

Don't Do This At Home: Children Giving Away Parent at the Altar

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What does it say about a bridegroom whose Best Man is his father? It struck me that Jay McGraw must not have many friends since the man standing with him at his 2006 marriage to Playboy triplet, Erica Dahm, was Dr Phil himself.

Perhaps that was a bit caustic but I am against any reason to shrink the number of people in the bridal party. Half the fun of a wedding is a full guest list with newcomers to the social circle. Just as true in Jane Austen's day, a wedding is one occasion where singles can meet singles. Watch the Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn comedy, *The Wedding Crashers*, to remind yourself of the zaniness when you mix singles, music, and food. More weddings!

This trend even extends to the most recent royal weddings – Peter Phillips with Autumn Kelly and Prince Joachim of Denmark to Marie Agathe Odile Cavallier. Putting Zara Phillips in the bridal party robbed some other lass of her chance to meet and mingle and simultaneously hurt our eyes in that strapless Empire-style seagreen frock. Zara was hardly looking her best.

And Joachim and his ex-wife Alexandra played it frugal too. At his wedding on May 24, 2008 to the Swiss-French Marie Cavallier, Joachim's best men were his young sons, Prince Nikolai and Prince Felix, taking a page from the Prince of Wales in 2005. Only last January 2007, the young Danish princes played a similar prominent role, taking the place of their Manley grandfather in walking their mother up the aisle to marry her young boyfriend, Martin Jorgenson.

Officially the reason was the Mr Manley was too physically frail to give away his daughter at her second marriage. However, could it be that their role was a signal to the world of her boys' approval of the choice of stepfather? And likewise in their father's second wedding, the implication they are complicit with the choice of Marie Cavallier by the Prince.

Even if that were so, young boys of 4 and 6 can hardly make independent decisions without the influence of an adult. And the issue of remarriage should in no way be decided by the children. Prince Joachim stated in the interview with *Jyllands Posten* <http://jp.dk/indland/article1342512.ece> that if his boys had not sanctioned his choice of Marie Cavallier, then he would not have married her. This sets an

unhealthy precedent - children should absolutely have no veto power over adult decisions. (Playing that ridiculous line of reasoning forward: If they had said no, would he have set up Marie as his official mistress? Do Felix and Nikolai also decide how many half-siblings they get? Preposterous!)

Better for him to heed the advice of commoner experts who counsel: inform the children he had chosen her with deliberate care and fait accompli this is the woman he will share his life with, and IN TIME, they will all learn to bond as a blended family.

Don't Do This At Home! As royals set the example, many people follow. I am writing this article about this trend of children giving away their parents at the altar to warn regular people against it.

Sites on second weddings and etiquette blogs on children at weddings offer many ways to include the offspring of one of the fiancé(e)s at the altar. After the exchange of vows, the bridal couple offers the offspring a vow too! (The divorce rate of second marriages that include children is over 65% - maybe they need more prayers from the congregation.)

This addition to the service of marriage in the Book of Common Prayer comes from all sorts of wedding planners and may not be purely profit-driven. It is in response to the phenomenon of starter marriages and the 50% divorce rate for first marriages and the children resulting from them. With second marriages coming under the additional stress of exes communicating and child support, it is a sound idea to acknowledge the key role offspring play in the failure of subsequent relationships of their biological parents.

Remember in *Sex & The City*, when Miranda dated a single dad who matched her for intellect and ambition? Ultimately that episode concluded with him kicking her out of his apartment in the middle of the night! All because Miranda was not putting up with disrespectful behaviour – the boy barged in on her in the loo and she slammed the door in his face. (The movie opens later this week, after London hosted the world premier two weeks ago.)

Yes, children are an important player in the remarriage. But that should not be extended to the offspring playing a key role in the WEDDING.

A royal child is brought up to behave in public, especially in important events. They will act charmingly in the role they are assigned, of supporter of their father just as they did with now Countess Alexandra.

Don't try this at home because you are not dealing with royal offspring who have been trained to carry out their duty regardless of personal feelings. From Princes Felix and Nikolai will come no tantrums, late arrivals, nor making faces during the ceremony. Books like *The Enlightened Stepmother* and websites such as the *Second Wives Club*, *Childless Stepmoms*, and blogs recount other examples of juvenile sabotage of My Day.

Not because they detest their bio-parent but because they love BOTH bio-parents and subconsciously see a remarriage as the blocker to family reunification. Which actually is true. Until a remarriage takes place, there is always a hope of a return to the original family of origin.

In effect the young child in a second wedding is pressured to smile and participate in his nuclear family's demise. No wonder raw feelings and acting out is the norm! Especially if the ex-spouse shows up. Because her children are adults, the presence of Andrew Parker-Bowles and his second wife, Rosemary, at Camilla's wedding to Prince Charles did not result in any Laura and Tom meltdowns. A touch too nouveau for me to get on board with children and exes at subsequent weddings. Don't people get diplomatic flu anymore?

The Danes definitely have it right – it is civil to extend an invitation to the ex and it is understood that it would not be accepted by the ex. Neither Alexandra nor Joachim attended the ex's second wedding. It stirs up memories in the other guests and if the ex is prominent – either politically or socially or just a stunning beauty – it will detract from the rightful attention to the bride. (Just because she is who she is, Elizabeth Taylor at Richard Burton's funeral almost upstaged the widow Susan Hunt.)

Another advantage that Marie Cavallier has over most about-to-be stepmothers is that the ex, Alexandra, has moved on, emotionally and physically. The efficient former businesswoman Alexandra and Martin and her sons live in a mansion in a fine area of Copenhagen, that was purchased by Joachim as part of her settlement, and therefore never the royal marital home. Marie won't have to worry about 3 am calls for child support as it is taken care of. Financially well-fixed, Alexandra even now gets a state apauge, albeit taxable since her remarriage.

Nor does Princess Marie need to worry about bumping into Alexandra at the office. Countess Alexandra does not maintain of an apartment nor office in any of the royal Danish buildings. No longer a member of the royal family, she functions independently – this obviates some of the confusion concerning Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York. The reality show, *The Duchess in Hull*, is wrongly titled – after the divorce, Sarah ceased to BE a duchess although she is legally allowed to use it. It should have been more appropriately titled *Fergie in Hull*.

Unlike Fergie and Andrew, who used to take family holidays together as the happiest divorced couple, Alexandra and Martin hand the boys over and go their own way. From their home in Copenhagen, the young princes spend time in France with Joachim at grandfather Prince Hendrik's Chateaux de Caix or shorter trips skiing and only occasionally at Schackenborg Castle. Of which Marie is the new chatelaine, as a farmer's wife.

The honeymoon location for Joachim and Marie is a secret but it is known that it will not be a honeymoon with children, one second marriage trend that this royal pair is letting pass them by. Start as you mean to go on – a marriage is between two people and a honeymoon should be an adult-only event!

Marie is eager for children of her own, with Joachim slightly more reticent. She is quite equipped to blend her own children with their two half-brothers, as Marie herself has half-siblings from each of her own divorced parents. It is very cordial with Alexandra, hardly buddy-buddy, no rivalry a la Nicole Kidman – Katie Holmes.

All the conditions are set for Princess Marie to have a fairy tale marriage to her Danish Prince. Like Dr Phil, I tell it like it is.