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# JEWISH EXPONENT

— WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH IN PHILADELPHIA —

Local

## Jan Dickler and Susan Cohen-Dickler Want to Tell Your Story Via Video



**MAY 25, 2016**By:

*Jon Marks | JE Staff*

The nice Jewish couple from Gladwyne, who live just down the block from Allen Iverson's old crib and where Chase Utley used to call home, clearly don't need to do this for the money.

They've made plenty of it from Banyan Productions, which has brought you such syndicated reality series as *Trading Spaces*, *Ambush Wedding*, *A Makeover Story* and 28 others encompassing more than 6,000 episodes over literally dozens of cable networks in the past 23 years.

No, the thinking behind PersonalCast Studios, which Jan Dickler and Susan Cohen-Dickler run out of their basement, is more basic, more straight-to-the-heart and more Jewish.

“It’s *l’dor v’dor*,” said Cohen-Dickler, Jan Dickler’s wife for 34 years and business partner for 25 of them. “Jews are always passing down traditions from generation to generation. Holiday traditions, family recipes. But everybody should tell their story. If we do it for them, great. If not, we hope someone else will.”

They believe the most important thing is that these stories are told — before it’s too late.

“It’s a frustration I hear all the time,” said Cohen-Dickler, a Temple University graduate from Northeast Philadelphia who worked in the business end for Westinghouse Broadcasting, which used to own both KYW-1060 and KYW-TV. “I have to do that with my parent.’ But how few do it.

“Our story is, ‘Capture your parents now. Don’t wait. No excuses.’ ”

It’s even easier than you think thanks to technological advancements that can make virtually anyone a videographer.

“Almost every person in America has these little mini studios in their pocket,” he said, spotting three iPhones and an iPad on the table. “As professional interviewers, we can be anywhere, because it’s not the equipment.

“So you can go out into the world and focus on everyday people in the transition of their lives, which is what we would do.”

They do it for weddings, births, anniversaries, tributes to moms and dads or any other life event. They also handle coming out videos — a sensitive subject done discreetly, along with gifts of acceptance where a parent might express their love to their gay or lesbian child and give their blessing. Or it might even be a video about your dog.

The main thing is you just tell how you feel about the subject. They’ll do the rest, adding music, photos or whatever it takes to give you something memorable.

“If it’s for a wedding, we get them to talk specifically about how they met,” Cohen-Dickler said.

“For a couple getting married, we interview them separately, so that when they see it for the first time they hear what each other had to say. They get a unique perspective on their partner. Once we start talking, they get more comfortable with the conversation.”

The interviews usually last between 45 minutes and an hour and often result in previously unexpressed revelations.

“The feedback we get from children and grandchildren is always interesting,” said Cohen-Dickler, who produced *Evening Magazine* before she and her husband, in partnership with former program

co-host Ray Murray, started Banyan. “We’ll hear, ‘I always just thought of her as bubbie. I never knew she had a life.’

“It’s a great perspective for younger people. And for the people we interview they feel good about it, like ‘Hey, I did do something good in my life.’ They’re talking to somebody not related to them so they may be more honest.”

As for technique that’s pretty simple, too.

“Whenever I start interviewing, I say ‘I don’t know a thing about you, so let’s start off with a blank page,’” Dickler said.

“Legacy is important. But what we’ve done is taken a lot of the cost out. The national average for a wedding video is around \$1,600. That’s capturing an act. It doesn’t answer the how and why. That’s what we’re focused on. How you met? How did you fall in love?

“People are naturally reticent about telling their stories. They’re not used to talking to a professional interviewer. But most of these are done out of the area. You can be sitting on top of Mount Everest and do it.

“We’ve been pioneers before and we think we’re gonna leave something that will resonate and be important .”

As for their own story, both said they’ve learned to separate their work lives from their private lives.

“It’s the number one question people ask, but we do different things,” he laughed.

“I say it’s because nobody else would work with him, but it can become challenging at times,” she teased.

Besides, there’s something bigger than the both of them.

“We don’t fight about business,” Dickler said. “We fight about sports.”

In fact, their mutual love of sports led to them getting engaged at Veterans Stadium during the 1981 divisional playoffs, where Montreal Expos catcher Gary Carter nearly ruined everything.

“I was going down on my knee to ask her to marry me,” Dickler said, pointing to a glass enclosure where those tickets are preserved. “She said ‘Yes.’ A moment later Gary Carter hits a three-run homer.”

Cohen-Dickler’s become such a passionate Phillies fan that she even started writing her own blog called “Girls Best Phriend.”

Just as passionate is her commitment to Judaism — she’s co-chair of the social committee at Beth David Reform Congregation and co-chaired the committee that selected the rabbi, Beth Kalisch.

In that regard, she’s worried about the future.

“It’s hard to get people to join,” she said. “Families are all over the place.

“So I just feel a lot of those stories — with intermarriage — will be lost if you don’t pass them on. Holiday celebrations, traditions and recipes. They’re becoming more endangered than they’ve been in a long time, because of the world we live in.”

A world made much smaller thanks to those “TV studios” you can now hold in your hand. Yes, Jan Dickler and Susan Cohen-Dickler would like to be the ones to bring that world , your world to those who matter most. But whether they do it or not they say the most important thing is that someone does it.

In fact, nothing would please this nice Jewish couple from Gladwynne more.

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