Barry Kling – Passover Remembrances – Jan 2016

Most of the seders I remember from growing up weren’t very memorable.  They tended to be very short – Kiddush, Four Questions, one or two Dayenu stanzas and a very short Afikomen hunt.    There were a few occasions when we went to other friend’s houses and I enjoyed those – especially when each person was given a reading or two  - however, those seders also dragged on and it became a game of I said, you said – with each person trying to outdo the others with their knowledge.    So, when I decided to lead my own seder – I knew that I didn’t want that.  I wanted everyone to come away learning something, participating and most importantly – wanting to come back for another round the next year.

I don’t really know how I got so fascinated with Passover.  I think attending a workshop at my daughters preschool at our temple inspired me.  I wanted my kids to have some Jewish holiday that they looked forward to, some traditions that they could continue.  Hopefully, the seder is one of them.

Over the years, we’ve done many fun ideas.  I think the seder I am most proud of was my “Amazing Race of Harry Potter” themed seder, which combined two of my favorites – The Amazing Race TV show and Harry Potter.   One of my regular seder guests was also somewhat skilled at magic tricks so I tasked him with developing a magic trick for each of the plagues – such a hit and it was so fun.   Since the Amazing Race takes the racers around the world, we travelled the world via Charoset, with recipes from multiple countries (a tradition that we still continue each year – our seder has many different charosets to choose from).  I think my favorite gimmick was our Academy Awards Seder – where we actually had Oscar’s engraved and voting online for the winners for a few weeks before the Seder – the Original Song Oscar was quite the voting duel.  It got everyone in the mood very early  and kept the anticipation building the entire night – as multiple awards were given out.   We’ve also written many songs for each of our seders.  I think the two that stand out in my mind are Hey There Elijah and Egyptian Rhapsody.

We held our first seder 16 years ago.  Our seders are typically between 12-18 people, and somehow we do it without any strangely shaped tables. My now 16 year old son was in his baby swing – he was three months old at the time.    We’ve had the same two families now for about 10 years and last year just added another family.  We’ve gone through toddlers, adolescents, teenagers and now college students – the only regret – no photos taken each year.

As far as influences,  I tend to let popular culture influence me.  I do start thinking about the Seder in February and keep a running list of ideas on my Iphone notes.  I try to keep the Seder current and aligned with things going on in the world that our guests can relate to (last years Winter Wonderland Seder for example). It just makes things more fun for everyone.  This year, some of our guests children are studing abroad so I'm thinking about an “Around the World in One Seder” theme – with readings and customs from around the world.   Just starting the search for material.

My goal each year is to keep the Seder moving – make sure every one participates – have a few surprises along the way and to make sure that there is a lot of laughter.   If everyone comes away appreciating one of the readings  or humming a song – and leaves saying “I cant wait to see what you do next year” – I’ve done my job. It's far less about spectacle and far more about fun and warmth and being with close friends and family.