

## Winter's Featured Wedding Custom:

### A Homegrown Wedding

by Zach Hawkins

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I woke up on the day of my wedding with two thoughts in my head: *Today I will marry the woman I love*, and *I need to get the bread in the oven*. The first thought was a culmination of nearly two years of courtship: the conversations and car trips, the meals and mishaps that somehow miraculously bring two people together in love. The second was part of a process that started a couple weeks earlier when I returned from Minnesota to my family's farm in Indiana—the place I grew up and the place Kira and I would say our vows—to prepare for the wedding.

The morning of the wedding I was to bake bread to be used for Holy Communion during our ceremony. Since Kira and I chose to do all that we could to keep our wedding local, it made sense to make a loaf of sourdough leavened with wild yeast, some of it from the very air of the farm on which we would marry. When I arrived on the farm, I mixed up a paste of flour and water, and presented it as food to the yeast living on the wheat, in the air, and on my hands. After about a week of daily refreshments of flour and water, the concoction began to bubble with life, ready to become bread.

I baked bread on my wedding day because it is something I love to do. As Kira and I strove to keep our wedding grounded—passing up long-distance flowers and food traveled from who knows where—we found that to do so is a matter of learning what the people around us love. For instance, Kira's father and grandfather love to make wine. When we announced our engagement they each uncorked a celebratory bottle from their respective first years of winemaking. It followed naturally that my communion sourdough should be consecrated alongside a chalice of Grandpa Verne's elderberry wine, made from berries he picked himself at the family cabin near Moose Lake, MN.

While I was baking bread that morning, Kira and our sisters—our Maid of Honor and Best Woman—were picking their bouquets in a field of wildflowers sown by family friends. At the same time, Kira's dad John, and my mom Kathy, were giving a final watering to a labor of love they had been fretting over for weeks: a flourishing flower garden surrounding the farmhouse. Friends from all over the country had converged on the farm a few days prior to the wedding to clean the barn, mow the yard, weed the gardens, and cook the rehearsal dinner. As friends and family worked side by side, I saw that the wedding, while centering on Kira and me, wasn't just about us. It was about all the kinds of love that bind us together—a love that roots us in the place where it is tended, a love that flowers and bears fruit.

The bread had nearly cooled when we started the procession from the side porch of our 19<sup>th</sup> century brick farmhouse, around an old lilac bush, and behind the rows of white chairs arranged on the front lawn. My dad Jeff, both a farmer and a Lutheran pastor, stood up before the congregation as the grower of the gardens that stretched out behind us, and the officiating minister of the marriage service. Kira walked down the

grassy aisle in a garment transformed from a simple bridesmaid's dress to a quietly intricate wedding gown at the hands of her mom Kari, while the congregation paged through bulletins designed by Kira's Aunt Jess.

Kira and I said our vows as the breeze blew and the birds sang, and slipped gold rings onto each other's fingers made by her Grandpa Verne. After the service, everyone picked up their chairs and moved to the big, white tent in the barn lot to eat chicken raised in pastures we could see from our tables, vegetables grown by friends on nearby farms, and cupcakes from the oven of the baker in town. Then it was on to the barn for a dance where the musicians perched in the haymow while a local contra enthusiast shouted directions like "right-hand star," and "swing your partner," to dancers, young and old.

As I looked around at all my loved ones, the good food, the white lights strung from the rafters of the barn, and my smiling bride, I felt wrapped up in an embrace of all the things I know and love best. The wedding belonged to all who were there. It was made up almost entirely of the place, and the people who belong to it.

I know I will often think of that day as I am baking bread. I have continued to use my wedding starter—I hope to keep it going for the rest of my life. As the sourdough starter is refreshed over time, it will take on more of the local organisms that give the bread its distinct flavor: the flavor of the place in which it is made. Every time I bake, the smell fills up the kitchen like it did on my wedding day—a familiar fragrance that continues through time like the vows we spoke in a place we know, surrounded by those we love.

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