

Here comes the bridesmaid

As spring begins to turn into summer, I find myself thinking of weddings. I have so many vivid memories from the day my husband and I were married almost 13 years ago, but there are so many other weddings we have experienced.

I cried as my oldest sister and my father danced to “When Irish Eyes Were Smiling” at her wedding, and I laughed after my husband and I missed most of my younger brother’s reception because we had to drive back to the hotel, 40 minutes away, to get his going-away outfit. At least we made it back in time for the ice cream sundaes.

Weddings are full of stories – the forgotten cake knife, the flat tire or the cell phone that rang in the groom’s pocket during the vows.

One of my favorite wedding stories, though, is from my little sister’s wedding – or just before her wedding – when I accepted her invitation to be matron of honor.

Bridesmaids are at the bride’s mercy. There is no guarantee that the dress will be attractive – or something you’d ever want to wear. You pay for a dress, smiling all the while, wear it for a day, take it off, and most likely never look at it again.

I’ve been fortunate that the brides who have asked me to be a bridesmaid have all had exquisite taste. I felt certain I could trust my little sister, too, and I was right. In the end, she decided to ask a seamstress to make the bridesmaids’ dresses.

It was an exciting idea – to own a custom-made dress. We went for a fitting, the seamstress sketched a gorgeous drawing for some tall, slender model, and we picked a fabric. We traveled to the seamstress’s shop in Pasadena three times for fittings, and I went once just to learn how to bustle the bride’s dress.

When I made my very last trip to pick up my dress, I decided to take one of our sons along. When we arrived at the shop, he was curious about everything. He asked about the different sewing machines. He made silly faces into her large mirror. He found a stuffed duck and some colored pencils to play with.

Then I tried on the dress and stepped in front of the mirror.

“Mama!” he said. “You look beautiful in that dress!” The seamstress was positively charmed.

After I had hung the dress back on the hanger, our little boy pleaded with me to put it back on – “because you look so beautiful in it” – and I told him he’d see me in it again soon enough.

His reaction made me feel good about the time and money I had invested in the dress. Isn’t it amazing, I thought, that my son can recognize the value of a custom-made dress.

The next morning I was making pancakes and turkey sausage for breakfast when I noticed that our son was watching me closely.

“Mama,” he said. “Are you wearing the dress from Pasadena?”

I looked down at my faded, frayed, shapeless bathrobe – the one I had owned since college and which should have been retired several years earlier. I hadn’t showered or combed my hair. I had pancake batter on one sleeve and sausage grease on the other.

“Um, no,” I said. “This is just my bathrobe.”

“Oh,” our little boy said. “I thought that was the dress for Aunt Treasa’s wedding.”

“Ah, well,” I thought. “At least there’s no chance I’ll outshine the bride.”

And, of course, I didn’t.

Whenever we retell that story, I think of how in my son’s eyes, I was as beautiful in a worn-out bathrobe as I was in a fancy dress. What a wonderful reminder of the love a child has for his mother, the love a husband has for his wife and the love God has for every person he created.

“God loves each of us,” St. Augustine said, “as if there were only one of us.”

And God doesn’t care whether we’re immaculately dressed in fancy clothes or wearing an old bathrobe with sausage grease on the sleeve.