

DAVID YOUNG

MAN TALK



* Mother-in-laws: it is time to stop the bad press

My mother-in-law should've shot me years ago. How the dear woman didn't, I just don't know, because I'm convinced there isn't a judge in the land who would've done anything other than shake her hand.

You see, buried well beneath all the bad press, these adoptive mums take all sorts of guff, casually batt it off and keep going.

Incredibly, too, they manage to smile in the face of lazy stereotypes, and the scruffy suitors to their innocent princesses.

The first time we met, she was retrieving her daughter from a dingy student flat. Her eldest girl was calling time on her studies, albeit temporarily. And I was stuck thickly in the plot.

Yet, she appeared at the front door in a bubble of Buddhist-like calm, when she could probably have filleted the hairy thing stood beside her daughter. She even drank a pot of tea without challenging a single decibel — all the while entertaining my biscuity chat.

When I turned up months later in 'her' part of the country for an entire summer, she may have blanched a little. She hid it well if she did. She didn't send me packing and, to this day, I cannot quite fathom why I wasn't frogmarched to the nearest bus stop. A skint student on a rusty borrowed bike, I had pedalled out to her house from my newfound townie abode to play 'Romeo and Juliet' a little more. Serenely, she boiled the kettle and listened, reckoning that a 10-mile trip was too little to defer visits.

The long evenings disappeared, as did the buckled wheels outside the back door. But every return was marked by extra spuds in the pot. The day came, though, when it was time to cross more than county lines — Juliet and I departed on a year-long exile to Sub-Saharan Africa. Many a night of the dark soul may have been navigated, yet she kept her counsel, offering only safe travel wishes and a tighter hug at the airport.

Each time there was stint abroad, she would retrace the pattern: sending us on our way, without urging a sooner return than readiness would signal.

Yet, there I was, getting away with repeated counts of daughter-napping.

That said, it may have happened late one night. My memory's a little blurry. Legend has it she clocked me an overdue cuff

in the jaw. The occasion of Juliet's eldest sibling doing the honourable thing, and venturing up the aisle, had arrived.

Not exactly the shy and retiring type, I waded wholeheartedly into the partying and toasting, raising glass after glass to people I'd never even bumped into before.

The band threw the whole place into a frenzy, and I took to the boards. Instead of keeping my electrically charged moves to myself, I scanned the function room, while in full-flight, for a partner.

Grabbing my petite quarry by the elbows,

I hoisted my mother-in-law on to the dance floor as if we were old buddies, throwing familiar shapes. That might have been okay, until I started ice-skating manoeuvres, and attempted to throw and catch Juliet's mam as if the Winter Olympics depended on it.

Numerous re-tellings say she slapped me more than once on the chin in an effort to wake (?) me from my sporting reverie. Other accounts say that the audience was too weak with

laughing to prise her from my grip when she descended from her flights.

Suffice to say that by the time I was sober she was her usual zen self. My repeated apologies could only draw a wry grin, the occasional mocking rebuke and warning of the perils of lofting senior ladies above your head. There was no summary hanging though.

Many siblings have tied the knot since, yet I've never tried my high-wire act again. That's not to say, as the years have clipped along, that we haven't had our jousts, just for the one-upmanship and ribbing.

No matter how I look at it, my mother-in-law is indeed a *belle-mère* (the French do have a way with words when it comes to blending affection and respect). She's had many an excuse to whittle a voodoo doll and get busy pinning it. But she hasn't.

She could've gotten her own back the day I married her daughter. Amazingly, she just smiled and nodded, and allowed herself a chuckle or two at the thought of it all. Maybe she'd seen it coming all along. Maybe she was relieved I finally got it together.

At the very least, after all I'd put her through, she deserved the satisfaction of catching me square a few more times. Then again, don't go telling anyone about what you've just read. She hears everything, and it might just give her ideas. ☐

'She's had many an excuse to whittle a voodoo doll and get busy pinning it'

SEASONAL SYMPHONY



Let the Irish Chamber Orchestra get you into the Christmas spirit with an evening of Seasonal Symphony and Song.

A choir of 60 voices — featuring the National Chamber Choir, the ICO Chorus and the Limerick Youth Choir — will perform Karl Jenkins' choral work 'Stella Natalis'

(Star of Birth) in Limerick at the University Concert Hall at 8pm this coming Thursday.

Tel: 061-331549; www.uch.ie.

There's a second chance to see the concert in Dublin at the RDS Concert Hall next Saturday. Tel: 0818-719300 or see ticketmaster.ie.

Tickets cost from €10.

SANTA EXPRESS

It's all aboard the Santa Express in Mayo this weekend if you want to meet Santa, Mrs Claus and their elves at the Westport House winter wonderland.

You can visit the man himself and receive a special Christmas gift, and join Mrs Claus (pictured right with Cormac Lyons, Charlie and Kitty Harburn, and Rory Lyons) for magical storytelling in the library.

If you fancy getting in a spot of shopping, too, head into Westport town where Spraoi na Nollaig will be in full swing with markets, carol singing and lots of activities. See westporthouse.ie.



CREATE CHRISTMAS

Why not tap into your creativity this year and drop along to Create Christmas at the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre in Dublin?

There will be workshops for adults and children, where you can learn to make your own Christmas cards, wrapping paper, decorations or small gifts.

And it's not too late to start making gifts, either. There are workshops this weekend and several in the week to come. For further details and to book see www.createchristmas.blogspot.com.



THINGS TO DO

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