

A Renewal of Vows

TOBY ROSENSTRAUCH

Special to the Journal

The summer that I was 17, I worked as a counselor at a hotel in the Catskill Mountains. At the end of the summer, the owners celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary and invited everyone to the event, which included a renewal of vows ceremony.

This was something I'd never seen before. Even if the idea had occurred to them, nobody I knew had the money to do it. In my neighborhood, paying for the first wedding was tough enough.

The event was spectacular and beautiful. I, who had not yet been married, decided that someday I'd like to have such a ceremony.

On October 30, 2005, my husband and I planned to have an anniversary party with a renewal of vows on the exact day and time of our original wedding. We engaged the cantor to officiate. We booked the Delray Beach Golf Club and invited guests from far and near. I shopped endlessly to



find "The Dress."

But on October 24, Hurricane Wilma hit Marco Island, Florida. A category five hurricane with 125 mph winds, Wilma roared across Florida, knocking down huge trees, causing power outages, blowing out windows and tearing off roofs from Naples to Miami and Palm Beach. We were right in the middle of the storm's path. We had no power – which meant no lights, cooking, traffic signals, air conditioning or telephone service.

By Thursday we ventured out to the Delray Golf Club, which we could not reach via telephone. The place was heavily damaged and was being used as FEMA headquarters. All bookings for the immediate future were cancelled, including ours. A FEMA employee let us use his cell phone to contact some of our guests. We gave each one a list of others to contact about the cancellation. Devastated, we

returned home.

By Sunday, the day of the party, little had changed. As my husband emerged from a cold water shower, a friend knocked on the front door (no doorbell). Another friend was making a barbecue consisting of everyone's thawed out food. We were invited, she said. We declined. All our stuff had been discarded, and we had nothing to contribute.

"I'm not leaving until you get dressed and come," she insisted. Reluctantly, we agreed, taking with us a bottle of wine. When we arrived, all the neighbors were sitting by candlelight, waiting for us.

"Surprise!" they shouted. "Happy anniversary!"

The impromptu party was for us! I choked back tears. What a lovely thing to do!

Many weeks later, when things had normalized, we went back to the club to rebook the big party. They could not accommodate us until the following year. We went from one catering establishment to another, unable to book anything in the

near future. Finally, we arrived at the fanciest catering hall in town. Yes, they said. They had one smallish room available for a January date. The price was almost double the original one. We grabbed it.

We started the whole process again. New invitations; new menus. The guest list was different, but still substantial. My 101-year-old aunt came. So did the best man at our "first" wedding. Tall grandchildren held the poles of the chuppah. The vow renewal ceremony was one of the peak experiences of my life.

As I held my husband's hand during the ceremony and looked at his face, I remembered us in that first ceremony — minus the graying hair and thickening waistlines — two kids in love, taking a leap of faith. That first time, it was a little scary. How would it all turn out? This time it was different. We repeated our vows with certainty. This time we were sure it was right. And so we re-enlisted.

Author Toby Rosenstrauch writes from Boynton Beach, Fla.

Nonprofit Helps Needy Young Athletes 'Get Into the Game'

QUINCY — Good Sports, a national nonprofit dedicated to helping needy young athletes, has created a fundraising platform designed especially for kids. The user-friendly, online portal allows children to donate birthday, bar/bat mitzvah and other gifts to outfit disadvantaged youngsters who need athletic gear.

The organization has created a "Party Playbook" for kids and families, complete with easy-to-create flyers and party invitations that include the Good Sports logo and a fact sheet. Invitations can be customized by color or by favorite sport, including baseball, softball, football, lacrosse, soccer and basketball. A related Pinterest page provides creative party ideas.

Families can direct guests to mail donations directly to Good Sports, or create personalized online party fundraising pages via Fundraise.com. All contributions will support the Good Sports equipment grant program, which provides disadvantaged youth around the country with much-needed equipment to participate in sports and fitness programs.

"Kids are increasingly donating the gifts they receive for special milestones to charity. This is such a positive trend, and we're excited to offer a way for these generous young people to help their less-privileged peers play sports," Good Sports CEO Melissa Harper said. "We know they'll enjoy creating their personalized fundraising campaign via our user-friendly website. And they can take great pride in knowing their gifts helped buy uniforms, equipment and shoes for young athletes in need."

Kids who raise \$250 or more for the program (bronze level) receive a Good Sports water bottle. Those who raise \$500 or more (silver level) receive the water bottle, plus a Good Sports drawstring bag. Kids who raise \$1,000 or more (gold level) will receive a Good Sports backpack and the opportunity to match their donation to an organization in their own community.



Parents whose children have participated in the Good Sports program say their kids enjoyed both the process of raising money for charity, and the good feeling that comes from helping others.

"Good Sports was an amazing resource for our son's mitzvah," said Kirsten Hano, of Wellesley. "They made it completely turnkey, and helped our fundraising go even farther than if we had done all the work ourselves. My son loved tracking his fundraising, and in the end, he raised well over his goal. He knows that he was able to make a huge, positive

impact on the lives of hundreds of kids."

Since 2003, Good Sports has provided more than \$10 million worth of equipment to 1,000 youth programs, impacting more than 700,000 kids. But the organization estimates at least five million young American athletes still need equipment to fully participate in sports or fitness activities.

"We're proud of what we've accomplished through our many partnerships with generous manufacturers and sports figures, but we aim to do so much more," Harper said. "Our throw-a-party program is another way to get more kids on the field and court, and we're grateful so many kids and families are willing to share their gifts with the children we serve."

For more information, visit www.goodsports.org/

Tzedakah Project Will Help Save Lives in Israel

NEWTON — American Friends of Magen David Adom (New England) invites students in synagogues and day schools to contribute tzedakah in order to donate an ambulance to Magen David Adom in Israel.

There is no minimum or maximum — 100% of all donations will go to this project.

The goal is for the students themselves to present the

Consul General of Israel to New England with the keys to the new ambulance next May. Students across New England are encouraged to do class projects or bar/bat mitzvah projects around this theme.

For questions, contact Burt Klein, the New England representative for AFMDA at 617-916-1827, or email burttonklein@gmail.com.

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