

## GETTING LENNY MARRIED

I was completing a book entitled "The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning" which I dedicated to an idea, inspired by getting Lenny married.

Not to our fantasies  
may they mostly fall  
as fast as they rise  
but to the wonders of reality.

I had tried to call Lenny's house for several weeks without success. He and Bella have broken up, I decided. She finally got fed up waiting for him and left. He's all depressed. I'll talk some sense to him, get them together, and finally they'll get married.

Then I reached him. "Been out of town", he said "Oh. How's Bella?" I asked. "Great!" So much for that fantasy. Lenny depressed! Think of him as Al Pacino the look, the style, the voice—except that Lenny is perpetually exuberant. "So let's have dinner."

At dinner Chinese food as always I started in on him again. "It's time. Nine years." Bella was 30 and Lenny, depending on whether you asked him or his brother Shelley, was 53 or 55. "Well, we're going to Europe this summer. I thought maybe we could get married there." I knew his "maybe". He had heard that Switzerland is an easy place for foreigners to get married. Switzerland! But I can recognize an opening when I see one. "I lived there once, in this obscure valley. I'll call my friend Nanni and set it up."

I knew it wouldn't be that easy. Twice before, with two different women, Lenny came so close that they had to return the wedding gifts. So I upped the ante. "I'll tell you what I'll go. Returning the presents is one thing. But you sure as hell are not going to make me travel all that way for nothing."

He was warming up. But not there yet. Suddenly he decided. "I'll tell you what I'll do if *you* get married too!" He was serious. But the only serious reality in my life at the time was another fantasy. "Who do you have in mind?" I asked. From his various responses, I gathered he meant a female. "I can just see myself running around frantically at the last minute to find somebody. Maybe I'll meet a nice flight attendant on the way over."

Now, you have to understand the relationship between me and my cousin Lenny. I am certainly not an Al Pacino type. In high school, Lenny was two years ahead of me that made him 55 in fact and my hero. A star on the football team, ladies man, even a lousy student. I cheered from the sidelines. There is a picture in my old album of the two of us with our dates at a school dance, mine laughing because Lenny, the picture of innocence, was tickling her waist from behind. ("I remember that. They said 'smile.' She wasn't smiling.") "Me, your hero," he bellowed when I told him this. "Now you're *my* hero!" Lenny did deals together with Shelley. But deal makers don't usually know people who write books. So he had become my one-man promotional committee, more than enough, I assure you.

He liked to remind me of an incident when we were teenagers, hardly worth remembering, I should think, had he not just lost his father. I must have been in a dicey situation at home, and when he asked how I was able to cope with it, I apparently said, "I know which side my bread is buttered on." Not exactly one of the great utterances of all time, nor even something I could imagine myself saying. But in his sensitive state, it made a strong impact. He said it had become a kind of guiding motto for him, at least in business.

Now back to getting Lenny married. Nanni had been my neighbour in l'Abbaye, a tiny village in the Swiss Vallée de Joux, named for its thirteenth century abbey. It sits on a lake also by the name of Joux, an enclave in the Jura Mountains with barely ten thousand people, scattered in a number of such villages around the lake. You can get there by going over the prominent ridge that sits behind Geneva and Lausanne. Nanni came there from Holland as an *au pair* at the age of sixteen, married Michel, the postmaster's son, and never left. She was delighted with the idea of the wedding, and agreed to make the arrangements. In fact, she said that the "Officier de l'état civil," formally in charge of all marriages in l'Abbaye, was Sylvette, her good friend.

I called the Swiss Consulate in Montreal, and was not surprised by their answer. I had, after all, lived in Switzerland. Getting a foreigner married there is so complicated, the lady explained to me, that it is hardly worth trying. It takes all kinds of documents and six to eight weeks to process them.

"I have some bad news," I told Lenny on the phone, figuring all was lost. At best, they would get married at home, in ordinary reality. "What could be so complicated?", said the

by now committed Lenny, who was soon on the phone to the consulate to begin the process. The only thing forfeited was his own crazy fantasy not to tell Bella. A surprise wedding!

Those many papers, duly signed by both of them, went from the Swiss consulate in Montreal to the foreign ministry in the federal capital of Bern, to the office of "l'Etat civil" in the cantonal capital of Lausanne, and finally to Sylvette's little desk in l'Abbaye, where I saw them when I visited in June. I went to make the detailed arrangements that is, to figure out what in the world we were going to do. I came to think of it as inventing tradition.

One thing I knew. The Vallée de Joux is a pretty place and we had to find a pretty spot. I used to go up in the hills behind the village, which look down on the lake and over to the Dent de Vaulion, a tooth-shaped mountain at one end of the valley. This is ski country in the winter, and Lenny had at one time run a ski school. In fact, he once broke *both* his legs when a tree interrupted his exuberance. In the summer, with the cows all around busily making Gruyère as well as its ubiquitous byproduct, it was just the place to get Lenny married.

Then Nanni told me that by Swiss law, marriages have to take place in the officially designated "Salle de mariage" in each village. In l'Abbaye, that turned out to be a room in the nondescript hotel. Ugh. That would never do. Nanni did add that an official in Lausanne, the Inspecteur du contrôle de l'état civil, could approve another location. "But don't count on it," she said. "It's usually done only for invalids and the like who can't get up to the room." Assuming Lenny wasn't about to break both his legs again, I called the man. He turned out to be Swiss: "Monseieur," he informed me, "ce n'est pas l'Amérique. En Suisse, on ne peut pas se marier en parachute." Not quite what I had in mind, sir. Let's not confuse our fantasies.

Luckily the Vallée de Joux, and Sylvette in particular, were not quite *that* Swiss. Being cut off from the wonders of Lausanne and Geneva every winter for centuries can have that affect. So the deal was that after a proper ceremony in the hotel, we would all drive up into the hills and get them married proper.

Here is how the plans took shape. There is a stunning little road that I used to bike between Geneva and the valley, hardly known even to some of the locals, called the "Route des montagnes." We would drive it in the morning up from Geneva, stop for lunch at my friend René's house, which affords a beautiful view of the lake. Then we would go over the pass at the end of the valley to the village of La Sarraz, where the family Albertano had their tiny Fonderie de clochettes. They had been making cowbells for generations.

In Switzerland, cowbells are serious business. And not only for regular munching. It is traditional in the countryside to celebrate events with big decorative bells human events as well as bovine ones. (I was once working quietly at home in l'Abbaye when suddenly there came this terrible racket. The annual spring march of the cows was taking place. Several hundred animals, led by a chosen few wearing huge decorative bells and flowered headdresses, were walking from their winter quarters in a town well below the valley to

l'Abbey and then up into those hills.) Some Swiss also give gifts of big, inscribed cowbells for events such as weddings. Even so, a cowbell is not everyone's gift. But I do know my cousin Lenny. Not to mention his Bella, being belle and all that.

So Michel drove me to La Sarraz to arrange for the making of Lenny and Bella's bell. There I also bought a little replica to get them in the mood back home.

From la Sarraz, we would go back to l'Abbaye to get them married in the hotel at three o'clock, and then head up into the hills to get them married again. Here was where we really needed tradition.

Even finding a place to do it was tricky. You can't just march into a Gruyère barn to get married, not in white shoes anyway, and there's not much else up there besides trees. Michel, however, came to the rescue with the suggestion that we use the shack of his ski club. Shack it proved to be when we went to have a look. But it was in the right place, in a lovely forest setting with a great view down and across the valley. All we had to do was find a nice tree under which to hold the ceremony and pray for sun.

Then we would head back again over the pass, and stop at the charming church in the town of Romainmôtier to take some pictures. Lenny was impressed with the fact that Diana Ross married her rich Norwegian guy there. From here, we would go to the wedding feast in Croy, the next village, where Monsieur Locatelli promised he would look into shaping the cake like a bell.

So that was the plan. Nothing left but the implementation, a process I had dismissed in my book on planning as mostly fantasy.

Back home, an enthusiastic Lenny and Bella savoured the pictures I had taken of Nanni and Sylvette, the valley, cows with their little bells on, and M. Albertano, unidentified by me except for his name on the little shop behind him. Lenny also got a great kick out of the little bell. "Wouldn't it be great to have a big one just like this," he said enthusiastically to my enthusiastic silence.

Happily, Lenny didn't ask about Albertano, although he nearly found out about him a few weeks later. We were having dinner at his house, Chinese food of course, but with a twist. Lenny had befriended a couple who had come over from mainland China to do deals with Canadians, and the deal that evening was that they did the cooking. In the middle of dinner, Lenny was showing off the bell when suddenly he noticed the name embossed on it. "Albertano, I know this name. I never forget a name," he insisted, forgetting the photo.

I had another gift planned, much smaller, that I would make myself. It required pictures of Bella, which I had taken a few weeks earlier, "just to test my new camera." I nearly blew that one too when I told Bella that my secretary Kate thought Bella looked like someone Kate knew. "How does she know what I look like?", Bella asked, and I gulped as I said, "She saw your picture," relieved that Bella didn't ask why I had not given her copies.

Lenny made no arrangements for anyone in the family to go. One of those earlier weddings had been upset by family feuding, and I think he wanted to avoid any possible complication. But as soon as Shelley heard about it, he not only decided to go, with Carmele, his girlfriend, but wondered why he wasn't the best man. "Best man", ye gods, they do have these things at weddings, I thought. But up in the Swiss hills, surrounded by the consequences of all those cows.

When Lenny left on a Monday in August, before the Friday wedding, I called Shelley to meet for dinner. He would be best man, we decided, meaning *he* could worry about the rings. Then the idea of decorating the tree came up. A natural huppah perfect! Carmele, bless her Irish heart, volunteered to look after that. They also decided to buy one of those small camcorder, which Franklin, Shelley's son, who planned to attend on his way through Europe, would operate.

For my part, with the big gift bought and the little one made, there was only the music to attend to. From an old tape at home, I first recorded Nana Mouskouri singing Ave Maria. That would open the ceremony. Then I recorded Hava Naguila and other horas to close it. (I'll let you guess what Lenny's father was.) I also recorded a whole album of organ wedding marches, just the thing to accompany the decorating of a natural huppah. Finally everything was packed and ready to go, including presents of Indian moccasins and frozen Canadian smoked salmon for Nanni and Sylvette, even my bicycle for a little trip after the wedding. Shelley and Carmele happened to be taking the same Swissair flight, which would get us to Geneva by noon on Thursday, all ready for the next morning. Lenny and Bella were to arrive at the hotel at about the same time.

Bella had strict instructions from me to ignore anything he might do on the last two days. "He'll be purring like a kitten on Saturday," I promised her. As for Lenny, he was ordered to cool it those last two days. "If you have to be miserable, do it on Saturday," I told the would-be-kitten. He had instructions for me too before he left. "I expect you to have someone there, even if it's a mock wedding." That was Lenny's fantasy, no more reasonable than most of mine.

I should have known what was coming when my bicycle was delivered to me in the Geneva airport as if it had spent the flight in some kind of cement mixer. Or maybe also when Swissair managed to fix it better than before in less than a day. An old friend used to say that "Perfection is no trifle, but trifles make perfection." He hadn't thought of getting Lenny married. On the day that was about to begin, all the trifles screwed up. But together they made perfection.

By five in the afternoon, all the Mintzbergs had checked in—Shelley, Franklin, Henry—but one. I had a business meeting in the hotel lobby with a woman, who was awfully understanding as I kept glancing anxiously at the registration counter. (I didn't know if I was more worried about Lenny not showing up, or else about him doing so only to make some kind of embarrassing comment about us sitting there.) Suddenly, there they were, the two of them, looking as relaxed and contented as a couple of purring kittens, explaining the heavy traffic into Geneva and a visit to some gigantic wine cellar. (Lenny did manage a

"What about her? Did you ask her?", but mercifully in private. He quieted down when I pointed to the ring on her finger, the very place where the one very pleasant Swissair flight attendant wore hers.)

The whole gang of us had dinner in the hotel that evening, and then Lenny, Bella, and I slipped out to walk around Geneva. Brides are supposed to look lovely on their wedding day, but Bella was a little early: always gentle, sweet, and pretty, she never looked gentler, sweeter, or prettier than that evening. Nor Lenny more relaxed or more grateful. "Get a good night's sleep," we told each other at the hotel, with Lenny adding "*You'll* need it!" So off I went to a terrible night's sleep, jet lag and all, full of worries about tomorrow's reality.

I finally fell asleep, only to be woken what seemed moments later. It was the lady from Swissair to tell me proudly that my bike was ready, a day ahead of schedule. Some nerve calling at this hour. What hour was it anyway? I managed to find my watch, which said 10:50! Twenty-five minutes before the time I insisted everyone assemble to leave. Ye gods! The first trifle in this perfect day.

And so it went. I made it downstairs at 11:25, barely 10 minutes late, to find only Carmele, casually on her way out, to buy the wedding bouquet. She talked her way past (really over) me. But I did manage to head off Shelley, who appeared a few minutes later, on his way to a bank, he said, "somewhere," to get money. Then out of the hotel kitchen came the salmon that I had managed to keep cold, but not frozen, all the way from Montreal. It was thoroughly refrozen. Meanwhile, half an hour before start time, Lenny and Bella were nowhere to be seen. (It turned out, she was up in their room redoing a disastrous hairdo by the hotel beauty parlor.)

So I called Nanni to say we would be late, and she volunteered to lay out lunch at her house instead of René's, to save time. I called René, who agreed to join us in the hills. I also got word from Nanni on the Albertano's, who, I had been informed a few weeks earlier, would be away on vacation until the following Monday. "Do something," I had pleaded with her, and now it turned out that one of the brothers would be back today, but, mercifully, could only meet us much later than planned, at six.

At one point, there I stood, 45 minutes behind schedule, like a glazed island in this hotel lobby, with all sorts of detached and distracted Mintzbergs and their mates circling around. And this in a land where a three o'clock wedding does not start at 3:01. "Herding cats," it was, when the purring kitten finally appeared and said, "Relax. We're all having a good time. And it's because of you we're having a good time." Good thing it was Lenny getting married.

Suddenly, as if by magic, we were all there, Carmele with the bouquet, Shelley without the money, Franklin behind the camcorder, Lenny having a good time, Bella looking belle, and me clutching the frozen salmon. All the cats duly self-herded, each purring in his or her own way. We merely had to get the two cars and go. Merely!

First Carmele reappeared, flushed. They couldn't get their car out of the parking lot—no money for the automatic machine. Then I couldn't find the map we needed to navigate the

intricate system of roads. I raced around the hotel, returning in a state of panic to Bella's clever suggestion that I look in the camera bag that hung around my neck. So we turned our attention to Shelley's rented BMW, now liberated from the parking garage, but whose trunk wouldn't close. At one point, five guys were assembled around it, debating procedure. When I suggested, with murder in my eyes, that they tie it, for some reason they immediately did. Finally we were off, with just enough time—if all went like Swiss clockwork. Lenny, Bella and I were in the car ahead, Shelley, Carmele, and Franklin in the one behind, its uncontrollable alarm shrieking occasionally (as it would for the rest of the day), a perfect reflection of our condition.

We headed down the lakeside autoroute toward the Route des montagnes. As we exited, Lenny said, "Oh look, a BMW dealer," and with a honk, off went Shelley to fix his trunk. Mercifully, the dealer was closed. So off we went again, announced by Shelley's shrieking car.

The Route des montagnes was as magnificent as ever. We stopped to take pictures alongside the cows and their bells, arriving at Nanni's at 2:15, which left a full forty minutes for lunch. She was a doll: the table was beautifully set, with roses on two plates. We dutifully ate "pain surprise," a hollowed out bread stuffed with little sandwiches, a specialty of the valley. Meanwhile, Lenny and Nanni struck up exactly the friendship I knew they would. "Il est supér, ton cousin!", she said in her characteristic way, her perfectly Swiss accent belying her perfectly un-Swiss enthusiasm.

All my anxiety evaporated in the clear air of the valley. A few minutes before three, we headed over to the hotel, and into a room that looked like it was made for board meetings. But no boardroom ever exuded that much warmth, as, in no time, Sylvette had them married properly, amidst great cheers from the assembled throng of eight. From the Chinese restaurant in St. Sauveur, Canada to the Salle de mariage in l'Abbaye, Suisse, via two sets of returned presents followed by nine years of courting Bella, not to mention all the failed fantasies in between, Lenny was finally married!

The rest was easy.

Outside, we gave Nanni and Sylvette their gifts, the salmon that turned out can be refrozen in a vacuum pack, and the moccasins. Never in the history of the world has anyone been more delighted with a gift than Nanni was with those moccasins. At least not until six o'clock that evening. Then it was off to get them married proper.

Nanni hopped in our car and Sylvette's in Shelley's, and up we drove the narrow mountain road behind l'Abbaye, which made the one lane Route des montagne seem like an autoroute. As we neared the ski shack, realizing that I had Nanni's son's stereo on my lap and the tapes in my pocket, I slipped in the wedding marches. And so the four of us arrived in a state of uproarious laughter as the organs blasted "Here comes the bride." Another great moment in a day of great moments.

Tradition, of course, has it that the Canadian bride picks the Swiss tree. And so the eight of us headed down the path, with Bella at the head surveying the trees, accompanied by

more wedding marches, with the Lac de Joux below and the Dent de Vaulion in front. Even if Franklin missed this on the video—he missed little else—the scene will remain etched in my mind as one of the most wonderful images in a day of wonderful images too.

Bella chose her tree, low enough to reach, yet high enough to stand under, and Carmele and Franklin set about decorating it, with Nanni and Shelley in support. This was the scene into which René appeared: all the cats scurrying in different directions, creating their own order.

Suddenly I realized I didn't have the glass. Somewhat more established Jewish tradition has it that the groom crushes a glass under his foot as the marriage is pronounced. We picked one at Lenny's house in Canada, and I looked after it so carefully that, on the plane, I asked Carmele to put it in her purse for safekeeping—where it remained throughout the ceremony. So I raced to the shack and selected an appropriate replacement for such a solemn event—a glass with two Smurfs playing in the snow.

Then the ceremony began in our idyllic setting. I gave Bella away to Lenny to the lyrics of Nana's Ave Maria, followed by Sylvette reading a lovely passage she had written. At this point, with a shriek of "Oh my God! I forgot the rings in the car," the "best," if not most organized, man raced off. The rings happily recovered and donned, the Smurfs duly sacrificed, and the stereo finally shaken to release its horas, the nine of us joined hands in a circle and danced over the Lac de Joux to having finally gotten Lenny married.

Shelley then opened the champagne, or at least held the bottle that opened itself. I met the best man's surprise with "One more step back, Shelley, and you are in deep shit—literally!" Getting Lenny married in cow country did have its trifling problems. Finally Bella threw the bouquet into the waiting arms of Carmele, who stood alone because I thought it too liberated to join her.

As we made our way down the mountain and then over the pass to La Sarraz, Lenny still had no idea where we were headed. Not until we walked up to the doorway with the name above it, as in the picture, did he make the connection to the little bell. I walked in and came out with a bell as big as Lenny's wish, no trifle this hunk of bronze, made exactly as ordered: embossed with "Bella et Lenny, 21 août 1992, l'Abbaye, Suisse," with Swiss and Canadian flags joined on the leather strap. Even by Lenny's standards, he was exuberant.

We then headed for the church in Romainmôtier, where all the cats duly lined up for pictures. After that, it was on to dinner at Croy, with Lenny entertaining René and Sylvette's husband, a character in his own right. The food was basic and hearty, at the request of bride and groom a big hunk of beef, followed by a cake, not in the shape of a bell but crowned instead with a chocolate bell.

I had one last surprise, my little gift for Lenny. He opened the card and read "Just so you never forget which side your bread is buttered on." Inside the box he found a slice of bread that I had made out of wood, with a picture of Bella smiling at him. He went to pass it around, but I stopped him. He couldn't figure out why until Shelley said "Look on the other



side." So he turned it over, and there, again, was a picture of Bella, this one grinning at him. Such was to be the wonder of Lenny's reality, and I was reminding him that he had better not forget it, this hero cousin of mine.

Well, enough of getting Lenny married, enough of the wonders of his reality. It was time to keep my side of the deal, to realize one of my own fantasies. The dedication did, after all, read "mostly."

Henry Mintzberg

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