture provides three invisible institutions, womanhood, marriage, and motherhood for her to enter."

The institution of marriage for the mother of the bride means "letting go" of your daughter like you have never emotionally let go before.

Many will recall Steve Martin in "Father of the Bride," and the days leading up to his daughter's wedding, which were riddled with numerous overwhelming decisions. In our instance, as the plans got under way, each decision exemplified how my daughter's vision of her perfect wedding occasionally strayed from mine. As differences occurred, or what she called "hiccups," we resorted to ne-

gotiating and finding mutual ground. When our ideas were too far apart, it required extensive conversation to make a decision.

Sometimes as the mother of the bride, it can feel as if you are not needed. I remember expressing this thought to her, to which she responded, "Yes I do need you, only I need you differently."

Differently? What did she mean by that?

What became more pronounced and clear throughout making the wedding decisions, was the new development of our mother/daughter roles. She was no longer my "child" or young adult who was in need of direction. Instead she was my adult daughter with her own mature thoughts. She had developed and distinguished her own voice. For me, again, this necessitated my letting go of control.

In turning the pages of the wedding album, the images of letting go clearly, and with sequence, unfold. Scenes from the early preparations in the home move to glimpses of all the girls and women primping in the bridal suite. Next are pictures of the traditional professional, exemplifying the

transition from the significant elder to the hands of the intended partner. And lastly, reflections of joy on everyone's face as they heartily celebrate in response to the new marriage.

On the wedding day a daughter joins her mother in embracing the role of wife. It is easy to wonder, what have I taught her about being a wife? Does she see the role of wife as that of a mutual partner? Will she balance career and motherhood? Or, will she create a different role for herself? One with meaning unbeknownst to me.

As mothers we are left having to trust that we provided our daughters with the tools to respect and navigate this new role. We can only hope that as each daughter grows in this new role, she will continue to express her voice, negotiate well, mutually make decisions and remain "lovely."

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