

# Wedding customs: Reasons for those cherished traditions

Every wedding tradition has a story behind it. Discover the reasons we practice some of today's popular customs, such as tossing the bouquet and garter, and having a wedding cake.

## • Why does the bride wear white?

White has been a symbol of celebration since Roman times. At the beginning of the 20th century, white became synonymous with purity. Today, white again symbolizes joy, but women are marrying in many other colours, too.

## • Why do the attendants all dress alike?

To confuse evil spirits that were thought to lurk at the altar, several of the 10 witnesses required at Roman weddings dressed like the

bride, groom. In Europe, wedding parties walked to church. Friends dressed like the bride, groom, to trick rejected suitors who might see the couple and put a curse on them.

## • Why does the ceremony end with a kiss?

In ancient Roman times, a kiss was a legal bond that sealed contracts, and thus, the betrothal. Christianity incorporated the betrothal into the marriage ritual. It was believed that when a couple kissed, part of each of their souls was left in the other with the exchange of breath. Occurring at the end of the rites, the kiss announces a new status.

## • Why is there a wedding cake?

The cake is a symbol of good

luck, fertility. In Roman times, a bun was broken above the bride's head at the ceremony's end. Wheat, the main ingredient, symbolized fertility; guests reached for crumbs for good luck.

During the Middle Ages, the bride and groom kissed over a pile of small cakes donated by guests. In Elizabethan times, bridesmaids baked buns, the feast's centrepiece.

In the 17th century, a visiting French baker frosted the stack of buns — creating the first tiered, frosted wedding cake.

## • Why is rice thrown?

In the Orient, rice symbolizes a full pantry. In other cultures, grains represent fertility, bounty. In some countries, brides carried sheaves of grain. In others, guests sprinkled the newlyweds with grains or nuts, wishing them a large harvest, abundance — and a large, happy family.

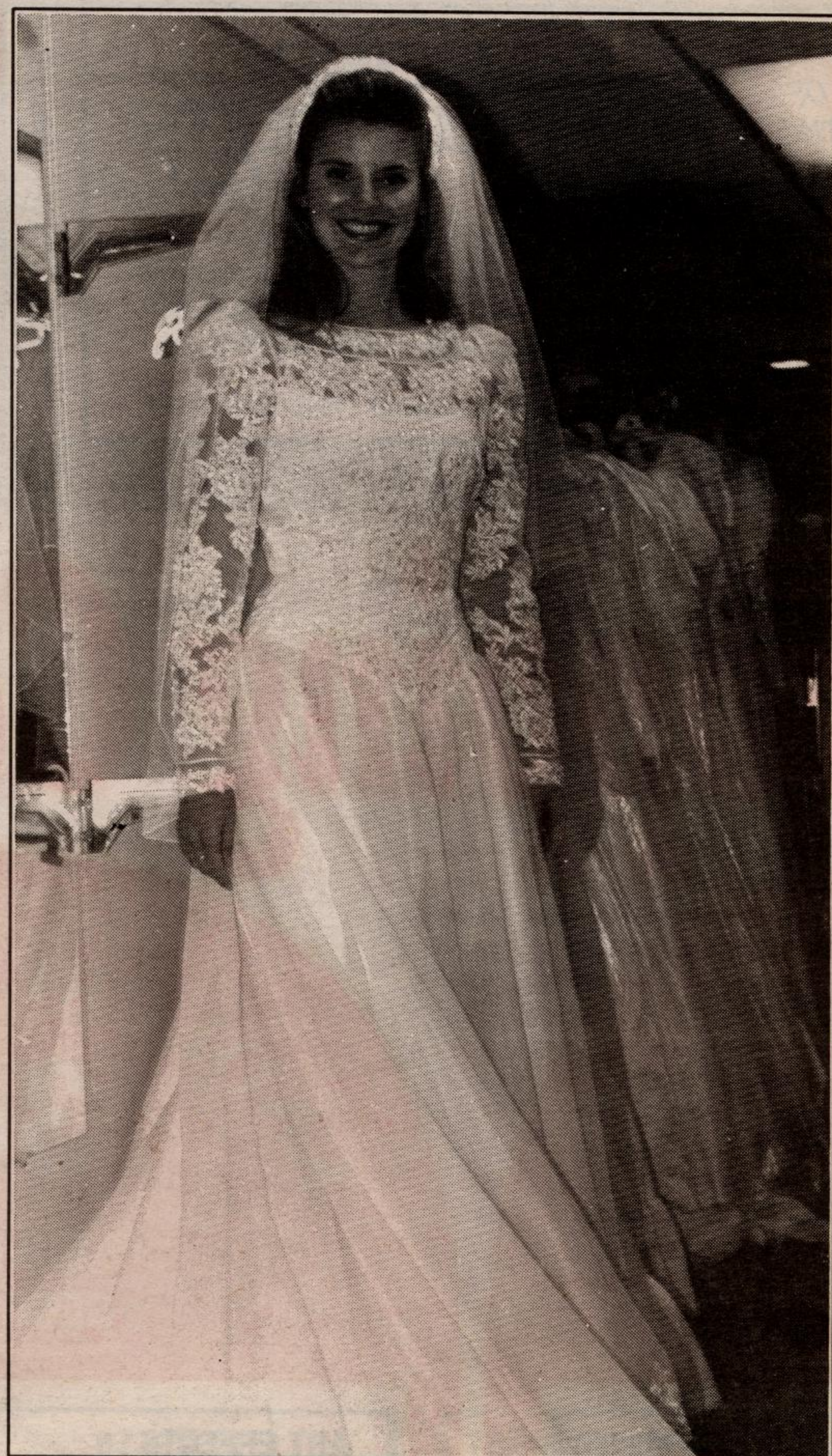
Today, guests may throw rice, rose petals, ecologically disposable paper, potpourri, wheat millet seed, safflower seed, or birdseed.

## • Why is the bouquet tossed?

As the bride left the wedding, she tossed her bouquet to a friend — for good luck, protection. The custom evolved to imply that whoever caught it would be lucky and wed next.

## • Why is the bride's garter tossed?

Guests once ripped off pieces of the bride's gown as good-luck tokens. In self-defense, the bride soon simply threw her garter.



## A CLASSIC!

Debbie Bick models a bridal gown from Elizabeth's Fashions in Georgetown. Debbie will be part of the bridal show at Georgetown High on Sunday afternoon from 12:30 to 5. (Doug Harrison photo)



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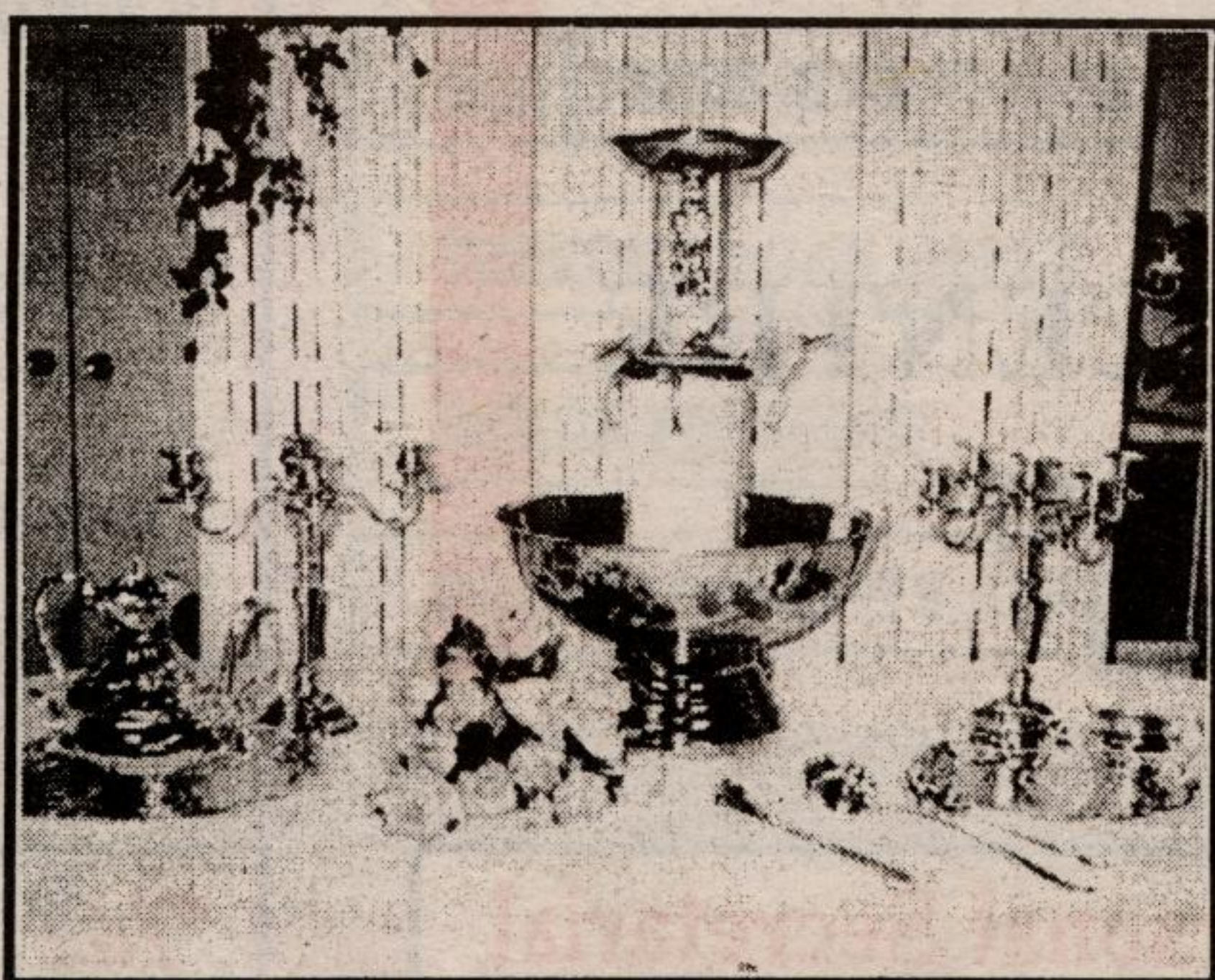
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## How to answer those 'sticky' questions

Engagement often brings a flood of unexpected inquiries, some of which you may find intrusive. Knowing why a friend is asking these questions will help you come up with tactful replies.

**"Why do you want to get married?"** Today, women have many options and no longer rely on marriage for financial support. The asker may just be curious about your views. Did you once announce to college friends that you never wanted to marry? They may want to know what changed your mind.

**"When are you going to have a baby?"** This is most likely to come from hopeful future grand-

parents. If so, you may wish to acknowledge their longing. Then politely — but firmly — tell them that when the time is right for you two to start a family, they'll be among the first to know.

**"Am I invited to the wedding?"** If the person asking is someone who probably won't be invited, respond, "I'm so flattered that you want to attend." Then, fill in an appropriate excuse ("Unfortunately, we're having a small reception"; "I have a huge family," etc.). If this is someone you wish you could invite, follow up with a post-wedding invitation to dinner, where you share anecdotes and photos from your wedding.



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