

## The Wedding Cake: A Ceremony by Itself

by: Joy Cagil

When my son and daughter-in-law held a knife and cut the first slice out of their all traditional, butter-cream frosted, lavish, and very expensive wedding cake, I couldn't help smiling. If we had been in the early Roman times, the wedding cake would not be one huge, tasty, decorative creation, but many small, possibly cupcake-sized, salty wheat cakes. In addition, the guests wouldn't be eating the cakes but throwing them at the bride or crumbling it over her head for fertility and single women would try to catch the crumbs for the same reason they catch the bridal bouquet today.

In the olden times when children didn't make it to adulthood due to childhood illnesses, fertility was important, and that is probably the reason the wedding cake tradition was born. Later on during their empire, Romans turned their salty cakes into sweet cakes. This time, they made a slightly larger bridal cake with many smaller cakes surrounding it. The smaller cakes were brought as gifts by the guests. These cakes everyone ate, but still crumbled some of those over the bride.

After the Roman conquest of the British Isles, Roman customs influenced the natives who baked dry cakes for their weddings and drank their ale with them. In old England and Ireland, there also was, and still is, the custom of a groom's cake, dark in color and made of dried fruit.

When the English sent their pioneers into the new world, they also sent their customs with them. First European settlers in the Americas made fruitcakes for their weddings because their preservation was easier.

The fancy wedding cake with several tiers was created through the initiative of the French, and although scorned by the English at first, it was later adopted and became the norm through all Europe. The wedding cake, owing to its long history, became an individual affair for a modern wedding party, with different shapes and styles and with a rich variety of flavors, fillings, and icings.

A wedding cake, after the vows, has become a vital part of wedding ceremony in our day. It is assumed that a wedding cake reflects the style, elegance, and delicacy of the couple's upbringing, in addition to their enthusiasm for their marriage.

Not only the ingredients and the making of the cake, but the ceremony of its cutting has become another reception by itself. Traditionally, the bride and the groom cut the cake together, with groom placing his right hand over the bride's right hand to cut the first slice. Then, they feed each other that first slice while everyone applauds. Sometimes, the top tier is saved for the first anniversary or the birth of the couple's first child, whichever comes first.

In some new world weddings nowadays, smearing each other with the icing has been taking hold as a custom, adding hilarity to the reception. My favorite wedding cake anecdote is a real one that may have seemed like a disaster at the time; however in hindsight, it has become an amusing joke. Yet, since the marriage has lasted, the incident might have been a good omen.

Several years ago, we attended a large wedding reception. Over the several steep stairs to the main reception hall, the wedding cake had to be carried rather than wheeled. I don't know why nobody thought of a ramp but two waiters, one on each side, took the cake up the steps.

Suddenly, a waiter tripped and the cake fell on the floor, but with luck or heavenly intervention, the top two tiers stayed intact. A pandemonium broke out with the bride's mother fainting and maintenance people scurrying about. Since the reception hall was part of a big hotel, the management came up with their version of a wedding cake. Several small cakes were arranged as the bottom layer with the two top layers of the original cake placed over them.

Judging from that experience, I think it might be a good idea to have a just-in-case second cake. After all, cakes are loved by most anyone and they don't go to waste.

### **About The Author**

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