

Episode 110: Jen is a professional bridesmaid

If you've listened to this podcast for a while, you know we've covered a lot of pretty horrifying stories. Mass shootings, animal attacks, plane crashes – we've heard the first-hand stories of the people who have actually experienced those things.

And when we talk about those stories, we do talk about the tragedy of what happened, but I also like to include the positive side – how the guest recovered from it, what they learned, how they're helping others who might have gone through a similar situation. No matter how bad something was, there's almost always a positive aspect in the story, and I try to make sure we find that.

Well, today's episode is different. No one dies, no one has a limb torn off, nothing like that. Every so often I like to have a guest on who has a really unusual occupation. You probably remember when I talked to Spence about his job as a modern day lighthouse keeper. I also talked to Dan, who consults with white collar criminals and prepares them as they're about to go to prison for the first time. I love hearing about unusual jobs like this. And I know you do too – because I always get really positive feedback about those episodes.

Today's guest is Jen. She has an unusual job, and it's in the wedding industry. She goes to the wedding rehearsals, the wedding itself, the reception afterwards – she's involved in all of that. But the thing is, most of the people at the wedding don't even know she is being paid to be there. In a lot of cases, only the bride knows – because the bride is who hired her.

Jen makes her living as a professional bridesmaid.

Scott

It seems like what you're doing is a lot like improv acting. Have you ever taken an improv class?

Jen

I have. And what's funny about it is I was so bad in that class that I wanted to drop out. It was really hard for me, but it is a lot like improv.

Scott

It is. You were just, kind of, jumping into a situation where they'd say "Okay, here's your role." and you got to be that person.

Jen

Yeah.

Scott

How did the idea for this first come into your head?

Jen

It's a complete accident. Like many people, I was going to a ton of weddings in my early 20s. A lot of my friends got engaged back-to-back and I always became a bridesmaid. What was weird was, after a couple of years of going to 6 weddings a year as a bridesmaid for my friends, distant friends asked me to be a bridesmaid. After a while, I had one night when 2 distant

friends asked me to be a bridesmaid on the same night. I was venting to my roommate because being a bridesmaid is expensive. You can spend a couple thousands of dollars on the role. I was a 20-something living in New York making no money. I was venting to my roommate and she was like, "Jen, come on, you're a professional at this. People are asking you because they know you're good and not because they like you." Then, I had this lightbulb moment that if I could do this for people whom I'm hardly friends with, perhaps I could do this for strangers. That's what gave me the idea.

Scott

So, how long have you been doing this?

Jen

I started the business in 2014, so it's been a little over 7 years.

Scott

In that time, how many weddings have you participated in?

Jen

I've worked with hundreds of clients. I've probably gone to over 150 physical weddings through the job.

Scott

Wow. All right. There's a little bit of terminology I just want to be clear on. I've heard the term 'bridesmaid' and 'maid of honor'. Isn't the 'maid of honor' like the 'head bridesmaid'? How do you differentiate those things?

Jen

You're so right. The maid of honor is like the team captain and the bridesmaids are like the other players on the team. Sometimes, I am the maid of honor. Sometimes, I'm the only bridesmaid. Sometimes, I'm 1 of 10 other bridesmaids that they have. So, I played all of these different roles.

Scott

What's the situation when someone needs to hire you for this? Does the bride not have any friends? How does that come up?

Jen

It's a great question. I didn't know when I first started the business. I didn't know who would hire me. What I've learned is that there are really 2 camps of people. Camp number 1 is the people without any friends, which I know sounds weird, but I can identify with that. As we're in different phases of our lives, we lose friends, or friendships change. So, there are people who hire me who just don't have close friends. The other camp of people who hire me have friends but don't want to let all of this dirty work fall on their friends - or their friends are a bit of a problem and they need a professional in the room. So, it's one of those two things. Even though most people fall into those two camps, everybody who hires me has a story and every story is different.

Scott

Well, this is a podcast where we love stories - I'm sure we'll hear a few of those. Just for people who are wondering exactly what it is that you do, can you just give a quick summary of your service? What is it you provide?

Jen

Absolutely. I come in as the hired bridesmaid I pretend to be your friend from some point in your life. I wear the bridesmaid dress, walk down the aisle, give the speech, help you figure out all of the plans before you get married, and make sure that everything goes smoothly at your wedding for you. I'm not a wedding planner. I don't actually physically plan the wedding, but I'll be there for the bachelorette party. I'll help you go dress shopping. I'll help you with all of those fun details. I'll make sure that you feel good and supported on your actual wedding day. That's what every bride wants. What's crazy is they don't even know that they want it. But once you start planning a wedding, the pressure, the anxiety, the nerves, and the stress you feel make you feel really alone even if you're a person with a ton of friends. The way that this industry is built makes you feel like you have nobody to turn to - that can feel so isolating and scary. That's another reason why people reach out. I just don't have anyone in my life that I feel like I can rely on for this. I also need unbiased and honest advice, which nobody in the wedding industry really gives you.

Scott

Your family is also not going to give you unbiased and honest advice either.

Jen

No. They all have their own agenda. They want you to plan the wedding of their dreams. Of course, they want you to get married. So, sometimes, when you're engaged to the wrong person, you don't really have anyone to talk to about that. A lot of people come to me to help them end their engagements, which I know doesn't sound like something so positive. But hey, it's the truth.

Scott

There are so many aspects of this job that seemed like it would be so difficult. When was the first time you got hired? Can you take us through that first one?

Jen

After I had the idea to start the business, I posted a Craigslist ad, which I didn't know what would come from it. Then, I got hundreds of emails. That's sort of how I built the business. One of those emails came from a woman named Ashley from Maple Grove, Minnesota, a place I had never been to before. She wrote to me saying that she had to fire her maid of honor a couple of weeks ago because the maid of honor was just causing her so much stress and sabotaging the wedding. This was a woman who didn't have a lot of close friends. Her mother had passed away a couple of years ago. Her wedding was in a month. She saw the Craigslist ad, reached out, "Hey, I think I need you", and she hired me. I got on an airplane. The day before her wedding, I flew there. I remember the airplane landed and I thought to myself, "What are you doing? You're about to go to a stranger's wedding. Are you qualified for this?" I was panicking. I was the last person off of the flight. I went to her house, knocked on the door, and stayed with her too. At that moment, when I walked into the room, everything felt right. I felt like I had known her my whole life, which is often how I do feel when I meet a stranger. I was there to support her and help her through a lot of difficult situations with family and friends. The next day, at her wedding, at that moment, I just thought to myself, "This feels so weird, but it feels so right." Even though many people won't understand this, this is a job that I think I'm gonna have forever. I got on the airplane. I went back to New York and I thought, "Okay, we're gonna make this a real business and it felt really right."

Scott

Do you remember what you charged for the first one?

Jen

I don't remember. But I do remember a big business mistake I made after I had this idea. I thought to myself, "I'm not going to charge people. I'm going to do it for free because I just loved the idea of doing this." I even went on national TV and said this. After that, I remember thinking there's no way I can do this for free. I'm already working full time. I don't remember what I charged her. Every single year, I've learned to change my prices and grow my business. I was a poetry major in college. I was a writer before I had this job. I had no business experience. I literally had to teach myself through mistakes.

Scott

So you're kind of a free thinker...

Jen

Yeah. I'm a big idea person. I have big ideas but when it comes to, like, business plans and things like that, I'm like, "Come on, let's just throw it out there and see what happens." I have spent my whole life learning through mistakes, which sometimes gets me in trouble. Sometimes, it's just the only way that a person like me can learn.

Scott

It's not like there's a book on how to be a bridesmaid for hire - I guess there is now, but you had no nothing to reference

Jen

No. I felt a bit like a fraud at that first wedding because I was thinking to myself, "Wait, why am I qualified to be here? This woman took a chance on me. Am I going to be able to know what to do? I've done weddings for my friends, but I haven't worked a wedding as a bridesmaid. I felt like a fraud." Then, I thought to myself, "What do I have to lose?" Let me just show up for this person, support her like I would a real friend, and go from there. Ironically enough, we have remained friends over the past 7 years. We've seen each other a couple of times - that doesn't always happen. In this situation, I felt such a strange loyalty and connection toward her.

Scott

Yeah, she got you started. You said that was from an ad on Craigslist. Was she the only one that responded to it? How did you choose if there was more than one?

Jen

I had about a couple of hundred responses. Some of them were not real, or they were like, "We don't want a bridesmaid but we want to marry you." It was bizarre. I'd say about 50 of them were legitimate. I went through all 50 and I decided what my packages were going to be based on what those people's needs were. I realized, like, "Okay, I can't take on all of these people." So, I reached out to about 5 or 10 of them. That's how I booked my first couple of weddings during the first 6 months. A lot of how I built this business was on free advertising, free publicity, and just free marketing. Craigslist got me my first couple of weddings. A lot of press got me the rest of them. Social media got me even more. I've never paid a dollar on advertising or anything like that.

Scott

It is one of those stories that the press obviously wants to pick up on because it's so unusual - that's why I'm talking to you. My listeners are gonna love hearing about this.

Jen

I'm grateful for that because it is such a crazy idea. I feel like I have to defend it because some people look at this idea and were like, "That's so weird. It's so strange." And I'm like, "Yeah, it is. But the more you get to know it, the more you're like, 'it's not even that weird'."

Scott

It's just something that nobody ever heard of it happening before. They're gonna think "That is weird." Do the other bridesmaids know that you're a fake?"

Jen

They don't. Usually, when the person hires me, nobody knows I'm hired except for them. Oftentimes, they don't even tell the person they are marrying, so it's really a complete secret. I just enter their life as if I've always been there. I entered their life as if I was a friend from 4th grade, or a friend from yoga class, or the friend they met while studying abroad. I just entered as that person and nobody knows that I'm not that person.

Scott

Do you and the bride get together and make up the full backstory? I mean, how do you normally come up with that?

Jen

It's weird because a lot of people think, "Oh, you just show up at the wedding and you do this thing." A lot of times, we spend so much time together before the wedding on the phone over zoom or in-person. If we live in the same city, I'd genuinely get to know them because I have to get to know them. So, I know their fun facts. I know their favorite colors. I know where they ate lunch in high school. I know all of these things. We do build that backstory and we do really get to know each other. Inside of that is a bit of a genuine friendship.

Scott

You must have some kind of questionnaire about all those little trivia facts that you need to know.

Jen

I do definitely keep, like, a running list. What gets challenging is when you have multiple weddings on the same weekend and try to differentiate who you are and who that person is.

Scott

Have you ever gotten caught when the stories don't match? What happened?

Jen

There was only one time I got, sort of, caught. The bride wanted me to be a friend from high school because nobody else at the wedding was from high school, and that worked perfectly. I memorize street signs and everything. Right before the wedding, her mom was like, "That's so interesting. I've never heard of this person." So, she opened the yearbook and realized I wasn't inside the yearbook. She questioned her daughter and her daughter confessed. The worst part was the daughter didn't tell me that the mom knew. So throughout the whole wedding, the mom has just been weird and odd to me. At the end of the wedding, the bride was like, "Oh, I forgot to

tell you that my mom knows that I hired you.” So, that was like the only time. There have been times when I met people at weddings and they wanted to stay in touch. They asked for my social media and I almost gave it to them. Then, I had to pull back and be like, “Oh, I deleted social media. I don't have it.”

Scott

There's got to be some way that they could find you if they were really suspicious. On the other hand, people wouldn't even think and be suspicious that this is even happening, right?

Jen

Exactly. I mean, when most people go to a wedding, they don't realize that there is a hired bridesmaid in the room - there could be, but you wouldn't know. Everyone has, like, an aloof friend that is, sort of, never around - that's sort of the persona I take on. It's like, “Oh yeah, I just live my own life. I'm sorry that I haven't been here for anything.” So, no one's questioning it. Most people at weddings are really honestly thinking about themselves.

Scott

What does this cost?

Jen

It depends on the service you want and how many different things you want me to be at. If you want the wedding, the bachelorette party, the bridal shower, and all of these different things, an average package will start around \$2,500 and, then, just go up from there based on all of these different factors.

Scott

That seems like a lot of money. I mean, you've got so many expenses involved that they have to cover for you, plus just the fee of you doing it. The nice thing is, I think, you've got a big advantage because when people are thinking about planning a wedding, they're just thinking, “Okay, I know I'm going to spend a ton of money, whatever it is.” Do they ever try to negotiate your price down at all?

Jen

Of course. I think, a lot of times, when you're hiring a wedding planner or florist, you can look up at how much they cost. So, when you're hiring me, you don't budget for it, you don't think about it. Sometimes people hire me, like, in a desperate situation. So, they're just like, “I don't even know if I could afford this.” There are times when people are like, “Well, can we get a lower price?” or whatever it is, and I sort of have to explain the breakdown of my pricing and all of that. Over the years, I've been pretty firm about my pricing just because I know the level of work that goes into each wedding. I also know how much I dedicate to each person. So, that's something that's a huge business lesson I've had to learn over the years.

Scott

You mentioned wedding planners earlier. Can you just describe how does your role compare with the wedding planner? How is it different?

Jen

They are completely different. There's really no overlap because the wedding planner plans the wedding. What they do is they'll help you figure out your color scheme and your florist. They'll bring the whole wedding together so that it looks incredible for you. They'll also manage your

vendors so that you don't have to worry if the DJ is late or the cake person doesn't show up. I don't do any of that. I like to say that I'm a people person. I'm there for you. I'm there for your bridal party. I'm there for your friends and family. I make sure that they have what they need. I like to say that I am the personal assistant. I'm the one running to CVS because you don't have band-aids. I'm the on-call therapist. I'm the one who you would text at 4 AM because you're having a panic attack over something about your wedding. I'm the social director. I'm going to make sure that people have fun at these events, not sitting at the table, and sleeping. I'm just the Peacekeeper. I'm the one that's going to make sure no fights break out at the wedding or you and the mother of the groom aren't fighting last minute because that happens often. I do all of that. If I'm not in the room to do that, you're relying on your friends and your wedding planner, but they can't do that - they don't have the capacity to do that.

Scott

Yeah, it sounds like they're the wedding planner and you're more of the wedding maintainer who keeps everything going smoothly.

Jen

I think that's a great way of putting it. Honestly, yeah.

Scott

Have you had a situation where the bride or even the groom decided that they don't want to get married?

Jen

Yeah. I think it happens way more than we think. Before I work this job, I was like, "That's only in movies." But yes, I had people who have cold feet many times - they would call it off months or weeks or even 5 minutes before the wedding.

I worked a wedding a couple of years ago in Staten Island. 5 minutes before the wedding, the bride grabbed me by the arm, put me in the room, and said, "Jen, I don't like the groom. I don't want to marry him." In a situation like that, my role is not to ever convince you to do anything. My role is to support you in a sort of unbiased and sane way because I am mentally all there, whereas you and your friends might be mentally in a different place. So, in that situation, I made the decision to lock her and the groom in a room for 10 minutes to talk it out. Ultimately, they decided to go through with the wedding but not actually legally get married - they never signed the paperwork. That's sort of how they dealt with that situation.

I don't know if this is proven but I think there's a phenomenon or something that is in our brains - if you ask a lot of people who get divorced before year one, they'll tell you, "I knew on my wedding day that this wasn't right." - that I would call, like, the diving board effect. Right before you're about to jump off a diving board, you suddenly have, like, a realization. I see that happen so many times right before you go walk down the aisle.

Scott

I've heard the same thing when someone wanted to commit suicide - right after they jumped off the bridge, that's when they change their mind. Maybe suicide and weddings aren't a good analogy.

Jen

I feel you completely. I have to say that nobody talks about this but you're so right. The amount of times I've had a bride hysterically crying or doesn't want to do this in some way-- whether it's drinking heavily, confessing something to me, or something happening where I'm like "You are literally being forced into doing this." It's tough because nobody talks about it and you feel so alone at that moment. I think my purpose is to not make you feel alone, to help you figure out what to do next, and support you through that, unlike a friend or a family member who doesn't want you to be embarrassed so they're literally going to push you down the aisle. I've seen mothers push hysterical brides down the aisle and it brings tears to my eyes because it's just so painful to watch.

Scott

It seems so odd when you described the 2 who decided that they weren't going to get married but they went through that - it was nothing but performance just to keep all of their family and friends happy for the day. Of course, later on, they got to tell everyone, "No, we really didn't do it, actually."

Jen

What was crazy about that wedding is everything that could go wrong did go wrong. It was an outdoor wedding. It was pouring rain. Their cake fell on the floor. It was like the universe was trying to be, like "Hey, this isn't right." and it showed that day.

Scott

When you think about weddings, they are supposed to be a happy day. But really, they're filled with a lot of high emotions and a ton of stress. What kind of situations like that have you seen?

Jen

I would say weddings are absolutely not the best day of your life. I think they're one of the hardest days of your life for many reasons. I've seen everything from grooms not showing up, mothers fighting, mothers walking out of weddings, fights happening, to wedding crashers at weddings. I've been at weddings where something was on fire and the fire department needed to come. I mean, I've seen it all. I just think the wedding industry makes the wedding appear as if it's like the best day of your life, but it's actually not. You're just putting on this party for everybody else in your life. I think most people regretted it a lot after the wedding ended. A lot of what they regretted is how much they spent, the decisions that they made, and so many things. I didn't know any of this before I started this job. Honestly, I've never liked weddings. I've never dreamt of my dream wedding. I don't like weddings at all. I work this job and it happens to be in a wedding setting. I'm doing this job because I have such a passion for helping people in difficult situations and weddings are one of them.

Scott

Any idea what the average wedding costs these days?

Jen

It's in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range. Before the pandemic, my husband and I were planning a wedding in Florida and I did everything I could to make it inexpensive including using, like, paper plates and those kinds of things. It was still gonna cost us a minimum of \$30,000. Thankfully, it got canceled and we never had it. It is so hard to plan a wedding that is less expensive than that because every vendor charges you so much money and it's just crazy. It's not worth it in my opinion.

Scott

Yeah. I guess it's worth it for some people. Man, I can just elope, take that money, and put a down payment on a house.

Jen

Yes. Never ever, ever, ever go into debt for your wedding because you don't want to start a marriage off with problems, especially financial problems. So, don't go into debt for a wedding. Don't use credit cards for weddings. See what you can pay in cash. If you can't have the wedding of your dreams now, stay married for 10 years and have it at the 10-year mark. I know that's alternative advice but some of the happiest people I've seen get married are the ones who spent very little on their weddings.

Scott

Yeah. A notary, a few people on the beach, and then done.

Jen

That's exactly what we had to do because of the pandemic. We got married outside a coffee shop on the sidewalk of New York City and we saved \$30,000. Let me tell you - I do not regret that at all!

Scott

When you do this, you're working essentially with strangers. Have you ever had a case where you were concerned about your own safety?

Jen

Absolutely. I do find that that is one of the mistakes of the business that I am not proud of. I wish I spent more time figuring it out but, when I started the business, identifying people was really tough because you have social media and that was it. Earlier on, I had a couple of people who refused to do video or phone calls with me - it was just through email and it seemed very, very sketchy - but I went through with the weddings anyway. Luckily, I was okay, but it was not a smart decision. When I started having employees go to weddings for me, I had to really, like, work hard to verify identities because I don't want to put them in questionable situations. Earlier on, I had one situation where I was meeting 2 grooms from Australia who wanted to get married in Time Square. They refused to FaceTime me. They refused to give me their social media. They refused to give me last names. Those are every red flag you can think of. Because I was so new and desperate for money, I did it. I remember meeting them in Times Square, standing by a couple of policemen, and thinking "I don't know who is about to get out of the subway. But if it goes awry, I'm just gonna go toward the police." Being in these situations is not something that I'm proud of.

Scott

When you do this - spending the weekend with someone - you just, like, thrust into their lives, got deeply involved, and then you're gone. Do you find it hard to just leave like that?

Jen

Yes, it is. One of the toughest parts of the job is when it's over because you leave. Sometimes, you leave really sad because you miss the people. Sometimes, you leave with the aftermath of a really tough wedding where you are left with such extreme emotions - you go home and you can't really unpack them because nobody understood what you've just gone through and it doesn't make sense. Earlier on in my career when I was working 2 weddings every weekend, I

was burned out. I lost relationships. I lost a part of myself because I was carrying so much of an emotional burden from other people. I'm a very empathetic person. I often take on the emotions of others and that really affected my mental state, my physical state, everything. When you leave weddings, you're physically and mentally exhausted. Some of the emotions just haunt you for a while. People think that this job is so fun. There are fun parts to it but there are also parts where you see, like, the dark side of humans which is not something I really had a big interaction with before this.

Scott

How did you fix the burnout issue? Is that when you started hiring people and not doing it all yourself?

Jen

I had to learn how to raise my prices to work fewer weddings and make more money. Also, hire people. Also, create other services with my business - that was really helpful during the pandemic and pre-pandemic when weddings, sort of, paused. I had to bring in other people to start working them for me because I can't go to 2 weddings every weekend - it's not sustainable and I'm not happy doing it.

Scott

What other services?

Jen

one of our most popular packages that I love is writing the Maid of Honor speech because I get to use my poetry degree. I probably write, like, 8-10 Maid of Honor speeches a month for people, and I love doing that.

Scott

Oh, so these are not even weddings that you would go to - you would just write the speech?

Jen

I just write a speech for people and I love that. I also offer Maid of Honor coaching. If you are a Maid of Honor, I can help you with your roles. I don't have to go to the wedding. I offer, like, wedding coaching. Again, it's virtual, so there are all different types of services like that. I'm continuing to add more so that I would go to fewer weddings and also just give people other options who don't want to hire a bridesmaid.

Scott

Weddings are such a big thing. Culturally, you must see a lot of different types and styles of weddings based on where that person is from. Was there a big education process to get used to that?

Jen

It absolutely was. Most of my friend's weddings were nondenominational. I'm from a Jewish background, so I went to a ton of Jewish weddings. When I started working at these weddings, I saw all different kinds of things. I remember my first Catholic wedding - the ceremony took, like, an hour plus and I was like, "This is so interesting - learning all of these different cultural traditions and religious traditions. It's really cool to see these things." Aside from that, one of the reasons I think I keep doing this job is there's something so fascinating about meeting people and having a connection with them through this work that I never ever, ever would in my entire

life. When I think about Ashley from Minnesota, there is not a chance that we would have really probably met in this world, let alone the fact that, "Will we have given each other a chance to get to know one another?" The fact is, through this job, I get to meet people who I wouldn't normally meet and build a connection with. I feel that just makes my life a lot more stronger than any other job would.

Scott

Yeah. So you've got quite a network of friends, I guess, all over the country...

Jen

Yeah. The problem is some of them don't ever want to see you again because they hired you and, then, they are like, "Okay, the job's done. Goodbye. I don't want anyone to know who you really are." Of course, there are some who want to stay friends with you but you're like, "I can't ever see you again after what happened at this wedding." I don't stay friends with many - I stay loosely acquainted to some of them. In terms of real, genuine friendships, it's few and far between.

Scott

Do some of your clients want to hire a whole group of bridesmaids?

Jen

Oh, yeah. Some of them were like, "I need you plus 3 or 5 or 10 people." That happens sometimes as well. Sometimes, they already have existing bridesmaids.

Scott

That's got to be an astronomical cost.

Jen

Yeah, because they're paying for me and they're also paying per person as well. That's just something that they want to have and want to do. Of course, it gets expensive. Also, picking the people and hiring for this job is a nightmare. I'm sure hiring for every job is a nightmare but this one's hard because it's not about your experience - it's about your personality and how well you do in extreme challenges. So, hiring for this job has been challenging. A lot of people work on 1 or 2 weddings and then never wanted to do it again. So, there's a high turnover rate or a rate of, like, "You're not the right person for this." So, it has been a challenge to hire. I started off hiring friends and that doesn't always go so well.

Scott

Right, it's tough when you have to fire a friend. That doesn't work too.

Jen

Or they just don't want to be your friend anymore because of what you put them through.

Scott

How do you even interview for that? I mean, it's based on personality. Is there some kind of personality quiz? How do you do that?

Jen

A lot of what I like to get to know is them. So, we would just have a couple of conversations like normal people - not even asking about the job. Sometimes, I would meet them in person or

bring them to social situations to see how they would adapt, how they would deal with it, or put them in verbal situations where I'm like, "Okay, here's a real situation at a wedding. How would you handle it?" It is really hard. I don't care if you've never been to a wedding before. I don't care if you've been a bridesmaid 30 times. It's not going to make you good at this job. The best people I think for this role are people who have, like, a customer service background or a sales background - not even, like, an acting background - who just really know how to deal with challenging conversations and situations.

Scott

And being able to adapt to a lot of different environments.

Jen

Adapt, relate, and also silence some of your needs. It's a tough job physically - I don't think people realize that. It's tough on your body to be running around and standing in heels and all of these things. Sometimes, it's very, very exhausting."

Scott

This seems like something that would work for men and groomsmen as well. Do people inquire about that? Are there other companies that do that?

Jen

When I first started, I was like, "Why not just expand to the groomsmen's side?" But I never did because I don't think it was my specialty. I don't know that I would necessarily want to go into that world. I don't know if other people have tried - I don't really think so - but I do think there is a need for it. I do think the need might be a little bit different just because the decisions and the process of what men go through in terms of the wedding situation are a little bit different. I do think that it can be a great business model for groomsmen,

Scott

Yeah, you're getting hired to go to the bachelor party and get drunk.

Jen

I know that's gonna take a certain kind of person. I'm like, "That's so not me. Let somebody else, like, run that show."

Scott

Obviously, you've done so many weddings and seen a lot. What was one time that completely caught you by surprise?

Jen

I worked a wedding, actually, in Las Vegas for 2 women from Chicago who were engaged. They told me, "We're flying down 30 of our closest friends and family to Vegas for a bachelorette party. At the end of it, we're going to surprise them - it's going to be the real wedding." It was so cool to be there and witness that because their friends had thought that they were just coming for a bachelorette party and that they would get married on the very last day - that was really cool to see. I still talk to them. I still keep in touch with them. That was one of the cool surprises where everything was pretty positive at that wedding and it was really fun to be there.

Scott

This is the kind of idea that someone might come up with and think “Oh, yeah. That sounds like fun!” but never really take any action and try it. On the other hand, you thought of this and just ran with it. Why do you think that is what makes you different in taking action like that?

Jen

You're so right. Even till this day, people are like, “Oh my god, I thought of that! I just never did it.” That happens with everything, right? I mean, people who watch the show ‘Shark Tank’ are like, “I thought of that invention. Why didn't I do it?” I am the kind of person - I don't really know why but, I guess, I need more therapy - who lives with this bizarre sense of urgency because my life is not going to be long, so I need to do everything now. So, when I have an idea, I act and don't overthink it. I don't ask people what they think - I literally just do. For good or for bad, I live my life at a speed of, like, 150 miles an hour, which gets me in trouble because I rush through everything. I'm not the kind of person who sits and thinks - I just do. When I got this idea, I didn't think, “Oh, maybe I should think it through.” I just put it out there. I guarantee you that, if I asked my mom or I asked friends and family if I should do this, they would talk me out of it because it's weird, dangerous, and scary.” Sometimes, we have to trust ourselves, just try things, and not wait. The longer you wait, the less you're ever going to do it and the harder it's going to be to do it.

Scott

Eventually, you'll probably, kind of, age out of this business, I would think. I mean, realistically, you can't really say that you were best friends with the bride when you're 20 years older than she is. What's your long-term plan for this?

Jen

It's funny you say that because I have worked on weddings where the bridesmaids are, like, 70 or 80 and the brides are, like, 25, and no one really questions. You're like, “That's cool. So, I'm hoping that's my plan but, I think, realistically, eventually, it's going to be too tough on my body, my mind, and my lifestyle to continue. Right now, I don't see an end phase, but I do see expanding the business to offer more services that don't include going to weddings in person and more products and things like that - that's sort of my hope. Eventually - I said this from day one - I want to normalize hiring bridesmaids. I want that to be a thing. I want people to say, “Yeah, I'm hiring a wedding planner and a bridesmaid.” I'm not going to stop until that happens.

Scott

You mentioned the pandemic before and we're kind of coming out of that now. I assume your business is picking up again. When everything was locked down, did you just not do anything? Were there weddings on Zoom? How did you continue them?

Jen

It was so interesting because I was going through it myself. I was engaged. I had a wedding planned in Florida and we sent out the ‘Save the date, March 3’. Then, we had to quickly send out cancellations. So, I was going through it. I did work a lot of virtual weddings. I also did a lot of, like, wedding coaching with people who were, like, “What the heck should we do?” For the most part, a lot of the work was canceled or paused. Many weddings were pushed until now, until next year, or until 2024, so there was a time when I was like, “Oh, my goodness, what's going to happen to my business?” That was tough. That's why I, sort of, had to innovate and also think of new products and services as well. But yeah, a lot of virtual weddings during that time.

Scott

So, with all of those weddings that were rescheduled, you must now have just a pile of weddings. Are there conflicts in dates where people want you to be in 2 places at the same time?

Jen

Yeah, a lot of that happened. Also, a lot of people just like me who had planned these big weddings were like, "You know what? We're canceling it. Keep the deposit. We're eloping." So, a lot of people also just did that. While we do have a big surge of people really getting married now, a lot of people are also just having parties and non-official weddings. A lot of people were also like, "Nope, we're just gonna elope and call it a day."

Scott

You have a podcast--

Jen

Yes.

Scott

--and it's titled 'You're Not Getting Any Younger'. You've called it a show 'for people who want to disrupt their lives, for a good reason'. What does that mean? What's your podcast about?

Jen

I think that a lot of people live lives where they feel stuck or they can't seem to figure out how to live more of their purpose. I've always been a person who disrupted my life, I've never followed a normal path. I've always, sort of, done things in a weird way. I wanted to, sort of, normalize the fact that if you're not happy with where you are in life, there are ways you can make changes and that might be disrupting it in some ways. So, when I started the podcast 4 years ago, I started it because I was also in a place in my life where I was feeling down and lost. I just kept saying to myself, like, "You got to find a way to get out of this because you're not getting any younger. You got to just keep going." So, the podcast has a lot of tips, advice, and guests who help people figure out careers, relationships, health, and things like that. I think it plays into my overall purpose as a human being, which is to help people feel less alone with what they're going through and to, also, always give them hope that there is a way to change if they're not happy with their lives.

Scott

Sure. I'm sure some people that are listening now would want to go hear that - we'll have links to that. I'll tell you, when it comes to putting out content and taking action, you do it. You've got the podcast. You've written 3 books related to weddings and marriage. You got a weekly email called the Monday pick-me-up. There's a newsletter called 'Odd Jobs' - I went through and looked at that stuff - that's all about unusual career opportunities or possibilities. There's a game you've created - the Newlywed Card Game. You're a professional speaker. You do one-on-one personal coaching. You're just a ball of energy and inspiration. How do you keep up with all that?

Jen

It's really hard. On some days, I don't know what to do next. I feel all over the place and I want to quit one thing or this thing but I'm not a quitter, so I always try to see things through and that is definitely exhausting. I try to put a lot of free things out there so that I can really try to help

people - the newsletters are always free. I am the kind of person that needs to be busy to function. Some people function in chaos and this is the thing I learned about myself - I function well in chaos, which is why I work well in wedding situations. I think I create chaos in my own life by doing too much.

Scott

Well, it seems to be working so far. Anyway, tell people about your website and your book. How can people get in touch with you?

Jen

Absolutely. You can find more about Bridesmaid For Hire at bridesmaidforhire.com. Then, I wrote a book about all of the wedding stories and also how I started the business - it's called 'Always a Bridesmaid (for Hire)' - and you can find it on Amazon.

Scott

One final question. What's your advice for someone who's just starting to plan their wedding?

Jen

1) Set a budget and stick to it - don't go a penny over. 2) Make a list of the things that you absolutely must have - two or three things that you and your partner must have. Then, try to find ways to get discounts or cut back on anything else. Let me tell you: nobody remembers anything from your wedding except for the food, the open bar, and the music, so don't waste your money on flowers, tablecloths, and even your dress because not a lot of people are going to remember it. So, do what's worth it and save your money. You'll need it when you get married.

Scott

That sounds like good advice. All right. Well, Jen, thanks for coming on here. Thanks for sharing your story. Really interesting!

Jen

Thank you for having me!

Scott

You could probably tell by our conversation – Jen was a blast to talk to. Before I heard about her, I had no idea that there was such a thing as a bridesmaid for hire. It seems like she has single-handedly invented the industry. You can get all of the links to her books and her social media in the show notes at WhatWasThatLike.com/110.

If you liked this episode, you might enjoy a couple of other ones where I talked to people about their unusual jobs.

One was with Spence, who is a modern day lighthouse keeper. The thing I remember about that one, that kind of stuck out to me, is that Spence spends most of his time alone on this island where the lighthouse is – but he's married. It's an interesting arrangement.

And the other one was with Dan. If you've been convicted of some kind of white collar crime, like embezzling or tax fraud, and you're about to go to prison for the first time and you're scared because you have no idea what to expect, Dan is the guy to hire. Here's a short clip from our conversation:

Dan

Most of the people that we deal with are definitely like-minded individuals. They're first-time nonviolent offenders. If you're a repeat offender and you're in and out of the prison system, you're not looking up "RDAP Dan" on YouTube, you already know what time it is and what to expect. The people that are coming to me are lost souls. They are contemplating suicide, just as I did. The thought of suicide crossed my mind several times, but I'm so glad I didn't. I'd be really upset at myself if I killed myself - I'm gonna tell you that right now. If you're listening to this and you're facing a federal prison sentence for some kind of a nonviolent crime, don't kill yourself, because you'll be really angry.

Scott

So that's from episode 51, titled "Dan prepares people for prison". If you haven't heard it yet, go check it out.

And I'm always looking for stories about other really unusual jobs. One in particular I'm still looking for is someone who works in the prison system, and is in charge of executions. If that's you or someone you know, I'd love to hear from you.

And just before we get to this week's Listener Story, I want to invite you to join our private Facebook group. We're having new members join every day, and sometime in the near future we'll have over 3000 people in there. It's a great place to chat with other listeners about a particular episode, but we talk about lots of other things too. One big rule – no political discussions. Which is why we all stay friends! You can join us at WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook.

And now we're at this week's Listener Story. This is what we do at the end of each episode - we play a story that comes from a listener, usually like 3-5 minutes, and it can be about just about anything – as long as it's interesting! If you have one, call it in to the Podcast Voice Mail line at 727-386-9468. Or you can just record it on your phone and email it to me.

Our listener story this week is in keeping with the theme of this episode – weddings. The storyteller had a few things go wrong leading up to the wedding, and at the wedding itself. Oh, and the storyteller is me.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

(Listener Story)

Hey, this is Scott.

Since we're talking about weddings today, I figured I'd tell you about when my wife, Jeanne, and I got married. And what went wrong.

Actually, it started before the wedding. At some point, Jeanne happened to look at her engagement ring, and she was quite surprised to see that the stone was gone. It just wasn't there. It turns out this was due to it being improperly mounted. So we took it back to the jeweler and explained what happened. They put another stone in. But of course now she's kind of paranoid, always looking at it, wondering if this one's gonna fall out too.

So we get to the day of the wedding. The actual ceremony was scheduled for the afternoon.

Jeanne had made prior arrangements with a local beautician to have her hair done that morning. It was all set up – the hairstyle she wanted, the appointment time, all of that was arranged in advance. So she goes to the salon that morning, and the stylist is not there. The manager calls her, and the girl's response was, "Why would I be there today? It's my day off!"

So Jeanne is kind of upset and she tells the manager, it HAS to be today, because of the wedding. And the manager is like, "Oh, you're in the wedding party?" and Jeanne says, "I'm the bride!". Fortunately, one of the other stylists there stepped up and did a great job. But it was kind of a stressful start to the wedding day.

For the men in the wedding, which was my dad, my two younger brothers, and my best friend Tim, we spent the morning getting fitted because the tuxes were all late in arriving. So we had to go and try them on, and have some alterations because there were some things that just didn't fit right. The worst of that was the tux for my youngest brother, Shawn, who was about 13 at the time. He ended up with a shirt that had sleeves that were WAY too long. But of course, no time to order another shirt. So the fix was, the shirt sleeves were actually just sewn to the jacket sleeves, with just a little bit of shirtsleeve showing. So it kind of looked normal. The downside is that he couldn't ever take off the jacket, which itself was too small. That comes into play a little later.

My wife's family is from Maine, and we're getting married in Florida. So they all flew down, and one of her sisters came in with her husband, and they rented a car while they were here. Well, traffic and driving here in Florida is very different than the country roads of rural Maine. On the way to the church, her sister was driving the rental car and crashed into the back of another car. No one was injured, but the car did sustain some damage. Her sister still visits Florida every year, but has not driven a car here since then.

Anyway, we all made it to the church, and the ceremony begins. All of the groomsmen and bridesmaids are at the front, and Jeanne and I are saying our wedding vows.

Now the funny thing to keep in mind is that this was a small country church, and the air conditioning just wasn't powerful enough to keep the room cool. This is Florida in July, and it was terribly hot outside, and uncomfortably warm inside.

So while we're saying our vows, my little brother – the one with the poorly fitting shirt, and the jacket that he can't remove – well, he's getting overheated and he's standing there for that extended period of time with his knees locked. And he passed out. Just dropped like a rock.

The videographer at that moment had his video camera focused on Jeanne and I so in the video you don't see Shawn fall – you just see the expression on our faces when we realize what happened. You do hear the fall though, because he hit a bench on the way down. He wasn't out for long, and he wasn't injured, just embarrassed.

But the ceremony went on, and we got married, and we headed off to Daytona Beach for our honeymoon. And while we were there, the stone actually DID fall out of her engagement ring again. And this time the jeweler wouldn't replace it because it looks like we're just trying to scam them for more diamonds.

In the long run, it all worked out. On July 7, just a few days from now, we'll celebrate 38 years.