

Columns

Rain may be good luck on wedding day, but not the day of

I have read that there are several signs of good luck should it rain on your wedding day. Many traditional sayings indicate that rain is good luck because it signifies that the couple will have children, be cleansed of the sadness and tough times from the past and be given a new chapter in their lives. Rain is also supposed to symbolize that the marriage will last. Finally, rain on your wedding day is alleged to symbolize the last tears that the bride will shed for the rest of her life.

Cathy and I recently attended a wedding in Charleston, South Carolina ... and if the amount of rain that falls during an outdoor wedding is any indication of tradition, the newlyweds will be happily married until they turn 110.

Let me set the stage for you. The venue was a small upscale antebellum home with a large garden bursting with colorful flowers of every variety. The grounds were beautifully landscaped with native foliage, including live oaks, palms

So there I was

By Pete Buckley



and azaleas overlooking the nearby creek and marsh. The garden surrounded an open area arranged with row-after-row of gleaming white folding chairs facing a stage-like area where the bride and groom were to say their vows.

The bride's parents had hired an experienced wedding planner and everything had been thoroughly arranged down to the last detail. The bar was set up on the porch, uniformed waiters were ready to offer delicious hors d'oeuvres to the guests from the time they arrived to the moment the ceremony was to take place. Staff members and the bride's family greeted the guests as they walked up to

the porch. The wedding planner had even developed a contingency plan in case it rained. However, the possibility of rain seemed remote since the weather forecast and the radar showed no rain in the area until after 6 p.m. If rain did interrupt the ceremony, there was plenty of room on the spacious covered porch to protect the bride and groom as well as the guests.

Guests were requested to arrive by 4:10 p.m. for the 4:30 p.m. ceremony. The parking lot for the wedding was located ¼ mile from where the wedding was to take place. I dropped off Cathy at the wedding venue and drove to the designated parking lot. Like

those of us alive on 9/11, we will always remember where we were when certain events happen in our lives. At exactly 3:45 p.m., a monsoon hit Charleston. I have never in my life experienced a rainstorm as fierce as this rainstorm. I, and many other guests, waited in our cars, hoping that the rain would dissipate from its hurricane-like force. As I waited inside my car I reviewed the wedding invitation and read that there were supposed to be covered golf carts driving patrons to and from the parking lot. We never saw a single golf cart. I'm guessing the golf cart drivers were fearful of the lightning bolts that were crashing all around us at the time. At 4:15 p.m. the other guests and I realized that this torrential rainstorm was never going to let up in time for us to get to the wedding, so I took out my trusty Illini umbrella and began the ¼ mile trek to the wedding. The wind was so strong that it inverted my umbrella multiple times so that the umbrella offered little

if any protection from the rain. The raindrops were huge.... like mini-water balloons hurtling from the sky. I mean I could actually feel individual raindrops impact my body.

When I finally arrived at the wedding, every single guest from the parking lot was soaked. The cuffs on my pants were filled with water and a minnow was swimming inside the cuff. I had to wring out my socks so I wouldn't slosh when I walked. Further bad news awaited because the rain was coming down so hard and at such a slant, that the porch could not be used for the ceremony either.

The bride's parents were shell-shocked. The definition of being shell-shocked is "mentally confused, upset, or exhausted as a result of a highly stressful or disturbing and often unexpected event or experience." These parents were the epitome of this definition. They were speechless and there was nothing they could do but grin and bear it ... and offer towels to the guests ...

and maybe hit the bar a bit earlier than expected. The bride, however, was non-plussed and rolled with the punches. The small dining room/dance floor was converted into a chapel and the ceremony took place without further ado. About an hour or so after the ceremony, the sky cleared and the bridal party was able to go outside and have photos taken among the magnificent scenery. The guests were able to watch the photography from the porch while celebrating the newlyweds with a libation of their choice. Unfortunately, swarms of mosquitoes also joined the outdoor festivities, and Cathy and I were soon sporting so many mosquito bites that our bumpy skin resembled Lego™ pieces.

If rain during a wedding is good luck, Erin and Mitch should enjoy their honeymoon in Las Vegas.

With tomatoes ripening, time to make soup

I am so excited; tomato season is here; well almost here. I have had two small yellow tomatoes from my container plants but my friends who have planted gardens tell me it will be a couple more weeks before those tomatoes are ready. That's ok, I bought a couple from the farmer's market and they were delicious and local. So I have had my first tomato sandwich of the season and I surprised myself by not having what I thought might be my first indulgence.

I had been surfing tomato recipes and I rediscovered a Canadian website for Cumberland maple vinaigrette. We found this delicious vinaigrette on one of our trips and I brought back a couple bottles because at the time they did not ship to the USA. That was years ago and after finishing the bottles I began trying to make my own version. It was pretty simple to make by using cranberry juice, maple syrup and a touch of white vinegar. I use this on many different salads and sandwiches so I decided my first tomato sandwich would be sliced tomatoes and cream cheese on rye with the cranberry-maple vinaigrette. I know it sounds odd but it is absolutely delicious.

Sandwich number two was fried egg and tomato on a crumpet. Yes, I said crumpet and this too is a Quebec reci-

Memories and Musings

By Cheri Sims



pe just like we might enjoy it on a bagel or an English muffin or a Kaiser roll. We think of crumpets as a British food but French Canadian food was also influenced by the British and in some parts of Canada they prefer crumpets. Crumpets are not always easy to find here in Illinois but I can buy them from Amazon if I can't get to St Louis to one of the British food shops. Some British recipes dip the crumpets in an egg mixture just like we make French toast but I prefer my egg fried on a plain crumpet with sliced tomato. I am also not fond of horseradish or olive oil and one must be careful when ordering tomato sandwiches in a restaurant up north. For some reason many chefs like to put both of those condiments with tomatoes.

Since I have not been traveling much of late I derive great pleasure in recreating recipes we found on our previous vacations and tomatoes were a large part of our lunch time picnic's all over the country.

Have you ever eaten a tomato and blueberry sandwich? If not, then the next time you are in Maine or Vermont you might try one. It will most likely be served on multi-grain bread or rolls with mayonnaise. When you travel down south you might experience fried green tomato sandwiches and the fried tomato might just replace the bread. Southerners seem to eat a lot of pimento cheese and believe me when I tell you that a fried green tomato and pimento sandwich will make your mouth water.

Of course, the BLT (bacon, lettuce and tomato) is the most famous tomato sandwich and my parents had them every week in tomato season. Daddy always grew beefsteak tomatoes and one slice would cover a whole slice of bread. Bacon was rather expensive back then so we would have to split a half pound between the three of us so a big tomato slice was very important. The BLT sandwich was the first meal I ordered on my

first lunch break at my first full time job. I was pretty overwhelmed by the first morning on the job and by lunch time I really did not know what to do with myself so I walked down to the SS Kresge lunch counter and ordered what I thought Daddy would order, a BLT with mustard and mayo and a cup of coffee. I think that BLT was probably the best one I had ever eaten and I continued the practice for a whole week of lunches.

I have discovered that there are a lot of web sites dedicated to the BLT and some of them have very unique recipes from a British site which uses clove and olive oil in their mayo to a gourmet chef site which uses cheddar cheese and avocado on their BLT. I really don't like to play with my BLT sandwich, they are so good the original way that it seems a shame to mess up that taste. The "Mental Floss" web site (<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/78688/11-blts-are-worth-road-trip>) has taken a road trip of BLT sandwiches across America and this site is a really interesting ride.

Making my own tomato sauce from scratch is really fun and I like to have a couple of batches of seasoned for spaghetti where I can just add it to freshly cooked meat and a couple batches of just stewed tomatoes to use in other recipes

for winter cooking. Tomato sauce freezes really well and keeps in the freezer for the whole winter although I usually always run out by March and wish I had cooked up more. Each year, when making the first batch of stewed tomatoes, I have to make "Tuscan" soup which is a soup we had for the first time at an Italian Supper club in Upper Michigan. It is actually tomato and bread soup and there are many versions to be found all over the world. I use the "Caio Fiorentina" recipe and modify the amounts of olive oil and garlic. I say Tuscan soup is bread and tomato soup but it is nothing like breaded tomatoes, which I learned to like in grade school. I really wish I knew how the cooks made their breaded tomato soup because I have tried many recipes and none of them taste like my grade school breaded tomatoes.

All hail the tomato!

Tuscan tomato soup

1 small onion -diced
5 cloves garlic -minced
1 clove garlic -whole
8-10 San Marzano tomatoes (canned variety is fine)
1.5 quarts vegetable stock
1 tbsp Rosemary -chopped
1 loaf crusty bread
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil + more as needed
1 pinch Sea salt (or to taste)
1.5 tsp red pepper flakes
1/3 cup Italian parsley -roughly chopped

In a medium size heavy bottom pot add a good lug of olive oil.

Add the onions and red pepper flakes and sauté together for about 5 minutes until translucent. At this point stir in the rosemary and garlic and give it a good stir.

Crush the tomatoes with your hands and add them to the pot. Pour in the vegetable stock and bring your tomato soup to a gentle simmer. Cook on low flame for 25 minutes.

Adjust seasonings to taste with sea salt and set aside.

The Bread

While the soup is simmering, cut the bread in 1 inch slices and grill it on both sides on a cast iron grill pan until nice charred grill marks form.

Use a large garlic clove and rub both sides of the bread. Brush with olive oil and sprinkle with sea salt.

Using your hands tear the bruschetta into rustic pieces and add them to the tomato soup. Cover with a lid and allow it to sit for 10 minutes.

Ladle the soup into bowls and serve garnished with the fresh parsley and extra red pepper flakes.

From the "Caio Fiorentina" web site (<https://ciaoflorentina.com/tuscan-tomato-soup-recipe-pap-pa-al-pomodoro/>)

VG Ag Days signals the end of summer

Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;

Wait the great teacher Death; and God adore!

What future bliss, he gives not thee to know,

But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.

Hope springs eternal in the human breast:

Man never is, but always to be blest:

The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,

Rests and expatiates in a life to come.

—Alexander Pope

Raising a family in Villa Grove, the coming of Ag Days weekend was always greeted with great anticipation, but

also just a bit of melancholy, as it is the signal that Summer's End is around the bend, to borrow from the great John Prine.

Of course, the other thing that Ag Days signified was the fast approach of football! JFL, high school, college and pros will all be getting ready to start their seasons and as always, I'm eager to watch how things play out.

I'm too far removed from the little guys to know if the JFL teams will be any good. I do think that there are some athletes there, so I'm optimistic. The real hope is that no matter the results, they'll find joy in the game and continue to work and improve as they get older.

Hook, Line and Sinker

By Tony Hooker



The varsity boys are returning several good skill players, so, as it usually does, the season's success could very well hinge on the play of the offensive and defensive lines. One thing's for certain. The Blue Devils will know where they stand pretty quickly, as they face some tough games

against ALAH, Sullivan Okaw Valley, Cumberland and Arcola during the first half of the season's schedule.

The Illini have done it again. They've sucked me in, and I'm drinking the orange and blue Kool-Aid and have a seat reserved on the band wagon. I think their offense

will continue to improve, and the defensive line could be 'elite,' as a certain UI basketball coach likes to say. I know that there are question marks in the defensive backfield, and at running back, but for some reason, I'm not dreading the results, like I have so many times before. I think Coach Bielema might be having an effect on me.

Finally, we come to the "Monsters of the Midway," the Chicago Bears, whose play last season earned them the #1 overall pick in the draft. (Huge shoutout to Lovie Smith for coaching his Texans to victory in his final game, allowing us to snatch the pick away from them.)

The Bears in turn traded the pick to Carolina for DJ Moore, who had seven TD receptions a year ago. He and recently re-signed TE Cole Kmet should give young qb Justin Fields a couple reliable targets, as he looks to improve his passing. The Bears defense ranked 32nd out of 32 teams in 2022, so there's nowhere to go but up, right? Seriously, I'll be watching just to see if there are moderate improvements on both sides of the ball. It seems like our leadership team is competent, which is a nice change. Hope does indeed spring eternal in my breast, and I can't wait to see how it all plays out.