

Planning diary



Mum and me at her 70th birthday party.



Dad, my brother David and me

I also remember, sometimes, feeling really scared.

The grieving process was complex, and when girls at school were going to discos and snogging boys, I was writing letters and poems to my dad and wrestling with this void – that I had not only lost a parent, but I had lost a parent I never really knew.

More than 20 years on – and despite Mum remarrying – I find the notion of being walked down the aisle as mythical and elusive as my father himself. Perhaps inevitably, the focus has shifted to my mum. We're very close and I feel proud every day when I think about her raising four children on her own. When my boyfriend proposed at the end of last year, Mum was delighted. I've made a string of bad relationship choices, and like a brilliant best friend, Mum has kept shunt and always been my cheerleader. But she most definitely approves of this one. And so it was with excitement, rather than trepidation, that I launched into planning the big day, with Mum at the helm.

But, then, just a few months into planning, everything changed. Mum was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I was blindsided. Faced with the idea of losing her, I realised that I'd been suppressing this fear for my whole life, and



Chris and me checking out our wedding venue

I was irrationally angry that this had to happen now. Overnight, the happiest time of my life became the most difficult and confusing, and I went from googling "wedding photographers" to "understanding chemo"; veering between hoping that having something to look forward to would strengthen my family, and just wanting to cancel it all together.

Today – as our November wedding approaches – it's not just the concept of being given away I'm struggling with; I've become resistant to a lot of wedding traditions in general. Because, quite simply, nothing else matters any more. Before the diagnosis, I was happily getting acquainted with my inner bridezilla. I was enjoying sweating the small stuff, such as getting the font right on our save the date and stating my case for wedding favours when my other half was having none of it. After all, planning a wedding is the only time it's

considered acceptable to be a total control freak.

But when I tried to crack on with the planning and throw myself into a million wedding details, I realised something had shifted irrevocably inside me. Take the dress hunt. I'd had my heart set on something really unique and bespoke by Halfpenny London and had a wonderful first consultation. Then suddenly it was decision time at my second visit, and my brain just went to mush. I remember standing in the mirror of the Bloomsbury boutique with my sister at my side, and I couldn't

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even tell if I liked what I was trying on. It just hit me like a thunderbolt that Mum (then in hospital) wouldn't be a part of any of this process. I burst into tears on the spot and decided it would be best to take some time out for a bit.

My new, pared-back approach to planning has resulted in some surprise wins though. Not long