

More

# attitude



## Here comes (the mother of) the bride

> When my daughter recently married, friends asked “What’s it like to plan a wedding these days?” My answer: Except for giving birth 32 years ago, I had nothing to do with it—and I couldn’t be happier >> by PATRICIA VOLK

STANDING OUTSIDE the performance space, I wait for my girl. Limos pull up. One by one, they disgorge fashionistas. All of them wear black platform spikes and short crinolined skirts and carry logo bags as big as the Ritz. My daughter, my poody-tat-pie, is engaged. The Monique Lhuillier Enchanted Forest bridal show is about to begin.

When I was getting married, my mother came home with a dress. “Look,” she said. “Only \$125!” It fit perfectly. My mother often bought clothes for me without me. She knew what was “becoming.” I treasured her cast-off Beenes and Blasses. But Polly’s taste has rarely matched mine. I love vintage; Polly loves cutting-edge. I love my grandmother’s

hankies; Polly loves tomorrow. **Founder and editor-in-chief of beautyblitz.com and a contributing editor at In Style, Polly wears clothes that aren’t in stores yet.** “You’re lucky I didn’t give you Esther for a middle name,” I used to tease her.

We take our seats in the front row. Music swells. I lean over. “Squeeze my hand when you like something, and I’ll squeeze yours,” I say.

The models look like extras from *Schindler’s List*. All have white faces, gray circles around their eyes, frazzled hair and tragic lips. If you saw them walking toward you on the street, you’d call an ambulance. But the dresses are gorgeous. I’m squeezing Polly’s hand. I’m milking it. She squeezes once. >>

We meet at a loft that sells wedding gowns. Polly describes with economy what she wants: "Strapless, no froufrou, nothing Cinderella, no hoops, no poufs, matte fabric, not stiff. I want a goddess gown, free-flowing, like I just stepped off the boat from Greece." Two sales associates return with armloads. My daughter strips down to her thong. I can count on two hands the people

Polly chooses the venue with Mark and lets me know the time and place.

"I think I'm free that night," I say.

My mother scheduled meetings with banquet managers for my wedding. We checked out five fancy hotels, then went with the cheapest. "Anemones are my favorite flower," Mom said, ordering the centerpieces. I had no bridesmaids, because she thought it was ridiculous to stick someone

## Polly makes appointments for Gale and me to get "hair trials" at a salon. I emerge as Madame de Pompadour and Gale is Veronica Lake.



who have seen me naked. That includes the obstetrician.

How does it feel to see your daughter in a wedding dress for the first time? Cataclysmic. Yes, I see my girl in the gown. But I also see her in multitudes, morphing like a flip-book. I see her with front teeth missing, the braids phase, en route to the prom, in her cap and gown at Columbia. I see her the first time I held her and said to myself, "Patty, if you do your job right, someday she'll leave you." I see all of her, the panoply. It's impossible to speak.

All that high emotion, even though I'm extraneous to the dress decision. I'm here only because Polly wants me to feel included. That's OK. I decided from the day Mark proposed we wouldn't have one argument over anything wedding. Polly's 32. She's extraordinarily competent. This is her day, not my idea of her day.

As it turns out, Polly will find the dress (Reem Acra) while shopping with her fiancé. At the fittings, seamstresses pin, tuck and nip. Polly swirls. "I want it to be as comfortable as my pajamas," she tells them.

"Can you dye it blue and cut the hem after the wedding?" I ask, hoping to amortize the dress.

This evokes the deadly eye roll and two-syllable "Ma-om."

with an ugly dress, even though she had eight in gray chiffon with matching sun hats at hers.

Polly picks a sage silk strapless dress for the bridesmaids. The mothers she tells to wear black.

Hard to believe, but I can't find a black dress I love. Six weeks before the wedding, I'm wailing to my chic friend Muriel about it. "Come on," she says, taking my hand. She introduces me to her dressmaker, Akira Maki, formerly of Halston. Akira makes a sketch based on what I tell him combined with what he thinks will look good on me. Swooshy? I don't swoosh. A cape? What am I, Batgirl?

"You are the mother of the bride," Akira says. "The mother of the bride needs a cape. Then later, the mother of the bride can take the cape off."

"Can I have the dress for less if I get it without the cape?"

Akira squares his shoulders: "You are mother of the bride! People should ooh and ahhh!"

"They can ooh and ahhh at my daughter," I say.

I find the perfect dress at Dolce & Gabbana. Almost perfect. It's short and white. Akira copies it long and black. I love it.

Around this time, Polly and I are invited to appear on a panel of modern

mothers and daughters. At one point, the moderator says, "Patty, your daughter is getting married. What's it like planning a wedding these days?"

"Well," I say, "my daughter knows her taste and has planned the wedding entirely herself with her fiancé. I'm going to her wedding as the most loving guest in the world."

It helps that I like Polly's fiancé and his family. Of all the young men who pursued her, Mark's the one best suited. Not that the Head Counselor wasn't adorable. I was charmed by the manners of the Ivy League Muslim whose mother gave Polly a shalwar kamiz to wear. I liked the Hedge Fund Body Builder, the Russophile, the L.A. Trust Fund Baby and, until we had to call the DA, the Stalker Lawyer too.

Mark is smart and bighearted, a product of his parents. They have full-blown lives and won't intrude. Unlike my in-laws, who loathed each other, Gale and David will not involve Polly

in their spats or drop in unannounced several times a week or when not on speaking terms, ask to move in.

If I can't throw my daughter a wedding, I can throw her an engagement party. This I do my way, at home, inviting 60 or so friends. Then Gale and David throw an engagement party at a private club. Then they host a shower near their home. Then Polly has a bachelorette weekend with her bridesmaids. All of this is larger than life. I wonder if Polly's compensating for her early birthday parties, where I'd cover the floor with brown paper and give the kids crayons. Is this my daughter's way of making up for never having Buzzy the Clown?

Two weeks before the wedding, Polly makes appointments for Gale and me to get "hair trials" at a fancy salon. I emerge as Madame de Pompadour, and Gale is Veronica Lake. We laugh our heads off and go shopping.

Through it all, I get to witness Polly's

remarkable organizational skills. She and Mark pick the flowers, the music, the invitations, the menu, the everything. Polly finds a pair of iceberg green Louboutin stilettos and falls in love. Who am I to say you can't wear iceberg shoes with an ecru wedding dress? She wants her father and me to walk her down the aisle together? Okie-dokie. When she decides that she'd like a topiary made out of Mark's favorite cookie, I'd have to be an idiot to say, "But you have to have a cake."

Polly sends her courtship saga to the *New York Times*. They call. The *Times* wants to feature Polly and Mark in their "Vows" column. I feel like I've snagged an invitation to the most fabulous party in the world. The night before, Polly and Mark's nearest and dearest gather for the final pre-wedding bash at a new hot spot. More Champagne! Sliders! More toasts! Truffled french fries!

And then it is August 9, 2008. I wake up and put my dress in a garment bag. >>



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Akira says the dress is alive and must breathe. I'm hoping it won't suffocate while I get my hair done. The wedding party converges at Louis Licari, my favorite salon. Limos wait to whisk us downtown. I share mine with two bridesmaids who compare epidurals. It occurs to me that in a year I could be a grandmother.

In the room where we get our makeup done, I take my dress out of the bag and give it CPR. As Polly mingles with the bridesmaids and her beloved nanny, Beatrice Gage Fletcher, we munch tea sandwiches in our bathrobes. Polly's makeup is applied by Mally Roncal, who does Beyoncé's. Her hair is pouffed by Ted Gibson, who does Angelina Jolie's.

I am so busy soaking this in, I've lost track of time. Suddenly someone grabs my arm. "You're late!" she screams. What? Huh? "Everybody's waiting!" she says, shoving me into a tiny, mirrored room where I step into my dress.

Then everybody sees everybody, including the bride and groom, and from this moment on, I leave my

body. I levitate. Is this what euphoria is? The music starts. My grandnieces scatter rose petals and the rest of the wedding party follows them down the aisle. When Polly comes out, everyone gasps. My girl is literally breathtaking. I cannot stop smiling. I smile for four hours, forget to introduce my friends, dance with everyone I know and by myself too. And when people start to leave, I think exactly the same thing I thought at my own wedding: Where are you going? It can't be over yet.

I had nothing to do with this wedding except give birth to the bride. I had nothing to do with my wedding except saying "I do." Neither occasion was what I expected. It's been my experience that expectations have little impact on outcome. That's the way it is, intrigue and surprise at every turn. There are people who are miserable if things don't go a certain way. Not me. My dreams have no rigidity. I wouldn't have it any other way. ☺

PATRICIA VOLK is the author of five books, including a memoir, *Stuffed*, and the novel *To My Dearest Friends*.