



‘I married my husband 18 times!’

Local Women’s Maureen Coleman meets Dundalk wedding celebrant Lorraine McCarthy who is determined to give couples the wedding of their dreams

When Dundalk family celebrant Lorraine McCarthy was about to conduct her first civil wedding ceremony, she found a rather interesting way of rehearsing in the run up to the big day.

With the ceremony due to take place at the Ballymascanlon House Hotel in the Co Louth town earlier this year, Lorraine, who recently qualified through the Irish Institute of Celebrants, wanted to ensure she was word perfect and was in control of her nerves.

“Myself and my husband Keith run a sign-

making and print business as well and ahead of my first wedding I wanted to make sure that nothing went wrong,” Lorraine says.

“So basically I married my husband and an employee from our business about 18 times! It was good practice for me and though the nerves came in waves on the big day itself, I felt totally in control of what I was doing.

“When the groom said to me that morning ‘Lorraine, are you sure you haven’t done this before?’ - I had a wee laugh to myself. It’s not everyone who can say they’ve married their husband to someone else.”

Lorraine is an outgoing people person who was always loved big social occasions and with good organisational skills too, she considered becoming a wedding planner for a while. But when she found out that her only son Conor, now 19, was dyslexic, she decided to put any career aspirations on the back-burner to concentrate on helping him through school.

“Conor’s my one and only child so of course I wanted to focus on him and give him all the help and support he needed,” she says. “I shelved the wedding planner idea and instead put all my time and effort into him.

“I have a couple getting married next year who want their black Pomeranian dog to be the ring-bearer.”

“Last year he did his Leaving Cert and he got the exact grades he needed to study Computer Science. I’d put my life on hold for him and had also been helping my husband out with the business but I decided that now it was my time to shine. I was approaching 45 and wanted my independence and to do something for me.

“Also, when I was 39 I was very ill and had a near-death experience. It took me four and a half years to recover from that illness so I really felt it was time to follow my dreams.”

Given Lorraine’s love of grand social events, particularly weddings, she decided to go down the celebrant route and signed up last year to do a weekend course in Dublin with the Irish Institute of Celebrants (IIOC). The course trains people to create unique, bespoke wedding ceremonies for heterosexual and same-sex couples as well as couples wishing to renew their vows. Lorraine can also perform baby-naming and coming-of-age ceremonies for children of Confirmation age. With more and more couples opting for civil weddings, there has been a growing demand for celebrants like Lorraine and at present, there are about 200 across Ireland, most of whom are women.

If required, celebrants can deliver a religious ceremony without the Eucharist and Lorraine says some brides- and grooms-to-be are keen to include elements of the Catholic Church’s ceremony as a compromise to religious members of the family.

“I’ve had inquiries from couples who say their parents aren’t too happy about them having a civil ceremony but they want their own bespoke wedding that a church wedding can’t offer,” she says. “To keep everyone happy, they ask if I can introduce something religious into the ceremony, such as the Prayers of the Faithful. That way, the couple get their personalised wedding but the parents are kept happy too.”

Lorraine is heavily involved in planning the

entire ceremony itself from the moment the door opens for the bride’s big entrance to the final pronouncement. She helps the couples choose their music, readings and poetry, if required, and can also advise on the wording of the vows. The wedding can take place anywhere and can be as short or as long as is desired. She also offers ‘ceremony enhancements’, which add a unique twist to the couple’s big day. These include hand-fasting – an old Celtic tradition whereby different coloured ribbons are used to represent the qualities of the bride and groom, a unity candle lit by both or mixing sands, using sand from a special place the couple hold dear to their hearts. The ceremony also shines a light on the couple’s own love story – where they met, their first date, their first kiss right through to the proposal. As long as the couple complete their legal work and register their marriage, Lorraine can do just about everything else.

“Whatever the bride and groom want, it’s entirely up to them,” she says. “I’m not confined to any venue, I’m happy to travel and I can conduct a civil ceremony seven days a week.

“The couple can have the exact ceremony they want. It’s very personal to them.”

Lorraine’s first wedding took place in February this year when she married a Dundalk man and his beautiful Iranian bride. The Dubai-based couple had planned to wed in May 2016 but at the last minute, the bride wasn’t granted a travelling visa. Eventually they were able to set a date and Lorraine was delighted to be asked to

preside over their big day.

“The groom had been married before and has two sons. He was very keen to involve his family and wanted to show off his stunning bride to everyone at home,” she says.

“It was a lovely intimate wedding with about 60 guests. Many of them flew into Dublin that morning by private jet. They had spent so long trying to get married so it was a very emotional day for them and I was thrilled to be part of it.”

Lorraine has a number of other weddings lined up for the rest of the year, including one in a de-consecrated Presbyterian church in Castlebellingham. The couple are travelling to Nerja in Spain first for a religious ceremony in a Catholic church but decided to hold a civil ceremony in Ireland for family and friends not able to travel to Spain. Another couple who have made inquiries want a ceremony as close to the Catholic church one as possible.

“The groom was married before so they can’t get married in a church,” explains Lorraine. “But the bride is very keen to have as religious a ceremony as she can.”

Lorraine has received many inquiries from mixed religion couples in Northern Ireland and from same-sex couples too.

So has she had any unusual or quirky requests?

“I have a couple getting married next year who want their black Pomeranian dog to be the ring-bearer,” she says. “But it’s their big day, so they can have whatever they want.”

