

One daughter's wedding down and one more to go

Dahlonega vs. Los Angeles: The beauty of destination weddings

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"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness" -- Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities

No truer words could be spoken for an aging father stuck between two weddings, unable to rest up from the first before being thrust into the planning (no, the drama) of the second.

Up until eight weeks ago, it had been nearly seven years since our middle daughter Katie married son-in-law Bob. It was a beautiful, traditional event held in Decatur in the very chapel that her mother and I were married in 39 years ago. Everything was easy, so I thought "well, this wedding stuff is not so bad."

Some six years (and two wonderful grandkids) later, the next wedding was, er, slightly different. It happened eight weeks ago in Dahlonega. And, as if one wedding every six years isn't enough, we found we were going to have two of them within three months. On the eve of the youngest daughter's wedding, the oldest announced her engagement—a very short one. Hence the tale of our two 'wedding' cities.

About the only thing Dahlonega and Los Angeles have in common (besides both sitting on a fault line, although that is neither here nor there) is that, by the end of this month, each will have survived an Altman wedding.

Our youngest daughter, Ashley, married fiancé Michael at Three Sisters Winery in Dahlonega. She was the second to be married—and decided on a mountain venue (my initial thought being "hooray", we can have it at our house on Sassafras Mountain!). Keep dreaming.

The wedding at Three Sisters (no, it was not named after our three daughters, although I wouldn't blame the owners if they wanted to change their name after our event) survived a brutal storm that literally brought down the tenting the night before (five hours before the event we had men welding pipes together—while I watched and drank liberally from the tasting room, thanking God that the tent had not tumbled onto our guests one evening later).

My next future son-in-law and I were busy the morning of the wedding trying to untie dozens of little Japanese lanterns that had become tangled in the back of the car. The mountain wind was tangling them further—and with several "supervisors" in the area we had plenty of direction. "Jason," I (half) jokingly told the last victim of the three Altman girls, "if you survive this, you can survive my daughter!"

In Dahlonega, there was no



healthy food to be found. We ate barbecue on Friday night and grits, ham and mac & cheese on Saturday. The wines of Three Sisters were flowing. Even the preacher had a glass of the Fat Boy Pink (one of the winery's specialties)—while the twenty-somethings imbibed in some expensive beer called "Dead Man's Ale" (obviously named after some former father-of-the-bride). My wife Lisa and I waited for the DJ to play the Beach Boys but it was a night filled with Smashing Pumpkins and Foo Fighters (those are musical groups, not wedding crashers). Help me, Rhonda.

Later in the evening, one attractive young woman—a friend of the bride—lost her balance on a perfectly smooth patio and fell into the bushes while another was driven back to her room after two glasses of Fat Boy White. And yes, we did have the foresight to order shuttle buses, which cost nearly one tenth of my 401K, but on this wedding night, was worth every dime.

Speaking of Jason & Jennifer, they are the next in line—their West coast wedding looming like a financial storm off the Pacific. It is only fitting that our oldest is the last to walk down the aisle. As a professional meeting planner, she's knows way-too-much about making great events even greater (I remind her—often—that I do not have an IRS travel budget). But Jenn is not only a savvy business person—she's a pro at getting good deals, so there's no one I'd rather have negotiating prices than my first born.

Why Los Angeles, you might ask? Years ago, Jennifer had returned from a business trip to an area south of Los Angeles where she had visited a small chapel bordering the Pacific Ocean. She said to my wife and me "If I ever get married, this is where I want the ceremony to be."

"Of course, sweetie," I said absentmindedly, knowing she would never remember the place. "That's wonderful Jenn—it would be so much fun," said my wife. We looked at each other as if to say it's exciting she's found a place, but she'll never want to leave here to go all the way out there.

How wrong could we have been? Ever try a destination wedding? If you can avoid it, you will thank me later. Dahlonega is one thing. Coordinating with 'cool dudes' and So-Cal hipsters is something else. I wonder if we will eat barbecue (unlikely given California's animal rights activists) or if we'll end up with some pasty, California vegan dish. As a (soon to be) three time father-of-the-bride, I know not to ask about these things (and, more importantly, never give an opinion, even when pressed, as it will undoubtedly be wrong).

We are now exactly one month from the California wedding. I am still getting bills from Dahlonega and am making room deposits in L.A. I have little hair left to lose and find myself craving those cheap cookies they sell at Walgreens. This wedding will make Hollywood proud—part *The Great Gatsby* (the chapel was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright's son) and part Father of The Bride—but we are still excitedly counting the days.

After all is said and done, I know I will have had a (small) part of making another very happy event for my wife and daughters—and the fact that I am looking for seasonal work at Home Depot seems like a small price to pay.

Thank God we had three daughters and not four.

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