



Illustration by Steve Greenberg

## Wedding Woes and Chuppah Horrors

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*Warning: Article may contain graphic descriptions of wedding snafus. Content may be unsuitable for anxious brides, grooms or mothers-in-law. (But don't worry, there's a happy ending.)*

It was a hot and sunny June afternoon, just hours before Julie Davine's meticulously planned 1991 wedding at the Hotel Sofitel. The *huppah* stood festooned in tulle with pink and white roses for the evening ceremony. Upstairs, the tuxedoed and gowned wedding party posed for photographs on the balcony of the penthouse bridal suite. Suddenly, Julie said she saw a cloud of black smoke. "I said, 'What's that smoke?' But everyone said I was being neurotic, so I dismissed it," she said.

The smoke came from the hotel's blown power transformer. The back-up system could generate sufficient power for lights, but not for air conditioning. By the time the ceremony started, "we were schvitzing up a storm," Davine recalled. During the reception, a friend pointed out a butter plate with its contents pooling.

Cindy Petrack faced a different snag during her 1993 wedding. She had chosen a favorite neighborhood restaurant to cater her reception at Temple Emet (now Kol Tikvah) in Woodland Hills. When it was time to discuss final details, Petrack called numerous times but got no answer. She drove to the restaurant to discover an empty storefront. The owner had gone bankrupt and skipped town. It was eight days before her wedding.

When it comes to weddings, glitches come with the territory. Fortunately, most aren't as major as a power outage or disappearing caterer.

"There are different levels of snafus," said Larry Gootkin of Larry Gootkin Music & Entertainment. "I always tell my clients that variables will come up."

At the same time, he points out, many potential problems can be remedied by professionals who are adept at improvising in a crunch. Gootkin recalled a reception where the cake failed to be delivered. To help out, he called his wife, who is a caterer. She instructed the maitre d' to race out to the nearest grocery store and purchase three plain cakes. Then she talked his staff through the process of assembling and decorating them. The couple never knew the difference.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that cakes make up a high percentage of wedding snafus. At one event, a wayward champagne cork flew up, hit the chandelier, and sent a shower of crystal down on the cake. It wasn't served. At another wedding, the cake turned out to come from a bakery that wasn't kosher. The cake appeared in photos, but not on the dessert plates. One cake at an outdoor wedding attracted a trail of ants. The offending portions were excised, and small pieces of the remainder were served to the guests.

In another example of a professional averting a potential snafu, Rabbi Allen Maller of Temple Akiba in Culver City recalled an occasion when he spotted a fly in the kiddush cup. "So I made up a quick thing, saying 'Before we share this cup of

wine, we should share some with the potted palm here," he said. And early in his career, Maller performed a wedding where the groom couldn't smash the glass, despite repeated attempts. "As a joke, one of his friends had put a whisky glass in the napkin," Maller recalled. Now, he said, he always checks how heavy the glass is and whether anything's floating in the wine cup before starting a ceremony.

While officiants and vendors can cover many gaffes, couples themselves can avoid some potential pitfalls by planning thoroughly and thinking ahead. Cindy Hassel, president of S&R Originals, an event decorating and coordinating company, noted that while you can't control the weather, you can't ignore it, either. She was asked to do a Feb. 14 outdoor wedding in Hidden Hills. When workers arrived in the morning to set up, the temperature was 70 degrees. By the time the evening reception started, rain had given way to a freak hailstorm that

When the coordinator whispered, "Keep playing!" they launched into the next piece. So the clergy got to walk down to "Here Comes the Bride," as the bride watched in disbelief.

Fortunately, most wedding glitches — even the big ones — become a source of humor immediately or soon after the event. Davine, whose guests endured sweltering temperatures, looks back on the day fondly. "It was still the best day," she said. "I don't have any bad feelings or memories. And I know no one will ever forget it."

"In life and in marriage you have to try to take anything that's negative and try to see a positive aspect," Maller suggested. "I would say that if you lose the wedding cake, just think of it as a contribution to the new low-carb diet."

He added, "Jews break a glass at weddings to remind us of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The lesson is that there are challenges in life and in marriage,

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collapsed the tent. "Don't try to fool Mother Nature," Hassel advised. "Expect rain between December and April, and if you don't get it you're lucky. You always have to have back up plans or a great sense of humor."

Hassel also reminds men to try on their tuxedos prior to the wedding to ensure proper fit. One groomsman confidently told her, "I don't have to try mine on. I own it." But on the day of the wedding, when he took it out of the dry cleaning bag, he discovered he'd taken his father's much larger-sized tuxedo instead.

Bandleader Gootkin consults with his clients to prepare a detailed event schedule, which helps avoid timing problems. He also urges couples to select vendors with appropriate experience, including familiarity with Jewish weddings. (Once, a videographer asked him, "What's a hora?") Gootkin once played at a wedding where the couple had also hired a classical trio — including a former member of L.A. Philharmonic — to play during the ceremony. The musicians played the processional, but the piece ended before everyone had reached the altar.

and we can overcome them the same way that the loss of Jerusalem and the Temple didn't mean the end of Judaism."

Wedding coordinator Hassel knows better than most what a real catastrophe is. At her own wedding, her father fainted, which was chalked up to the heat. But when he complained of indigestion later at the reception, a guest determined that he was having a heart attack and had him rushed by ambulance to the hospital. Fortunately, he recovered. But the incident gave her perspective. "I, more than anyone, understand that this is all stuff; it's what I do for a living.... But you can get married in a rabbi's study and it's still a wedding."

When Maller counsels couples prior to their wedding, he urges them to keep matters in perspective. "I tell couples, 'A wedding is one day of your life. Hopefully, you will be married for many, many years, which is thousands of days. So don't lose balance.'"

In other words, despite any minor blunders during the wedding itself, there will still be a "happily ever after." ■

### Wedding Tips

**T**o help keep your wedding high on romance and low on horror, suspense or comedy, heed these tips from the experts:

- Carefully choose vendors, such as coordinators, bands, DJs, photographers and caterers. Check references thoroughly and select people you feel comfortable with.
- Make sure your vendors are familiar with the sequence and customs of Jewish weddings.
- Verify that the vendors you meet with are the same people who will actually be working at your wedding.
- Draw up an agenda and schedule so everyone knows what's supposed to happen and when.
- Share preferences and important information with your vendors. If your families are feuding, you despise the song "YMCA" or Uncle Harry is allergic to dairy, better to make accommodations in advance.
- Prepare a checklist of all the items that need to be taken to the wedding location. Don't forget a sewing kit and safety pins.
- Appoint a trusted relative or friend to be your lieutenant on the wedding day. That person can oversee details and work with your coordinator and/or vendors so you can be free to savor your special day.
- Don't expect every detail to be perfect.
- Enjoy yourself.