

More Wedding Stories

2. Never trust your friends to pick a “secret” reading for your wedding ceremony. You should pick every word of your ceremony.

It’s always best to pick every word of your ceremony. Once upon a wedding, two of the Bride’s girlfriends said they would each do a surprise reading. Judge Armstrong always likes to include the words of each reading in the ceremony, but this time he was only asked to introduce each reader. It was an outside wedding and a perfect summer day. Grandmas and Grandpas, and Parents, Uncles, Aunts, and all the other relatives and friends, old and young, were there to celebrate. Many children were present.

The first reading was just before the Vows. It was a short poem entitled *We’ve Done It*. Here is a rough sketch of a few of the lines.

We’ve Done It

Our clothes in piles on the floor
Sitting together on the edge of the bed
We’ve done it.

My bare breast against your arm
Our sweaty bodies pressed together
We’ve done it.

Etc. etc. etc. – you get the idea.

The second reading was after the Exchange of Rings. It was about an older couple sitting together outside. A fly lands on their table. The wife hands her husband a fly swatter and says to him:

“Get the son of a b----.”

The two young ladies thought all this was funny – a great joke. The Bride was not happy. It was the only time that “son of a b----” was a line in one of Tom’s wedding ceremonies.

Pick every word of your ceremony – and every word of each reading – unless you really, really trust the reader.

3. The Groom who ran away.

It was a backyard wedding on a beautiful summer’s day. The Groom and Judge were at the front and the guests were all seated on chairs. The processional music was playing and the first bridesmaid was coming down the grassy aisle. Suddenly the Groom took off running, going around a hedge, out of sight, into a neighbor’s yard. The guests gasped, the bridesmaid stopped, the musicians fell silent. The Judge, Ken Maas, was dumbfounded. This had never happened before.

Then, back around the hedge, came the Groom. The Bride’s Father had him by the collar with one hand – and in his other hand was a shotgun – painted white.

The crowd roared with laughter and the ceremony continued on. Only the Groom and his future Father-in-Law had been in on this well planned stunt.

Did the Bride know in advance? We hope so.

4. Who gives this woman in marriage?

The Father of the Bride sometimes has a line to speak. Who gives this woman in marriage to this man? There are many answers.

“Her Mother and I do.”

“No one gives this girl away, for she has a mind and heart of her own. But I do give my blessing, hopes, and prayers for their future

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

together.”

Minnesota Response: “I do, Yah sure, you betcha.”

But at one wedding the Bride’s Father added his own words.

“I do. No refunds, no returns.”

The Bride had not inherited her Father’s sense of humor and was not happy – luckily Judge Armstrong was the only one who could see her face and she quickly got over it.

5. The Motorcycle Wedding

A couple, who were members of a motorcycle club – okay – maybe a gang, decided to involve the whole group (gang) in their ceremony. It was in an open field. The Judge, Bride, Groom, Best Man and Maid of Honor stood in the center of a circle of about 100 motorcycles. All was quiet as the vows were spoken and then the rings exchanged. With the pronouncement and kiss, all 100 engines started and a deafening roar commenced. The Groom and Bride got on their motorcycle and rode off together into eternal bliss – with the guests behind them.

6. The Lost Wedding Rings

“Our rings are safe and they’re in this house, but we can’t find them.” With these words Judge Armstrong was greeted by the Bride at the front door. It was a wedding at the couples’ home. The Bride had put the rings in a safe place and then forgot where they were. They had searched everywhere – to no avail. Since an exchange of rings isn’t legally required for a marriage, the wedding was performed with no Ring Exchange. Hopefully the rings turned up on a later day.

7. The Stolen Wedding Rings

The Bride and Groom decided to take some pictures in a park in Minneapolis. The two boxes with the rings were left on the front seat of their car. Somehow the door wasn't locked. When Judge Armstrong got to the wedding and reception site, he noticed a police car parked out front. The officer was taking the report of the theft.

But fear not, the ceremony went on with rings borrowed from relatives. The guests were none the wiser. It takes a pretty heartless thief to steal wedding rings when the Bride, in her white dress, was easily visible in the park a few hundred feet away.

8. The "Where is the Ring?" Gag.

Groomsmen have pulled this stunt at several weddings where Tom officiated. The Judge looks at the Best Man to pass the Bride's ring, the Best Man searches his pockets and can't find it. Then he turns to the next Groomsman, who goes through the same motions. Finally the last Groomsman, after initially not finding the ring, discovers it in his pocket. The ring is then passed forward to the Groom.

9. The Cracker Jacks Box

This is a variation of the "Where is the Ring?" detailed above. The last Groomsman has an empty Cracker Jacks Box in his pocket - he pulls it out - shakes it - and finds the Bride's ring in the box. Then the ring is passed forward to the Best Man.

10. The Courthouse Wedding - Getting your Foot in the Door

Back in the days before September 11th, life was simpler, security was lax, and each Washington County Judge had a key to the courthouse. There was a side entrance from the parking lot that was very near the back of a small courtroom. On a Sunday, Saturday, or an evening, Judge Armstrong would meet couples, with two witnesses, and maybe a few family members and friends. He would greet them in the parking lot, then open the side door, and use the small courtroom for their wedding.

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

Once upon a wedding, on a Saturday, when Tom got to the courthouse, the parking lot had over 50 cars in it. He was 30 minutes early, and there was a large crowd of people waiting in the summer sunshine. Five young women wanted to get in right away so they could “decorate.”

The small courtroom wouldn't work for this crowd, so Judge Armstrong opened the biggest courtroom. The ladies decorated, the guests hung out in the hallway, and the couple arrived. The Bride was nicely dressed in a bridal gown, and the Groom was in his military uniform. “Things got out of control and everyone wanted to come,” she said. Judge Armstrong had expected four people.

A white runner was placed on the center aisle of the courtroom. There were at least 175 guests. The largest courtroom was packed, including the jury box.

Once they got their foot in the door, it was impossible to say “no,” but there are judges who would have turned their car around and headed home. Tom knows – he used to work with some judges like that. Lucky for the couple, Tom is flexible and wouldn't spoil someone's wedding day. Even if the couple was somewhat deceptive to him.

Did the couple send out invitations to this large crowd to be there? Was Tom the only one who didn't know? Was it easier to ask for forgiveness than for permission?

Now, no Washington County Judge has access to the courtrooms after hours. The Sheriff has the keys and wants any couple to hire three bailiffs, four hours minimum pay, to man the metal detector and provide security.

On dreary winter Sundays, Tom used to bring his three youngest boys to the courthouse to run their remote control cars down the wide

empty hallways. Once, after Christmas, the boys even tried out their new scooters at the courthouse.

As a retired judge, Tom doesn't do weddings at the courthouse. Life has gotten very complex and the quiet atmosphere of the courthouse on a weekend is long gone. No more weddings, no laughter of happy children running their toys down the empty halls - it's now locked up like a tomb.

11. Prison Weddings

Judge Armstrong has performed weddings at four Minnesota Correctional Facilities - MCF is the lingo - MCF Stillwater, MCF Oak Park Heights, MCF Lino Lakes, and way up north at MCF Rush City.

These are not big weddings, only the Groom, the visiting Bride - not dressed as a Bride - and two witnesses. It takes place in the visiting room. The Groom sits by himself on one side of an aisle and everyone else sits on the other side. No rings can be exchanged. The witnesses sign the papers before they enter the visiting room. Then the documents are distributed and, along with purses, watches, wallets, keys, belts, etc. secured in lockers. If you visit someone in a prison, be sure to bring quarters. At most, but not all MCFs, you need quarters to rent a locker. Rush City MCF has free lockers. Bet you didn't know that.

Most of the weddings make sense. The couple have children together and he is getting out in a year or so. One, however, involved an inmate with a release date in the year 2104. If you are old enough to read this, you will probably not be alive in 2104. The Bride didn't know him before he was incarcerated - for murdering more than one family member.

So, why did she marry him? Who knows? Love is a Many-Splendored Thing. *(Cue the music and start dancing.)*

Tom's first day of retirement was January 3rd 2011. He has stopped doing prison and jail weddings. Only weddings, in pleasant surroundings, from now on.

12. **It's a Wonderful Life**

We all know the Christmas time movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. In 2007, the Lyric Arts Company of Anoka did a play based on the 1946 movie. It was two acts with an intermission. A couple, who loved the movie, decided they wanted to get married at the intermission. The cast agreed that it was a great idea. Judge Armstrong was asked to officiate. Just as the first act ended, an announcement was made that there would be a wedding taking place on stage.

Applause and cheers broke out and the Bride and Groom entered. The couple's friends and family had purchased tickets and were there in the audience. George Bailey acted as the Best Man, and Mrs. Bailey was the Matron of Honor. Uncle Billy was not asked to be the ring bearer - he would have lost the rings - like he lost that envelope full of money.

The ceremony was performed, rings exchanged, the couple kissed, and were introduced to the cheering audience. Then the Marriage Certificate was signed by the two actors using their real names. The Bride and Groom didn't know either of them before the play. It was a fun way to get married.

And Mr. Potter got to keep the \$8,000.00 - so even the bad guy had a happy ending.

So - what's your favorite play?

13. **A Surprise Wedding - on the Bride**

At 8:20, on a weekday morning, Judge Armstrong got a phone call from a Groom asking if he could perform a wedding at exactly 2:20 that afternoon. Tom was on vacation that day - now he's retired and every

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

day is vacation – so a 2:20 p.m. wedding would work. The couple had purchased a marriage license, but hadn't set a date or discussed other details. It was the Bride's birthday and she would be celebrating with her fellow workers at 2:20 when their break started.

Judge Armstrong, the Groom, the Bride's sister, and her husband, and their two young children, met in the parking lot of the building in which the Bride worked. As they all walked around the corner of the building, the Bride, a sharp knife in her hand, was about to cut her birthday cake at the end of three picnic tables in a row. Twenty co-workers were seated watching her.

“Oh, you came, I didn't expect you.” She said excitedly. Then a puzzled pause, “Who is he,” she said, looking at Judge Armstrong dressed in a suit. The Groom told her “It's Judge Tom Armstrong, let's get married.” Well, this was a tense moment in time. The potential Bride was armed with a long bladed knife. Would she say “yes,” or stick it through the loving heart that was beating just for her. The Groom knew his Bride. She was elated and the ceremony took place before the cake was cut. All the guests cheered and the birthday cake became a wedding cake.

So, would you be happy if this happened to you – or - would you plunge the knife into your boyfriend in front of a Judge, 22 witnesses and two young children? Let's see - life with him or life in prison. I'm thinking – I'm thinking.

Don't try this at home.

14. The Surprise Wedding that Almost Wasn't.

The guests and relatives thought it was a summer Saturday afternoon party at a home. The couple knew it was going to be a surprise wedding. Tom's cover story was that he was their real estate agent stopping by - they were selling the house. The Bride and Groom were then to disappear to a bedroom to get papers. They were then to quickly change and reappear dressed as a Bride and Groom.

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

However, as Judge Armstrong walked up to the house, a guest, sitting in the front yard watching small children, recognized him. "I was on jury duty a few weeks ago and you thanked us for coming." No cases had tried that day. "So what's going on - are they getting married?" Be careful about quick-witted guests - they can spoil all the fun. Tom smiled at her and said very quietly - "Don't say a word." - and she didn't. No one heard this and the surprise was saved.

Lines that could spoil a surprise wedding.

Uncle Harry: Hey, aren't you the judge who sent me to prison?

Cousin Clyde: You look like the Judge I had in Juvenile Court.

Friend Sally: Now I know where I saw you, you were the judge on my divorce.

15. The Groom Who Spoke No English

Judge Armstrong has performed many ceremonies with interpreters, where one or both of the couple didn't speak English. Most times a family member will interpret for the couple and guests. Judge Armstrong says a sentence or paragraph and the interpreter, with a copy of the ceremony in hand, translates.

But, once upon a wedding, there was a Bride who picked out three extremely long repeat-after-me wordings. An Expression of Intent, Marriage Vows, and then a lengthy repeat-after-me Exchange of Rings.

That day Judge Armstrong found out that the Groom didn't speak any English. The Bride knew that and could have picked a simple "I do," and a "With this ring / I thee wed." Tom had to take it almost one word at a time. The Bride had not been wise in selecting long repeat-after-me passages in English. The poor Groom was just repeating sounds he didn't comprehend. Hey, maybe that was what she wanted - he didn't know what he was agreeing to.

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

16. The Bride From Oklahoma

These are selections from a ceremony written by a couple – We’ll call them Mary and John.

Convocation

As Billy Crystal once said: “When you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible. ” So lets get this started.

This romance is connected with the Internet and our beloved zip code – a mixture of the new and the old. Mary and John met online.

Mary was born and raised in Oklahoma – “where the wind comes sweepin' down the plain” and “The corn is as high as an elephant's eye, An' it looks like its climbin' clear up to the sky.” (*From the Musical Oklahoma*)

John was born and raised in the Twin Cities and is bound and determined to stay here. Yes, he has brain freeze. They met on match.com. One night Mary got bored with her own zip code and boldly typed a search radius of 800 miles. Now, if Mary had played it safe and typed in 795 miles – we wouldn’t be here tonight, because John lived 796 miles away.

Last year was Mary’s first winter here in Minn-e-yota – where the winter’s 43 below – unlike Oklahoma. Mary saw more snow than she had experienced in all her life put together. “When the wind came sweepin’ down the plain” – it wasn’t time to be singing about corn, but to hunker down for a blizzard. Mary survived, but what’s more, she proved herself to be a worthy Bride for a Minnesota Man and she even learned to speak our native tongue.

Expression of Intent to Marry

To Bride: Mary, do you take John to be your husband?

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

Bride: Yah sure, you betcha.

(The guests roared with laughter.)

To Groom: John, do you take this woman to be your wife?

Bride: He does.

Groom: Yes, Dear.

Judge Armstrong: He's ready for marriage.

After the serious Vows and Rings . . .

This ceremony wouldn't be complete without a quote from Seinfeld - which will explain why John is not wearing a tuxedo.

According to Seinfeld:

“The idea behind the tuxedo is the woman's point of view that men are all the same, so we might as well dress them that way. That's why a wedding is like the joining together of a beautiful, glowing bride and some guy. The tuxedo is a wedding safety device, created by women because they know that men are undependable. So in case the groom chickens out, everybody just takes one step over, and she marries the next guy. ”

John doesn't want to take the chance he might be replaced - so no tuxedos at this wedding.

17. The Memo on the Check

A couple wanted a very simple wedding with just the two witnesses. They had been together eight years. The Bride called Judge Armstrong and made all the arrangements. Everyone met and the marriage certificate was signed before the ceremony. The Groom didn't seem very

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

happy – in fact he looked very reluctant. The Bride was with the two witnesses, who were signing the Marriage Certificate, and Tom quietly asked the Groom if he wanted to get married. He said “Oh yah.” It’s the only time Tom has ever felt a legal need to ask.

So Tom performed the ceremony the Bride had selected. The couple kissed quickly and the Groom walked off alone. The Bride then walked after him. He looked as if he had just been told that his brother had been killed in a car accident. He wasn’t crying, but he was visibly distraught. The Bride said, “It will be okay.” His reply was “I’m glad my parents weren’t here to see this.” The rest of the words were not loud enough to hear. The two witnesses appeared to be in a good mood.

The Groom then wrote a check to Judge Armstrong. When Tom got home he looked at the check. In the Memo area in the lower left corner of the check were these words: “Worst day of my life.”

You were warned at the beginning that some stories were sad or “you decide.” Sometimes the statement, “if the story doesn’t have a point, it must be true,” is all we can say. So let’s end this one with “and they lived happily ever after.” Yah sure, you betcha.

18. Unity Symbols and Superstition

Many weddings use candles, or mixing sand, as unity symbols. Sometimes at outdoor weddings the unity candle won’t light or blows out immediately. Is this a sign from God? Of course not, but at times couples are distressed when something like this at a wedding doesn’t go right. Is their marriage cursed? No!

In 1973, Judge Armstrong was serving as a Captain in the Army JAG Corps working with an FBI agent on a criminal case involving civilian employees of the Army. The agent said that in May, 1942, he and his brother were both about to leave for the service. Each of them separately decided that for Mother's Day they would give their mother a rose plant. It was a surprise to each brother that they had purchased the same gift.

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

The two rose bushes were planted that day, Sunday, May 10th 1942.

Both sons left for the Armed Forces and the war raged on. One plant lived and the other died. It was the FBI agent's plant that died. This event caused his mother a great deal of distress because she thought it was a sign that her son would be killed in the war. Each son heard this and regretted buying the rose bush. However, both her sons survived and both came home in good health.

But, only one of the rose bushes survived the war, and we don't know its present fate. Is that rose bush still blooming at over 70 years of age? How did Hitler secretly get to Wisconsin and kill the other rose bush? We'll never know.

The message is that we shouldn't put too much into whether a plant lives or dies, or if the unity candle blows out, or it won't stay lit. We humans are a superstitious race.

19. The Wedding in the Rain

Once upon a wedding, it was raining on the day of the ceremony. The vows were planned to be outside on a sunny afternoon, but the weather did not cooperate. No problem, the location was a large hotel with both an outside and an inside area for the ceremony. The chairs were all set up in the large fireplace room and were also still set up outside on the lawn.

However, the Bride refused to get married inside. Her heart was set on an outside wedding. The Groom realized that it wasn't his wedding and he had best support his darling girl in her decision. With a shrug of his shoulders, and quiet resignation in his face, the Groom headed outside into the rain with Judge Armstrong. He already understood the marital relationship and was ready to say "I do," come rain or shine.

As each guest left the building, the staff handed out a towel to wipe off a chair. Very few guests brought umbrellas. Hardly anyone sat in the

chairs because the seats were padded and the water had already soaked the material. Most of the towels were used over the ladies' heads to save their hair. Judge Armstrong is "follicly challenged" and most of his hair departed years ago. Sometimes being bald has its advantages – especially in the rain.

There was only a large umbrella for the Bride and Groom. The DJ providing the music had a covered area for his electronic, water hating, expensive equipment. So the guests didn't have to suffer in silence.

During the wedding, the Bride whispered to Tom to skip the sand ceremony. The containers had cellophane over the top to keep the sand dry and the larger vase free of water. She had begun to realize that the rain was not letting up and the ceremony should be shortened.

The Bride and Groom were dry under the umbrella held over them by the Best Man. The Groomsmen were very wet – but who cares – they are mere males in rented tuxedos. However, the two Bridesmaids had their hair and dresses soaked. Make-up was running down their faces. They looked as if they had been in a shower, or were about to do a crying clown act. Were they silently cursing their "friend" the Bride? Will they always think of her with fondness? Were the wet guests happy – including Grandma in her wet wheelchair? What about the guests who sat on the chairs and felt the water slowly oozing through the towels and into their underwear?

Is there a lesson here? Did the Bride lack flexibility on this important day? Did she live happily ever after?

So, always plan for bad weather. Once upon another wedding, the couple rented umbrellas to hand out to the guests. If it's raining and you have a back-up – maybe, just maybe, you should use it.

Judge Armstrong was back at this hotel for another wedding a few weeks later. The staff was still talking about the rain wedding and shaking their heads about the Bride's decision.

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

Remember to plan for bad weather and then be flexible. You have guests – it’s not just about you. Although it is your day – it may not be your weather.

20. Dodging the Bullet - *Bridezillas* – Reality TV

In June of 2004, the reality TV show *Bridezillas* first appeared.

From Wikipedia

A typical episode presents the stories of two Brides-to-be, splitting time between both Brides. The story begins as the Bride and Groom are introduced, and they describe how they first met and fell in love. The Bride then explains what she has envisioned for her wedding. The remainder of the story shows the events leading up to the wedding, centering primarily on the Bride's interactions with members of her family, her Groom's family, members of the wedding party and even the wedding's various service providers (wedding planners, caterers, etc.).

The interactions are generally negative, exposing the featured Bride-to-be as uncontrollable, bullying, emotional and using whatever means necessary to get what she wants. The story ends with the wedding, the reception and a final concluding interview with the now-wedded couple.

Episodes are intended to run in sequence, as a single Bride's story is told over two episodes. For example, the start of Bride B's story will be presented in tandem with the conclusion of Bride A's story. On the next sequential episode, Bride B's story concludes while Bride C's story begins.

Sometimes it’s good to take a vacation.

The Bride e-mailed Tom for a wedding in March. Unfortunately – no make that fortunately – Tom’s boys were on a spring break on that date and a family vacation was planned. So he gave the Bride the contact information for another good and competent judge to do the ceremony.

The Bride paid a deposit and several weeks went by. Then she wanted the judge to sign a waiver form for the TV reality show *Bridezillas*. The replacement judge wisely said “No.” His thought was that the show must encourage folks to behave badly in order to appear on TV. No one really needs that kind of publicity. The judge just wanted to perform a normal and dignified ceremony.

Well, if you ever see a rerun of *Bridezillas* and the wedding is at the Como Park Conservatory in March of 2012 – remember that Tom was far away on vacation when it all happened.

21. The Damascus Rug – A Wedding Tradition

A few years ago, a couple got married at an outdoor wedding in Phalen Park in St. Paul. It was at the amphitheater with a round higher stage where the wedding party stood. Spread out on the cement was a beautiful Persian Rug. The family referred to it as the Damascus Rug. The Bride and Groom stood on it during the ceremony.

Tom introduced the Bride’s Grandmother and she explained the history of the Rug. Before the First World War started in 1914, the Bride’s Great-Grandparents both taught at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon. They had no way to come home to America until the War was over. They decided to marry, but they wanted something as a memento of their wedding. They traveled to Damascus, Syria, and purchased this rug to stand on during their ceremony.

The Damascus Rug hung on the wall of their home in America. Their seven children were married as they stood on the rug. Their grandchildren had all been married standing on this rug. Their great-granddaughter was married by Tom as she stood on the Damascus Rug. It was the 31st wedding and the rug looked as if it had been purchased the day before. It was kept by a family member and brought to each wedding.

22. The Three Bears Problem

Is a Wedding Ceremony too long, or too short, or just right?

Tom has performed weddings where the couple only selected a few words for the ceremony. The Bridal party was barely up to the front and they were walking back again.

On the other hand - once you hit 30 minutes you start to lose the crowd. Tom has done two weddings that were an hour long. At one there were many readings and a bagpiper who played very well, and very long, each of four times during the ceremony. Bagpipe music is great, but there can be too much of a good thing. Half the guests were standing at that wedding.

Tom warned the other Bride that it was a very long ceremony, but she said "It's the only time I'm getting married and I want an hour long ceremony."

Hmm - if she treated her husband like her guests - with no thought as to how her actions affected others - that may not have turned out to be a true statement, but we hope that all is well.

23. - Dogs in the Wedding Party

Tom has done four weddings with a dog as the ring bearer. One was the Bride's dog, 13 years old, who slowly came down the aisle with the ring box in his mouth. The Best Man took the ring box and the old dog laid down at the front. The other three dogs were young and frisky, and on leashes with the box tied to their harness.

There was a wedding where the dog had no specific job. He came down the aisle leashed and then was set free. He was a big friendly dog. He wandered around the wedding party and the front row of guests. The selected ceremony wording had a spot where Tom mentioned the couples' "furry child" - to much laughter.

At the kiss, with all the applause and excitement, he jumped up on the Bride and Groom. His right paw almost pulled down the front of the Bride's strapless dress - but the Groom - in his second act as a husband - the first was the kiss - quickly got the dog down as the Bride saved the top of her dress. The Bride and Groom had their backs toward the guests - so no guest saw this close call.

24. - The Scam Wedding

“send the rest to my cake Baker.”

On Nov 15, 2012, GEORGE MIKE e-mailed:

My name is George Mike and my fiance name is Susan Peter .We are planing to Have Our wedding in your city,the date of our wedding is on January 25th 2013. They are still working on the venue and as soon as the venue is ready i will let you know.I want to know if the date is available and i want you to give me your fee,we will be in State on December 20th 2012 by then the contract will have been finished because am in New Zealand now for business.Looking forward to read from you soon.

Thanks God Bless

From: Tom Armstrong to GEORGE MIKE

Sent: November 16, 2012

George,

I am available to perform your wedding on Friday, January 25th, 2013.

Etc. Etc. Tom sent out his standard information e-mail.

On Nov 16, 2012, GEORGE MIKE e-mailed a reply:

Hello,

Thanks for the mail,am very happy that you have agreed to perform on our wedding,the date of my wedding is on January 25th 2013.,i will give you the location as soon as the location is ready,i told you in my last mail that am not in state for now. Since your fee is \$300 and i will add \$100 as

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

a compensation from us,the total amount you will deduct is \$400, i want you to reserve the date for us.I have a client that will send you a cashier check of \$2000. I believe true transaction should be based on trust that is why i said he should send you the payment,as soon as you get the money you will deduct your fees and send the rest to my cake Baker. So i will like you to get back to me with your Full Name and Full Address with your Cell And Home And office phone #. Looking forward to read from you Soon

Thanks

Tom has seen this scam before – in Court. The \$2000 “cashier check” will look very real but will be a forgery. The \$1600 check Tom was asked to send to the “cake Baker” was supposed to be a real check. The “cake Baker” quickly cashes it, before the “cashier check” bounces, and George Mike and his co-conspirators, are \$1600 richer.

Have you hired a “cake Baker” for your wedding?

25. The couple who thought they were married.

A couple had a big wedding in October 2012. A minister friend from Florida performed their ceremony. They thought they were married, all the guests thought they were married, but the Marriage Certificate came back in the mail rejected by Washington County. The minister was not licensed to perform a wedding in Minnesota. He had not filed the documents needed to establish religious affiliation. It’s a simple thing to do, but he hadn’t done it. It has to be filed before the ceremony. So - they weren’t legally married.

By now it’s January 2013. They contacted Tom and asked him to perform a Sunday afternoon ceremony at their home. Many family members were there to celebrate - again. “We hope you do it right this time!” was the friendly advice.

Tom has been performing weddings since 1981 – he did it right – they were legally married this time. It was a fun occasion.

However, they couldn't file a joint tax return for 2012, because they weren't married in 2012. That could have made a big difference with a tax refund or taxes being owed.

26. Location, Date and Time.

Sometimes the exact ceremony date, time, and location are very special to a couple.

Tom did a wedding on Easter morning once because that was the date they met. He also did a wedding at a boat launch on Forest Lake on a Sunday morning, because that was the date, time, and place where they met.

One very memorable wedding, about 20 years ago, was on a January evening, with a 20 below wind chill, on top of a hill, 300 feet from the road, in the dark. Everyone was dressed very warm. There were three cars of guests.

Tom went from car to car and got the Marriage Certificate signed first – before the pen froze up. Tom had a flashlight to read the very short ceremony the couple had selected. Earlier that day, a trail, and the very top of the hill, had been stomped down in the deep snow. The Bride and Groom had bought the land and, as best they could figure, everyone was standing in their future living room.

Of such things memories are made.

27. Wrong Names - Same First Name

Once upon a wedding a couple cut and pasted Tom's finished ceremony sample from this website. Tom didn't catch that they accidentally left a "John and Mary" in it. Those are the names in the

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

sample. Tom caught it during the ceremony, hesitated ever so slightly, and then said the correct names. Too often the mouth can be quicker than the brain.

Once upon another wedding Christopher and Christine got married. They wanted their names as “Chris” and “Chris” in the ceremony. They had cut and pasted from the samples and accidentally left a "his" in the wrong place. Tom didn't catch it before the ceremony and read it out loud. He realized it as the word left his mouth and could not be inhaled back. There was a roar of laughter. Oh well. If you are looking for perfection, look not in this world.

Tom now asks that couples with the same name - Chris and Chris, Pat and Pat, make one or both names different - Christine & Christopher, Patricia & Patrick, whatever. It's less confusing for the guests too. So far no Kellie and Kelly wedding.

28. Tom follows the selected ceremony - but sometimes:

It was a beautiful summer afternoon at the Plymouth Millennium Gardens. The couple had decided to join flowers in a vase as a unity symbol. The vase was placed on a stone wall behind the wedding party. The Bride and Groom each took a large flower from their Mothers and then placed them into the vase.

Tom continued with the ceremony. The vase, with water in the bottom, had been fine in the wind, but the two large flowers added a sail effect. Crash - the vase and flowers fell four feet to the patio and the vase shattered. There was a slight gasp from the guests.

Tom then said, “It’s traditional at a wedding to break a glass (pause - the crowd burst out laughing) as a symbol that a couples’ lives have changed - just as permanent and final as the breaking of the glass is unchangeable.”

It is better to laugh than to foolishly contemplate some omen from above. See story #18 about superstitions.

29. A Secret Bus Wedding

The Bride contacted Tom to perform a wedding in a park beside the St. Croix River. The couple, along with their guests, were coming on a large bus from Eau Claire, Wisconsin. At first Tom thought the wedding would be in the park, but it was March. Later he learned that the wedding would be on the bus.

After selecting their ceremony, and further e-mail coordination, Tom was waiting at the appointed location. The bus came around the corner and stopped to pick him up near his car. It went a couple hundred feet further to a spot overlooking the St. Croix.

The Groom was seated at the front and gave the driver an iPod with the music – to hook into the bus sound system. Then the Maid of Honor came down the aisle, from the back of the bus, and sat in a seat at the front. Next the Bride came down the aisle and the guests stood up. The couple stood at the front with the Maid of Honor and Best Man seated next to them. Tom had his back to the front window. The driver was in her seat and stopped the music. Tom asked the guests to be seated.

The vows were given, rings exchanged, the newly married couple kissed, and their families and friends cheered. Next the Marriage Certificate was signed. Tom was told by the driver that no one knew exactly where they were going when they left Eau Claire – until the bus picked Tom up in Stillwater near the river. Tom asked the Bride where they were going next. The Bride whispered “That’s a secret – but it’s a restaurant.”

The driver circled back to Tom’s car, he waived goodbye, and the bus headed off to an undisclosed destination. The Bride later e-mailed Tom that it was Buca di Beppo Italian Restaurant.

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

Are you undecided about a location for your ceremony? How about a bus? Just have your guests get on the bus and be surprised. Get married along the road on the way to your reception. Tom could pose as a hitchhiker and get picked up by the bus.

30. Watch out for Spell Check

Bubbles have replaced rice and birdseed as the preferred method for wedding guests to “shower” something on the new couple. Just before the Introduction of the Couple, Tom will pause and tell the guests to get their bubbles ready to greet the new couple.

Tom added this line to a wedding ceremony. Then later as he was rereading it he discovered that Spell Check changed bubbles to “Get your Bibles ready to greet etc.” Sometimes Spell Check is not helpful and must be watched carefully. Tom had this picture of people throwing Bibles at the new couple. Don’t ever completely trust Spell Check – it’s just waiting for the right opportunity to make a fool of you.

31. Competition for the Bride

The couple had chosen Vows with an “I do.” Tom asked the Groom “Do you John take Mary as your wife, etc.” “If yes, say ‘I do.’” The Groom said “I do.”

Then Tom asked the question of the Bride. “Do you Mary take John as your husband, etc.” “If yes, say ‘I do.’” Immediately, faster than the Bride, the Flower Girl, Olivia, sitting on her mother’s lap, very clearly, and very loudly, yelled “I do.”

The Bride’s “I do.” was muffled by the guests’ laughter.

Did Olivia get “first dibs?” Was the Bride just out of luck with her Groom taken by another? Fortunately for the Bride, Olivia was way under

age and the Bride's name was on the Marriage License. But good try Olivia.

The next line in the ceremony was "May these two people, now married, keep this covenant that they have made." As Tom said "these two people" he paused and pointed at the Bride and Groom.

Sometimes the unexpected makes a wedding even more memorable. This story will be told for years to come. Remember - children are in weddings for comic relief. Olivia was just doing her job - however - families being families - many years from now someone will tell this story at Olivia's wedding. And just maybe, on that day, another Flower Girl, yet to be born, will upstage Olivia.

32. Marriage License Problems

The Wrong Couple

Tom arrived early at Edinburgh USA, in Brooklyn Park, and the couple was still taking pictures. They waived and said "hello," and the Bride directed someone to give Tom the Marriage License envelope. It hadn't been opened yet. Tom looked at the Marriage Certificate forms and his heart dropped. The names were different. Were there two weddings at the golf course that winter day? Had he approached the wrong couple and greeted them with the wrong names? How stupid could he be?

Then he read the Marriage License form - it had the right names. The couple was married that day, but the Marriage Certificate couldn't be completed. On Monday, the Bride went back to Anoka County and found out that seven couples had been given the right Marriage License and the wrong Marriage Certificates. The envelope stuffer had messed up. The Bride got the right Certificates and all the papers were completed by mail.

They were legally married at their wedding, but it just took a little longer to get the certified copy of the Marriage Certificate so they could prove they were married.

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

“Didn’t You Bring the Marriage License?”

Or “It’s the only thing I asked him to do.”

It’s a beautiful Saturday afternoon at the Gale Mansion in Minneapolis. The couple is from New York City. Tom has e-mailed them the standard information about purchasing a Minnesota Marriage License, and many e-mails were exchanged getting the ceremony wording ready. He first meets the Groom and, after discussing ceremony details, asks him for the Marriage License papers. “Didn’t you bring the Marriage License?” he asks.

They have no Marriage License. Tom discusses coming to the Courthouse on Monday, buying a license with a five-day waiver, and Tom will marry them – this was before he retired. But the couple has a Sunday flight to their Honeymoon Cruise. The only solution is to get married when they return to New York City.

The Bride is secluded upstairs. It falls upon Tom to tell her what the legal situation is. Usually the delivery of bad news is not something Tom has had to do at weddings – just at the Courthouse before he retired.

“Don’t worry, the ceremony will be just fine, but you don’t have a Minnesota Marriage License so you will need to get legally married in New York City after your Honeymoon.” The Bride’s face goes from happy to blank, and she silently turns and walks away to look out a window at the side of the house next door. Her mother is the only other person there. She whispers to Tom, “Don’t worry, she’ll be fine.” After a couple of long minutes the Bride returned to Tom, touched his arm, and said very sadly, “It’s the only thing I asked him to do.”

But the “wedding” (really a dress rehearsal) went on and none of the guests were the wiser. Did they get married back in New York City? Did she dump him (over the side) during the Cruise? Did she still love him with all his faults? Did she take 100% control of all the paperwork in their lives? Alas, Tom doesn’t know.

Judge Tom Armstrong / 651-773-4092 / Tom@tgarmstrong.com

The Wednesday Phone Call

Tom was booked months before for a Saturday wedding. On Wednesday morning he got a call at the Courthouse from the Groom. He needed to buy the marriage license. In those days one person could purchase a marriage license, but there was a five-day delay after application. Saturday was only three days away. That morning he had told his Bride that he had the marriage license. The Groom came to the Courthouse in Stillwater over his lunch. Tom got another judge to sign a Waiver of the Five-Days and the Groom went home that day with the marriage license in hand. Did the Bride know? Tom never told her – he had made the Groom an honest man.

The law has changed. Both parties must apply for a Marriage License. After August 1st 2016, there is no five-day delay and the license is issued immediately. Sometimes the government does make our lives easier.