
C**Los Angeles Herald Examiner**Thursday, May 25, 1989

**Connecting**Cathryn Ramin

The camaraderie of family is like no other

MY HUSBAND pulled the car up to the front door of the house, and we climbed out. The wedding would begin in 15 minutes.

My brother peered at me from a ground-floor window and waved. He looked gentle and calm, as always. Except for his tuxedo, he might have been preparing to set out on a walk. In my family, he is the voice of reason. He is also the one to whom I turn when nothing in life seems to make sense.

I asked him if everything was going OK. He said it was, with minor exceptions. He withdrew from the window; some last-minute business called him. Probably, he said, smiling, the bride needed him to help her get her head on straight.

At that second, a crew of cousins fell upon me, full of hugs and news. I grew up with this unruly crowd, an even dozen of them. We used to raise hell at Thanksgiving, at Christmas, on the Fourth of July and on Labor Day. We shrieked and played tag and volleyball and wrestled and went sleigh-riding, and threw footballs and Frisbees, depending on the season, until we collapsed, howling, and had to be put to bed.

WE GREW UP AS BULWARKS for each other.

Today, all is not well; one husband is very ill and sadly absent, one aunt is coping poorly with the change of life. An uncle is downing vodka sours as fast as he can. As cousins, we stand united. We are ready to perform emergency rescues.

If my husband and I have children, they'll never know the pleasure and security of being part of an extended family. They'll be the West Coast cousins — intriguing foreigners with skateboards, but never part of the East Coast clan. I try to explain this to my husband, but it is hard for him to understand. He is an only child, and he and his cousins are barely acquainted. He grew up in isolation, never given the chance to wolf down peanut butter and bacon sandwiches at midnight with a bunch of lunatics who shared his ancestry.

Tom, the younger of my two brothers, and also the best man, grabbed hold of my elbow. It's going over, he roared. He pointed toward the area where the outdoor ceremony was about to take place. A spectacular arch of tulips, white lilacs, calla lilies and stephanotis had caught a great gust of wind. Freed from its moorings, it soared, then tumbled to the grass. One cousin, an engineer by training, took flight in that direction. Six of us followed. Clad in best suits, pastel dresses and high heels, we hoisted the fallen altar. Someone said something about starting a high-jumping contest.

BUT THERE WAS WORK to be done; flowers were strewn across the lawn. I gathered them and began to push them back into the arrangement.

It was time to sit down. Ron and I took places in the second row on the groom's side. My grandmother, recovering fast from the stroke she suffered two months ago, sat next to us, erect and dignified, proud of her grandson and very pleased with her matching shoes and bag. Two ushers unrolled a stripe of white linen. More ushers and bridesmaids took their places.

And then, without warning, my brother came down the aisle, peaceful, happy, smiling slightly, reminding me more than ever of a great, docile bird. The bride followed, on her father's arm. She gazed at my brother as if he held all the answers. He shook her father's hand and took his betrothed to the altar manfully, without hesitation or confusion.

The service started. The arch was swaying in the wind again. ■

Cathryn Ramin's column appears on Mondays and Thursdays.