NIW NIEUW ISRAELIETISCH WEEKBLAD

From 2000-2004, Lisa Lipkin, was a weekly columnist with the Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad (New Israelite Weekly)(http://niw.nl/) is the oldest Jewish weekly and also the oldest still-functioning news magazine in the Netherlands. Founded on August 4th 1865, it tries to inform the Jewish community on issues concerning Jews and Judaism in the Netherlands and in the world.

Park Avenue Purim

Just before Purim, I got a call from Salvig, the Swedish director of public programs at Scandinavia House, a Cultural Center on Park Avenue. She wanted me to give a Jewish storytelling performance for kids as a compliment to their new temporary exhibit on Norwegian Jewry. "When I suggested a Purim performance, Salvig seemed elated. She just had one question: "What's Purim?"

I explained the story of Purim to her, but emphasized the fact that the real fun happens after the show, when everyone gets to eat hamantashin. Salvig loved the idea, but just had one question. "What's hamantashin?"

I told her that it was a three cornered pastry, modeled after the hat of the evil minister, Haman, and that the best ones are filled with poppy seeds and are sold at the Second Avenue Deli. "They sound delicious," she said, before adding, "But where's the Second Avenue Deli?"

This was taking Swedish provincialism too far! I contained my frustration, however, grateful that Yiddishkeit had infiltrated the most gentile place around. I calmly told her where the deli was (Second Avenue and Twelfth Street) and how many hamantashin she should buy. ("Get double the amount you were planning on… Jews love to eat.") I told her that she couldn't consider starting on time, because Jews come late, and that she couldn't end on time either, because Jews love to schmooze afterward. I told her to count on an extra fifteen minutes before the show for schleppers, an extra thirty minutes afterward for eating and talking, and an extra ten for pulling the out-of-control kids off the curtains during the performance.

Poor Salvig was starting to get nervous. She'd never gone Jewish before. Even at last year's holiday party, her only deference to Jewishness was a small electric menorah, which she placed atop the radiator behind the herring platter. Don't worry!" I reassured her. "This event will be great. Scandinavia House is doing a real mitzvah." She seemed relieved. She just had one question: "What's a mitzvah?"

On the day of the performance, I arrived at Scandinavia House at exactly the same time as the hamantashin. The aroma of poppy seeds, oozing from the delivery guy’s pastry box, blended with the smell of Swedish meatballs in the cafeteria. We rode the elevator together to the third floor, where the audience had already begun to gather.

Life in New York is like an unpredictable roller coaster. Even seasoned cynics like me get surprised by its oddities and its unexpected lessons on tolerance and acceptance. No one in the audience, not a soul, was Jewish. Dominican nannies, with nowhere else to go in the

neighborhood, filled the room with the Asian, Black, and Hispanic kids they were watching.

None of the children minded hearing a Jewish story at all. They liked its evil minister and its beautiful princess and its good-over-evil plot. They liked the hamantashin even more. "Oh, this is so good!" one nanny told me. "They taste just like the cakes we would eat in Santo Domingo every January on Dia de Duarte."That sounds so nice," I told her. "I just have one question. What's Dia de Duarte?"

Sometimes Skin Deep is Deep Enough

When the New York Yankees won the World Series several years ago and the entire city was in a euphoric state, I heard a Christian minister say, "Better to take away a city's churches than their ball fields." A wise man, that minister. He understood the power of baseball to elevate the spirit and transform even the most sober adults into carefree children.

This week I witnessed such a metamorphosis when my father, a dermatologist, asked me to accompany him to Shea Stadium, the home of the New York Mets. I hadn't been to a baseball game in years, but when I asked him whether it would be cold in the stands, he said "We won't be watching the game. We'll be looking for malignancies."

Before I had a chance to analyze his bizarre answer, he explained. He and several of his colleagues had been asked to screen the entire team for skin cancer. And I was invited to tag along. I almost passed out. "You mean we're checking Mike Piazza's tushy for moles?!" I asked, elated at the thought of meeting their star catcher and examining his firm asset.

"Please Lisa. This is a serious medical visit!" my father replied, annoyed by my lack of professionalism. "You can come with me, but you'll have to wait outside the examining area."

"But dad," I whined. "Can't you sneak me out a white lab coat from you office? We'll pretend I'm Nurse Betty and I can assist!" By now, the risqué possibilities in my imagination were running amok. I would help right fielder, Cliff Floyd, smear cancer-preventing sunscreen all over his batting arm. I would sidle up to hunky manager, Art Howe, and recommend a nightly soak of bath oil for his rugged, but dry, skin. I would nurse the blisters on Steve Trachsel's adorable toes so that he could pitch a winning game. "You better behave yourself or I won't bring you!" my father cautioned. "You are officially un-fun," I said, but agreed to go along anyway.

Two days later, I found myself in a room with fifteen Jewish dermatologists wearing name tags which boasted their specialties (Melvin Schwartz, plastic surgery; Jacob Gruenman, liposuction; Nancy Meade, acne) and a plate of spicy salami and Italian bread, compliments of the Mets management. While the rest of the doctors ate and schmoozed, dad sat like a bookworm in the corner of the room, reviewing his medical journals.

Suddenly, a player walked in. Muscled and firm, dressed in his tight pitcher's uniform, Tom Glavine sat down and waited his turn. But rather than leer at him as I had intended, my eyes were redirected to another man in the room: my father. His journal suddenly dropped to the floor and his eyes, normally weary with age and stress, popped open. "It's their star pitcher!" he whispered to me, like an eight year old who's just been handed a birthday gift. "He's pitched two near-perfect games this month!" he said, before jumping up and greeting the player.

It's not often kids get to see their parents shed their workaday masks and become young again. I watched dad trying to keep his professional composure while he took a medical history, but I knew better. It was the face of a kid from Brooklyn, when Brooklyn was the world and baseball was at its center.

American Gigolo

I saw my gigolo this morning and I feel great. My cheeks are aglow, my energy is up, and my mood is high. I pay him twice a week to service me and he never lets me down.

"How do you want it today, Lisa?" he asks with a naughty smile. "Do you want me to do some hitting? Some slamming? Do you want me to get your heart rate going?"

"No," I say seductively. "I just want to play a game today."

"Whatever you want" he says, always ready to please me. He pops open a fresh can of tennis balls and we take our places on either side of the net. He gives me whatever I ask for-lobs, serves, net play, and even witty repartee between points. By the end of the match, not only has my tennis game improved, but my sexual desires have abated.

Call me crazy, but in a city like New York, where the ratio of men to women is two to one, and where the majority of unmarried guys are gay, we single gals have to be inventive. Last Shabbat, after saying kiddush, my girlfriends and I began comparing notes. Turns out, I'm not the only one with a creative substitute for sex. Tennis is mine, but my Jewish friends have discovered their own modern metaphors.

Leslie goes to the Cuban car wash in New Jersey. For thirty minutes, five handsome Cubans hand wash her Ford Explorer while she sits inside. The car bumps and grinds as it travels through the automated scrubbing machine. Then, the muscled boys emerge, armed with an array of exciting equipment. From the front seat she watches them scour her bumpers, polish her mirrors, rub her chassis, lather her windows in foaming, bubbling soap, and then rinse her--I mean, her car, down.

Sharon swears by her Long Island hairdresser, Pierre, who "blows her out" with a hand dryer after a satisfying wash. Then he runs his fingers through her frizzy locks, messages her oily scalp, and tells her how gorgeous she looks, even if she has just rolled out of bed and her clothes are crumpled and smelly. If she's lucky, while her hair is wrapped in aluminum, and she's waiting for the blond dye to take hold, Pierre will rub her shoulders and whisper compliments in her left ear. She knows he just wants a good tip, but for the moment, she suspends all cynicism and becomes Long Island's most enchanting seductress.

Lois hires Tyrone, a black man from the Bronx, to wash all the windows in her Tenth Avenue apartment. She likes him because when he rolls back his sleeves in order to remove the air conditioner from her window, he reveals these enormous, sculpted, biceps, and when he bends over to squeeze out his rag, well, the joy is
immeasurable. The whole process takes about an hour, which she watches from her bed.

By the time we finished exchanging notes, the Shabbat meal was being served. It was a lush,

moist, brisket, drenched in rosemary-encrusted mushrooms, accompanied by plump tomatoes. All of us felt another metaphor coming on.