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TRADITIONS

By Laura Urbani

Use them or Lose them?

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.

Since the Victorian age, brides and grooms have tried to fulfill that custom in the hopes of bringing good luck and fidelity to their marriage.

That is just one of many traditions that most couples incorporate into their wedding plans. Others prefer to put their own special touch on traditions or abandon them altogether.

"Tradition has so many directions you can go in," says Bonnie Walker Chirigos, owner of Creative Affairs Inc., a wedding consultant company based in Pittsburgh. "There are always fresh and creative ideas."

Chirigos encourages couples to be traditional, but that doesn't mean they have to do the same old things. For Chirigos, tradition is all about family and being you. She suggests using family touches like old photos and heirlooms to add tradition, while keeping the ceremony unique.

"Couples can make their own traditions. It's bringing emotion and feeling to the event."

Wedding consultant Marla Boyle, owner of La Bliss in Greensburg, agrees that brides and grooms like to include unique ideas that represent their personalities.

"It's all based on preference," says Boyle. "The majority of weddings are still traditional, but they throw in some modern things. Other brides have nothing traditional."

Boyle recently planned a wedding that was held in the mountains near Normalville, Fayette County. The guests were seated in a large grassy field while the vows were exchanged under a tree. The reception was held at the field in an event tent.

"They wanted it to be different," says Boyle. "They didn't want it to be a cookie cutter wedding."

One of the biggest breaks in tradition was the exclusion of a wedding cake. Instead guests were served a variety of French pastries.

"It was more laid back. It was one of my best weddings. There were no formalities," she says.

Couples who keep the cake, oftentimes do without its messy tradition. Some refuse to smash the first slice of cake in their new spouse's face.

There was a time when the bouquet toss was one of the more anticipated events at a wedding. Some of today's brides are choosing to keep them.

"We don't often throw bouquets anymore," says Chirigos. "We don't do the garter toss. I can't remember the last time someone threw the garter. It was one tradition I didn't think

was necessary. It was uncomfortable for others."

There are some traditions that have been updated to fit a modern society. Rice is no longer thrown to wish the couple a fertile marriage. Instead, bubbles are blown or confetti is tossed. Ceremonial toasts still occur at the reception, but often the best man and maid of honor present their toasts together.

A wedding ceremony is not complete without the vows. If the officiant agrees, some couples like to write their own vows. Some choose traditional wording, but often do some editing.

"They can tell the officiant what they want or don't want," says Linda Miller, an associate with Creative Affairs. Like using the word 'obey' in the vows, "that's not happening anymore."

Brides still like to wear stunning gowns, but the white dress is no longer the only option. Wedding dresses can now be found in several colors or with splashes of color.

"Pastel wedding dresses are beautiful," says Chirigos.

While tradition dictates that fathers walk their daughters down the aisle, there are many options for women today, including walking alone.

"In Jewish tradition the father and mother walk the bride down the aisle," says Miller. "We've done that for non-Jewish weddings. I can count on one hand when a woman walked alone. It's very rare. Sometimes the mother and father will walk halfway down the aisle. So you have a shot of the bride walking alone when she comes in and then she joins her parents for the rest of the way."

Some couples choose exotic locations for their ceremonies. Chirigos has planned weddings everywhere from Aspen to Florida, to the Bahamas and Tuscany, Italy.

"They'll get married at these exotic locations," says Chirigos. "Then when they come back, they have a reception. People choose venues for different reasons. Sometimes people pick venues because it's a place where they have wonderful childhood memories."

Chirigos planned a ceremony on a cruise ship because that was where the couple met during annual family vacations.

Sometimes traditions can be overwhelming. Parents and friends may have certain expectations about what should be included in the ceremony. The bride and groom should feel free to have the ceremony of their dreams, even if that means excluding every tradition.

"Don't listen to anybody but your heart," says Chirigos. "You have to do what's right for you not for somebody else. It's nicer to do something different. You don't want to do what everyone else does. You want it to be personal. When you walk in, the wedding should represent that bride and groom and their families." **WE**



AMEE OBIDZINSKI