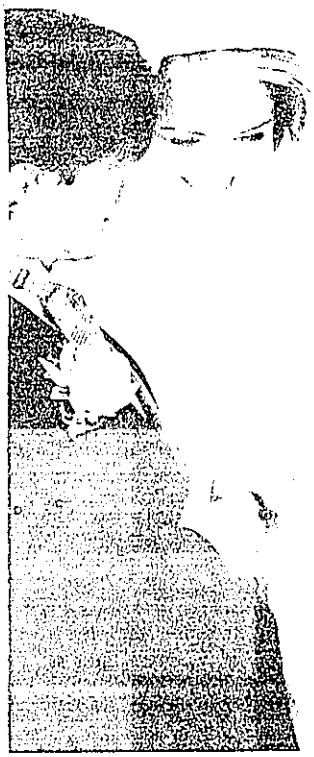

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Rite of passage gives moms time to reflect

BY SANDRA TOLBERT
SPECIAL WRITER

How does a mother watch her little girl walk down the marriage aisle, out of her life and into the world of someone else? How is it possible to cut that symbiotic cord with love and tenderness and just let go – hoping, praying, waiting for her to become all that you know she can be?

For the bride and her mother it is more than preparing for a wedding. It is akin to a sacred dance – a ritual way of letting go and bonding; a mother's affectionate farewell and a daughter's entry into another journey of her life.

Traditionally, the planning of this rite of passage into the world of matrimony is women's work. While men remain relatively silent in the planning stages, the women bustle, fuss, organize, reorganize and sometimes fume.

Mothers and daughters bond together over fine china, starched linens, glittering crystal and all the fine details that women are supposed to care about. Daughters seek maternal guidance over guest lists, menus, etiquette and that fairy tale wedding dress, while mothers wait to be asked the difference between fine and casual flatware, cookware styles, color schemes and tiered wedding cakes.

■ "Don't try and substitute your tastes for what your daughter might like. Be there for what your daughter asks and don't take over. It is your daughter's wedding. Be supportive. Don't get stressed out, relax and enjoy it and then everyone else will."

Linda Bloch,
—Mother-of-the-bride

Preparing, planning and organizing are a woman's thing and for ages have remained the medium by which women bond and understand each other.

Berkley bride Brigitte Murray wouldn't change one thing about her relationship with her mother, and when it came time to prepare for her 1998 wedding it only got better. Through the questions and answers, seeking and organizing they grew closer. And what was even better, they both recognized and treasured the moments.

"My mom was always available to talk and help as needed. I value her opinions about finances, clothes, just about anything. It brought us closer together," says Murray.

With a gleam in her blue eyes, the 27-year-old petite blond described her mother as comforting, supportive and always available to discuss menus and shop for that special dress at Somerset Collection. The wedding was a small, relaxed ceremony on the deck of her mother's home, the place where Murray spent most of her life gathering happy memories. It was a strikingly discreet celebration of marriage vows immersed in homespun warmth.

Her mother Marjorie Hughes also regarded the ritual planning with her daughter as another sensitive moment in her daughter's journey towards self discovery which brought them closer.

"Our relationship deepened as a result of the planning and my emotional support of the most important event in her life. We talked a lot. We always had good communication. She valued my opinions on what to wear and the menu. It was a perfect day," says Hughes.

For both mother and daughter the rite of passage was perfect and they wouldn't change one thing about the wedding plans or their clearly tender relationship.

Neither would the 30-year-old Birmingham bride Amy Young, who recently planned her elegant Jewish wedding rich with ceremonial symbolism including the traditional chair lift dance of the bride.

Young relived her true fairy tale wedding by saying, "Mom and I planned the whole thing. She gave me a ton of space and supported my decisions or suggested what I wasn't sure about."

Young describes her plans for passage into marriage as rich with mother-daughter bonding. Calm and enthusiastic, she related how the preparations were made by her mother and herself as a fifty-fifty deal, each taking their fair share of responsibility. Two bonded women, one older and one younger, taking on the grand task of an opulent fete for 280 guests.

"Mom never seemed stressed, she took care of little details and was serious about major decisions," added Young as she eagerly described their many shopping excursions including choosing a wedding gown, cake selection, trips to the bridal registry, ballroom decor, garden and flower decisions.

Mother of the bride Linda Bloch discovered the secret to her daughter's heart and offered some tips on how to successfully help your daughter plan a wedding: "Don't try and substitute your tastes for what your daughter might like. Be there for what your daughter asks and don't take over. It is your daughter's wedding. Be supportive. Don't get stressed out, relax and enjoy it and then everyone else will."

Bloch's formula for a congenial mother-daughter relationship worked. She added, "It brought us very close."

Oddly enough, the very act of letting go creates the space for bonding between little girls and moms: Between mothers and their growing, stretching, reaching daughters.

It is a bittersweet struggle for mothers to let go of that little girl in order to greet her as a woman and best friend. And it is a sweet revelation for her daughter as she begins to discover her own selfhood and meet her new best friend – her mother.