

## Retirement is My Icing on the Cake

After going to school and growing up, I went to work, and more work, and more work. It was called a "job" or a "business".

When I retired it was time to stop the daily selling, building, or servicing. It was time for the "Icing on the Cake." It was time to really do only the things that brought me pleasure and fun.

Since 1984, my icing keeps piling up and up. Each "hobby" lasted only as long as it was inspiring, full of enjoyment, and bringing wonderful new friends to add to the old ones.

My return to Yiddish was back in 1989 and then other hobbies came and went, but Yiddish keeps going on and on. New challenges crop up and some are only dead-end streets like trying to form the International Association of Yiddish Teachers. It was an idea to have a website with the letters IAYT, but it seems that was taken by the International Association of Yoga Trainers. So the next best thing was to get IAoYT, with the "o" standing for "of".

Not wanting to be wasteful and to make good use of my new venture of having a Yiddish translator's association and clearinghouse, IAoYT.org will be the future link.

The Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, MA recently had a very successful meeting for translators on translation and now has an online list of translators even longer than the one on *Der Bay's* website which can be found at:  
<http://www.derbay.org/translation.html>.

### The Rationale of the Proposed IAoYT Website

As companies, organizations, institutions, and governments become larger, they tend to become moribund. It takes longer for creative ideas to be tried and innovations implemented.

This is intended to be a challenge for the major Yiddish groups to get behind the idea of the IAoYT. Since Fishl is already an aged and still aging old

man, the actual site should be taken over by one of the major Yiddish organizations.

### The Contents of the Proposed IAoYT Website

There is no universally accepted accrediting body for Yiddish teachers or translators. Therefore, anyone can consider him/herself a translator. At first the IAoYT list should consist of a combination of the existing lists. Later criteria then may be established for future listings.

Second, the site can be utilized for posting translation jobs by including the contact information and the nature of the material to be translated.

Third, *Der Bay's* website has a listing and a discussion on the caveats for both the translator to consider before undertaking the assignment and the pitfalls the "translatee" should avoid in choosing the best possible match. For example, what is the criterion upon which the translator will be paid? It can be by the entire job, by the hour, by the page, or by the word. Five other caveats are discussed at *Der Bay's* website.

# Yiddish-style “kuwabara kuwabara!”

By Yoshiji Hirose, PhD.

Among the unique expressions of the Yiddish language is the expression *keyn eynhore*. *Keyn* is of German origin and means “no.” *Eynhore* comes from Hebrew and means “the evil eye.” For example, if someone were to ask, “How’s your son?” instead of responding, “He’s fine, thank you for asking,” one would respond, “He’s fine, *keyn eynhore*” (or, “*akuma no me ga sosogaremasenyōni, kuwabara kuwabara*” if you happen to be speaking in Japanese).

As Leo Rosten explains in his book *The New Joys of Yiddish*, the expression *keyn eynhore* contains a magical essence meant to ward off the curses of various gods or demons envious of the speaker’s good fortune. Although Judaism is a monotheistic religion, the use of such an expression suggests a history of interaction with polytheistic religions. In Christianity, the English expression “Thank God” is often used when conveying one’s gratitude or relief. These two phrases are analogous, but the nuance is a little different. *Keyn eynhore* is more similar in meaning to English-speaking people going through the act of saying “Knock on wood” and touching something wooden when making a favorable observation or boasting of oneself.

In Japanese there is the expression *o-kagesamade*, which probably has no English equivalent. This expression includes both thankfulness to the gods and a sense of gratitude towards the people around you. Like above, if someone were to ask, “How’s your son?” the response would be, “He’s fine, *o-kagesamade*” (thanks to the gods and I appreciate your kindness in asking). Each culture has its own subtleties of language.

Well, back to Yiddish expressions. When asked, “Vos makhstu? (How are you?), a Yiddish-speaker would respond in much the same way an English speaker would, with “*gut*” (good) or “*gantz gut*” (very good). In textbooks by such world-renowned Yiddish linguists as Uriel Weinreich this is regarded as being correct. However, for a Yiddish-speaking Jew or one who is conscious of old culture the usual response would not be “*gut*,” but “*nishkoshe!*” (It’s bearable. / So-so.) This bears a close resemblance to Japan’s Osaka dialect, which is heavily influenced by the city’s mercantile history. In Osaka, the exchange would go something like this:  
“*Mōkarimakka?*”

(Making any money? / How’s business?), “*Bochi bochi denna*” (I’m getting by. / Not that bad.). This too is an expression for eluding the wrath of a devil’s jealousy, in this case that of a fellow bargain hunter.

In the same spirit, it was not rare for a child to be named “Alter,” meaning “aged” or “old,” in Jewish society in pre-World War II Eastern Europe. In days past, when safely, giving birth to and raising children, was both blessed and difficult, children were purposely given names such as “Aged One” so as to avoid attracting the jealous attention of devils or demons.

Michael Wex (1954 ~), author of the widely talked about book *Born to Kvetch*, during a humor-filed special lecture at the International Association of Yiddish Clubs 14th Conference (held in September 2011 in Detroit) noted that when one is asked “*vos makhstu?*,” the Jew who answers “*gantz nishkoshe!*” (not bad at all!)” is roughly equivalent to saying, “I feel about the same as I did when I won the Nobel Prize and my son graduated from medical school on the same day.” This is Jewish humor, of course; but one can feel the Jewish pessimism coming within a whisker of optimism. This may be sapience born from a history of 2000 years of persecution. They fear not only the envy of devils and demons, but that of people as well.

**Editor’s note:** “Yoshi” has been a regular presenter at our IAYC conferences.

Present-1998 Professor of English Department,  
Notre Dame Seishin University (Japan)  
2000 Ph. D. from Kansai University (Osaka, Japan)  
1998-1987 Associate Professor of English  
Department, Notre Dame Seishin Univ. (Japan)  
1995 Diploma in Jewish Studies (Oxford Centre for  
Hebrew and Jewish Studies)  
1980 MA from Kansai University (Osaka, Japan)  
1978 MA from University of Washington  
1977-1973 BA Kansai University (Osaka, Japan)

## Works (in English)

Shadows of Yiddish on Modern American Jewish Writers. Osaka: Osaka Kyoiku Tosho, 2005.  
The Symbolic Meaning of Yiddish. Osaka: Osaka Kyoiku Tosho, 2002.

# The Ger Mandolin Orchestra: A Living Memorial to Poland's Jews

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By Eric Stein

Over the last year I have had the great privilege of participating in a unique new musical project. The Ger Mandolin Orchestra is an 11-piece ensemble comprised of some of the world's leading mandolin players. The project is the brainchild of a San Francisco-based Israeli named Avner Yonai.

While searching for his family's roots in Poland, Yonai discovered a 1930s-era photograph of his grandfather and two other relatives playing in a Jewish mandolin orchestra in the Polish town of Góra Kalwaria, known in Yiddish as Ger. Intrigued and inspired by the photo, Yonai set out on a quest to revive a modern version of the Ger mandolin group, to serve as a living memorial to his Polish-Jewish forebears, and more broadly, to the rich cultural life of Jews in pre-World War II Poland.

In partnership with the Jewish Music Festival in Berkeley, California, Yonai began his quest by enlisting as musical director Mike Marshall, a Bay Area resident and one of the world's greatest mandolinists. Imagine my excitement to have received a phone call from Marshall last January inviting me to participate in the group.

After hearing the list of other participants my excitement only grew. Each of the players in the group is a virtuoso in his own right, and the stylistic expertise amongst the members ranges widely from Jewish and East European folk music to bluegrass, jazz, Irish, Brazilian, classical, and much more.

One of our great challenges was determining what repertoire the original Ger orchestra had played. Despite prodigious efforts, little information specific to the original group's work was discovered. So, like many great archaeological tasks, much was left to inference and historically-educated guesses. There was little doubt that such a group would have played its fair share of Jewish music, and on that count I was thrilled to be able to contribute five of my own original arrangements for mandolin orchestra of Klezmer and Yiddish music.

Ongoing research and general theorizing about the historical and sociocultural context of the original Ger ensemble led to the completion of our repertoire with the addition of Polish, Slavic and Italian music.

The group came together for the first time in March in Berkeley. Over two intensive days of rehearsal, eleven musicians who had never before worked together were transformed into a finely-oiled mando machine. Our debut performance at the venerable Freight and Salvage Coffeehouse was a smash success, and we all knew instantly that we were part of something very special. Within two weeks of the Berkeley performance, Yonai received a letter of congratulations from the current mayor of Góra Kalwaria, which included an invitation for the new Ger Mandolin Orchestra to return to Poland and perform in the town of its origination.

Plans had coalesced for the group to make good on the Mayor's invitation and travel to Poland the first week of September. My excitement was tempered by a degree of anxiety about what instrument I would play. All the members of the ensemble trade off on different instruments of the mandolin family, but I volunteered to play bass if no one else was willing.

In California I had played a beautiful customized, fretless 1920s Gibson mandobass. But being an American instrument, mandobasses are hard to come by in Europe. I suggested that a bass balalaika or bass domra would be the next best thing (despite never having played it). After many emails and tireless work by Yonai's team of tour organizers in Poland, the rental of a contrabass balalaika from a musical ensemble in Lodz was arranged, for 150 zlotys (\$50)!

Notwithstanding my initial musical challenge of conquering this imposing, three-stringed beast, reuniting with the group in Poland was a joyful and moving experience. We were greeted in Góra Kalwaria as guests of honour at a variety of civic festivities. Though once home to over 3,000 Jews (approximately half of the town's population at the outbreak of WWII), only two Jews remain today as residents in Gora-Kalwaria.

Now in their 90s, Henryk Prajs and Felix Karpman provided crucial information in efforts to research the original Ger mandolin group. Having them in attendance at our concert, along with an over-capacity audience of mostly non-Jewish residents of Gora-Kalwaria, was extraordinarily meaningful.

Our concert took place in the Tzadik Synagogue, an elegant but neglected old building that had not had this many people in it for 70 years. The atmosphere at the concert was electric, and the Orchestra rose to the occasion with a terrific performance. I was thrilled to have a chance in the second half of the show to escape the grasp of "Big Ethel" (our loving sobriquet for the bass balalaika) and perform a Jacob do Bandolim tune on mandolin in a trio with Mike Marshall and Portland's Tim Connell.

Our concert concluded with a rousing version of the famous Polish folk song Szla Dziweczka. The image of 400+ Poles swaying back and forth, arms linked, while singing with us in the old Ger Synagogue will remain etched in my memory.

The following day was jam-packed, beginning with a morning workshop in Warsaw attended by 150 young Polish children who are part of mandolin orchestras in and around the area. Later that afternoon we performed a full concert in Warsaw's ornate Nozyk Synagogue, one of the only original Jewish buildings in Warsaw to escape the near-complete destruction of the city during WWII.

Our concert took on a momentous gravity, re-animating a Jewish building with music and heartfelt emotion. Later that same evening the group performed a song as part of the Singera Festival Finale, before an audience of many thousands at an outdoor stage constructed in the shadow of some of the few remaining original buildings from the WWII-era Warsaw Ghetto. This performance was broadcast live on Polish Television to an audience of millions, serving as a fitting climax to our whirlwind week of cultural and musical reclamation.

It has been a month now since my return from Poland, and like many of the other members of the ensemble, I am suffering Ger withdrawal. All of us are eagerly anticipating our next opportunity to come together. There are plans afoot for a CD recording this winter, a return to Poland next July, and participation next September in the 2012 Ashkenaz Festival here in Toronto. We are all incredibly grateful for, and awed by, the supreme efforts of Avner Yonai in spearheading this extraordinary project.

To learn more and hear clips of the group, search "Ger Mandolin Orchestra" on YouTube or Google, or contact Eric Stein at: [estein@sympatico.ca](mailto:estein@sympatico.ca)

## Fishl's Friend Cookie

My name is Rukhl Privin Blattman. Mama never gave me an English name and Rukheleh was too hard for my 18 month old brother to pronounce, so he said Kuckeleh and Bubbie started calling me Kookeh, Papa called me Kucki, an American woman came to my crib and said why don't you call her Cookie, then she'll have an American name—so I have been called Cookie all my life.

I was born in Boro Park, Brooklyn, New York to a cantor, marriage performer and shoykhet named Alter and my Mama, Deena, but Papa always called her Dinsha. My parents were Orthodox Jews and I was one of ten children. My job was working in the Garment District as a bookkeeper. Then I married Lenny Blattman and had two children, Lori and David.

Life went by, my parents passed on, and upon retiring we moved to Florida. I was yearning and searching for Yiddish. I longed so to hear once again those beautiful sounds of my first language, which we had spoken in my childhood. I hadn't spoken it in 35 years when I found the Circle of Yiddish Clubs where all the heads of clubs met once a month. I joined, started singing Yiddish, and increased my repertoire of Yiddish songs, helped someone with his Yiddish club, and took over when he could no longer be its leader.

I volunteer two Fridays a month at a senior center now for almost 20 years. I turned myself into a Yiddish entertainer, with stories, jokes, and songs. I have organized and performed gratis in 11 shows for abused Jewish children here in South Florida in 11 years. I go to independent and assisted living facilities and monthly run their Cookie's Yiddish Hour. I also lead a Yiddish hour here where I live in Kings Point, Tamarac. My performing has expanded and I sing professionally for various organizations.

**Editor's note:** Cookie is an IAYC Board Member and recently attended the convention in Detroit, MI where she once again was a performer.

### Cookie's regular programs are at:

2nd Mon - The Preserve at Palm Aire, FL 11 - 12 AM  
3rd Tues. - Kings Pt. Yid. Club Tamarac, FL 1 - 2 PM  
2nd & 4th Fri. - Cantor Sr. Ctr. Sunrise, FL 12:45 P.M.  
4th Mon. - Forest Trace Sunrise, FL 11 - 12 AM  
4th Wed. - Garden Plaza Inverrary, FL 11-12AM

## DANNY BOY - Yiddish Version

Al Grand © 2006

Oy Dovidl, di fayfn rufn oys tsu dir  
fun tol tsu tol, un fun di berg mit shteyn.  
Zumer iz oys, un blumen iz nito far mir—  
du geyst avek, un ikh blayb do aleyen.

Kum gikh tsurik ven zumer kumt shoyn nokhamol,  
oder ven shney makht ales vays un reyn.

Ikh vel zayn do un un ikh vart far dir alemol—  
Oy Dovidl mayn Dovidl, bist azoy sheyn!

Oyb du kumst ts'rik ven ale blumen zaynen toyt  
un ikh bin oykhet toyt, vi toyt ken zayn,  
du vest gefinen vu ikh lig in toytnbet  
Un du vest faln koyrim glyaykh arayn.

Un ikh vel hern vi du veynst un benkst nokh mir,  
un af mayn keyver vestu kumen gikh.

Du vest onbeygn zikh zeyer noent tsu mir,  
un ikh vel fridlekh zayn ven du zogst "ikh lib dikh!"

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I acquired a proficiency in and love for Yiddish—as well as my earliest exposure to Gilbert and Sullivan—in the pre-television era of the 30s. In *A Walker in the City*, Alfred Kazin recalls his childhood in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn with such olfactory specificity that readers could smell "that good and deep odor of lox, of salami, of herrings and half-sour pickles" that emanated from the neighborhood pushcarts.

The East New York section of Brooklyn, which is coextensive with Brownsville, is where I grew up. Both sections were like transplanted shtetls heavily populated by first-generation Yiddish-speaking settlers from eastern European countries such as Russia and Poland. Thus as I grew up I learned Yiddish from my Yiddish-speaking parents as well as from the parents of my friends. Many of the storekeepers spoke Yiddish and the Yiddish radio station WEVD could be heard blaring from open windows in my neighborhood and was well-loved in my own home.

# Sarah Traister Moskovitz

Professor Emeritus, California State University at Northridge

Professor Emeritus of Human Development and Counseling, Dept. of Educational Psychology, CSU, Northridge. Taught at Northridge for 28 years and Attained full professor rank.

Ph. D. Educational Psychology and Human Development, Yeshiva University, NYC, 1970.

Instrumental in creating the first Child Survivor Groups in Boston, Chicago, Sydney, and Melbourne Australia, and in London, England that formed after I lectured in these places.

## Selected Presentations

Presenter at second Remembering for the Future Genocide Conference at Oxford, England, The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide.

Chair and Organizer of Second International Child Survivor Conference in Oxnard, CA 1994

Keynote speaker at first Australian Child Survivor Conference, Melbourne Australia, 1993.

Moderator of Panel "What Happened to Hidden Children During and After the War?" Hidden Child International Gathering, Jerusalem, July 13, 1993.

Chair of panel, "Psychological Effects of Being Hidden in WWII". First International Hidden Child Conference, NYC. May 25-29, 1991 Interviewed and quoted by Time Magazine

## Poetry

2010 Established website <http://poetryinhell.org> for 153 translations of the Yiddish poetry that was buried in the Warsaw ghetto in milk cans during the Holocaust by the Ringelblum Oyneg Shabbes people. You can access the original Yiddish and the translations of the poems.

2009 "Rich with this Tradition" Miriam Ulinover-Ghetto Poetry in BRIDGES, Journal Special issue on Translation, Indiana Univ. Press.

2007. Four Holocaust poems published in Blood to Remember: American poets on the Holocaust, Ed. Charles Fishman.

2006. Presented poetry at the opening of the Ringelblum Archive Exhibit at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

2005. Plenary Session presenter at "Art of Yiddish" Conference in Los Angeles. Skirball Museum.

2003. While a Scholar in Residence at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, I lectured on the Yiddish Poetry in the Ringelblum Archives.

## Books

2001. "Come to the Table, Kunt Tsum Tish", a bilingual book of original poetry with translations and transliterations of the Yiddish. Clara Press, Pacific Palisades, CA

2002. Presenter at the International Association of Yiddish Clubs Conference in Milwaukee, WI.

1995-2007. poems published in Pakn Treger, Pen, Bridges, Kheshbon, Jewish Women's Literary Annual, *Der Bay*, and on line at Mendele.org.

1999 Keynote speaker, Conference of Child Survivors, The Adaptation and Coping of Child Survivors, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, May 1989.

1985 Keynote Lecture and Workshop at Sydney, Australia Survivor Conference on Child Survivors, published in the Memorial Commemorative Book.

## Honors and Awards

2003 Scholar in Residence at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum finding Yiddish poetry in the Ringelblum Archives microfiches sent from Warsaw to the US Holocaust Museum.

1985 \*Invitational research conference "The Meaning of Survival" sponsored by the University of Texas Medical School at Austin, Institute of Medical Humanities.

2000 \*Invitational Scholars Conferences, "Remembering for the Future," at Oxford University, England, 1988, and Remembering for the Future II, published in the Conference Proceedings.

# Lyulke The Gravedigger© Part I

by Chaim Kamelmacher, aka Harry Kamel  
(Translated from Yiddish by Barnett Zumoff)

It was a small shtetl in the province of Volhynia (northwestern Ukraine, bordering on Poland). It had about 8,000 people, 90% Jews, 5% Poles, and 5% Ukrainians. The railroad tracks divided the shtetl in half: called "this side of the tracks" and "the other side". This side was more popular; it had a beautiful pine forest where sick people from all overcame to be healed by the pure air. It had the large retirement home, and Geller's villa, the theater, and many tradesmen. That shtetl was my Maniewiczze.

Every Jew ended his life in this world on "the other side of the tracks", and it was not voluntary. Why, you will ask—because that's where the cemetery was. They called it "the holy place," and the one who accompanied people to it was Lyulke (Yiddish for pipe), because he was the only gravedigger. I don't know if anyone chose him or how one qualifies to be a gravedigger.

Lyulke was past sixty. He had a small face and a pair of burning eyes that were piercing when he looked at you. His nose was large in comparison with the rest of his face. He had a salt-and-pepper beard and a long mustache; one end curled upward to his nose and the other curled downward to his neck, because he never trimmed it. His forehead was very wrinkled. He was of medium height and always wore his black silk coat and a black hat.

The brim of the hat was not lacquered and was made of the same material as the rest of the hat. One could see part of the dirty white collar of his shirt, which his coat-collar failed to conceal. His once black boots, with worn-down heels, now had a weird color. He had only a few upper and lower teeth. Lyulke didn't look so good, and many Jews didn't like the idea that he would be the one to accompany them to their eternal rest, even those who were sure that they were going to Paradise.

They called him Lyulke because he always kept his pipe in his mouth even when he wasn't smoking. He bit on the pipe with his few remaining teeth, which were almost concealed by his mustache. Lyulka lived on Vonska Street (narrow street, in Polish). He prayed on Sabbaths and holidays in the old shul. What the heretics did there didn't bother him. They took the towels down from nails on bare poles with which the Levites dried the hands of the

kohanim before they gave the priestly blessing, curled them up into tight balls, and threw them at the congregation when they stood up for *shmone esre*.

That morning Lyulke arose early. It was a very beautiful morning. He poured the *negl-vaser* (nail-water), recited his blessing, and dressed himself. He put on his talis and tfiln, and with intense fervor, rocking back and forth, said the morning prayers. When he finished *shmone esre*, taking three steps back and three steps forward, he quickly took off his tfiln and put them in the oily, brown, tattered tfiln-sack, on which one could barely make out the Star of David.

He prepared breakfast by grating a clove of garlic onto a crust of black bread and salted it. He said his blessing and bit into the bread with difficulty, for it was old and dried out. He took off the two bricks that covered the little pit in the clay floor and took out a herring, which was wrapped in a Polish newspaper, the *Gazeta Polska*. He unwrapped the newspaper and laid the herring on a tin plate, took his pocket knife out of his pants pocket, cut off the head and tail of the herring, and took out its *milts* (male gonads, which are internal in fishes). He used the same knife to spread the milts on his crust of bread and continued eating his breakfast.

That morning the herring tasted good and he ate another piece. Most of the time Lyulke ate a piece of potato with skin, but on this morning he didn't have time to boil the potato. He washed everything down with black chicory, washed his hands, put on his coat and hat, kissed the mezzuzah on the door-jamb, and went out into the street.

The sun, which was still very low in the sky, was casting long shadows of the pine trees onto the nearby cottages. The air smelled delicious after the previous night's rain, which helped melt the snow; it smelled like springtime. Lyulke was in a hurry, because he had to bury Yosl the short, a butcher from this side of the tracks,

Yosl had died the previous night. They said he had "a crayfish" (A play on words: the same Yiddish word means both crayfish and cancer Yosl had clearly died of cancer); nobody understood that a crayfish was a living creature that Christians ate.

Lyulke set out for the little house in the cemetery to pick up the *mita* (casket used to transport the body to the cemetery), to bring it to Yosl's house. It took twenty minutes to reach the cemetery. He knocked on the gate and repeated several times: "It's Lyulke—surely you know me." He waited a few minutes, very softly singing a melody. Then he took the key out of his coat pocket, put it into the old rusty lock, and opened the gate.

He walked through a large puddle from the rain to reach the house. Inside it was quite dark; only a few rays from the morning sun succeeded in breaking through the moldy glass of the little window. The rays illuminated only a small part of the *mita*, and it looked sad. Apparently the residents were still sleeping, because not a rustle was heard.

It wasn't long before he heard the whinnying of a horse and the scraping of the brake on the wooden wagon with iron wheels. It was Motl the wagon driver with his old mare. Motl had the privilege of bringing in the *mita*, "the bed" for the deceased. He always worked hard at consoling the family of the deceased, to get a few dollars.

The *mita* was about 6 1/2 feet long, 2 1/2 feet wide, and 1 1/2 feet deep. Two poles ending with knobs were attached to the *mita*, one on each side. Yankl the carpenter (may his memory be for a blessing) had made the *mita* from pine boards and had seen to it that there were no cracks. He'd say that he was sure that he would lie on the *mita* some day, and, to be sure, his prophecy came true two years after he finished it. The *mita* was painted black and had a black covering cloth that lay inside.

"Today you're not late," Lyulke said to Motl, "what happened?" (Motl was always late.)

Motl answered: "My old mare seems to feel better, and she has a better appetite. Today she ate all the hay I gave her and a bit of oats besides, and drank a whole bucket of water."

Lyulke grabbed the *mita* by the front handles and then Motl grabbed the rear handles. Lyulke was preparing to lock the door when he remembered that he had forgotten his tin pot with the tin ears, which collected a few dollars at every funeral. Motl closed the gate; it was easier for him for he was younger. They laid the *mita* on the wagon. Motl gave the reins a pull, yelled, "Ho, horsie", and lashed the mare. Lyulke looked back and said "I'm

going back to my neighbors," and the wagon with the *mita* left the cemetery.

Yosl had been a butcher on this side of the tracks. As fate would have it, there was another Yosl who bought a butcher shop not far from his. So how could one distinguish between the two Yosls? Leave it to the women—they had an answer: "We'll call one of them Yosl the short and the other one (who was a bit taller) Yosl the tall." The women said that Yosl the short was not stingy; he often threw in a few marrow bones for soup. Some of the women said that his meat was tastier, and he even koshered it, salted it, and saw to it that the blood ran out.

It appears that they needed a butcher in *gan eydn*, and Yosl the short was chosen out of all butchers. Even his wife, Tsivia, agreed. Why else would the merciful Almighty inscribe on the previous Rosh Hashone and seal on Yom Kiper that a man in his forties, and observant of all the mitsves in addition, should die, if they didn't need him in Paradise? After all, he didn't have the honor of leading his only daughter to the wedding canopy.

It seems that the Almighty had planned it well. He had provided Yosl with a *kadishl*. The women didn't know what to do without Yosl. Who would give them bones, a piece of kishke, the lungs and livers? They could go to Yosl the tall and tell him what the other Yosl did for them. Each butcher had his female fans. In those days it was harder to change butchers than for a *khosid* to change *rebbe*s.

Yosl lay almost naked on straw in the dining room. A candle in a large candlestick was burning at his head. There were pans of warm water and wet towels on the floor. The *khevre kadishe* had completed Yosl's purification, because the floor was very wet. Now they waited for the shroud. Yosl's eyes were not fully closed. People said it was a sign that he still wanted to live. Every decent Jew prepared a piece of white linen for his shroud; Yosl's was made from the finest Bulgarian linen.

Perhaps it was only an accident that the shroud and the *mita* arrived at the same time. Munye, Velvl's apprentice, brought the shroud, which was as white as snow, and Tsivia gave him a dollar tip. Munye had just left the house when Lyulke and Motl arrived with the *mita*.

Lyulke cried out, "The *mita* is here, the *mita* is here—open the door!"

## Story No. 3 Old People Fade Away

Norman Simms – Hamilton, New Zealand - nsimms@waikato.ac.nz

So, nu, you remember I told you that old people are small. Very small in stature. They shrink with old age. They also start to stoop over and don't care about standing straight and tall. What for? If you are already nearly a million years old, what is there to be proud of or to want any more? That's what I thought they thought when I was too young to know how to think for myself in a proper way.

There was a little old Jew who lived somewhere on our street. Nobody knew exactly where, but the wee fellow would be there early in the morning, shuffling along, with little baby steps, slow, slow, slow so that if he were any slower he might as well be dead. On the way to school, we would pass him by, racing to get ahead, because if he caught you at the corner, reaching his tiny hand out of his too big sleeves, like a giant, he would never let go until you got across the street. Then you would be late, so watch out.

All the cars and trucks had to stop on busy 47th Street, the route to Israel Zion Hospital (now Maimonides) and everyone in their cars or on the sidewalk would stare, because it was a spectacle, an embarrassment, something more interesting than almost anything except maybe an accident. Though he seemed an eternal menace that we tried to avoid throughout our years of P.S. 164, one year he stopped being there. No one knew what had happened. No guesses, wild as they could be, seemed to have a shred of fact behind them. That was the way things were back then.

In high school, four and a half years later, my French teacher was also short, shrunken, and collapsed in on himself. The stories running around the school were plausible, I thought. A few years before he had been a tall, handsome, powerful man, a good teacher, a person you could respect. Then he became ill—a heart attack or a stroke, most people said, a broken heart, said others—and began to fade away, to lose his self-respect along with his inner vigor and muscle tone.

From being a middle-aged man and a mentsh, he quickly became a decrepit dwarf, a whining and nervous martinet. To learn the French language from him was to be asked everyday to stand up and recite—la récitation—verbs and nouns, adjectives and adverbs. Maybe sometimes it would be a whole sentence, but never a paragraph, let alone a narrative or a conversation.

Monsieur Halbwachs would wear a suit that was twice as big as he, with a crumpled shirt whose collar showed tufts of hair, even above the big red bowtie he wore everyday. His voice was low and intimidating.

His whole demeanor, therefore, was such as to make us fascinated, as though we were sure that he would either fall down, fade, and disappear any day now, or that, just as suddenly, he would fill up with his own airs and pretensions, like a thin rubber balloon, and float away, out the window, and sail beyond the clouds. *Il est disparu.*

Meanwhile, my own grandpa Dave, a man of more than six feet, robust and rough, who learned to fight for himself when he went into the Deep South to bargain with red-neck farmers and Georgia crackers for the fruit and vegetable markets of the City, also changed in this same disturbing way as he grew older and older before my very eyes.

One day, he was a hearty, red-faced workingman, a Yidl who could defend himself against any anti-Semites in the countryside or in the dank streets around Washington Street Market. The next day he was a half-blind, confused old man. All my life, he towered over his wife, his children, his grandson, me; he came early in the morning to deliver the freshest produce—lettuce, cauliflower, carrots, watermelon, whatever he deemed best—and to force me to eat it for breakfast.

He shlepped me to the ball games at Ebbet's Field or Yankee Stadium, and made me drink cardboard cups of beer with him, because I was too scared to walk by myself to buy a Pepsi or a cherry soda. Then I had to walk with him, holding his hand, down the street, across the avenue, to his appointment with the optometrist for his big, thick spectacles. He was the same height as I was, and that made me feel strange and ashamed. It wasn't natural. Or maybe it was. It is our common fate, *keyn eyn hore.*

**Editor's note:** The first two childhood stories by Norman Simms were published April and May 2009 in *Der Bay*.

He retired as a professor from Waikato University in Hamilton, New Zealand (on the north island). He is a longtime member of our Yiddish Network and can be reached at: [nsimms@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nsimms@waikato.ac.nz)

# An Anonymous Gift

by Philip Fishl Kutner

One day the following letter arrived from America.

To the Wise Men of Chelm

Many years ago my great grandfather was expelled from the Chelm Yeshiva because he was stupid. He was so embarrassed that he fled to America. After many years as a peddler in the Lower East Side of New York, he opened a store that grew into a small department store, and became wealthy. He recently left us. In his will there was a small gift to the Wise Men of Chelm to be spent for the benefit of Chelm.

Signed: An Anonymous Donor

When the letter arrived, the Wise Men of Chelm immediately called a meeting with the prime purpose of determining how to spend the money for the benefit of Chelm.

There was no agreement, and even though they met many times there was no solution. Everyone in Chelm began arguing for a different way to spend the huge gift. As the days passed and turned into weeks and even months, it became obvious that something had to be done and done soon. Children were not doing their lessons and women forgot to go to the *mikve*—that made the men very unhappy. Even the animals were agitated, for they were not fed on time—but what to do?

Malke, Mayer the Mayor's wife, said, "We must find out who was this anonymous donor?" The Wise Men of Chelm all agreed, but how were they to find out if the donor had been in New York and they were in Chelm. It was decided to send someone to New York to speak with the letter-writer and once and for all settle this dilemma.

The emissary to New York had to be bright to be able to deal with the clever Americans. He would also have to be young, to be able to withstand the dangerous and tiring trip across the Atlantic Ocean.

Pincus was the unanimous choice. After all, wasn't he the brightest *yeshive bokher!* His other attribute was that his father Petricov (a converted Jew) was a peddler and often visited other towns around Chelm. Besides Pincus was the tallest and strongest *yeshive bokher*—he was perfect for the task.

At first, his mother was hesitant because she didn't want to lose her son and what might happen to him in New York. However, all of the other women pestered her, and reminded her that otherwise Chelm would fall apart, and that this was a *mitsve*.

So very early the following Monday morning Pincus said goodbye to his parents, brothers, sisters, and all of his close friends and set forth to America to find out who was this anonymous donor.

## Pincus Arrives in America

When Pincus arrived in New York City, he immediately phoned the Chelm Landsmanshaft. He learned that its name had been changed to the Chelm Brethren Benevolent Society of New York City. For a full week he walked around The Lower East Side asking all the storekeepers if they knew anyone from Chelm.

Finally he got a yes answer and learned that the man came into the deli every once in a while. Pincus decided to go to the deli when it opened and stay there all day until it closed.

Each day he ate the same sandwich of pastrami and corned beef on rye bread with a sour pickle. After a week of this schedule, he decided that this would not work and another method would have to be used. However, when he looked at the money he had left, he realized that there was not enough money for the ship ticket back to Chelm.

The kind deli owner took pity on Pincus and offered him a job and to live free in the back of the store. The deli owner had a daughter who already was 20 years old and there was no suitable match.

Out of pure necessity he offered Pincus a small partnership if Pincus would marry his daughter. It was a plain wedding with few guests. Mrs. Pincus was not attractive (to be honest, she was homely), but she was an astute business lady.

After the deli owner died, Mr. and Mrs. Pincus took over the deli. If you visit New York, walk into the Pincus Deli and mention Chelm—you will be given a free, Giant Pincus Pastrami sandwich.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Birthday**

by Philip "Fishl" Kutner

It used to be that boys became an adult on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, now so many things have changed so that 18 is that age. Since I was not yet 21 when I married my lovely Serke, (she was 18), I needed my parents permission.

Fortunately in New Jersey women were able to marry without parental consent at 18. At the wedding they chided her about "robbing the cradle."

While I am a big boy now (64 years later, with three children, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild, and Serkele still by my side), I still speak to Mama and ask her advice about articles in *Der Bay*. Unfortunately when it comes to using my computer to e-mail, Skype, Facebook, blog, etc., Mama shrugs her shoulders and says, "Zol ikh visn fun aza zakhn azoy vi fun doktoyrim."

## **Der Bay**

**Editor: Philip "Fishl" Kutner**  
**Website: <http://www.derbay.org>**  
**E-mail: [FISHL@derbay.org](mailto:FISHL@derbay.org)**  
**Home Phone: 650-349-6946**  
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