

Hens Behaving Badly!

by Kerry Cue

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Weddings. I've been to a few: traditional, hippy, Greek (Vows were pledged in Greek then translated. The feminists gasped when they heard the word 'obey'), Italian (400 guests seated at trestle tables in the local town hall with little boys in suits running and skidding on the polished floor boards), on a farm (with mooing cows. It was more an 'I moo' than an 'I do'.), in a restaurant (my own wedding), at a registry office (The bride was 8 months pregnant and wore black), in a church with Millie the Golden Retriever as a bridesmaid, a B-team wedding (Married the week before, the couple dressed up again for a party with the B-team guests. We got the B-team speeches too!) and more.

Starting in the sixties, I've sat through many gruelling ordeals associated with the traditional Aussie wedding and that's not including the Father-of-the-bride's coma-inducing speech or the embarrassingly tasteless telegrams from the girls at The Shady Lady brothel. The first ordeal was the engagement party. Held at the house of the parents of the bride, it was all cheese cubes, Jatz biscuits and sausage rolls with 'It's a Hard Days Night' thumping in the background on a hand operated record player. Guests drank sherry and beer or, at an upmarket do, a bottle of Porphyry Pearl wine. One bottle. Guests had to fork out for a present, begrudgingly, if the guest of honour just had a 21st birthday party and was about to launch into wedlock. The lucky couple might score a few a set of multi-coloured aluminium picnic cups and a tartan car rug.

The Kitchen Tea was another gruelling wedding tradition. An all girl affair, guests sat on vinyl couches in the maid of honour's lounge room eating more cheese cubes and kabana and drinking cups of tea as the guest of honour ramped up her wide-eyed look of excitement to open presents like a plastic bread bin and a Tupperware Celery Crisper. At a particularly torturous kitchen tea I

attended, one guest showed slides of her recent Women's Weekly cruise to Vanuatu.

It is not surprising, when my generation finally decided to get hitched in the seventies and early eighties, that we dumped many tired and torturous wedding traditions. Brides wore hot pants or love beads with flowers in their hair. Couples got married at the beach in bare feet or in a rain forest or at the zoo (Seems appropriate!) Even the mother-of-the-bride ditched the silk shantung ensemble and turned up in a dress-coat without a hat.

But some old traditions never die. My generation is gobsmacked that our adult children have resurrected the traditional wedding do. Not only has the traditional wedding returned with a vengeance, it has done so on a scale bigger than Ben Hur with stylists, make-up artists, photographers, cathedrals, string quartets, stretch limos, frou frou wedding frocks, tiaras and the rest. We are also discombobulated that our offspring have invented some new tacky and torturous traditions.

In my recent travels I happened to be out and about in Bath, UK, on a Saturday night and was intrigued by the number of Hens' Parties parading in the street. I knew these flocks of gagging girls belonged to Hens' Parties because some wore t-shirts labelled 'Lanny's Hens 2011' and rabbit's ears. The bride wore a pretty-in-pink satin sash. I write this article as a warning to parents of adult offspring! It has become a tradition in the UK that the bride and bridesmaids go on a rampaging girls-behaving-badly weekend, locally or abroad, and get totally plastered based on the assumption, I guess, that those who spew together glue together. The fascinating dimension of this new tacky tradition is that the Hens' Party girls frock up in fancy dress.

In Bath I saw one group dressed in Burlesque gear: fishnet stockings, suspenders, bustiers and tutus. One hen wore a top hat and carried a riding crop. 'Who's the bride?' I asked and a plump, fresh-faced but terrified girl was pushed forward. 'Congratulations' I said while thinking, 'OMG she's being held captive by sadomasochistic bridesmaids'. Another group wore pink satin and ostrich feather devil's horns while yet another sported feather boas. Hens also dress up as fifties house wives with feather dusters, Greek Goddesses and cave girls.

Groomsmen dress up too for the Stag Party piss-up. I saw one group dressed as Yacht Club Commodores in gold-trimmed caps,

white shirts, blue sports jackets and cravats. But the boys weren't so dedicated. Some just plonked on the cap. One local told me he had a surreal moment when he watched a punch up between one stag party dressed as cowboys with another dressed as soldiers.

Companies sell Hen's Party weekend packages including a trip to a male strip club. Brighton, the Hen Party Capital, can have up to 2,000 drunken hens wandering around on a Saturday night dressed as bedraggled Air Hostesses, French Maids, builders (She must be marrying a real tool) and fairies.

Maybe these Hens weekends are a way of blowing off steam or maybe they are just another way of getting attention in a look-at-me era when appearance counts more than having a wedding - or even a life - invested with meaning. I guess the Hen Pecking Divorce Party pissup will be next. They could dress up as witches from Macbeth and put a curse on him.