Dovetail
A Journal by and for Jewish/Christian Families

# The Wedding: The First Day of the Rest of Your Lives

When my husband Ned and I talk to a Christian-Jewish couple who are considering getting married, we always tell them one rather discouraging statistic as we encourage them to look beyond the wedding day.

Actually you may already know it. Doom-saying relatives and friends may have shared it with you. The divorce rate for Christian-Jewish marriages in 1989 was 75 percent.

What they probably haven't shared with you is that, as Dr. Egon Mayer of the Jewish Outreach Institute points out, the figure includes second and later marriages, statistically more likely to end in divorce than first-time marriages. (Or, in the words of Susan Weidman Schneider, author of **Intermarriage: The Challenge of Living with Difference,** "Divorce leads to intermarriage.")

Then there's the larger context. According to Tom W. Smith, director of the General Social Survey conducted annually by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center,* the shape of the family is going through an historic shift. Couples are marrying later and having fewer children; others are divorced and raising blended families with new spouses, or are single parents, or are providers for siblings or aged parents. Cohabitation, alternative life styles, and two-career families all play a part.

Smith's survey, "The Emerging 21st-Century American Family," also notes that by 1998 only 56 percent of adults were married, compared with nearly 75 percent in 1972. And of those who do get married, a surprisingly high percentage even of those who marry within their own faith, no matter how conservative that faith, get divorced.

Then there are the findings reported in an Associated Press story of 12/30/99:

> Baptists have the highest divorce rate of any Christian denomination, and are more likely to get a divorce than atheists and agnostics.... Among Christian groups, only those who attend non-denominational Protestant churches were more likely to be divorced, with a 34 percent divorce rate....
>
> Of major Christian denominations, Catholics and Lutherans have the lowest divorce rate at 21 percent, according to [a survey conducted by Barna Research Group in Ventura, Calif.].

*Quoted in an article by Susan R. Pollock in the *Detroit News*

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*Material from the Detroit News and Associated Press was drawn from publications by the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, LLC (CMFCE). For further information, contact: Diane Sollee, Director, 5310 Belt Rd. NW, Washington, DC 20015-1961; www.smartmarriages.com*

People who attend mainstream Protestant churches have an overall divorce rate of 25 percent.

The levels vary among non-Christian groups, Barna reported. Jews have a divorce rate of 30 percent, while atheists and agnostics have a relatively low rate of 21 percent, according to the survey.

So there seems to be a relatively high divorce rate even for those who marry within their faith. And yet, despite all these changes and challenges, weddings themselves are more popular than at any time in recent history.

And, of course, interfaith couples in ever-increasing numbers are not only marrying, but want their weddings to reflect both their faith traditions.

The moral we draw from all this is that everyone who gets married these days is facing greater challenges than ever in making that marriage work, but that there's no need to see the situation as hopeless.

You can use the discouraging statistic we started with to help motivate you to begin now to talk to each other more deeply about the challenges that lie ahead. You can find out more from the articles in this issue, and you can begin to look into some of the resources available to interfaith couples. You will not go into marriage with that dangerously misleading but all-too-common idea that now you ought to live happily ever after, and that if you have to work at your marriage it means you've picked the wrong mate and you need to try again.

Use that nasty statistic to spur you to keep working, and it can do you good service. It does not have to predict your future.

May the sun shine bright on your wedding—and on your marriage.

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**Dovetail**'s mission is to provide a channel of communication for interfaith couples, their parents, and their children. No matter what their specific choices regarding faith for their home and children, the more interfaith families can share their ideas, experiences, resources, and support, the more they can make peace in their homes and communities. Jewish and Christian perspectives can dovetail.

Believing that there are no definitive answers to the questions facing interfaith families, **Dovetail** strives to be open to all ideas and opinions. Editorial content attempts to balance and respect the perspectives of both Jewish and Christian partners in interfaith marriages, as well as the diverse perspectives of parents and children of interfaith couples. Inclusion in **Dovetail** does not imply endorsement. **Dovetail** accepts a thoughtful and constructive discussion of all related issues in the Letters to the Editor section, and reserves the right to reply.

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**Dovetail** welcomes article submissions (query or completed manuscript), letters to the editor, and comments or suggestions. Send to M. H. Rosenbaum, Editor, at the above address.

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# Always Miracles

## by Debbie Schore

There is a great young Hasidic rabbi who leads a large congregation in Rockland County, New York—a place where (just to the north) are many great rabbis leading many large congregations. This particular rabbi has a long red beard, short red *paos* [ritual sidelocks] and a station-wagon-full of children. A few years ago, he packed his children up in the station wagon and drove them two and a half miles from his shul to my father's house (just to the south).

"See," he told his brood, "this is how far this man walks every Shabbos so he can daven with us." Then, so as not to embarrass my father, he drove his children two and a half miles back to their own house, and together they pondered the miracle of a man who would go to so much effort every week to do a mitzvah.

### A Modest Miracle

On a sparkling Sunday last July, I walked down the aisle in a long white dress with my father on one side and my mother, holding a candle, on the other. The sky was the blue of a Maxfield Parrish painting. The huppah in front of us was exquisite: four birch saplings were its poles, and its canopy was dripping with fresh, fragrant flowers and vivid greenery. My now husband, Al, and I had planned our wedding to a T, chosen each kind of flower, specified what music could and could not be played, carefully scripted the ceremony. There was only one thing that I couldn't plan, couldn't dare to ask for, and that part was coming up now.

And now, my father stops, and blesses me with the *b'racha* that I couldn't ask him for. He says it with his hands on either side of my face. We both choke back tears. There will be no pictures of this in my photo album; we both look too strange, too tentative. Then my father, who yesterday walked five miles to pray, finishes the b'racha, turns, and hands me off to the Roman Catholic man that I am about to marry.

That moment of grace—that modest miracle—came sandwiched between many more awkward moments between my father and me, beginning more than fourteen years earlier when Al and I first began dating. In fact, our first exchange on the subject could've been straight out of *Fiddler on the Roof*. It was January 2, 1984, and I came bouncing home from college to announce proudly that my good friend Al and I were now dating. My good, Filipino, Roman Catholic friend Al, that is. On that day, my father fasted, prayed, and wouldn't speak to me.

The small, subtle miracles that occurred over the next fourteen years were due to the extraordinary natures of my husband and my father, and to God, I believe. It was due to Al, who was patiently there through family triumph and tragedy, quietly encouraging, or picking up the pieces. And it was due to my father, whose heart shifted slowly from hardness, to grudging acceptance, to love. And, because both of these men, at their core, are made of kindness and respect, fourteen years later they were able to come together under a blossoming huppah to share their love of me with one another.

### Achieving the Miracle

Al and I considered all of this when we wrote our wedding ceremony.

*Debbie Schore and her husband, Al Guintu, met at and graduated from Columbia University. After a successful career in the music industry, Debbie turned to writing. She is currently working on a multi-faith Haggadah, when she isn't out riding her horse, Captain Crunch.*

Like many **Dovetail** readers, we felt that no officiant's prepared script would be able to convey all that went into our relationship. We'd searched quite a bit for the right person to perform our wedding. Al's family thought we should have "both" (a rabbi and a priest). My family went for "neither" (someone with no religious affiliation, like a judge). In the end we chose a cantor who worked as an actor: someone who would read the script that only we could draft.

We built our ceremony (just as we're building our lives together) on a foundation of respect and honor: respect for each other's religion, culture, and ethnicity; honor for our family and friends who've supported us.

We chose the Jewish customs of having both sets of parents walk us down the aisle (signifying the joining of our families), and the huppah, with its four open sides, welcoming people from all directions. We selected readings of great meaning to us; we wrote our own vows. We included the traditional Filipino veil and cord ceremonies. We lit the unity candle. Al broke the glass with a huge grin on his face. He dipped me when it was time to kiss the bride.

We chose the blessings carefully, avoiding references to "Jesus, the Son of God" in the Catholic prayers, and to Jews being "the chosen people" in the Jewish ones. We struggled so that no one would feel offended. We found an adaptation of Psalm 89, which begins:

> May your house be founded on
> two strong pillars—
> the one Justice, the other
> Righteousness.
> Let Mercy and Truth walk
> beside you.

Al's mother read from the Prayer of St. Francis: "Where there is doubt, let us sow faith; where there is despair, hope."

Our families cried, our friends cried. People who'd known us forever cried. People we'd only met recently cried. Our wedding (just like our lives together) brought people together. The path we'd chosen to walk was carefully considered, and thoughtfully shared.

But it began with the sacrifice of a humble man who walks two and a half miles each way to pray every week.

There is a quote from the author Willa Cather that Al and I used to start off the program to our wedding ceremony, and I think it is what enabled our wedding to happen at all:

> Where there is great love there
> are always miracles.

### *Writing Competition Announced: Spirituality Under 25*

*Skylight Paths Publishing, publisher of spirituality books for people of all faiths, will hold a spirituality writing competition open to anyone born after November 1, 1975. Says publisher Jon M. Sweeney, "We want to know how [young people] are crafting their spiritual paths, and how their spiritual practice is different from that of their parents and grandparents."*

*For a copy of the rules and an entrance form, send a stamped, self-address envelope to: Spirituality Under 25, Skylight Paths Publishing, POB 237, Sunset Farm Offices—Rte. 4, Woodstock, VT 05091 or download from www.skylightpaths.com.*

# Resolving Wedding Conflicts

## by Abby Mendelson

Although some clergy denounce interfaith and interchurch marriages as a scourge, citing them as the leading cause of marital discord and divorce, it need not be so. Although marriage across religions is clearly not for every person, or every church, viable methods exist to resolve conflicts—even to the complete satisfaction of all parties. Here are a few examples, each followed by a conflict resolution technique that helped, or could have helped, to ameliorate the problems involved.

### Finding and Building on Common Ground

When Catholic Satara and Baptist Jerome decided to wed, they agreed on a wedding Mass. Jerome understood that although he did not have to convert to Catholicism, he did have to make a commitment to support his future wife's faith. Yet as the couple pushed up the date to accommodate her terminally ill father, Satara's priest felt that Jerome was not ready to make a sincere affirmation of her Catholicism and refused to marry them.

Satara opted for a marriage across religions—in her case a home-style Baptist ceremony. "It was a hard, heart-wrenching conflict," she says. "I'm still a Catholic—but in the Church's eyes I'm not married."

The Reverend Larry Homitsky, a Methodist minister who regularly performs interfaith and interchurch marriages, says, "I invite other spiritual leaders into the church and work to blend their traditions into the couple's bond and their expression of love. Whenever another minister and I sit with the couple and their parents to answer questions, the parents leave with a wholly different understanding—in part because their spiritual leader was present. I have performed many such services, and I've not had a bad experience."

### Choosing One Religion

Patty was raised a Baptist. When she married Dave, raised in a traditional Jewish home, she converted. She and her husband are now happily Jewish, as are their two children. But all does not sit well with her family.

If her family has problems, Patty doesn't. She continues to be happy with her decision, in part because she feels that her children cannot be raised both ways. "I use the biblical analogy of creatures having to be evenly yoked," says the Reverend James Simms, a Baptist pastor. "In marriage, people should try to pursue similar spiritual goals, to create a family that goes forward. How can they do that if they're not pulling in the same direction? I'm very strong on encouraging couples to worship together, even if one of the members has to leave my church. Because I want to see the faith issue resolved, not tearing people apart."

### Knowing What You're Fighting About

Faye and Leo, of different religious backgrounds, decided to wed and called their families for a get-together. At one point, Leo's mom sat next to her opposite number and casually inquired as to how many of *her* brood had married outside the faith. "Every damn one of them," Faye's mother snapped.

*This article is the second of a series contributed by the Conflict Resolution Center International. For further information contact The Rev. John Stahl-Wer, 204 37th St., Pittsburgh, PA 15201-1859; tel 412-687-6210; fax 412-687-6232; Email crcii@conflictnet.org.*

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Faye, like many, faced what Rabbi Yisroel Miller calls "the major issue: that people have no argument [as to] why the young person should not have a marriage across religions. The child is not rebelling against theology. More often than not, he or she has been raised without it. On the other hand, parents and clergy often act out of deep tribal needs. That may be an excellent motive, but to the child it makes no sense. To deal with the conflict, everyone has to ask: how much do principles count? Do I say that love conquers all? Or do I take a stand for what I believe is right? In any event, endless bickering doesn't help. As a parent or clergyperson, make your point once, clearly, and let it go. The child will either accept it and act accordingly, or not. But endless whining or pressure to compromise doesn't help anyone."

## Mediating with a Neutral Third Party

Richard, a Jehovah's Witness, found a bride among the Baptists. However, his mother objected fiercely, citing Witness doctrine that even entering another church would defile her son's soul—and cause him to lose his place in heaven.

Despite her strong theological objections, Richard's mother was present at his marriage in a Baptist ceremony—but only after his Baptist bride-to-be got her minister to mediate.

The Reverend James Simms says, "My technique is to be open; hopefully, we can spread the canopy of faith wide enough to embrace many different positions and beliefs. In this case, the mother-in-law came to my office to talk. She was very cordial—in fact, she even brought breakfast. We talked for an hour and a half, and while her own beliefs remained unchanged, there was far less hostility."

## Accepting the Participants' Decision

Catholic Kathy married a Unitarian. She wanted to be married in her Church to please her parents. But when her non-Catholic fiance refused to affirm her faith, they were married by a Unitarian minister in a nondenominational chapel.

Kathy's Catholic parents, who at first objected, turned the other cheek, accepted their new son-in-law, and joined in the celebration.

As the Reverend Larry Homitsky says, "By the time a couple agrees to have a marriage across religions, there is probably very little that can be done to stop them. In the final act, it may be necessary to call a halt to the hostilities, accept what a couple want to do, and try to succor them in every way possible."

## The Best Defense May Be a Good Offense

Innumerable parents and ministers say the same thing: to have children or congregants stay in your faith, keep your religion strong in their lives. Show them the beauty of your way of life, so that they could not conceive of living or choosing a partner without it, or a partner who would not become an active participant. Perhaps your congregants' children will marry out, but at least you'll know you've done your best to keep them.

# Questions to Ask Yourselves... And Each Other

## by Dan Josephs

**Questionnaire for Catholic Partner Regarding Jewish Wedding Ceremony**

1. On what side of the bima does the bride stand, and on what side does the groom stand?
   a) Bride on right, groom on left*
   b) Bride on left, groom on right
   c) Flip a coin as people are walking down the aisle
   d) The person with the most guests stands on the right

2. What is a Chuppah?
   a) Bread you break before the meal
   b) A toast
   c) A canopy symbolizing the couple's home*
   d) A Mexican entree

3. What is a Ketubah?
   a) Jewish ethnic dish eaten at weddings
   b) Marriage contract*
   c) Wedding cup
   d) Something you say after someone sneezes

4. What is a Kiddush?
   a) Something kid-like in nature
   b) A skull cap
   c) Blessing over the wine*
   d) Ancient temple sacrifice involving a baby goat

5. Why do you break the glass?
   a) Eastern European tradition to avert evil spirits
   b) A sign that the wedding is over
   c) To symbolize the destruction of the Temple
   d) All of the above*

6. What are the seven blessings?
   a) Tradition started by Walt Disney with the Seven Dwarfs
   b) Seven days of wedded bliss
   c) Seven prayers for the couple*
   d) Blessing over seven different wines mandatory in an Orthodox wedding

7. Who walks the bride down the aisle?
   a) The bride's mother
   b) The bride's father
   c) The bride's second cousin once removed
   d) The bride's parents*

8. Why do Jewish couples traditionally marry giving wedding bands without jewels?
   a) Diamonds were not discovered until 1384 CE
   b) To discourage competition with neighbors and/or siblings
   c) To save money for the house
   d) To avoid fluctuations in gem prices affecting the value of the ring (since it's part of the wedding contract)*

9. What is the typical length of a Jewish ceremony?
   a) Under 30 minutes*
   b) Over 30 minutes
   c) Until the groom passes out
   d) Until the marriage is consummated

10. What is the traditional drink of the wedding ceremony?
    a) Water
    b) Gatorade
    c) Wine*
    d) Chicken soup

*Dan Josephs, Esq., the Christian partner in an interfaith marriage, is one of the founders and coordinators of the Chicago Jewish-Catholic Couples' Dialogue Group, the largest such group in the country. He is also national network group liaison for DI-IFR and editor of* ***Dovetail's*** *Bulletin Board page.*

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**Questionnaire for Jewish Partner Regarding Catholic Wedding**

1. What is pre-Cana?
   a) People in Israel before the Canaanites
   b) Word for wedding traditions before Cain
   c) Marital consultation and preparation*
   d) Part of the Mass prior to the canon

2. Where do the bride and groom stand at the altar?
   a) Bride on right, groom on left
   b) Bride on left, groom on right*
   c) Flip a coin as people are walking down the aisle
   d) The person with the most guests stands on the right

3. Who signs the marriage certificate?
   a) The photographer
   b) The rabbi
   c) The priest
   d) Both the rabbi and the priest*

4. Who walks the bride down the aisle?
   a) The bride's mother
   b) The bride's father*
   c) The bride's second cousin once removed
   d) The bride's parents*

5. Which of the following is not a sacrament?
   a) Wedding
   b) Communion
   c) Ordination
   d) Last rites
   e) None of the above*

*More-or-less correct answers, with tongues in cheek.

6. Which is required reading at a Catholic wedding Mass?
   a) Reading from one of the four Gospels*
   b) Reading from Hebrew Scripture*
   c) Reading from the Epistles*
   d) Announcements of the next bingo game

7. What is the unity candle?
   a) A Catholic wedding Mass symbol
   b) A universal symbol of togetherness*
   c) A fund-raiser for Catholic Charities
   d) A representation of the eternal flame of life*

8. Why does the traditional Catholic ceremony include a visit to the Shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary?
   a) To say a special prayer and show devotion to Mary*
   b) To pray for fertility
   c) To show off the bride's wedding gown
   d) To have something to do during the obligatory singing of "Ave Maria"

What is the typical length of a traditional Catholic wedding Mass ceremony?
   a) Under 30 minutes
   b) Over 30 minutes*
   c) Three decades
   d) Until the next mass starts

10. Which of these are included in a traditional Catholic wedding?
   a) Vows
   b) Blessing and exchange of rings
   c) General intercessions
   d) Final blessing/benediction
   e) All of the above*

**Some (Serious) Questions to Consider about Your Wedding**

1. In choosing a location, have you considered:
   - Where will you both feel comfortable?
   - Where are your celebrants willing to perform the ceremony?
   - Where will your families feel comfortable?
   - Are your wishes based on religious feeling or on nostalgia or aesthetics?

2. Who do you want as celebrants for your wedding? Why?
   - How will your partner's clergy affect your family?
   - Have your celebrants done an interfaith wedding before?
   - Do you know how they'll conduct the ceremony?
   - Have you met with them? Will you meet with them beforehand?

3. Are you going to have (and will your officiant/s allow)
   - A program of your ceremony?
   - A Chuppah?
   - A Ketubah?
   - A Unity Candle?
   - Yarmulkes for your guests?
   - The peace greeting?
   - The Kiddush?
   - Your own vows?

4. Are you going to have any readings? If so, from where, and who will do them?
   - Old Testament (Hebrew Scripture)
   - New Testament
   - Apache Wedding Blessing
   - Poems
   - Shakespeare
   - Other sources

5. What types of music are you going to have? Does your location's host put any restrictions on the type of music?

6. How is your family reacting to you and to your ceremony?
   - Do you want to involve your family? To What extent?
   - Where will your family stand or sit during the ceremony?
   - How will you and your family process into the location?

7. What type of marriage preparation (if any) do you want to do? Do your clergy require that you do any?
   - Pre-Cana
   - Network group meetings
   - Meetings with the clergy
   - Religion classes
   - Professional counseling or consultation with intermarriage experts

8. At the reception, what types of prayers do you want to do? Who will do them?

9. Have you considered and discussed the cultural and ethnic differences that might crop up at the reception? What do you expect the reception to be like? What does your family expect?
   What will you do about
   - Having a head table? Who sits at it?
   - Dancing? Various cultural and ethnic music and dances (Hava Nagila, polkas, Irish jigs)?
   - Religious-based dietary restrictions?

   Have you discussed any differences with your families?

***Documentary on Interfaith Marriage***

*Seeking Jewish female/Christian male couple with children (preferably at least one teenager) who would be willing to be interviewed for a documentary film on the topic of the challenges of raising children in an interfaith home. Especially seeking families in the New Jersey/New York City/ Philadelphia area.*

*For more information about the film and to express interest, please contact the director, Jennifer Kaplan, at 732-828-6060 or Email JLKap@juno.com.*

*Thank you.*

**The Big Question for Everyone**

10. Do you have any dreams for your wedding that you haven't told your partner?

**Protestant Practicality?**

A kindergarten teacher asked her students to bring something related to their faith to class. At the appropriate time she asked the students to come forward and share their symbol of faith with the rest of the students.

The first child said, "I am Muslim and this is my prayer rug."

The second child said, "I am Jewish and this is my Star of David."

The third child said, "I am Catholic and this is my rosary."

The final child said, "I am Southern Baptist and this is my casserole dish.

## A Haggadah for Interfaith Families

**The Inter-Faith Family Seder Book: How to Celebrate a Jewish Passover Supper with Christian In-Laws and Non-Jewish Friends** by Nan Meyer (1998):

The title says it all. This is a delightful, easy-to-use haggadah that, while making the prayers, songs, and ritual accessible and comprehensible to the non-Jew, does not fall into the trap of "Christianizing" the seder. It has such practical pointers as suggesting white rather than purple grape juice for the children because purple stains, "and there may not be much time to get their holiday finery cleaned for Easter Sunday." Then there are sensitive interpretations, such as that for the ten plagues visited on the Egyptians: "When people do evil, they defy God's will and bring suffering upon themselves.... [but] we cannot rejoice over their pain." Finally, traditional songs like "Chad Gadya" are paired with a universalist English (only the blessings are in Hebrew in this user-friendly ritual) paraphrase of "Eliyahu ha-Navi" set to the tune of "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing." We've taken advantage of the $8 special price for orders of 10 or more for our family seder.

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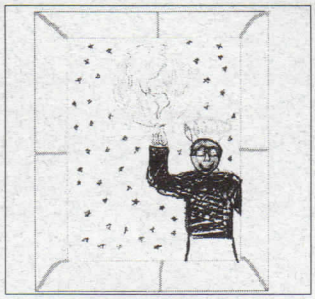
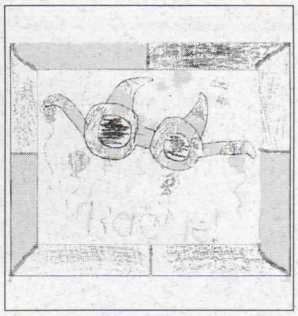
# Mardi Gras Masks, Purim Patterns

## collected by Debi Tenner

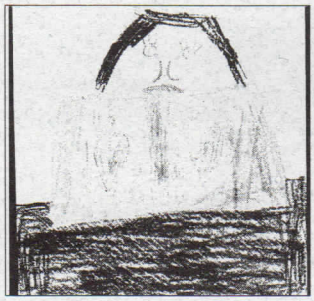
Aaron



Gabe

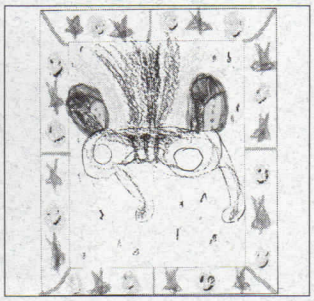


Rachel



Claire

Lindsey



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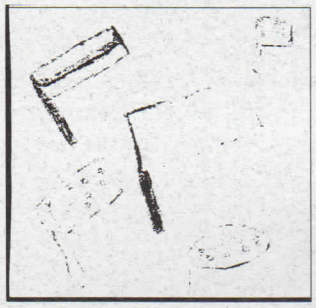

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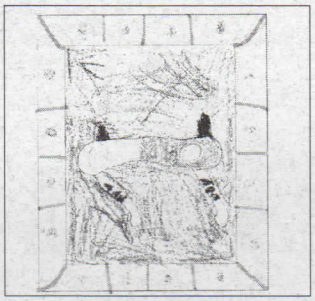

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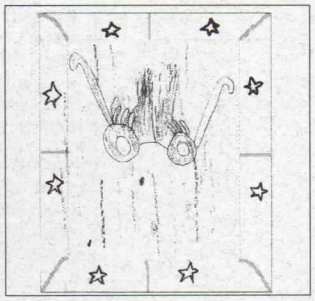

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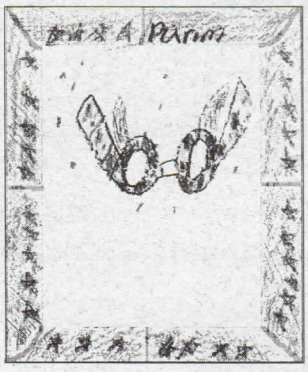
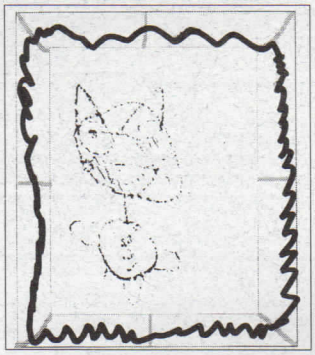


Eliza



Sharon

Debi Tenner is the mother of two and teaches the Sunday School class for older children in the New Haven, Connecticut interfaith group. She currently works in the local public school system and has been a summer camp educator for the Congregational Churches of Connecticut.

Are you looking for a Passover haggadah that is sensitive to the interests and attention span of young children, yet also inspiring for adults? Do you believe that a Passover seder should be a joyful celebration, rather than a solemn, drawn-out ordeal? Do you need something that gives lots of user-friendly information (how to's, why's, recipes, songs, etc.)? If you answered "yes" to any of the above, Mary Ann Barrows Wark's **We Tell It To Our Children: The Story of Passover** may well be your answers.
***Reprinted with permission from the review in Dovetail 2:4***


1. *"When do we eat?"*
2. *"When do we eat?"*
3. *"When do we eat?"*
4. *"When do we eat?"*

**Are these the four questions your kids really ask at the seder?**

This Passover, enjoy your seder with a special Haggadah designed for families with young children.

Passover can be a fun educational holiday. But if you have young children, getting them through the seder can often take a miracle. Unless you use the one Hagaddah specifically created for families with young children.

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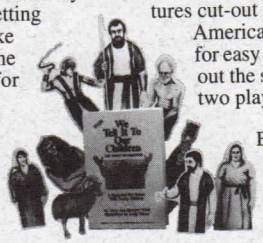

To attract and hold a child's attention, it features cut-out finger puppets, songs based on American folk music, even large print for easy reading. Entire families can act out the story, with children as young as two playing small roles.

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4

# Spring Senses

## Holidays and Happenings

by Loretta Fox

Spring is a sensual time, when nature treats us to colorful new growth, awakening us and renewing us. It's an ideal time to sit up and take notice of new life springing up under our feet, to appreciate the beauty in our world more by doing things a little differently, especially in this extraordinary year.

On March 8, Ash Wednesday ushers in the Lenten season, a time of preparation for the rebirth promised at Easter. Although Lent can take on a somber feeling, as many Christians use the occasion to make personal sacrifices, it is traditionally marked by good works. It is a perfect opportunity to begin beneficial new habits or behaviors.

Purim, on March 21, takes a lighter approach to leaving the old behind. As Jews hear the story of Esther and celebrate with costumes and noise-makers, nothing is taken seriously. It is a day to laugh at ourselves. In fact, Purim is the only Jewish festival that allows and encourages drunkenness in the spirit of the celebration. Purim invites a fresh approach and, therefore, renewal.

Both of these sacred occasions, Lent and Purim, suggest that we step outside our usual routines. And this year, we also have the Year 2000 as a unique moment in history. It can be a time to examine our past behaviors, to acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses, and to reenergize ourselves for a more positive future.

During this special season, make it a challenge to celebrate life by using all of your senses to experience new things, and so bring them alive again.

To awaken your sense of taste, try visiting a bakery or sampling an ethnic food that you've never tried before.

To renew your sense of smell, go on a nature walk or hike, breathing deeply all the way. Try a new cologne, or indulge in some of the widely available aroma-therapy products.

For sight, treat yourself to a theatrical performance or movie. Choose one that you wouldn't ordinarily select, perhaps something that might inspire you in a new way. Ask friends for recommendations. Go to a museum and look at paintings, sculpture, architecture. Or simply change your angle; go to a familiar place, like your front yard, and lie down on the ground. Look at the sky, the rooftops, the tree branches. Look up at flower blossoms! Take notice of things you may have overlooked.

To challenge your hearing, try listening to new music. Attend a concert of live music, perhaps chamber music or a choral performance. Or try listening closely to children's music. Consider attending a lecture or debate to sharpen your listening skills.

For touch, visit a soup kitchen or shelter and shake hands with the people there. Join a work project, and pick up a hammer to help build something solid. Contact local social service agencies, hospitals, newspapers, or the phone book for ideas.

As, in the spirit of the spring season and its holidays, you leave the ordinary behind for a while to challenge and awaken your senses, you have the chance to return to your life refreshed, senses awake to celebrate life's beauty everywhere, to be aware of the sacred even in the ordinary.

*Loretta Fox is an adjunct faculty member at Chestnut Hill College teaching Religious Studies. With a Master of Arts in Theology from St. Charles Seminary, Loretta has worked in various capacities for the archdiocese of Philadelphia. She is the Catholic partner in a Jewish/Christian marriage, and her full-time job is being an at-home mom. She and husband Scott have two daughters, Abby and Zoe Grace.*

# Otherwise Engaged

## A Review by Elaine Margolin

If you're like me, you probably can't give a coherent account of your decision to marry. It seems that only in marriage do we kiss common sense good-bye and expect that every human need can be met by a single all-too-human being. Most decisions to marry begin in delusion, in not knowing who you are and who the other one is. Eventually, the veils start to peel away and we wonder whether what we are getting is worth giving up what we have. All upcoming marriages have a critical moment, one when you decide whether you can do it, be there for the heaven and hell of it.

We know right at the beginning of Suzanne Finnamore's new semi-autobiographical novel **Otherwise Engaged** that this modern 36-year-old career woman is in trouble. She has been waiting for this moment for longer than she cares to remember. He is about to propose. For now, she is not going to dwell on the fact that they have been fighting about this for weeks. It is going to happen. That's all that matters.

"He did it. I said yes and checked my watch. 7:22 p.m. I sneak a pen out of my purse and write the time down on the palm of my hand, in what I hope is a nonchalant fashion."

She has met the right guy. Herself a Presbyterian, this Jewish Prince fits all her basic requirements:

> I looked at Michael and I saw the epitome of the Nice Jewish Man spread out before me. I took in the trim watch, the good shoes carefully brushed, the lines of patience around the eyes. From her kitchen in Carmel, my mother held up a wooden spoon in silent praise of that man that sat before me discussing opera. A wave of psychic enthusiasm passed over our heads from Carmel. My mother has wanted a nice Jewish man for me since the beginning of time. She wanted that since before the earth was a cloud of gas.

The heroine starts to recognize that this is going to take a lot of work, for both of them. She begins to think about what their marriage might really be like after the wedding, the two of them alone together. She is no longer able to see her Jewish Prince without his spots and has a bizarre fantasy:

> Last night in my mind I formed MAJM: Middle-Aged Jewish Men, a support group for middle-aged Jewish men and their non-Jewish partners. The former would have a forum in which to gripe about HMOs and the way the airlines are run and how you can't find anything good except in New York. They could renew their vows never to buy retail unless completely unavoidable, and then afterward, we of the shiksa would also have a chance to share experiences and touch base with our own kind, eating things with mayonnaise and acting carefree. Sticking forks into toasters and improperly hanging pictures.
>
> When I met Michael I was thrilled to be finding a MAJM. But I didn't know the whole story then. I only knew him as good MAJM, the wise funny great cook with the sexy reading glasses who genuinely likes women and understands fabric. The MAJM who won't let you buy second best, what he dismisses with a wave and the magical work chazzerai. I wanted the sophisticated MAJM, the well-dressed breezy professional *New York Times* MAJM. I honestly thought that's what I was getting. Not the neurotic madman who stalks salmonella, who has to rush home if there is a raw tomato in the car.

However, all is not lost. She's working on it all the time. Finnamore takes you right along with her through the nonstop dialogue that's racing around in her head as she tries to get "ready" to be married. (If she had just asked us older women, we could have told her right off the bat that no one is ever ready.)

This is an engagingly delicious book, both serious and funny, and full of hard-won wisdom.

***Otherwise Engaged*** *by Susan Finnamore: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1999*

**Bulletin Board Addition**
**Pennsylvania, Philadelphia**
New group. Contact: Michelle Carson, 215-473-4086 or Kimberly Shore, 215-646-3363

# Unique Wedding Resource Wins Kudos from Couples and Clergy Alike

"This eminently practical guide helps couples plan a wedding ceremony that will reflect their own differing religious backgrounds, traditions and beliefs and also be sensitive to the beliefs and traditions of their parents, other relatives and guests."

**Library Journal**

"This extremely helpful book looks closely at one of the first problems an interfaith couples will face: planning the wedding ceremony. Solid practical advice."

**Booklist**

"An invaluable resource for clergy, who know well the wedding rituals of their own tradition, but may be uninformed about those of another."

*Reverend Julie Parker, Hofstra University*

"Compassionate, realistic, helpful. This is a great book for interfaith couples who want to plan a ceremony that incorporates both of their backgrounds. I highly recommend it. The sample ceremonies are very helpful!"

*A reader from Palo Alto, California*

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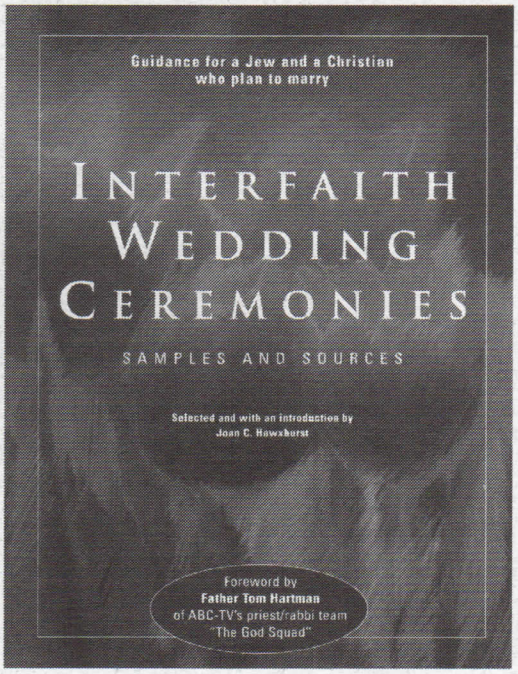
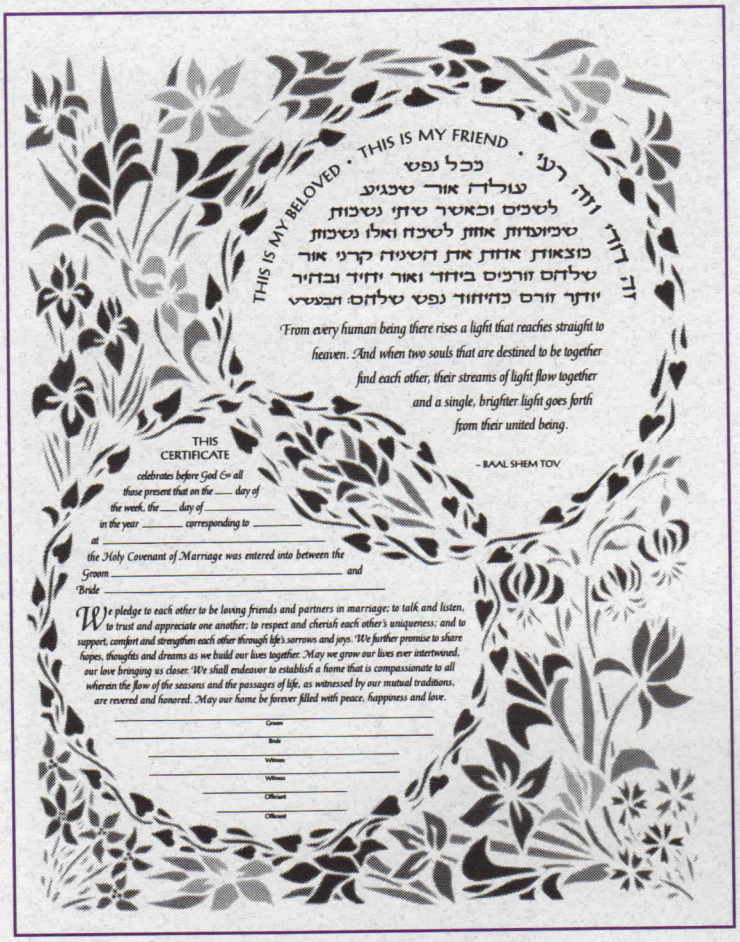



**Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies: Samples and Sources.**
Joan C. Hawxhurst, editor.
ISBN: 0-9651284-1-5
Softcover, $19.95.

**This book contains all the ingredients for a successful and meaningful interfaith wedding, from complete sample ceremonies to advice on finding clergy and working with your two families. Also includes an extensive resource list.**

An invaluable resource for clergy. Solid practical advice. Compassionate, realistic, helpful. I highly recommend it!

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Now, for the first time, a Ketubah is available in language especially suited to interfaith couples. A rabbi adapted the text and collaborated with an artist and a specialist in typography and fine printing to create this unique piece. The poetic and egalitarian style clearly expresses an interfaith couple's commitment to respect each other's heritage. It is a beautiful art piece, a keepsake and an ideal gift to reflect your love and support.

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