

My Big Fat Jewish Vegas Wedding

by Wendy Levine

I could argue that I'm still *on* my summer vacation. I got married in Las Vegas this summer, and I'm still enjoying it. So when will the vacation end? Never mind. I don't want to know.

People had warned me about the last minute things that go wrong before a wedding that threaten to leave you with a thousand unnecessary worries. Well, the worries were there, but as far as that special day, I wouldn't change a thing. Though I have learned some things in the process.

My almost-husband drove me insane months ahead of time, turning into an anal pre-planning maniac, pressing me to make up my mind on every decision, large and small, weeks before I was ready or it was required. Then once I came to all the necessary conclusions, he proceeded to obsess over every aspect. Thank God I didn't decide sooner, or I'd have endured the obsessing phase, which proved much more stressful, that much longer.

The thing is, we weren't looking for much. We just wanted everyone to dress nice, show up, have a wonderful time and not have to spend too much money or sweat too much. We were, after all, requesting their presence in the desert in late July, where the oppressive heat can turn all but the highest vacation high droopy and the vacationer drippy and on a never-ending search for colder beverages.

Our theme wedding was a secret from everyone who attended. We'd arranged for a van to pick up all our guests at a central hotel and whisk them (in air-conditioned comfort, of course) to the Viva Las Vegas Wedding Chapel. The groom and I arrived separately, around the same time via glitzily logoed Viva Las Vegas Wedding Chapel limousine, then were separated almost instantly—him to deal with the paperwork, me to be transformed into a bride.

With my father by my side, we watched from “backstage” while a yarmulked Austin Powers barreled in to *our* song, the theme music from the Austin Powers movie. After his brassy entrance, my father and I strode shakily down the aisle, and he dropped me off beside the man who was going to have and to hold me from this day forward.

The music faded and we took our places on the round mirrored platform, as if we were the topping on our own cake. Our family and friends held the chupa over us, first high and straight, later lower and cockeyed, as the four wooden stick handles weighed increasingly on our attendants. Its presence was a promise fulfilled to the groom’s departed grandparents.

The four-cornered fabric roof is a Jewish symbol of unity and a shield from harm . Unfortunately, it also shielded something else—the lens to the webcam, which would have broadcast our ceremony live on the internet. We’d advised friends back home to tune in at the appointed time to see the wedding online, but the chupa blocked the view. The cancelled broadcast has resulted in one happy consequence. Whenever we visit someone who tried to watch the ceremony on the web, we play them the videotape instead and re-live the happiest nine minutes of our lives.

Now let’s go to the video. They say your wedding day becomes a blur, which is why I’m so glad we have the tape. Every time I watch I notice something else, something I never would have known without the video record of it—the look on my father’s face, how much I’m smiling, how beautiful my friends looked—all for us, all for our big day.

The ceremony included a dance break to “Just the two of us”, (the movie version of which is actually sung by Dr. Evil), then the vows, the kiss, and the jubilant strut to the back office where a certified official pronounced us husband and wife for legal purposes. We were quickly hustled outside where “Reverend Powers” posed with us for pictures, then everyone

boarded the bus and we got back in the limo for our first ride as a married couple. The cocktail reception was held at a restaurant in the Caesars Palace Hotel. The wedding cake from the world-famous wedding cake place had been festively strewn with flowers and I slipped our wedding invitation (featuring a photo of Elvis and Priscilla at their wedding) onto the top. Our friends greeted us with hugs and cards, the hors d'oeuvres marched out, martini glasses appeared full, then empty until everyone was seated and sated. And that's all we wanted from the day. I'll be forever grateful that we got it.

I'm also grateful that I took someone else's advice about my makeup. I'd asked my sister-in-law to do my hair and face, and the night before she'd counter-offered with an appointment at the hotel salon. Though it's not my style and I felt a bit like an overgroomed poodle afterward, I'm glad I accepted. First, because when you walk around in public in a wedding dress, everyone stares at you. It's nice to feel you look your best. And when I review pictures of the absolutely gorgeous bride, I praise her wise decision all over again.

And to this day, I am thrilled with the \$4.50 wedding pumps I got at a thrift store. After the reception we had a long walk to the outside. I'd brought new white sneakers to change into. The picture-taking was over, and no one could see them under my nearly floor-length dress. At last I walked in comfort and felt no guilt when I left the heels in the hotel trash bin.

I do have some advice to anyone planning a function that means the world to them: Look for high quality people. Make your selections based on the service you're given when you first call to discuss your plans. Double check your arrangements, then don't call again. Get everything on paper and have it with you. Have a contingency for every plan and don't expect perfection. Settle for magic.