

Game of Throws: Area Surgeon Relaxes With Knife-Tossing

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As Chanukah 2006 drew near, I asked Ted, my husband (at that time) of 33 years, what he would like.

I expected his usual requests for another bottle of Polo cologne and a new pair of the exact same sneakers.

To my surprise, Ted asked for a throwing knife.

Couldn't he just throw the knife he uses to cut bagels? What did he want to throw it at? And how did he come up with this cockamamie idea?



As a plastic surgeon specializing in cosmetic breast surgery, he is quite adept with a knife, but as far as I knew he didn't throw them.

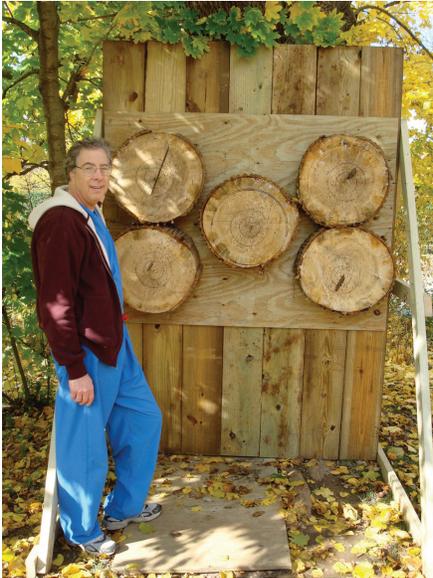
He told me that he had long admired the knife-throwing skills of James Bond, Rambo and "Crocodile" Dundee. When he was a boy, he loved Stretch, a game in which he and a buddy would throw their penknives into the dirt. The only pointy objects in my childhood were Jacks.

I bought Ted a military-styled throwing knife with a corded rope handle at an Ardmore floor sanding shop. The owner sold swords and knives from a counter in the back.

As soon as Ted unwrapped the gift, he hurled it at the maple tree on our lawn. It didn't stick — we later learned that the wood was too hard — and when the sap leaked out, Ted fretted that he had hurt the tree. He tucked the knife into his night table drawer, where it sat for months until I read about Joe Darrah, a knife maker, one-quarter Blackfoot Indian and eight-time world tomahawk champion who lived just 10 miles away.

Ted emailed Joe and asked if he would teach him to throw. "Come right on over" was the reply.

They threw everything from knives and tomahawks to scissors and nails at log rounds for six hours. Ted learned how to throw knives at distances from 6 to 20 feet, holding it first by the blade and then by the handle to change the number of rotations.



He was hooked. His cousin, a carpenter, constructed a target alongside our driveway.

Our tree-trimming guy delivered a stack of soft pine log rounds, 5 inches thick and 16 inches in diameter. Joe made him a set of 13-inch, 13-ounce balanced throwing knives — and an engraved throwing scalpel. Ted bought tomahawks and a Bowie knife.

Almost overnight, a whim had become a hobby.

Five years earlier, Ted and I began a series of ballroom dancing lessons — in search of our inner Fred and Ginger — but this was his first solo hobby since we were married.

Interestingly, it began the year our nest emptied, when our youngest child went off to college and when Ted, then 55 — he's now 62 — started noticing that those 55+ Active Living newspaper inserts were targeted at him.

When Ted was a kid, he'd tell me, he'd come home from school, throw his books on the dining room table, and run out to shoot hoops or play handball or Wiffle ball with his Wynnefield friends until his mother called him home for dinner.

Now when he comes home from work, he puts the boxes of breast implants for the next day's surgeries in the living room and runs out — still in his scrubs — to throw knives before it gets dark. I can see the boy in him — gleeful, carefree, relaxed.

At work, Ted kept a low profile about his hobby so as not to scare his patients. When CBS3 TV and the Philadelphia Inquirer profiled him in 2009 with headlines reading: "Nip and Duck: The Knife-Throwing Plastic Surgeon," the cat was out of the bag.

His patients got a kick out of it. They seemed to appreciate that knife throwing and surgery require the same skill set: dexterity, focus, confidence and patience.

Ted started competing close to home at a South Jersey campground, but there was no camping for us; we stayed at our Atlantic City condo and drove over in the morning.

We counted 25 throwers from six states. Ted got a solid intermediate score; he didn't win any trophies but he got a lot of "Atta boys!" and a nickname, Doc Ted.

Next was a trip to Austin, Texas, for the International Knife Throwers Hall of Fame World Championship. It included a daylong event at the Alamo, where throwers had to use a Bowie knife and wear period clothing.

While Ted competed, I was recruited to be a scorekeeper. You can be sure I didn't fudge his scores, not when his opponents were wielding tomahawks.

Over the years, we've met a colorful cast of characters. We instantly bonded with Mike and Rosa Gross, professionals who perform as One Sharp Marriage. When their kids left home, they tried tennis until Mike hurt his back; now Mike hangs upside down and throws knives around Rosa, who's on the Wheel of Death. She shoots a crossbow at an apple on his head. They are adorable and crazy-brave.

When people hear what Ted does for a hobby, they think I'm going to let him throw knives around me. Would a Jewish wife stand for that?

We've been to more than 15 tournaments; Ted has achieved the rank of expert knife thrower and been inducted into the International Knife Throwers Hall of Fame, whose motto is: *Aut sica inherit, aut non inherit*, Latin for "Either the knife sticks or it doesn't."

Our children, Ben, 29, and Samantha, 26, have participated — and won trophies — a few times through the years; after all, while some kids have a basketball hoop in their driveway, they have a throwing range.

At tournaments when the throwing day is done, we try our hand at blowguns and the atlatl, an ancient spear-thrower tool. There are whip-cracking demonstrations, chuckwagon cook-offs (we judged peach cobbler and biscuits), and silent auctions where you can bid on rifles.



It is not like any Sisterhood/Men's Club fundraiser we've attended.

We love to travel, so when we heard about a European championship in Northern Italy in 2012, we decided to go, combining it with a trip to Milan and Lake Como.

This past August, we went to Brittany, France, for a world championship; Ted would be one of four Americans on the roster. Two weeks before we left, I, at the age of 61, was recruited because they needed a fifth thrower to make an official team.

They begged me, a novice, to practice a bit; I'd only have to throw from 3 meters. I didn't do well, but it was thrilling to participate along with 144 other contestants from 10 countries.

Two months later, I accompanied Ted to Texas, where I threw knives and tomahawks from all the distances. I did the Quick Draw and Silhouette event. I used his old knives and shared his tomahawks. I loved it. Ted got a kick out of it.

Fred and Ginger, step aside.
Make way for Bonnie and Clyde.

And this Chanukah? I asked
for my own set of tomahawks.



Joyce Eisenberg is author of The Dictionary of Jewish Words with Ellen Scolnic; with Doc Ted, she co-authored The Scoop on Breasts: A Plastic Surgeon Busts the Myths. This article originally appeared in The Good Life, a supplement to the Jewish Exponent.