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Wedding plan tasks now a family affair

By **SHEILA GARRETT**
Special to the Record-Eagle

Once upon a time, the traditional wedding consisted of a bride and groom, both young and living at home with their respective parents.

Back in the day, the bride left her father's house on his arm and her parents put on the wedding. Her mother made many of the decisions and her father paid the bills. Roles were clear-cut.

Today's bridal couples tend to be older and financially independent. One or both may have children from a previous marriage. The key to planning today's wedding, according to etiquette experts, is flexibility.

Columnist Judith Martin, in her book "Miss Manners' Guide for the Turn-of-the-Millennium," tartly points out, "Alert observers have noticed, in recent years, that bridegrooms are just as likely as brides to have parents."

She goes on to suggest that the bridegroom's family should be allowed, if they wish, to participate more fully in the wedding, as should any children of the bridal couple. It is not

uncommon for the bridegroom's parents to make a financial contribution to the wedding. And many couples today host their own wedding entirely.

Edith Gilbert of Charlevoix and author of "The Complete Wedding Planner," notes that in some cases, the bride's parents set the amount they are willing to spend, and anything beyond that may be contributed by the bride, the groom or his parents. Grandparents who are in a position to help may wish to do so as their gift to the bridal couple. The couple themselves may choose to hire a specific band that they like. If the bridegroom's family is larger than the bride's, they may offer to pay for food and the bar.

All authorities agree that the essential first step is to formulate a plan, including what you intend to spend, the size of the guest list and the degree of formality desired.

The custom of giving the bride away may be omitted altogether, as in the case of a second marriage. But if it is observed, the bride may ask her father, stepfather, or another close male relative to

give her away. It is quite acceptable, in the absence of such a family member, for the mother to give the bride away. Miss Manners favors the custom, observed in Jewish weddings, of having both sets of parents at the altar.

Traditionally, the bride's parents host the wedding, issue the invitations and see to the comfort of the guests. It is customary for the mother of the bride to stand first in the receiving line. However, if the bridegroom's mother is acquainted with more of the guests or is hosting the wedding, it is not improper for her to head the receiving line, with the mother of the bride beside her. If the couple are hosting their own wedding, they may head the receiving line with their attendants.

Area resident Dee Smith, whose daughter was married in August, decided to consult a wedding coordinator. Some of her friends, she recalled, became so wrapped up in the responsibilities of their children's wedding — the size, scope and cost — that they could hardly appreciate the event.

The Rowlette-Smith wedding was arranged by the bride's family because the bridegroom's family was in England and the bride-to-be, Markelle Smith, was in Portland, Ore.

Dee Smith gives great credit to her husband of more than 30 years, Gregg, for pitching in.

"He was wonderful," she said. "We split up the responsibilities. He took care of the music, and the groom's family gave the rehearsal dinner."

On the day of the wedding, she relied on the coordinator, Pat Martel, to deal with any problems that arose. The par-

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