

WE'RE ALL GETTING MARRIED

Weddings are particularly memorable, writes **Lindy Alexander**, when there are special guests attending – the bride and groom's own children.

After missing flights, dodging torrential downpours and caring for a sick child, Robyn Amott wasn't having a conventional honeymoon in Port Douglas. "It was a complete disaster," she says. Amott and husband Michael, from Melbourne, married in a relaxed ceremony at a winery in 2008 with their then 14-month-old daughter, Chloe, as their flower girl. Not realising that Chloe was unwell in the lead up to the wedding, the couple ended up spending most of their honeymoon in their room looking after their daughter. "Let's just say it wasn't quite the honeymoon we had

were changing, said "many people now get married after having children".

Data from the federal government's *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*, shows a cohort of 790 children who were living with both of their biological (but unmarried) parents in 2004. Six years later, 23 per cent of those unmarried cohabiting couples with children had married.

Australian Institute of Family Studies assistant director Ruth Weston says these figures show there is no longer any one single life course pattern. But, she adds, despite the rise in couples having children

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hoped for," Amott says. "We spent a lot of time reading, which, even with a child, isn't usually what happens on honeymoons!"

Despite things not going exactly to plan, Amott is pragmatic, seeing her honeymoon and post-child wedding as a reflection of modern family life. While marriage was never particularly important to her, once she had her daughter, it took on more significance. "With Chloe, there seemed to be a greater purpose to getting married," she says. "Rather than it just being all about Michael and me, it was more of a celebration of our life and being together as a family."

Instead of being one of the first major steps in the adult life course, marriage today has become something that couples build up to, often after studying, starting a career, buying a house and, in many cases, having children. A 2011 OECD report, *Doing Better for Families*, which explored the ways in which family contexts across 34 countries

outside marriage, the institution of marriage is still important. "Most people want to be in a lifelong, loving relationship. In fact, most people across all ages reject the notion that marriage is an outdated institution."

Marriage celebrant Rita Cohann says weddings tend to be emotional affairs, and those that involve children are inclined to be even more so. About a quarter of the couples Cohann marries each year already have children. "A lot of couples do it completely backwards," she says. "They'll have children, then they'll get engaged and then they'll get married."

Most of the time, the couples Cohann marries want to include their children in the ceremony and acknowledge that they are an important part of their lives. "Children take it very seriously," she says. "It does bring in an element of spontaneity to the wedding because you never quite know what they are going to do, but they love being involved."

Photography by Figara Photo/Snapper Media





A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES



**MEGAN WISHEART AND
JON GOSEWINCKEL**

Megan Wisheart and Jon Gosewinckel always intended to get married, and the top two people on their guest list were their kids Lewis, 12, and Niki, 6. "We thought it'd be nice to make our relationship a formality," Megan says, "but we wanted to wait until the children were old enough to be part of it."

Megan, who owns a jewellery business in Sydney, thought it would be ideal to combine her 50th birthday party in 2011 with her wedding. Her parents were flying in from New Zealand, and the couple had friends coming from interstate for the party. Megan and Jon elected not to let anyone know their wedding would be on the same day. Instead, they told their close friends and family to meet for drinks at a hotel before the party.

"Our guests were asked to sit down in chairs facing the ocean," Megan says, "and it was then that they started asking each other what was going on." What happened next took everyone but Megan, Jon and their children by surprise. "We got the organisers to put on the Bruno Mars' song *Marry You*, and the four of us marched through the doors," she says. "Niki and Lewis were leading, with Jon and I behind them. There were gasps and very surprised faces followed by tears and big smiles." The only drawback was that two of Megan's closest friends were late and so missed the entire ceremony. "They couldn't believe it," Megan says.

Jon says the wedding's surprise element matched his and Megan's personalities. "It was more fun for us and suited our characters to have a spontaneous approach to the wedding," he says. "And it was great to have the kids play their part."

Lewis and Niki relished being included in the preparations. "The kids were amazing and only gave the surprise away to one person [the babysitter]," Megan says. Niki was the flower girl and says, "The best thing was being able to dress up and hold the flowers." Megan thinks Niki probably would have preferred her to wear a "huge white meringue-style dress ... but that was never going to happen!" As the ring bearer, Lewis was excited about his responsibility and, he adds, "I liked watching people bursting into tears."



**LISA SCHOFIELD AND
JOHN McMURDO**

Will McMurdo, 12, loved being part of his parents' wedding ceremony. "I felt really excited for Mum and Dad to get married," he says. "I handed my dad the ring for Mum and that was cool." The service took place in his parents' native New Zealand in 2007, against the backdrop of Lake Wakatipu and Queenstown's mountains. Will, who was six at the time, says he is glad his parents made the formal commitment to one another, but that "it was a little bit strange to go to my mum and dad's wedding, because most kids don't usually do that".

Will's mother Lisa Schofield remembers Will as a preschooler questioning her as to why she and his dad weren't married. "John and I had been together for many years and we knew that we'd get married eventually," she says. Lisa and John spoke to Will about their plans to marry and Lisa says Will was "chuffed". The couple got engaged while Lisa was pregnant with their third son, Smith, but wanted to wait until after he was born before getting married.

The night before the wedding holds a special place in Lisa's memory. The family of five was staying in a beautiful house overlooking the lake and mountains. "We were all so excited because it was such a special time," Lisa says. "We put on loud music and were all just dancing together."

The next day, John's mum conducted the ceremony in front of 30 friends and family members. Will and younger brother Rafe presented their parents with the wedding rings, while Lisa's sister held Smith, who was 11 months at the time. "We waited so the boys could come to the wedding, and it was non-negotiable that they would be part of it," Lisa says. "It wouldn't have felt right to do it without them."

For Lisa and John, who moved to Australia with their three boys in the days following the ceremony, their wedding and marriage were an opportunity not only to cement their relationship, but also to celebrate with close friends and family before they left New Zealand. And despite going about things in a non-traditional manner, Lisa says she wouldn't have it any other way. "I've done things the way I never thought I was going to do them, but I quite like that," she says. "I don't need to fit into any stereotype." ●