

Heaping plate of crow tops wedding surprises

By Sherri Gardner Howell

There wasn't much about my younger son's wedding plans that I was comfortable with as the different parts of the wedding unfolded over a six-month period. It appeared to me it was going to be unconventional, non-traditional and much more like a party than a celebration of marriage.

There were two things that I deeply respected that were a consistent part of the wedding plans: The fact that Brett was marrying Olivia, who we love, and the tremendous amount of work, planning and thought the two of them were putting into the wedding, especially the bride-to-be.

But most of the other things that were unfolding to be a part of this wedding celebration were just totally out of my comfort zone. They wanted to have a bouncy house inflatable. They asked if I knew of any Chinese lion dancers. They wanted pies and banana pudding instead of a wedding cake.

The wedding attire for the groomsmen and bridesmaids was also unconventional, with the groomsmen wear in Taiwanese fisherman pants, and the bridesmaids wearing dresses that could be tied and draped a number of different ways, each bridesmaid to her own choosing. Their dear friend Scott was getting ordained over the Internet so that he could perform the ceremony. A cotton candy machine, a popcorn machine, a two-hour happy hour with the bride and groom in attendance before the ceremony began and no rehearsal the list went on. The "rehearsal dinner" that my husband and I would give them was a party through Tennessee Tailgate at the UT South Carolina game!

I thought they were leaving too much to chance, too many things to do at the last minute and too many unknowns. Olivia's notebook with color swatches and sketches and ideas looked impressive and organized, as I know she is, but I was sure she would be a nervous wreck trying to accomplish everything that needed to be done in the four days they would be in town before the wedding.

And now I must confess: I had a heaping plate of worry and words to eat when Monday morning rolled around and BestFest 2013 the tagline for their wedding was in the history books.

My heart nearly burst with pride at each twist and turn of the wedding. These two best friends, madly in love, were determined to make sure their love for each other and commitment to being husband and wife was a true celebration of love, family and friendship. The ceremony was beautiful, helped by answered prayers for beautiful weather. They spoke to each other with hearts overflowing with love, and Scott did a beautiful job making it all “official.” From the youngest child to Brett’s 86-year-old grandmother, each guest was made to feel that this celebration of love took their needs and their enjoyment into consideration.

There were things no one will ever forget on both ends of the spectrum. Their vows to each other said so much about the journey they have taken from best friends in middle school to husband and wife. Their commitment to family — ours, hers, theirs — was evident at every moment. Their love of their friends and the supremely important roles their friends play in their lives flooded the whole weekend.

And then there were the “gotta have them” Brett and Olivia moments. There was the Tailgate “rehearsal dinner brunch” with a victory thank you Vols over South Carolina to cap the day before the wedding for these two orange-blooded Tennessee fans. There was the throwing of glow sticks during the reception, festival style. And there was the first dance as husband and wife, to the incredibly romantic song, “I Will Always Love You,” which they danced in complete sumo-wrestler costumes.

But at the end of the day, the wedding was everything a wedding should be: a celebration of love for each other, for family and for friends.

My plate of crow went down very easily, seasoned with joy and tears of complete happiness.