

The Record LOCAL

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War goes on; so does wedding

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The Katushya missiles rained down on Haifa, igniting fear and extinguishing life. But in the midst of war, love prevailed.

Under an outdoor wedding canopy in the Carmel Forest in northern Israel, Moti Peleg and Ronit Rinat were married.

"Our wedding started with a blast," quipped Peleg, a Ridgewood psychologist, noting that moments before the ceremony, a rocket fell several miles from the hall, near his wife's Haifa home.

Love story spans Israel, New Jersey

"We have the philosophy that the party will go on and we will prevail," he said.

The guests blocked out the sound of war with song and shouts of *mazel tov*. "The atmosphere was filled with such love and closeness, that for a peaceful while we all put our fears aside," said Peleg, an Israeli native.

Rinat, who was crowned Miss Israel 1964 and was subsequently Miss Universe runner-up, wore a

strapless white Cinderella-style dress. She said she kept her fear hidden so that her three children and eight grandchildren wouldn't be nervous.

"War is darkness. You need to have a place with light to remind the world of hope. This wedding brought a lot of hope and warmth to people's hearts," Rinat said in a telephone interview from Haifa, where she is staying with family.

As the couple exchanged vows July 13 — the day after war broke out between Hezbollah and Israel — the guest list shrank. Some re-

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Ronit Rinat, a program administrator from Haifa, and Moti Peleg, a Ridgewood psychologist, at their wedding in northern Israel on July 13, a day after war broke out.

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mained in bomb shelters. Others were turned back by roadblocks or were too scared, said Peleg.

He credited all the brave relatives and friends who "risked their lives to see me marry the woman of my dreams."

The war around them gave the guests even more determination to live in the moment, said Peleg. "That's the Israeli mentality of daily survival. You live with the hope that you will prevail."

Peleg, 59, and Rinat, 60, have both experienced hard times in life. Both are children of Holocaust survivors, and both grew up during Israel's tumultuous beginnings and survived Israel's wars in 1948, 1956 and 1967, in which Peleg served.

"We will overcome this too," Peleg said about the current war.

Rinat now remains in Haifa, watching over her mother, who is blind and refuses to leave her home. She will join her husband in New Jersey after the war ends, and the couple plan to move to Israel next year.

Peleg first heard about Rinat when he was a 17-year-old air force student living with his parents on a farm near Tel Aviv. "I saw a picture of her in the newspaper when she was crowned Miss Israel, and I felt a connection to her."

He came to the United States to study psychology, and he wed an American woman. They were married for 23 years and had two children. Eight years ago, the couple divorced. Peleg lives in the Hackensack area and has a psychology practice in Ridgewood.

Two years ago, Peleg decided to find his soul mate and recalled the object of his teenage dreams. He discovered that Rinat was a widow living in Haifa. He sent a message to her: "A man from New Jersey has been looking for you for 42 years." They spoke by phone and "right away, we felt a chemistry." They communicated by phone and e-mail for several months before meeting in 2005.

They have since shuttled back and forth between Israel and New Jersey. They became engaged six

months ago.

Rinat is the administrator of a program in Israel called the Listening Circle that fosters communication between couples, families and, now, Arabs and Jews.

After their very spirited wedding, attended by 300 guests, the couple honeymooned at a resort on Israel's northern border, where they were the sole guests.

They saw bombs falling nearby. One morning a missile fell at the restaurant where they had eaten the night before.

"It looks like firecrackers, it sounds like thunder," Rinat said. "It's unbelievable to see bombs falling and realize you are in the middle of a war. There's no escape. But I felt we need to trust in God and show our faith."

Before he left Israel, Peleg, who specializes in trauma and stress, volunteered to do counseling for Haifa residents in the bunkers. Many were Russian immigrants and families with young children.

During a lull in the bombings, he took out his guitar and sang Israeli songs about hope. "People who had been hiding in their rooms for two weeks suddenly emerged to

join us. They sang with all their hearts. I wanted them to feel they were not alone. By the time I left, they were less afraid."

His *raison d'être*, he said, is: "If you have a dream, go for it. If you want a woman who you feel is your destiny, don't give up, even if it takes you 42 years."

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