

Love can change the meaning of a day

After much rummaging through the house, I'd found the tie I wanted: black and red, with a blue crescent-moon pattern adding a whimsical touch. Purchased 17 years before in New York City's Chinatown — seven weeks after the first Trade Center bombing — it represented the cutting edge of early 1990s fashion.

The wife, looking askance at the colorful relic, started to suggest something more contemporary. But I was firm.

"New York forever," said I.

This past Saturday was a much different Sept. 11 from the bitter occasion most of us recall from nine years ago. Call it "Deuces Wild Saturday": two weddings, two cities, two hours apart. My cousin's date had been set for months, but a second invitation from another couple that same day had complicated matters.

Nevertheless, we could make an appearance at both. I pulled the tie into a Windsor knot and reached for my black hat.

"Let's roll."

Shelly and Daren, together for better than four years, had chosen an old farmhouse northwest of Chapel Hill for their outdoor ceremony. As a light rain fell a crowd gathered in front of a large deciduous tree, a guitarist and violinist performing selections from Handel to Louis Armstrong; as the ceremony commenced the mothers of the bride and groom mixed earth from the couple's places of origin — Iowa and Pennsylvania — into a new vase, symbolizing the joining of two into one.

Shelly looked nervous as the preacher made his remarks on love, commitment and mutual joy, a feeling confirmed when her voice broke with emotion during the wedding vows. Fortunately for Shelly it was over quickly; for all the planning that goes into them, wedding ceremonies remain fairly simple. Afterward the clearly relieved couple stayed on the lawn for some moments, talking to those who'd come to share their happiness.

Then after a quick cocktail and warm wishes it was down love's highway again, to a banquet hall north of Greensboro. Six years ago my cousin Alison had asked a fellow named Ben to be her date at her twin brother's wedding; tonight was her turn. We arrived in the nick of time, after the wedding party had made their entrance but before Alison's dad escorted her up the aisle, leaving just enough time for a dash to the back row.

No two weddings are quite the same. Shelly and Daren's had been lighthearted but formal, while Alison and Ben's had a rock 'n' roll theme: a portrait of Bob Dylan on the wall, candy dishes in the shape of LPs, a program featuring groomsmen and bridesmaids on the cover of rock albums. Though we left early — the day of running around had taken its toll — it was clear everyone was enjoying themselves immensely.

For a few moments, it wasn't 9/11 anymore. It was just another day, quite a happy one.

Never forget, they say — as if we ever could — but one can mourn and still find a way to move on. I don't know why the two couples chose that date as their wedding day, but I'm glad they did; for me this past Sept. 11 now stands as a day apart from hate, a day

on which, once more, love reigned. It's been too long in coming, if you ask me. My grandmother was born Sept. 11, 1912, and lived nearly nine decades before 19 madmen turned her birthday into an atrocity. On Saturday — through God's grace, with family and friends watching — Shelly and Daren, and Alison and Ben, began to take that day back.

Never forget, indeed. But always remember to keep on living.

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