

## "Honey of a wedding"

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by B. Lou Guckian

Getting married usually means a lot of planning, but if you want to start your marriage on the right foot, Honey Douglas recommends a pre-wedding gift: a planner.

Douglas (her first name is Warrenne but she prefers her nickname) ought to know. The 90-year-old San Antonian has devoted her life to helping couples prepare for marriage—for free.

An active member of St. Luke's Episcopal Church since 1949, Douglas was honored recently by the church for her service in counseling and coordinating more than 1,000 weddings the past 50 years. She jokes that if she "had been paid for all the weddings I have handled and all the hours that I have spent, I'd be the richest woman in San Antonio."

Douglas isn't the stereotypical finicky wedding planner, but she does get involved in all areas of planning. She coordinates music, recommends organists, florists and photographers, takes couples through rehearsals, even picks out tablecloths. The work is a calling for which she credits her mother, Mary Lou Hill, who also devoted her talents to the church and was well-known for putting on weddings. "No one got married unless Mary Lou was there," Douglas says.

"My mother told me I had a flair for being a bridal consultant when I was only 8 years old." A thousand weddings later, Douglas has a lot of stories to tell. One of her favorites was the time a pastor telephoned in the dead of winter because two 16-year-olds had come to his church wanting to be married. They had run away from home, they said, and their families were against their marriage. The couple refused to leave without exchanging vows.

Douglas hurried to the church. Realizing the couple would not be swayed, she telephoned the boy's parents to reassure them of the couple's safety, arranged a wedding—quickly—and found a place for the couple to spend their wedding night.

Another poignant experience involved a couple in their 80s. They had met and fallen in love while living in a nursing home and wanted to marry. Douglas arranged for their wedding, too, and the couple was able to move into their own home.

For as many fancy weddings as she has planned, Douglas never got one herself. At 19, she eloped with a dental student from Baylor University, Frank Murray Douglas, to whom she was married for 64 years until his death. She says she knows firsthand what it takes to make a marriage work and isn't shy about imparting her wisdom to anyone who'll listen.

There's a special place in a corner of Douglas' living room where a couple can talk things out before they walk down the aisle together. She calls it the "constructive criticism" table. Seated at the table, the bride and groom are encouraged to air any concerns they may have about their betrothed or the wedding itself. Douglas steers the pair through a friendly exchange, asking that each respectfully listen, respond without anger and commit to resolving the problem.

Douglas advises those who will become stepparents to take responsibility for ensuring that the children have a sense of importance early on in the couple's relationship and to include them in the wedding ceremony. This, she says, will give the children a feeling of belonging. Still, marriage is about risk. "I gambled when I married my husband," she says. "It's what you make of it, whether it turns out to be a gamble or a blessing."

Though her work is unpaid, she believes "God pays me."

"My life has been so enriched by the people I've met while doing my wedding work," she says. "It's what I've done since I was 8 years old with my mother, and it's been my lifeline."

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