

# An institute they can't disparage

**Happily married for 31 years, the Kofsky's -- both wedding ministers -- hope to get other couples off on the right foot**

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Jordan's Judy and Sheldon Kofsky are the kind of couple who finish each other's sentences. They still look at each other as if they're on their first date.

Recently, the pair shared details of their special day: June 26, 1977.

Picture this: it's a gorgeous outdoor wedding north of Toronto in the backyard of Sheldon's aunt.

"Overlooking a ravine," Judy says with a sigh, sitting snugly next to "Shel" on the couch.

Uncles make heartwarming speeches. All the food, including the cake, was made by family. There were tears. Laughter.

But the ceremony, well, it was OK. A bit stuffy and traditional.

"We had a traditional minister," Sheldon says. "He showed up. The violin played. We walked out. We never saw the ceremony. To this day, we never saw the ceremony."

This retrospective review seems all right coming from two qualified experts.

Both Judy, 57, and Sheldon, 58, are wedding ministers. The devoted twosome give new meaning to the old adage, "A couple that prays together stays together."

The Kofskys estimate they preside over at least 100 weddings in Niagara and beyond a year. With the summer season ramping up, so are the ministers. Couples are requesting their services nearly every day of the week.

Not to repeat their own personal regret, they give each couple a copy of the ceremony so they can relive the words.

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"It becomes part of their life," Sheldon says. "Part of their tradition."

Traditions -- researching and adapting them to suit couples -- are the Kofskys' business.

There are inter-faith ceremonies. Some throw surprise weddings where the guests have no idea what's coming.

There are medieval-themed ceremonies. Beach and boat weddings. And the Dukes of Hazzard?

Yes, one adventurous and television-obsessed Welland couple convinced Sheldon to don a white suit and cowboy hat to portray the devilish character Boss Hogg, the county commissioner character from the popular 1980s show. The ceremony featured a General Lee car and a mock arrest.

An amateur theatre actor on the side, Sheldon, who has been a minister for about a decade, says he feels at home playing any role.

Says Judy: "When they make a ceremony that unique and special, they've

worked on it so hard and it means so much to them, then for us to say the vows to them, to do the ceremony as part of it, is an honour. They've really gone that extra mile."

Helping couples say their "I dos" came naturally to Sheldon.

After spending years in the restaurant business, Sheldon, the son of a chef and a sales clerk, says he was looking for another way of working with people. He took correspondence courses and applied for a minister's licence.

"This one has been the most enjoyable for meeting people and working with people. They come in like a blank canvas. They ask, 'What should we do?' I say, 'What would you like?' "

Judy saw how much fun her husband was having, and decided to get her minister's licence a year ago.

"I thought as a backup, I'd get mine, and it's actually worked out pretty good. I enjoy it. We've had a lot of nice couples."

There are times the two perform ceremonies together.

"A couple of couples couldn't decide between us, so they said: 'Could you both come?' " Judy says.

Sometimes the couples are just down the road.

There are times tourists are eating at Zooma Zooma Cafe or Inn on the Twenty and end up at the Kofskys' Main Street bed and breakfast called Jordan Village Guest Manor -- which they bought seven years ago after moving to the village -- for an impromptu wedding.

"We straighten everything and move things out and do the ceremony right here," Sheldon says.

Neighbours end up joining in the fun as witnesses.

They never dispense marriage advice. The couple, who have three children -- Mandie, 29, Kyle, 27, and Ashley, 25 -- say their job is to give couples a ceremony they're comfortable with. Give them a good start.

They do share their own story. The fact that they've been married 31 years.

"I don't think it's an accomplishment today," Sheldon says. "I think it's the way it should be."

Not just a business

How the marriage business has affected the marriage of ministers Judy and Sheldon Kofsky:

"We've had a couple of good days, but not together," jokes Sheldon.

"You know what? This is the most wonderful person in the world," he says, looking at Judy.

"I cherish her. She's special to me. I love her. This has allowed us to continue what we've always done, to work together. Now we work together in the theme of writing marriage ceremonies. We'll talk to each other. 'What do you think of this? What do you think of that?' "

Judy: "If I've met the couple, too, and he's working on it, I'll say, 'You know, (the groom), would never say that, but he might say this.'

"You know what, we've worked together a long time. We work well together."