

To tongue or not to tongue?

By Leslie Goldman
Special to the Tribune
Published January 21, 2004

That, apparently, is the question on the minds of more than a few brides-to-be. At least, that's what it seemed like on a recent visit to the chat rooms at the popular wedding site The Knot (www.theknot.com). One lively discussion, devoted to the topic of the first kiss as husband and wife, was buzzing with bussing questions.

"How will you kiss?"
"Have you been practicing?"
"Are you going to use `Church Tongue?'"

With all the anxiety that comes with planning a wedding, does a nice girl really need to be worrying about something called the Church Tongue?

Absolutely, said William Cane, author of "The Art of Kissing" (St. Martin's Press, 1995). "This kiss will be memorialized on film and will serve as a reminder of your marriage vows." In addition, Cane said, despite what you may think, the officiant's edict that "You may now kiss the bride," is for the audience's benefit as much as it is for the new spouses.

That's why MeLisa Baltés, 23, of Owings Mills, Md., has been busy preparing a fabulous Hollywood-style wedding kiss with her fiancé Chris Folsom for their June nuptials. "Every single wedding I've been to, it's been the same," Baltés said. "They just sort of smush their faces together, look at each other nervously and head down the aisle." When their time comes, Folsom will wrap his arm around Baltés' waist, dip her low and kiss her passionately.

Bride-to-be Sarah Thomen, 27, of Bartlett, was inspired by "The Bachelorette" show's Trista Rehn who, in her televised union to Ryan Sutter, jumped into his arms as they kissed. "We want to do something fun and silly to make people smile," said Thomen, who is set to marry Jeff Stoub in April. "We want our kiss to be something different and memorable."

Then there's the Church Tongue, popularized in the 1998 Adam Sandler/Drew Barrymore flick "The Wedding Singer." This is a version of a French kiss in which onlookers don't see any part of the participants' tongues.

Diana Ramirez, 26, from Oakland, wants to employ this technique in her August marriage to Jeff Simon. "Something between a quick peck and making out," she described. "Not too short or long and the tongue is hidden from view." Of course, that might prove difficult, she said, considering that although her Mexican family is very affectionate with each other, they consider such displays with newcomers disrespectful. "This will be the only time they will have actually seen us give more than a quick peck," Ramirez said, acknowledging that when she broached the subject with her fiancé, he teased her for giving it so much thought.

Chicago wedding expert and WeddingQuestions.com creator Becca Kaufman agrees.

"It's very funny what couples will spend time concentrating so intensely on," she said of the wedding kiss. "Other than it being a perfect photo opportunity, at the end of the ceremony, most brides don't remember a thing."

Kaufman has seen it all--uncomfortably long kisses, excessive use of tongue, knocked noses, brides dipping husbands. She said it's fine to craft a kissing plan, but when it comes time to do the deed, brides should be prepared to see their plans change.

"Let yourself be swept away in the moment. What people want to see is the genuine affection, that you love each other and want to be there."

Assuming the kiss takes place, that is. Eleven years ago, Julie Krell, 35, of Tucson, Ariz., found herself so wrapped up in the religious customs of her wedding to husband Marc--two rabbis, circling the chuppah (or wedding canopy), breaking the glass--that they almost forgot to kiss. "It was so fast, we almost missed each other's mouths. People started cheering and broke out in song, and we just joined hands and ran down the aisle. Our photographer couldn't even get a picture of it." Their time in a traditional private room afterward didn't help. Marc, who had fasted for the day in keeping with custom, was so ravenous that the only thing getting near his lips were the hors d'oeuvres, Krell said.

Holly O'Brien, of North Aurora, remembers turning toward guests with her husband, Chris, and seeing her mother frantically mouthing something to her. It wasn't until they had left the room that O'Brien, now 26, realized her mother was whispering, "You forgot to kiss!"

"We wrote out every step of the ceremony but we forgot to write, 'This is where we kiss,'" O'Brien said. The pastor never uttered the magic words and the next thing they knew, they were rushing down the aisle.

To avoid such slip-ups, Cane suggests practicing for three months before the wedding. The first month, anything goes; just get comfortable with the act. The second month, pare it down to a few front-runners. The third month, focus on "the one."

Cane's favorite? The romantic, slightly erotic Hollywood kiss, like the kind Baltes envisions. Cane recommends couples hit the gym in preparation, as this maneuver requires ample back strength. The biggest mistake, besides a quick peck? Too much tongue. "You'll have plenty of time for that later."