



Field of Dreams

By Jean Home, FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW
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This one's not about the social scene, even though it includes an amazing celebration. You will meet the Pollons, a family in whose faith and life purpose are incredible lessons of love, commitment and service. It's really Benjamin's story, because it seems his whole life was a journey to this rite of passage. At age 13, a child becomes responsible for himself under Jewish law. After years of study, he is permitted to read from the Torah (the Hebrew version of the Old Testament) as a "son of the commandment," which is the meaning of Bar Mitzvah. In the case of **Dorothy** and **Neal Pollon's** three red-headed sons, **Aaron**, **Joshua** and **Benjamin**, it became a triple ceremony, or **B'nai Mitzvah**, that was led by **Rabbi Mark Mahler** on March 25 (Benjamin's 13th birthday!) at Temple Emanuel in the South Hills.

You should know that Dorothy, an attorney, works as a pro bono advocate for special-needs kids, specifically those with autism; and Neal, now a consultant, co-founded the systems software giant, Legent, that went public under his watch. The family lives in Sewickley and the boys attend Quaker Valley Middle School.

Although twins Aaron and Joshua were born 11 months before Benjamin, they gave up their own B'nai Mitzvah to wait for Benjamin and help him reach a milestone no one believed possible. It also was their idea to turn over all monetary gifts (which the parents matched) to causes that help kids like Benjamin. The twins, of course, are mensches (Yiddish for "really good guys"), something they learned at their mother's knee, along with Jill, their adorable four-year-old sister.

Benjamin came into the world with a disfiguring skin disease and with melanoma cancer ... disorders that set him apart at birth as not one child in a million, but just one. Then he was diagnosed with mental retardation and autism. Yet, despite 13 years of surgery and 10 more of intensive therapy to gain the life skills we all take for granted, this kind, loving lad continues to thrive. Because his great joys are music and baseball, the Pollons plan their entire summer around Pirates' games with fireworks. So it came to pass, as in the film "Field of Dreams," Benjamin's field of dreams came looking for him at a party that had grand slam written all over it.

When it came time to plan the festivities, the family turned to **Bonnie Walker Chirigos** and **Linda Miller**, of Creative Affairs, who, right, built it and they came. Some 110 of the boys' pals and Benjamin's angels in the outfield, his doctors, teachers and therapists who accounted for nearly half the 220 adults on the guest list, streamed past corn stalks, white fencing and bales of hay at the entrance to the Home Plate Club in PNC Park.

Between the bleachers and backstop at cocktails, tall burlap-covered tables sported wheat-grass squares centered with baseballs in mitts and, buy me some peanuts and crackerjacks, stadium-style vendors carried trays of hors d'oeuvres. Why, if fans weren't mingling with living statues of Babe Ruth and Roberto Clemente or Pirates' great Manny Sanguillen, they were having their faces painted by renowned air-brush artist Peanut Butter.



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Cooperstown, here we come. Out stepped **Missy Elliott** in a smashing surprise concert that lit up the scoreboard. You heard me ... she's the six-time, Grammy-winning hip-hop artist with a huge heart who also stayed on to dance and hang with the kids.

On another note, the Pirates' Ann Elder paved the way to PNC Park for the Pollons, as did music talent agent Brian Chirigos (Bonnie's son) with Missy's concert.

Guests donned personalized baseball jerseys and caps for the third inning that brought everyone (including Missy) outdoors to the stadium. Thoughtfully provided monogrammed blankets, hand warmers and heaters warded off the brisk weather as the Pollon All-Star Team was called to the field from the dugout by Pirates' announcer **Joe Klimchak**. After singing the "Star Spangled Banner," the team presented two checks for \$15,000 each to MVPs from the Pirates Charities for Children and the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. Fireworks? Zambelli sent up an awesome volley of thunder.

The younger set headed to their own chaperoned area to dine on ballpark fare, compete in amusement park games and rock to **Naz**, the deejay entertainment group from New York. Nearby, in a stunning black-and-gold setting where Benjamin's village of caregivers were honored in a ceremony that turned up the goosebumps, the crowd tucked into a classy dine and then twirled on the dance floor to a swing band.

These are the kind of stats, gentle reader, that you won't find on baseball cards. Because this night was in a league of its own.


Command Performance

Onstage and off, they've made beautiful music together for more than 40 years. And on Wednesday, conductor **Sidney Harth** and his violin virtuoso wife, **Teresa**, struck a perfect chord with their friend and internationally renowned pianist **Yefim Bronfman** during a one-night concert at Oakland's Carnegie Music Hall to benefit Duquesne University's **Mary Pappert School of Music**.

Under the maestro's baton, Bronfman plunged into the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto and was accompanied by the young musicians of the DU Symphony for the Pittsburgh premiere of David Stock's "A Little Miracle."

At the dessert reception afterwards were many friends such as **Janet and Dave Pappert**; **Francisco and Laura Harth Rodriguez**; PSO's **Andres Cardenes**; **Perry Morrison**; **Sydelle Kessler**; **Joan and Jerry Apt**; **Connie Bernit**; **Mildred Posvar and William Martin**; DU music dean **Dr. Ed Kocher** with **Kamie Schoonhoven**; and **Lilli and Dr. Michael Nieland**.

— John Altdorfer



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