

Some are missing meaning of vows

By SHEILA MCCARTHY DUNNELLS

Attending a wedding is exciting at any time. However, this particular wedding was a special one.

I was returning to New York to attend a cousin's wedding, and I was going by myself, without my family.

For the first time in 10 years, I think, or in five years, I am certain, I was a party of one. Not a wife to Tom or a mother to Bradley, but a single, independent person.

Tom and Bradley accepted my travel arrangements with predictable good spirits. What was unpredicted was the reaction of others.

"Your husband is letting you go?" "You mean you can leave your son?" Obviously, from friends' responses to my news, I had misunderstood the real meaning of "Until death do us part."

My husband received much the same reaction from his business associates. "You mean you are letting her go?" they asked.

Their expressions indicated that they found his behavior decidedly odd. Letting her go, indeed! I sniffed.

THE NIGHT before my scheduled departure, I suffered some preliminary separation anxiety. Strangely, the pangs were far less severe than I had anticipated.

No help or reassurances did I receive from the men in my life. They were too busy plotting for my absence.

Instead, they acted like Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum, piskilated at the prospect of being by themselves for a week. Conspiratorily, they plotted the overthrow of orderliness.

In advance they announced their mutiny would include hamburgers for breakfast, no dishes, no laundry.

"We'll make no beds," they announced in unison. Triumphant, they concluded "We'll do fun things only." I don't know what frightened me more, their behavior or the thought of the aftermath of a week of it.

The scene at the airport was emotional. My son Bradley tearfully said "Good-bye Mom. I hope the plane doesn't crash, because you are the only mother I want."

Momentarily, I entertained the possibility that this might be an omen but decided that it was too late to cancel. My face quivering, I kissed them good-bye and headed for the Admiral's Club.

It was jammed with business people. For the next few days, I thought, I will be part of this adult world. I will be like one of them — away from my fam-

ily so that I can take care of business elsewhere.

In truth, if I feared making the transition from mother to maverick, I worried for nothing. I boarded the plane, ordered a beverage and forgot I was someone's wife and mother. I was free, and liberated enough to enjoy it.

AT THIS point, however, it is only fitting to look in on the other half of this scenario. Father and son went to the movies and ate popcorn for dinner.

They visited Santa. One night they set up a tent in the den and camped out. They also went bowling. Overall, they had a ball and thoroughly enjoyed each other and their time together.

I suspect there were very few thoughts of me. They, too, were free and liberated enough to enjoy it.

It is my opinion that the only thing necessary for a successful babysitting experience between a father and son is a creative mind and a flexible personality.

Meanwhile, as I arrived at Laguardia Airport in my native New York, I was happily anticipating going home. However, I saw so many harried business men and women all struggling to get someone in a hurry.

I wondered if all that racing through life was meant to guarantee smooth-running gee-gaws and giminy-cracks in the suburbs.

Such thoughts were fleeting. On the whole, the wedding was wonderful. I was neither bored nor lonely during my week of freedom.

When I got off the plane at Metropolitan Airport seven days later, my husband was smiling and my son was wide-eyed, happy and scrubbed clean to greet his mom.

"We had fun, just the two of us. We cleaned the house," Bradley blurted out. "And, I am dressed so that we can take you out to dinner."

While I hugged him I felt a little like Cinderella. It occurred to me that I have the best of both worlds.

I have space when I need it. And because of a special person in my life, I live in a home where I am accepted, and in a world that is filled with the laughter of a child. I have the warmth of friends and an outlet for an occasional creative thought.

The glow that I felt at that moment will hopefully last until my next trip. It will also help on those long winter afternoons when the laundry is higher than the snow and everyone is in a bad mood.

I expect that it will. I feel very fortunate.

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May 8 and 22
June 5 and 26

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Published January 24, 1980

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