

I do! I do!

Stephanie and Jon yearned for a romantic, hassle-free wedding. With Carnival handling the details, they just had to sail and sigh.

BY PEGGY S. PERSON

Couple No. 1 is having difficulty agreeing on how to complete this sentence: “We always agree on _____.” But then, the honeymooning couple is up against seasoned competition in this Carnival version of “The Newlywed *not so* Newlywed Game.” While couples No. 2 and No. 3 have been married 26 and 53 years respectively, Jon and Stephanie Simmons were wed just three days earlier, right here on the ship. No wonder they don’t know what they agree on—yet.

When Jon and Stephanie said onboard “I do’s” in front of 33 friends and family members shortly before their ship left port, they became one of approximately 2,200 couples who are married each year in “Fun Ship” weddings.

The nontraditional setting was perfect for them. “We’re very casual people,” Stephanie says, “so we always planned to do something other than the usual church wedding.”

“It was this or Vegas,” Jon agrees. The idea of a shipboard wedding was actually his. Jon is a big fan of Texas musician Monte Montgomery, who was scheduled to give several private performances on a February 13 sailing from Galveston. So Jon and Stephanie had already planned to book the cruise when Jon mused, “I wonder how much it would cost to just get married on the ship?”

The price was right, and the wedding was on. “It really saved us money—having our wedding and honeymoon all in one,” Stephanie says. They chose a 20-minute ceremony followed by a one-hour reception in one of the ship’s lounges.

The wedding also saved a lot of stress. “I was so relieved that they take care of everything,” Stephanie says. “It was nice not to have all the arrangements weighing on me.”

Carnival provided flowers, recorded wedding music, a photographer, a videographer, a local officiant, an open bar, hot and cold hors d’oeuvres, the wedding cake, champagne for a toast and a pianist for the reception. All Stephanie needed to arrange was her dress, the invitations and an appointment to have her hair and makeup done.

As for Jon, “I didn’t even have to rehearse,” he says. “I just had to find my tux and that’s all.”

Planning? Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

Stress-free arrangements are a major appeal for most couples, says Alina Vazquez, supervisor of “Fun Ship” weddings. “People choose our packages because it’s very carefree for them,” she says. “We require very little of their time to pull everything together.”

Weddings can be arranged up to 35 days prior to sailing, but Vazquez recommends booking at least six to eight months ahead. “We only do three weddings per ship per day,” she says, “so the earlier the better.”

Couples receive a description of shipboard packages, ranging from an intimate ceremony for just the bride and groom to weddings that include a one- or one-and-a-half hour reception or luncheon for guests. Carnival also helps coordinate weddings onshore. Package prices depend on the port, the number of guests and the options chosen.

Onshore weddings often take advantage of beautiful beach, garden or waterfall backdrops. Onboard ceremonies and receptions are held prior to sailing in various locations around the ship—typically a lounge or theater. For traditionalists, *Carnival Pride*, *Carnival Legend* and *Carnival Spirit* each feature an intimate, Gothic-

style wedding chapel with a center aisle, lovely stained-glass windows and a private dressing area for the bride.

Of course, some romantics dream of being married at sea by the ship’s captain. But, Vazquez says, that’s “a little complicated. In order for a wedding to be legal, you have to have a wedding license. The problem is that at sea you don’t have jurisdiction to issue the license.”

The one exception for Carnival guests is in Canadian waters outside Vancouver, British Columbia, where couples can be married while sailing (though not by the captain). “There we’ve worked with local authorities who have trained our staff, one to act as wedding commissioner and one to act as license issuer,” Vazquez says.

Once a couple chooses their package, they receive local licensing information and an outline of the ceremony. The bride and groom can personalize the ritual by choosing from a selection of readings or poems, blessings or prayers and music for the processional and recessional. They also have the option of providing their own vows, readings or songs on CD.

Stephanie and Jon chose to have their mothers participate with them in a candle-lighting ceremony to symbolize the coming together of their separate

SAY “I DO!” ALL OVER AGAIN

Looking for an exciting way to celebrate your 10th, 25th or 50th anniversary? A “Fun Ship” ceremony is a memorable way to renew your vows and show your deepened love.

And it’s a great chance to gather loved ones for a fun-packed reunion. Invite them to sail with you then relax, confident that your “Fun Ship” cruise will entertain all of your well wishers, from early-bird in-laws to night-owl friends and, of course, kids of all ages.

Choose from the same worry-free shipboard or onshore packages available for weddings. Proof of marriage is required to book a renewal.



Left to right: Stephanie and her stepfather wait for the ceremony to begin. The intimate scale of the wedding and reception made guests feel truly a part of the couple’s special day.



Let the romance begin!
The shipboard honeymoon
started as soon as the
wedding ended.

lives, families and friends. “It was beautiful,” says Stephanie’s mother, Susie Ward. “I promised I wasn’t going to cry, but of course I did.” She was not alone.

A Day to Remember

Once guests dried their eyes, Jon and Stephanie led them down one deck to an open bar and buffet of hot and cold hors d’oeuvres. There the guests raised their glasses in a champagne toast to the newlyweds, laughed as Jon and Stephanie fed each other a piece of apple-filled wedding cake (one white tier, one chocolate) and cheered as they took a turn on the

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cozy dance floor to “Unchained Melody.”

For Stephanie, the intimate nature of the reception was a big plus. “So often people don’t get a chance to greet all their guests. Being in a small place, we were able to get around and talk to everyone who was there, including family members who had come in from California.”

Jon’s cousin Melisse Mossy traveled from the West Coast for the wedding. “I’ve really been looking forward to it because it’s something totally different,” she says. “Everybody wants their wedding to be

special. And, especially with this being a Valentine’s cruise, it will be something for Jon and Stephanie to remember always.”

Time to Set Sail

Because Carnival weddings are held in port or onshore, the bride and groom can include guests, like Melisse, who are not going on the cruise. But Vazquez notes that more than half the invited guests usually opt to continue the fun by sailing along with the bride and groom.

In fact, one of the advantages to getting married on a cruise, Vazquez says, is the opportunity to have “everything in one. People can have a family reunion, a wedding, a honeymoon and a vacation all rolled into one package.”

Stephanie agrees that the economies of combining their wedding and honeymoon were appealing, and the family members and friends who sailed with them on their four-day cruise enjoyed the chance for a short vacation.

Stephanie had cruised before, but this was Jon’s maiden voyage. “I’ve enjoyed the cruising,” he says, adding that he’d like to try a longer cruise next time.

When their ship docked in Cozumel, he and Stephanie took the Passion Island cruise to a private island before picking up souvenirs in town. On the ship, they savored plenty of private moments for two interspersed with fun with family and friends. Of course, they caught the performances by the Texas musician who inspired the idea for their Carnival wedding in the first place. And had the audience laughing along with them at the “Newlywed *not so* Newlywed Game.”

“I can’t believe it’s already over,” Stephanie said on the last day of the cruise. “I wouldn’t have done it any other way. We’ll definitely be back, probably for an anniversary cruise.”

That’s something they both agree on.

CAREFREE “FUN SHIP” WEDDINGS

Follow these simple, stress-free steps for a special day to remember:

Decide on a sailing. There are 22 ports where you can be married with Jamaica, St. Thomas, Key West and Cozumel among the most popular.

Book early. Book your cruise, then your wedding, at least six to eight months ahead.

Choose your package. Pick an onshore or onboard wedding and select from several ceremony and reception packages.

Customize your wedding. Choose from sug-

gested readings, prayers or blessings and music for the ceremony or provide your own. Use handy order forms for your cake, groom’s tuxedo and optional upgrades (floral, video, live entertainment, ice sculpture, etc.).

Invite your guests. Submit a final list of sailing and nonsailing guests three weeks prior.

Say “I do!” Bring the license, the bride’s dress and your dreams. Your on-site wedding coordinator will handle all the specifics!

Call 1-800-933-4968 for more details.