

BIZBASH

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The Bunny Hop Keeps Going and Going

The Society for Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer's annual family benefit posted its 18th year on Tuesday, and shows no signs of stopping.

The Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Society's Bunny Hop, held at F.A.O. Schwarz on Tuesday night, had a slightly decreased turnout of just under 1,000 guests due to the March Madness snowstorm. (It's not the first time I've braved the big snow for this lollapalooza).

The event had a simple formula that pleased its most important constituency: Young, small people just love it. To garner expert opinions, I enlisted my nieces Kendra and Rory to sample the scene and provide comment and criticism. What they loved the most? "Getting to run around in the store, the snakes, the giant rabbit."

So I'll start there.

F.A.O. donates its store and 15 percent of the evening's toy sales, which this year helped the event raise more than \$300,000. Clearly, it's a smart deal all around. Have you ever left F.A.O Schwarz without buying something for the child?

The Bunny Hop was confined mainly to the ground and second floors. In addition to F.A.O.'s toy guards and generally festive atmosphere, the main level featured a giant inflatable pink fabric bunny and his purple and yellow (natch) egg companion. New to me but in their second tour of duty, the bunny and egg were not just décor items provided by David Beahm—they were also interactive punchbags for understandably overexcited young'uns. Kids could kick, run into, onto, over, and literally hurl themselves against these glorified party balloons, which as a result needed to be frequently refilled. As an adult commented to me, "We didn't have things like that when we were kids," and I shared his jealousy.

Upstairs, in addition to toy shopping, there was a variety of stations with different activities and age targets. At the Mother Garden station, a nurse, a clown, a rocking chair, and a few well-handled dolls were enough to freeze young girls in their tracks. Older kids could pet an albino black snake (whose mouth was not reassuringly banded shut) or a 40-pound boa constrictor. There was also some kind of toad that puffed up.

At the top of the escalator was a dance floor, where the catchy Madagascar anthem, "You Got to Move It, Move It," was apparently on a recording loop to the delight of dancing queens (and kings) in training. I loved it, loved it, too, for awhile.

Food was served in two styles: passed on trays for adults and at chafing dish stations for the children. My nieces were completely uninterested in food for over an hour, except for the tiny ice cream sprinkles. They looked like cupcake decorations in a dry ice bowl, so of course I understood the visual appeal. My sister Kerry, the educated adult, told me, "It's tiny frozen ice cream, it tastes just like regular ice cream," which it did not. The sweet, cold, pastel, little pebbles did eventually melt in my mouth—that's the good news—and the chemical aftertaste hardly lingered—that's the less than good news.

Later I got the girls to choke down some hot food, tasteless to me, but nifty to the kids. For pasta there were pinwheels and organic meatballs, as well as Annie's Homegrown Mac n' Cheese, the texture of which was new to me. Think of cheesy chads from voting ballots, but apparently it's like foie gras to kids. There was grated cheese on the side if you wanted to wild it up, but no salt and pepper if you were an adult. I thought it was an easily fixable oversight.

Oh dear, the grilled cheese was cut in the shapes of bunnies and birds and kids loved that.

For adults, Olivier Cheng passed what appeared to be the exact same menu he plated up last week at the Frick, which I liked very much the first time. And I wasn't the only one who noticed that we were being re-served the same appetizers, which weren't quite as hot and pristine as before.

Most parents could not have cared less, but you really couldn't hold a glass of wine, the just-made candy necklaces, and the hard-to-understand-the appeal-of pouch of rocks all at the same time. I must have left five glasses laying around that store.

Many of the people who make a living by entertaining children are terrific. For example, Animal (his stage name), who demoed the mini hand sacks called Myachi (to learn more about a wholesome, simple, inexpensive toy, visit www.myachi.com), was entertaining and educated. Still, so many of them give me the willies. Forget the clowns—everyone knows that creeps-only need apply. How about a tissue paper flower lady who regularly shoots her pupils and parents the evil eye? Or a snake charmer who keeps a live rabbit too close for comfort to the boa (now that would have been a show)?