

COVID Couple

A Family

Wedding in a

Pandemic

On July 18, 2020, my step-son Jackson and his longtime girlfriend Britney finally got married. Weddings are always great reasons to celebrate, but we were all especially glad to celebrate that this wedding got to take place at all! Getting married during the time of the virus was difficult.

We've all heard tragedies of couples who have seen their wedding plans dashed due to the pandemic. Jackson and Britney have a few friends supposed to get married, only to have the venues they booked cancel on them due to the lockdowns. Some even had their venues close totally and they lost the deposits they had put down. In the weeks leading to the ceremony, we were on high alert for something that could go wrong.

Originally, the rehearsal dinner was scheduled to take place at a local restaurant in Dublin. A month before the wedding, we kind of got booted from the place. The restaurant was concerned that, due to social distancing requirements and the number of guests attending, we would have to spread out into another room to safely fit everyone. Unfortunately, that other room was already booked. That was a big snag, but we got a local country club for the rehearsal dinner.

This wasn't the end of all the wedding crises. The day before the rehearsal dinner, the country club called and said that one of the kitchen staff had tested positive for COVID-19. The entire kitchen team *and* the wedding coordinator had to go into quarantine, which meant there was no one to make the rehearsal dinner. They suggested that we might call in a local

barbecue joint. My wife, Amy, and Jackson's dad shut that suggestion down right away.

They checked around and found that the staff from a Cameron Mitchell Restaurant was available because their restaurant



was closed. The staff came in and did all the cooking and the serving during the rehearsal dinner. We didn't tell Jackson and Britney about this snag until after the service. They didn't need to have one more thing to stress out about.

Thankfully, this was the last major mishap for this wedding. It was a lovely ceremony, and everything went off without a hitch. The wedding favors included custom face masks with a picture of our so-called "COVID Couple" on them. Everyone wore them, and it was quite the fashion statement to see at a wedding.

I was glad Jackson and Britney had their wedding go through mostly as planned. Those two dated in high school and have been through a lot in their seven years together. Being newly married in the middle of a pandemic is a wild start. But if they can make it through these strange times, I am confident they can make it through so much more together.



-Jim Monast

SHOP ONLINE LIKE A PRO

3 Ways to Save on Trendy Back-to-School Buys

Shopping online is tricky in the best of times, but it's doubly trying when your kids' opinions are involved. If back-to-school shopping is challenging in your house, try these tricks to hunt down the backpack, pencil bag, and lunchbox the kiddos are begging for without going over budget.

1. Opt for secondhand or refurbished items.

If your kid is dying to have the same Parkland Kingston Plus Backpack that celebrities' kids were flaunting last year, you might be able to snag one secondhand for half the price. The same goes for the popular PLAE Max Shoes or even electronics like iPads. Check out online retailers like JemJem or Gazelle for refurbished electronics, and try the Poshmark app for bags, shoes, and clothes. If you really want to get fancy, visit TheRealReal.com for luxury-brand clothing.

2. Always check discount apps and websites.

If you're not at least Googling "[store name] coupon code" before checking out online, you're probably missing out on big savings. Visit popular coupon websites

like RetailMeNot and Groupon, or streamline your search by downloading a money-saving browser extension or app like Honey, which automatically checks for coupon codes and offers price comparisons. Other apps, like Flipp, let you view deals from dozens of stores in one place. Remember to see if your favorite store has its own app, too — downloading it could grant you access to exclusive deals.

3. Don't forget to factor in shipping.

If you shop internationally, shipping can sometimes double the cost of an order. To save money, choose domestic retailers and check each website or app for shipping specials and discounts. Many websites offer free or reduced shipping for first-time customers or orders over a certain dollar amount. If you choose to shop somewhere without such a discount, check the shipping costs and factor them into your budget before you shop to avoid nasty surprises.

If your kids are old enough, consider talking them through this process as you shop. Who knows, this could be a great back-to-school lesson in budgeting!



CLIENT STORY

CARL SMITH

I've mentioned before there have been a lot of truck drivers in my family. My brothers Bryce and Allen drove first for the moving company Mayflower Transit and then for Tri-State Trucking out of Joplin, Missouri, when I was little. My Uncle Nick had his own small trucking operation out of Iowa for many years, until memories of a horrendous accident led him to retire.

Bryce gave it up when it got too hard to balance marriage and family with weeks on the road. After he retired from Whirlpool, though, he went back to driving for a few years and even taught newbies how to handle the big rigs ... for some guys, it just seems to get in their blood. My eyes got big when he'd talk about hauling dynamite through the Rockies or moving a Saturn V rocket engine to Cape Kennedy!

When I was a toddler, my parents often had to load me in the car to see "the big trucks" on Range Line Road in Joplin before I'd go to sleep.

It used to be a good paying job and the drivers were highly trained professionals, courteous, and safe on the roads. Now, it's still a hard job but doesn't seem to pay as well.

One guy who drove in the glory days is Carl Smith. After leaving high school early and serving three tours in Vietnam as a machine gunner, he learned to drive semis. While he did a couple other side gigs over the years, he could never leave the smell of diesel and the sound of air horns for long. After 28 years and millions of miles without an accident, he got into a doozy when he plowed into another rig stopped on I-71 in Kentucky. He lacerated his spleen, broke his leg, busted his teeth, and bashed his head. He was off work for 16 months. After extensive rehab, he tried to go back to training new drivers. Getting in and out of the trucks was too much, as his leg would give way without warning; he didn't feel safe. He then tried working security but the lingering head injury resulted in memory and concentration problems. Reluctantly, he listened to his doctor, who advised him to file for permanent total disability.

As is often the case, though, the Industrial Commission doctors agreed that Carl couldn't sit, stand, climb stairs, squat, concentrate, or remember short instructions, but they still concluded he should be able to do something (maybe become a politician!). When we got to the hearing, however, a long-serving Industrial Commission hearing officer agreed this was a pipe dream. Over the objections of the Bureau of Workers' Compensation attorney, the hearing officer granted Carl's permanent total disability.

I'm always honored to help these big-rig drivers. I suppose it takes me back to a simpler time, years ago, when a little boy riding in the back seat of his parents' car would look up at the driver of a Peterbilt or Kenworth (or the guys "chasin' the bulldog" in their Macks) and motion for him to blow that big ol' airhorn. He'd smile and oblige, much as if saying, "That's a big 10-4, little buddy!"

A HEARTWARMING REUNION

As kids, our teddy bears offer us comfort in hard times, fun adventures during play times, and protection in scary times. But for 28-year-old Mara Soriano, her teddy bear is far more than just a childhood memento or an adorable friend.

Mara's mother, Marilyn, was diagnosed with cancer in 2017. In order for her eldest daughter to remember her, she gave Mara a gift. It was a teddy bear from Build-A-Bear, named Mama Bear, and its fluff contained a message from Marilyn to Mara. The message told Mara how much she loved her and how proud she was of her daughter. As the cancer progressed, Marilyn's health began to deteriorate quickly until she passed away in June of 2019, and Mara's teddy bear became irreplaceable. In an interview with CTV News, Mara says, "That bear was basically the last reminder of the mom that I knew — it was her voice that I remembered growing up."

In early July of this year, Mara was moving into a new apartment and, tragically, Mama Bear was stolen during the move, along with a few other electronics. Devastated, Mara took to the streets, putting up posters, digging through dumpsters, and posting a plea on the online community.

People across the internet began sharing her post, hoping that Mama Bear would soon find its way home, and quite quickly, it became viral.

These pleas caught the attention of actor Ryan Reynolds, who posted a tweet about Mama Bear: "Vancouver: \$5,000 to anyone who returns this bear to Mara. Zero questions asked. I think we all need this bear to come home."



In late July 2020, Mara received an email from someone stating they had Mama Bear and wanted to reunite the two of them. While skeptical, Mara set up a safe meeting place and went to see if she would be reunited with her bear at last. To her delight, it wasn't a scam: "I'm not gonna lie, I kind of buckled," Mara told CTV. "As soon as I saw [him] pull her out of the bag ... I just started sobbing and I grabbed her out of his hands and I couldn't let her go."

Today, Mara is so incredibly thankful for the thousands of people who helped her reunite with Mama Bear, and, certainly, this story shows that even if the world is filled with uncertainty and difficult times, people will come together for one another.

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ANSWER

NIBBLES WITH NUG



Inspired by FoodAndWine.com

BALSAMIC MARINATED FLANK STEAK

The summer isn't over yet! Get out the grill for this delicious steak dinner.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 garlic cloves, sliced
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for grilling
- 1 tbsp fresh rosemary leaves
- 1 3-lb flank steak
- 1 tbsp dried oregano
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 2 tbsp whole-grain mustard
- Freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup balsamic vinegar

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine garlic, rosemary, oregano, mustard, and vinegar in a blender. Purée until garlic is minced.
2. Add oil and continue blending until creamy, then season with salt and pepper to taste. Reserve 1/4 cup.
3. Place steak in a ceramic or glass baking dish and cover steak with the remaining marinade. Turn to coat the other side, cover, and let marinate in the fridge for at least 4 hours.
4. Remove steak from marinade and let excess marinade drip off. Sprinkle the steak lightly with salt and pepper.
5. Light grill and oil grates with olive oil.
6. Grill steak over moderate heat for 10–12 minutes, turning halfway through, until steak is lightly charred and the internal temperature reaches 125 F.
7. Let the steak rest for 5 minutes. Thinly slice, drizzle reserved sauce, and serve.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 A COVID-19 Wedding — What Could Go Wrong?
- 2 Shop Online for Your Kids Like a Pro
- 2 Client Story: Carl Smith
- 3 The World Came Together for Mama Bear
- 3 Balsamic Marinated Flank Steak
- 4 The Truth Behind the 21st Night of September

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE 21ST NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER?

4 DECADES OF EARTH, WIND & FIRE'S 'SEPTEMBER'

"Do you remember the 21st night of September?"

In 1978, Maurice White of the band Earth, Wind & Fire first asked this question in the song "September," a funky disco song that quickly topped the charts. While disco may be dead today, "September" certainly isn't. The song is still featured in movies, TV shows, and wedding playlists. On Sept. 21, 2019, the funk hit was streamed over 2.5 million times. It's no wonder that the Los Angeles City Council declared Sept. 21 Earth, Wind & Fire Day.

The story behind "September" is almost as enduring as the song itself. It was co-written by White and Allee Willis, who eventually became a Grammy-winning songwriter and Tony nominee. But before any of that, Willis was a struggling songwriter in Los Angeles living off food stamps. When White reached out and asked Willis to help

write the next Earth, Wind & Fire hit, it was truly her big break.

White and Willis proved to be excellent songwriting partners, but they clashed over one key element of the song: the nonsensical phrase "ba-dee-ya," which White included in the chorus. Throughout the songwriting process, Willis begged to change the phrase to real words. At the final vocal session, Willis finally demanded to know what ba-dee-ya meant. White replied, "Who cares?"

"I learned my greatest lesson ever in songwriting from him," Willis recalled in a 2014 interview with NPR, "which was never let the lyric get in the way of the groove."

The groove is why "September" has stood the test of time, right from that very first lyric. For decades,



people have asked Willis and members of the band about the significance of Sept. 21. As it turns out, there isn't much beyond the sound.

"We went through all the dates: 'Do you remember the first, the second, the third, the fourth ...' and the one that just felt the best was the 21st," Willis explained.

The truth is that nothing happened on the 21st night of September — except a whole lot of dancing.