

My Friend from Chelm fun Philip "Fishl" Kutner

To be honest my friend really wasn't from Chelm. He just said it. He really believed it. His reasoning was that his grandmother was from Chelm, and that meant the seed for his mother must have been in Chelm, therefore he had to be from Chelm.

His wife's real name was Chelma, but the other children in school couldn't say the Ch, so the teacher said, "let's call her Thelma." So from then on his wife was known as Thelma. Maybe you know someone who had the same experience.

Anyway, every time my cell phone rings and I see his number on my cell phone screen I know my friend wants to come over—he has a problem. He tells me that I am the best psychiatrist in the whole world, and that I ought to charge money.

To tell the truth all I do is listen and say "yo" when he looks up at me. If he keeps looking at me, I say "yo, yo" and he continues. After a while he has talked so long that he reaches a conclusion and thanks me for my sage advice.

I do not want to leave you with the impression that every time he comes it's a problem. Sometimes he comes over when he is lonely for the *old country*. My friend likes to sit on my back porch just as the sun is going down and watch the mosquitoes land on the screen. My wife had me screen in the porch so we could sit outside without getting bitten.

My friend said that no place in the world had mosquitoes like Chelm. When he was a little boy his father took him on a visit to Chelm to see his great grandmother Chaya Lema. That was when he first saw the giant Chelmosquitoes. He said that no one around town has bigger mosquitoes than we do. So he comes to look at ours.

Let me tell you about this time my friend called and said, "It isn't fair. Can I come and talk about it?" Before I could reply, he said, "I'll be over."

It seems that my friend had a dream, and in the dream he stood right in the middle of Main Street in Chelm. The rich people lived on the North end of town and the poor folks on the South end. Since Main Street was the only street in town, the poor folks and rich folks' houses faced each other.

We all know that there are many more poor folks than rich folks so how did it work out that Main Street was the same size on the poor side as the rich side? Well, that is the story to be told.

It seems that there was a depression and some of the rich folks became poor folks and had to move to the poor end of town. This threw the whole town off balance and women began to wail in the street and children ran around in circles. Even the dogs began to howl and the cats stopped chasing the mice. It was a real dilemma.

A town meeting was called and the mayor raised the question. The Weiss Rabbi stood up and proclaimed that there is a simple solution. They would sell lottery tickets to the poor folks and whoever were the winners would exchange houses with the rich folks. The proceeds from the lottery tickets would go to support the police department, fire department, recreation center and senior center.

It seemed all was set, for the Chelm Rabbi was truly Weiss. However, Chelmen the rebetsn then reminded the rabbi that Chelm does not have any police (all Chelmites are well-behaved). There are no firemen (all the homes are made of mud and stone). There are no recreation centers or senior centers, for there is no free time (all the people are busy sweeping the muddy streets). "Besides" said the rebetsn, "The poor people do not have money for lottery tickets."

"At that moment I awoke from my dream" said my friend. "I was in a cold sweat, and could not fall asleep again. I tossed and I turned and it did no good. I went down for a glass of hot milk and I still could not fall asleep. If I do not solve this problem, I know I will not be able to fall asleep tonight. Oh what shall I do?"

I listen to this calamity and nodded often with interspersed, "yo, yo." I was sure that my friend would soon solve this Chelmblem, as he had solved so many Chelm problems in the past. However, after an hour of deep brainstorming, it became obvious that this was no minor problem and that there would be need for some lateral and creative thinking. It soon reached the point where I felt it was necessary to interject my white-haired wisdom into the problem-solving procedure.

"Why not have a simple drawing and not have any money involved?" was my suggestion. "Oh, no" said my friend. "Everyone will think Chelmites are poor. It would be terrible." Suddenly, his eyes lit up and he said, "I solved the problem. We shall give all the people a yud, alef, vov note (I O U). They can then proceed with the lottery". My friend had solved the problem, and went home happy.