

Father of the Bride, Part Two

I gave away my second daughter last weekend, and it wasn't any easier this time around.

I've never met George Banks. That would be impossible, since he is the fictional dad played by Steve Martin in the 1991 film *Father of the Bride*. But I feel I know George because I've watched this sappy comedy so many times. I watched it again last week just before my second daughter's wedding.

I guess the film provides a mild form of therapy. It helps me deal with my loss. Despite what they all say ("You're not losing a daughter! You're gaining a son!") I started to feel an uncomfortable lump in my throat at least 72 hours before the ceremony.

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Yes, I knew that I, a grown man, would cry at this wedding. When my oldest daughter, Margaret, married in 2008, my tears started flowing as soon as the grandmothers were seated. Would I keep it together this time?

Giving away a daughter is a huge deal for a dad. While I am not as high-strung as George Banks, I identify with his paternal anxieties. Like most fathers, he worried that his daughter's fiancée might be a criminal in disguise; he also

fretted about the boyfriend's rich parents (and snooped around in their desk drawers to find out how much money they made); and, in almost every scene, he hyperventilated about the costs of the wedding cake, the tuxedos and the food for the reception.

While most people just laugh at George, I empathize. I know how much it costs when you add up the church rental fee, the caterer's fee, the photographer's fee, the florist's fee, the musicians' fee and—let me unbutton my collar to get some air—the cost of the wedding gown. I understand why George wanted to have the reception at his favorite restaurant, The Steak Pit. (His son's advice: "Dad, I don't think you want the word 'pit' on a wedding invitation.")

In the movie, George's pent-up wedding anxiety erupted in a fit of anger over the cost of hot dog buns—and he landed in jail after he threatened a grocery store manager in the bread aisle.

I never assaulted anyone during my first or second daughters' engagements. I decided to trust God to provide for all the wedding expenses. But that is much easier than trusting the guy who is standing at the church altar with the ear-to-ear grin. He's taking your little girl on a honeymoon and then living with her for the rest of her life—and supporting her on ... what?

All fathers of daughters must face this inevitable moment. I knew someday a groom would replace me. I had to let go.

I knew from memory the words that would be read from Genesis 2:24 in the ceremony: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall be one flesh" (NASB).

That verse sounded so romantic at my own wedding; now, it sounded cold, ominous and *very, very* final.

When Georgia Meredith came up the stairs from the church basement last Saturday and grabbed my arm, 22 years of memories flooded my brain in a second. This was the little girl who, at age 3, broke her tooth out when she fell off her tricycle. This is the girl who loved to read animal encyclopedias with her dad after everyone else in the family had gone to sleep.

Now she was wearing a flowing gown and looking like a princess, only I was not her Prince Charming. My job was simply to escort her down the aisle and place her hand in his.

I managed the tears OK at first. They didn't flow in full force. When the pastor asked, "Who gives this woman to marry this man?" I coughed up my one official line, "Her mother and I," and grabbed enough breath to whisper to Sven, "She's all yours."

But when Sven started repeating his vows to Meredith, he choked up. That set off a chain reaction, and I lost it. Now both the groom and the father of the bride were a mess. I didn't recover until the couple exchanged rings.

In Father of the Bride, George didn't get to talk to his daughter at the reception because he was too busy moving cars that were illegally parked in front of his house. We did not have any parking problems last weekend. I was able to say the proper goodbyes to Meredith, and we danced together to Ray Charles' "Georgia on My Mind."

I let go of my little girl, and I'm trusting God to take care of her and my new son. But I've been humming that tune ever since.

J. Lee Grady is editor of *Charisma*. You can find him on Twitter at leegrady. He encourages parents, especially dads, to share their wedding memories in the comments section.

Listen to Ray Charles' version of "Georgia on My Mind," below.

[Thls_tMuFkc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Thls_tMuFkc)