

# Brides

## 'It's a lucky dress'

### Eight brides in a single family have worn a Marshall Field's wedding gown purchased in 1950

By CAROLINE KUBZANSKY  
Chicago Tribune  
Tribune News Service

CHICAGO — When Serena Stoneberg walked down the aisle of a North Side church last year, her wedding continued a family tradition that spanned seven previous brides across three generations and multiple Chicago neighborhoods and suburbs.

Stoneberg became the eighth bride to say her vows in the satin gown that was previously worn by her grandmother, great aunt, aunt and cousins on their wedding days. Her late grandmother purchased it for \$100.75 at the Brides' Room at the former Marshall Field's on State Street and was the first bride to wear it in 1950.

The family heirloom has made seven more brides look good since then, with all but one of the weddings taking place in and around Chicago. Many of those brides gathered in Serena Stoneberg's River North Hotel room the day before the wedding, to socialize.

The third bride to wear the dress, Sharon Larson Frank, 77, who was the youngest of the first generation of brides to wear the dress, said it didn't start out as a significant tradition to be married in the same gown.

See **Lucky** page 6B



Tribune News Service/Chicago Tribune/Chris Sweda

Bride Serena Stoneberg, center, stands with six women in her family who have all worn the same wedding dress, at Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood on Aug. 5 at her wedding. From left are Susan Stoneberg McCarthy, married in 1982; Sharon Larson Frank, married in 1969; Eleanor Larson Milton, married in 1953; Stoneberg Lipari, Julie Frank Mackey, married in 2013; Jean Milton Ellis, married in 1991; and Carol Milton Zmuda, married in 1990. Not pictured is Adele Larson Stoneberg, married in the dress in 1950, who died in 1988.

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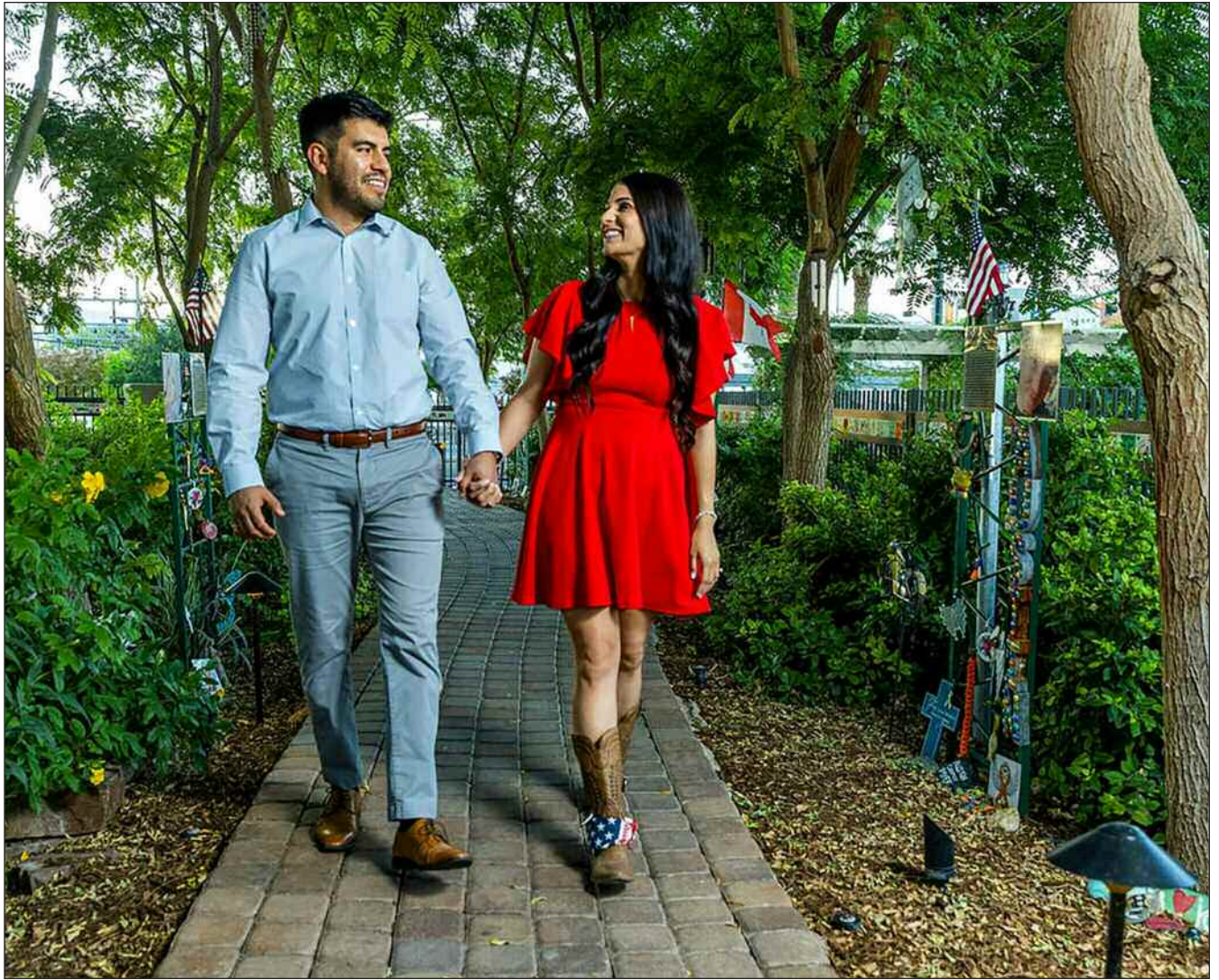
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Brittany Castrejon, a survivor of the Route 91 Harvest festival shooting, walks with her fiancé, Jorge Gonzalez-Calvillo, at the Las Vegas Community Healing Garden on Sept. 22.

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# Survivor's story

By **SABRINA SCHNUR**  
Las Vegas Review-Journal  
Tribune News Service

**LAS VEGAS** — A survivor of the Route 91 Harvest festival shooting in Las Vegas opened a new chapter Oct. 1 by getting married on the fifth anniversary of the worst day of her life.

"Something bad happened to me on this day that rocked and changed it," Brittany Castrejon said. "I didn't have control over it. An evil person got to say what happened to me, my cousin

and everyone else on that day. Me getting to marry my best friend on that day, I can make it a great day in my life."

The Las Vegas woman,

now 33, was among thousands who attended the country music festival on Oct. 1, 2017, across from Mandalay Bay.

See **Survivor's** page 3B

**Woman was married  
on fifth anniversary  
of Vegas shooting**

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## Survivor's ...

Continued from page 2B  
Sixty people died as a result of the shooting, and hundreds were injured.

Castrejon met Jorge Gonzalez-Calvillo through his aunt, who tried for years to set them up. Castrejon is a court stenographer, and the aunt was a Spanish interpreter at the Regional Justice Center.

In 2020, Castrejon flew to meet Gonzalez-Calvillo, a construction engineer who was living in Denver at the time. The pair spoke on and off until September 2021, when things got more serious.

"My parents got married in six months," Gonzalez-Calvillo said in an interview. "When I got to my 30s, I decided that's probably not how things are going to happen. I had given up on finding true love right away, and sure enough, as soon as Brittany and I officially started dating, it didn't take very long to decide to get married."

### 'Out there with no cover'

Castrejon and her cousin Danielle Pieper were in front of the stage on Oct. 1, 2017, enjoying Jason Aldean when Castrejon heard what she thought were fireworks. People started yelling to get down.

"I knew something was wrong when Jason Aldean ran offstage in a hurry," Castrejon said. "I heard people yelling 'call an ambulance' and others holding them like they needed help."

Castrejon and Pieper, who was 14 at the time, crouched near the stage for 10 minutes with nothing but Castrejon's purse to cover them.

"Most of the people that died were on our

side of the stage," Castrejon said. "Me and Danielle were out there with no cover. Just me on top of her with my purse on her head. I got to see people around us not so lucky. I'm glad that I didn't freeze and had her to protect. That kept me going."

When the shooting stopped, the pair rushed to the Tropicana Las Vegas, where a California woman took them to her room to sleep that night.

Now Pieper, 19, is attending cosmetology school, working at Ulta and planning to be a bridesmaid in her cousin's wedding on Saturday.

"It's crazy to think how far we've gotten," Pieper said. "It's crazy how far we've gotten and the people we met along the way afterwards."

Castrejon is not the only Route 91 shooting survivor who has chosen an Oct. 1 wedding date.

Todd Wienke and Oshia Collins-Waters were married on the first anniversary of the shooting. Wienke shielded Collins-

Waters from bullets and was shot three times in the process.

The California City, California, couple had stayed at Tahiti Village for the first time during the concert in 2017, and they returned to the venue the next year for their wedding.

Castrejon and her fiancé are getting married at Revere Golf Club in Henderson, where three years ago shooting survivors Kimberly and William King were wed.

The Las Vegas couple met in November 2014 and were engaged in December 2017, when William King proposed with a makeshift ring made out of a purple Route 91 festival wristband and a leather trinket.

Castrejon said that after five years of reflection and grieving, she can listen to country music again and attend large events like concerts. She and Pieper still try to check on each other after mass shootings across the country, and Castrejon is a member of several

Facebook groups with other survivors.

"Still, whenever we have shootings around the country, we have to come together during those times and give each other more comfort," Castrejon said. "Those things still affect us more than the average person who has never been through a mass shooting."

The cousins joined several other survivors on Jason Aldean's "Ride All Night" tour in 2019, the first time the singer returned to Las Vegas since the shooting. Castrejon said the healing experience included survivors holding signs and Aldean acknowledging the fans he had lost last time he performed in Las Vegas.

Gonzalez-Calvillo, 35, said he's thankful every day that he did not lose his future bride in a shooting that left so many families with a void.

"It's the wedding that almost didn't happen," he said. "I would have never met my soulmate."

*'It's the wedding that almost didn't happen. I would have never met my soulmate.'*

—Jorge Gonzalez-Calvillo

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In 2009, 15 adventure-seeking couples rode on the Pepsi Orange Streak roller coaster after they exchanged wedding vows on the roller coaster at the Mall of America in the Nickelodeon Universe theme park. The Chapel of Love celebrated 15 years by offering a free roller coaster wedding ceremony for the couples. The couples also received free toasting glasses, a bottle of champagne, a DVD of the ceremony and a couple won a round-trip honeymoon to CanCun, Mexico, and a \$1,000 shopping spree at the Mall of America.



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# Adieu to 'I do'

## Mall of America out of wedding business

By JENNIFER BROOKS  
Star Tribune  
Tribune News Service  
MINNEAPOLIS —  
George and Patti Masmanides knew they wanted a destination wedding. They thought about

Hawaii, about Disney World, about exchanging vows on a distant sunny beach somewhere. "Something fun and fantastic," George Masmanides said. The year was 1994 and

one of the nation's hottest vacation destinations was just down the road. So the couple got married at the megamall. "Thirty years ago, the Mall of America was a really big deal," George Mas-

manides said with a laugh. "People were flying in from Japan to visit this mall. People were coming from all 50 states. ... We thought, well, we have a destination wedding we can drive to." See Adieu page 7B



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# ICU nuptials

**She was too sick to make her wedding, so hospital staff brought the wedding to her**

By **KAYLA GUO**  
The Charlotte Observer  
Tribune News Service  
CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Maria Isabel Cipple Leon, a cancer patient at UNC Hospitals, was supposed to get married in a wedding at her church earlier this month.

But when it became unclear if she would be healthy enough to leave the intensive care unit, her medical team and UNC's chaplain's office rallied together in under a week to put on a wedding at the hospital's own chapel.

A medical student on her team brought a cake. Residents brought a bouquet of flowers, which they used to decorate the bride's wheelchair. The physical therapy team and the bride's nurses helped her, with all her lines and tubes, into a wedding dress. The chaplain's office coordinated with her pastor on scheduling, paperwork and logistics. Food Services made sure there were enough cupcakes to go around.

The result was a true wedding ceremony — one that surrounded the couple with family, loved ones and medical staff who had cared for the bride, and that enveloped the hospital in a kind of joy and love only an event like this could bring.

**'How wonderful it is to have community'**

"It was really beautiful," Palliative Care Chaplain and Bereavement Coordinator James Adams said. "The thing I took away from it is just how wonderful it is to have community. ... It goes

*'The thing I took away from it is just how wonderful it is to have community. ... It goes to show how important it is to have folks with you when you're in a tough spot to make sure you get what you need to support you when you're quite ill.'*  
—James Adams, UNC Hospital

to show how important it is to have folks with you when you're in a tough spot to make sure you get what you need to support you when you're quite ill."

At first, hospital staff anticipated a small ceremony in the bride's room, with seven to 10 guests at most because of COVID restrictions. But as planning went on over the week, the guest list expanded to encompass dozens of family and friends and the ceremony moved to the hospital chapel.

The day of the wedding, members of the couple's church came early to help set up and transform the hospital's "sparsely decorated chapel into quite a beautiful venue," Adams said.

When it was time for the bride to make her way down the aisle, loved ones sang and lined the hall-

way, and created an arch of white roses for the couple to walk under into the chapel.

The couple's priest gave a short service, mostly in Spanish. But he paused at one point to speak directly to hospital workers in English, "to make sure that we knew that the love that we were showing for her was very important as well," ICU nurse Sophie Austin said.

The joy the wedding brought was not limited to the bride and groom or their loved ones, but felt also by the health care workers who helped put it all together.

"It was just really joyful," Austin said. "It was just emotional for all of us involved to see this outpouring of support."

She added that especially because the unit served as the COVID ICU, "a lot of this joy was kind of miss-

ing the last couple of years. So I think it's great for us to be able to do it as well."

**'Really, really overjoyed'**

Adams, as the hospital's palliative care chaplain and bereavement coordinator, tends to officiate or help organize funerals rather than weddings or birthdays.

"You don't get to do a lot of the joyous occasions," he said. "So I was privileged (and) really, really overjoyed to get to help someone set up a time, this space, to have this joyous life event."

"I feel privileged to be a part of it," he added, "and grateful to a facility and organization and a team that's willing to go out of the box to give a patient and family what they need to find fulfillment and joy."

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# PEOPLE'S CHOICE

The Commercial Review is launching a new special section this year to give you, our readers, the opportunity to recognize your favorites.

**Here's the concept:**

For the next few weeks you vote for your favorites in a variety of categories: We tally the votes.

The winners will be listed in a special section to run next month. The top overall vote getter will be featured in the special section. Eligibility is limited to those in The Commercial Review's coverage area, which includes all of Jay County, the western portion of Mercer County (including Fort Recovery), the southern portion of Adams County (including Geneva), the northern portion of Randolph County (including Ridgeville); and the eastern edge of Blackford County.

### The Categories

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To vote, fill in your selections below or visit [theocr.com](http://theocr.com) and click on the "People's choice" link. (Rather than making this multiple choice, we are leaving each category open-ended. That leaves the voting up to you, the readers, and avoids the possibility that we might leave off an option that would be worthy of winning the vote)

**Deadline to vote is Jan. 31.**  
Winners will be acknowledged in a special section that is scheduled to run Feb. 24  
Did we miss a category? Let us know and we'll consider adding it to the list next year!

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## Lucky ...

Continued from page 1B  
"We never talked about it and said 'well, you'll wear the dress,'" Larson said. "It just sort of evolved."

But over time, they said, the garment has taken on deep meaning as a connection to one another and to Chicago.

Larson's daughter and the seventh bride, Julie Frank Mackey, 42, who got married in 2013 and was the last person to wear the dress before this month, said she never considered being married in anything else.

"You were going to make it work," Mackey said. "Even when it didn't fit me. It was really important just to be a part of that tradition. I just always knew from when I was a little girl

that I would wear that dress."

The dress is long-sleeved, with a high collar and floor-length train.

Serena Stoneberg, 27, added a few of her own flourishes for her ceremony. She wore her own shoes, her own jewelry and a new veil from her great aunt, the third woman to be married in the dress.

"But other than that, I'm really excited to fit into the tradition as it is," Stoneberg said.

The family has made some slight modifications to the dress over the last 72 years.

Mackey, who is taller than average, had her mother add an eight-inch wide ribbon to the hem and a back panel to make the bodice fit.

Jean Milton Ellis, the

sixth woman to wear it, added a crinoline to "give it a little boost" and avoid modifying the hem.

But they've done their best to stay true to the original design of the dress, which the oldest living bride, Eleanor "Elly" Larson Milton of Northbrook — who is the middle sister in the first generation — described as a classic.

"I think that's why eight brides are willing to wear it, because it doesn't scream 1950 or 1970," she said.

Milton credited her older sister and the first bride, Adele Larson Stoneberg, with the smart buy. Adele Larson Stoneberg, who died in 1988, is the only one of the women not at the dress' eighth matrimonial occasion.

Adele Larson Stoneberg's choice to purchase the dress at Marshall Field's was an obvious one, her sisters said. Their mother, Anna Larson, was a devoted patron of the massive Chicago department store on State Street, and when the time came in 1950 to pick out a wedding dress, they doubted Adele would have gone anywhere else.

"My mother (Anna) loved Marshall Field's," Sharon Larson Frank said. "So I don't think she could have gone to any other store. And [Adele] went to the bridal shop because they would have wanted it to be a beautiful dress."

Sharon Larson Frank said her mother, Anna Larson, would travel on the "L" train to do her shopping downtown "and then the Marshall Field's truck would deliver it the next day to the house," in Lincolnwood.

Every year at Christmas, the family would gather in Marshall Field's Walnut Room to see the giant Christmas tree and celebrate with a meal together.

See **Lucky** page 8B



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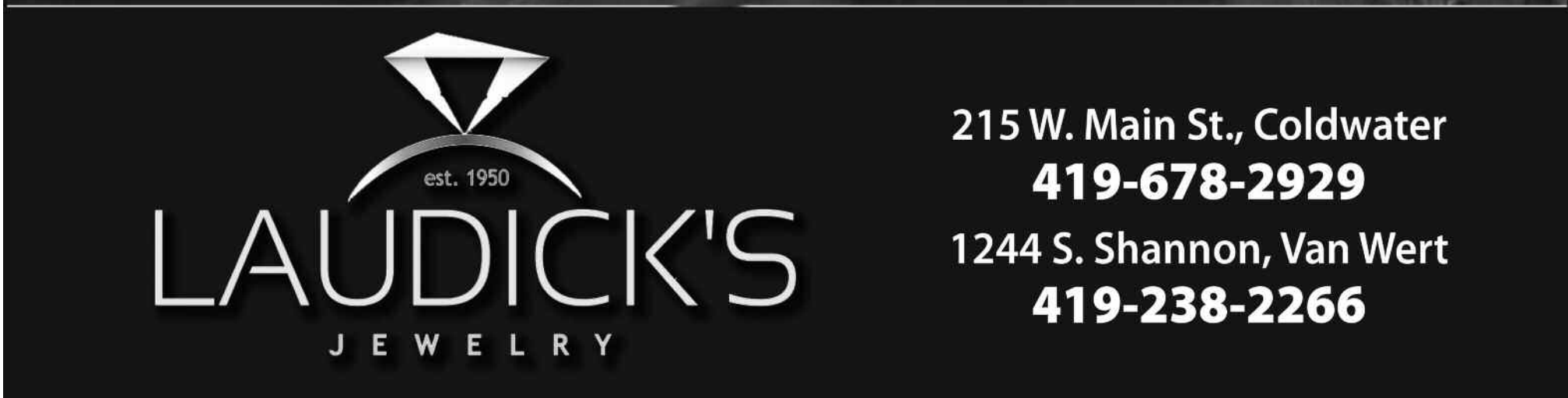
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# Adieu ...

Continued from page 4B  
The couple exchanged vows at the Chapel of Love, a newly opened wedding venue inside the recently opened mall, on Dec. 4, 1994.

Afterward, the wedding party, in full formal wear, paraded past the shops to pose for photos at Camp Snoopy, the vast amusement park in the center of it all, where a mall Santa was waiting to greet them.

It was fun. It was fantastic. It was the Chapel of Love.

Now, after 28 years and 8,300 weddings, the chapel is closed.

For decades, the Chapel of Love has been there for couples who couldn't afford or didn't want a big wedding. For couples whose big wedding plans were derailed by the pandemic. For couples who wanted to get married on Halloween and have a skeleton walk them down the aisle. For couples who wanted to exchange vows on a roller coaster.

"You know what? It's been a good run," said Felicia Glass-Wilcox, who took over ownership of the Chapel of Love in 2005 and was looking forward to a stress-and-glitter-free retirement after the final couple said "I do" on Aug. 28.

That final wedding included a bride whose parents were married at the Chapel of Love 28 years ago.

"If you're having a small wedding, it's a good option, because we do every darn thing for you," said lead wedding coordinator Tairie Starr, who has been with the Chapel of Love almost since the start.

The chapel was bright and airy and filled with flowers. The attached bridal shop glittered with bridal tiaras, veils, floral

arrangements and wee satin suits for tiny ring-bearers — anything the newlyweds might need on their big day, marked down 40% for the chapel's going-out-of-business sale.

It did not pass to a new owner. The era of marriage at the megamall came to an end.

"This is really sad for me," said Starr, who got married at the chapel herself. The venue was perfect for couples who didn't belong to a church or who simply wanted a fun, easy wedding day. "I could care less that it's a mall."

Over the years, the Mall of America became a place people come to mark their milestones. First dates. Baby's first visit with Santa. The chapel hosted baptisms, wedding vow renewals and at least one funeral.

"I never cared about making money. This was

*'It was interesting.  
You're dressed up  
and you're walking  
past Dairy Queen.  
It wasn't like  
going to church,  
but it was fun.'*

—Tim Jost

a labor of love," Glass-Wilcox said. "You have to make them feel like they're the only bride you've seen that week; they're the most important person in the world. And in that moment, they are."

"That's why I've hung around so long," Starr agreed. "It's not about the money. It's my life. I was married here. I had a lot at stake here."

The two women stood in the chapel, making plans for what they'll do after the last "I do." They should go out to dinner afterward, they agreed. Just the two of them.

"Let's celebrate all the good we've done," Glass-Wilcox said.

Getting married at the mall, surrounded by crowds of shoppers and tourists and Cinnabon, isn't the traditional wedding day. Which, for many couples, was part of its charm.

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# Lucky ...

Continued from page 8B

"None of these women drove, so we would take public transportation," Sharon Larson Frank remembered, adding that their Aunt Lil would come in from the West Side of Chicago and she and her mother would head in from the North Side, with everyone meeting up at Marshall Field's.

The store played an important role in the family's everyday life as well as its celebrations.

When Elly Larson Milton had daughters, Marshall Field's became a place where they could meet Anna Larson, their grandmother, for tea.

Jean Milton Ellis grew up in Glenview and would often meet her grandmother.

"Grandma would often say, 'hey, tomorrow, let's meet at Marshall Field's on State Street,'" she said. "And I would enjoy taking a bus down and I'd meet her on the old third floor waiting room and have a Field's sandwich and Frango Mint pie for lunch."

When Jean Milton Ellis left the region for school, she would get "packages of Frango Mints because of the withdrawal from those little green boxes," she said.

On Saturday mornings, Elly Larson Milton's father, Elmer, would drive his wife Anna down to Clark Street to shop.

"That was still her neighborhood, even though she lived out in Lincolnwood," Elly Larson Milton said. "She wanted to pick up the coffee cake. We always had coffee cake and limpa" – a dark Swedish rye bread – and lutefisk, a traditional Swedish dish made from dried fish.

The family's Swedish heritage didn't just dictate their Saturday morning shopping, but also where their marriages took place.

The first three weddings that included the dress from Marshall Field's were at Ebenezer Lutheran Church on Foster Avenue in Andersonville, where Serena Stoneberg's ceremony also took place.

Anna and Elmer Larson, Serena Stoneberg's great-grandparents, were committed members of the church and friends with the ministers. They had their



Tribune News Services/Chicago Tribune/ Chris Sweda

Bridesmaids pass by Serena Stoneberg as the group heads upstairs for Serena and Chris Lipari's wedding at Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood on Aug. 5.

daughters Adele, Elly and Sharon baptized and confirmed there.

"Being married in the church was a very familiar place," Elly Larson Milton said. "We had all gone to Sunday school there. We worshipped there on a regular basis. So Ebenezer Lutheran Church was our second home."

After Adele Larson Stoneberg's wedding, they had three urns of coffee and a cake from a bakery on nearby Foster Avenue or Clark Street — the women couldn't remember which.

The oldest brides said it was markedly different from the way many people celebrate weddings today.

"We got married and then we went across the hall to the Sun-

day school room and had cookies and coffee," Sharon Larson Frank said. "But there was no band or dancing."

"Or booze," Elly interjected. The next generation of weddings were scattered throughout the northern suburbs.

Adele Larson Stoneberg's daughter Sue Stoneberg McCarthy was the first to wear the dress in a church that wasn't Ebenezer Lutheran. She got married in Park Ridge at St. Luke's Lutheran Church.

Later, Sue Stoneberg McCarthy's house on Park Ridge's Delphia Avenue was a frequent gathering place for the whole family. Jean Milton Ellis said one of her strongest memories of visiting there was how the house, like much of Park Ridge,

was directly in airplanes' flight path to O'Hare International Airport.

And when it was her turn to wear the dress — after her sister Carol Milton Zmuda and cousin Sue Stoneberg McCarthy — Jean Milton Ellis married at the Westmoreland Country Club in Wilmette.

The dress has spent the last decade in Pittsburgh since Mackey's 2013 marriage, on a dress form after a specialized cleaning.

In the 72 years since the dress has appeared at the Larson-Stoneberg-Milton-Frank family weddings, no one who wore it has gotten divorced.

"All the marriages, they've all lasted long," Elly Larson Milton added. "Truly long, healthy, happy marriages."

Julie Frank Mackey said it's a lucky object.

"I think about the dress, and all of the happy marriages that started after that dress walked down the aisle, and I only wish the best to Serena and Chris because it's a lucky dress," she said.

Serena Stoneberg said wearing the dress for her own wedding would connect her to all the brides while she's at the altar, as well as to the one bride not at the wedding: Adele, Serena's late Mormor (grandmother in Swedish).

"It's super special [to be] wearing her original dress," Serena Stoneberg said the day before the wedding. "It'll probably feel like she's there a little bit."

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