

Chelm Gets a Trolley

by Philip Fishl Kutner

Sooner or later a mutation had to occur in the Chelm population. Instead of only fools being born a genius might be mutated. How would the Wise Men of Chelm deal with such an aberration?

It was in the early 1900s that such a child was born to ordinary Chelemer parents. Papa was the town shames and mame was a housewife. The boy was named Kluger after mame's great uncle.

Even before he could walk everyone knew that he would be a special child. He cried all the time. This was interpreted that he was trying to speak, but did not know the words yet. Sure enough, the prediction was correct. Just as soon as he could sit up and begin to crawl, he began to speak.

Normally, a child's first words are mame un tate, Kluger started with "tomer volt" (what if). All day long he drove his mame crazy with questions. Every sentence began with "tomer volt." Her response was always, "vart farn tate." This did not satisfy Kluger, and he kept up the questioning all day long.

When he went to the Chelm Yeshiva, it continued much to the consternation of his teachers. They all said that he would grow up to be a genius, but that he also was a nuisance in class. Kluger never let the teacher finish a sentence without asking a question—starting with, "tomer volt."

It wasn't long before he took his place at the Council of the Wise Men of Chelm. Here his questioning was insightful and often led to wise decisions. Now they did not make fun or ignore Kluger. He was the one everyone turned to for advice. His response was not an answer, but a question that led the questioner to the answer.

At one Chelm Council Meeting, Kluger asked, "What if we had a trolley going round and round the The Chelm Center Square. The Square was a large field in the center of Chelm that was where the weekly farmers market was held.

Kluger added, " Shoppers could go all around the market and get off whenever they wanted. Besides, the children could stay on the trolley and their mames would be able to shop without being annoyed."

Everyone agreed this would be a great idea. Now came the hard part. What trolley should they get, and where would they get it?

Kluger Travels to New York

Kluger decides to go to New York City to learn all about trolley cars. When he arrives, he is told that there are at least a dozen trolley museums in America. The nearest one is north in Kingston. So he travels there to learn all about trolleys.

He also learned that there are at least 10 types of trolleys or streetcars. Another surprise came when he learned that there is a town in New York called Poland located just northeast of Utica. It has only 2,500 people, is only a half a square mile in area and less than 10% of the residents are Polish.

After becoming an expert on trolleys, he realized it would be too expensive to ship the trolley across the Atlantic and then over to Poland. He also found out that Gdansk has streetcars. It used to be called Danzig and is the major Polish seaport. Other cities include Warsaw and Krakow. Most of these came from Austria and Germany.

So Kluger returned to Europe and stopped in Vienna to buy a used trolley and it was shipped by freight car to Chelm. First the tracks were laid so that the trolley could be placed on he tracks when it arrived. When the trolley arrived, 100 husky Chelemer men carried trolley the short distance to the Chelm Square and set the trolley on the rails. The Chelm Klezmer Orchestra played and Mayor Mayer gave a long speech in Yiddish.

The tracks were laid in a perfect square. Because the trolley could not make right angle turns it went up and back on only one side of the square. Every week 100 husky Chelemer picked up the trolley and moved it to the next side, so every month all four sides of the square was covered. This made all of the Chelemer happy.

Upon returning from a recent trip to Chelm one of the members of the Yenems Yiddish Club, from Yenemsville, gave a report on the beautiful Chelm Central Square. He purchased a book of tickets at a reduced rate. Since he was there for only a week, most of the tickets are still unused.

He is interested in selling them at quite a greatly reduced rate. You can make your trip to Chelm even more enjoyable and save a lot of money by traveling on the Chelm Trolley with these reduced tickets. To get your book of tickets, contact *Der Bay* for the Yenemsviller contact phone number and e-mail address.