

My First Wedding

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I stood at the back of the church in my silky dress, a flower in my hair, my parents at my side. I looked down the aisle, my eyes following the white runner that stretched to the altar, where roses spread in every direction. The organ music filled the room and the sun streaked through the stained glass windows. I had been looking forward to this day for a long time!

It was 1950. I was six. I had just finished first grade and Miss Brown, my teacher, had invited me to her wedding. It was my first, but right away I was beginning to learn how to feel and what to dream about.

An usher offered me his arm and walked us to our seats. I felt very grown up! I felt like *I* was the bride! My parents let me have the seat on the aisle.

When the bridesmaids were all in their places and the wedding march started, I leaned out to get a better view. But, I hardly recognized Miss Brown! She didn't look anything like she did in school! This was a magnificent lady! Like a queen! I felt unsure, a little confused.

Then, she saw me! And, she winked at me! Now I knew her.

At the reception, I got a hug, bigger than ever at school, and Miss Brown – oops, *Mrs. Reynolds* -- introduced me to her parents. Her mother had tears coming down her face the whole time – in happiness, my dad said.

The huge cake was like a castle, with a little bride and groom on the top. I gasped, but everyone else laughed, as Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds smashed cake into each other's faces. People yelled for a kiss! A kiss!

Outside, I threw rice. And then they drove away, noisy cans tied to the bumper, shaving cream on the windows. A big sign said "Just Married." No one knew where they were going for their honeymoon.

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I was on my way – I was beginning to know how things "are supposed to be," how girls could measure their success in life. The rules and the images were now laid out for me.

And not just the lessons of how *weddings* should be, but how one's *life* should be – pick a man, children should follow. A career? Maybe – if necessary, if your husband doesn't mind, if it doesn't hurt the children.

But are these good lessons for a girl? Such rigidity about how things should be? Did one size really fit all?

Now, I say "No! Not good!"

But - as a girl - these messages were everywhere, and I soaked them up. This is what I wanted! And, I spent years running around with a slip on my head, playing bride.

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