

A Star of a Bakery – Boynton Beach, Fl.

By William Rabinowitz

Ah, it is the time of year when sleigh bells ring and the snowbirds sing. Life in Boynton Beach is regular as clockwork. The season of the Hajj has returned.

Usually between Thanksgiving, the end of November and a few weeks before Pesach, the car carriers from the Northern climes of the East Coast of America fill I-95 heading southward. God forbid that Chanukah will be late in December and the migrating Jews must delay leaving New Jersey, New York and points north to head south. Nothing is considered more tragic by our Mishpocheh then to have to delay up North so they can enjoy their grandchildren in the annual orgy of Chanukah gifts being unappreciatively ripped open. Maybe a candle will be lit, frequently from the wrong side, but who knows these things except the Chabbadnicks. A Chanukah song will be sung about a dreidle and a canola oil soaked, fried potato pancake, shredded not grated, mixed with too much onion will be consumed. Hopefully, there is going to be brisket on the side. The greatest fear is that the snows will fly in the north before the elderly members of the tribe can escape to the warmth of Boynton beach and points further south – Del Ray, Boca Raton, Aventura and maybe Miami – but not so much Miami anymore – too Spanish.

Life in Boynton Beach undergoes a change. Boynton Beach is the fastest growing Jewish area in Palm Beach, Co. Florida. Nationally, it is second in Jewish growth only to Las Vegas. So much of Jewish New York and New Jersey is depopulated in the migrations that many a kosher butcher closes and heads south as well.

If you migrate for the winter season, between Thanksgiving and Pesach, you are considered a snowbird. A snowbird is a migratory fowl that escapes the cold by going south and returns to the nesting grounds of the north in the spring. It is the season of the Hajj, a term borrowed from our Muslim cousins to denote a special religious requirement to go to Mecca at least once in your life. For Jews, the annual migration must be because of our Middle Eastern blood. We cannot tolerate the cold so we migrate for the warm winter season to Florida. I had a Rabbi explain to me another mystic aspect of our Middle Eastern heritage. Why do Jews, shuckle or sway while praying? It seems, he told me in all seriousness, when I was a young Yeshivah bucher, the reason we sway is because of camels. Jews used to ride camels a lot in the old days in Israel and on the caravan routes. Time is money, so you did not want to get off the camel to pray. You prayed while riding. Riding a camel is like riding a ship across the desert – with an eternal rocking and swaying. So, it became genetically inbred, while praying we cannot get the camel out of the Jewish prayers so we sway and rock while praying. Personally, I get nauseous while praying that way too much.

I, like a small group of devoted loving husbands, commute back to the North weekly to work so that our loving spouses can stay in the warmth of Boynton and play Mah Jong

daily for the winter's duration. Our wives say they love us for our sacrifice and dedication to them. Most of the guys I commute with on the airline routes are happy to get away from the crucial decision of the day – where to go for the early bird dinner and if we have to go with the Mendelsons or the Ratchicks, Cohens or whoever. There is a special term for us. We are snowflakes. I guess one has to be a flake to commute two thousands miles every week and be glad to do it. No wonder so many widows are here. Many of us guys seem to meet God at 30,000 feet, usually somewhere over North Carolina. But, we love our families, so we go.

Boynton Beach Jews, who live here year round, consider themselves true locals. Most do not join the local synagogues. “Why should we have to pay another building fund? We paid up North and don't want to pay again” they vociferously complain. Only about 20%, or even less, of the Yidden affiliate with a synagogue – and that includes the Orthodox. Most of the local Jews became year round local Yidden when they migrated here within the past 20 years. They uprooted the orange groves and built their retirement reproductions of Levitt communities. They have not lost their New York accents or their Northern Jewish aggressive rudeness. After all, unless they push, they know that the other New Yorkers will simply push them aside – and that is year round. Now comes the season of the Hajj and the rules change.

The headless drivers appear much more frequently with out of state plates. Mysterious wrinkled hands at ten and two O'clock are firmly planted on the steering wheel. Even if you can see their heads from behind the steering wheel of their cars designated with the ever present disabled driver placard flying from their review mirror – you can know them by the thick wrap around dark glass because the bright sun hurts their eyes. Why they insist on going to get drops in their eyes to dilate their pupils just before driving I don't understand. So you have an invisible disabled blind person driving a car from out of state not knowing where they are going. There is a whole ritual and type of car to be aware of but that is another story and so is going to dinner or God forbid going to Shul if there is not a good Kiddush afterwards.

Let me share with you a true Boynton story of life here. It is called going to the Star. No, it is not a special geriatric presentation of an old entertainer from the 50's who still can stand up straight and sing (sort of). No, going to the Star is going to the Star Bakery; a special experience made even more excruciating, oops, special when the snowbirds have migrated.

The Star Bakery is *the* kosher bakery in Boynton Beach. It is located in the back of a strip shopping center behind the Winn Dixie grocery store. The Piggly Wiggly stores went out of business and Winn Dixie took over the sites. It would have been fun to think that all the Jews had to buy their groceries at Piggly Wiggly grocery stores. Star is an extraordinary place. It is absolutely kosher and absolutely open on Shabbat with fresh Shabbat baked breads, pastries, and sugar free products. It takes a Talmudic twist of the mind to get around that one. It is certified as kosher by the V'aad of Rabbis of Palm Beach County and it is open on Shabbat: something about on Shabbat the place is owned by goyim and the rest of the week, except Yom Tovim, it is owned by Jews. Though

perfectly gymnastic in religious Halachic ruling it works for the V'aad d'Rabbanim and a certificate of kashrut is hung proudly.

Today, it was the night before Christmas and the stockings were hung Wrong part..., it was the day before erev Christmas and the locals, the snowbirds and the flakes were out in strength to get their fresh baked Star products. The word was put out to the community and panic ensued. The Star was going to be closing early for Christmas Eve Yom Tov and even **worse, closed** all day for Christmas. Panic set in. **The** place was mobbed. So why does the wife send me to the Star, during the panic before Christmas, bakery shopping? What, we should not have a fresh *ruggy* or prune Danish for the Mah Jong game on Christmas. Who cares if I get run over or mangled by enraged blue haired ladies with their walkers or attacked by cane wielding World War II vets who remember the terrible days of empty cupboards from the great depression. Out I went.

Inside the stark fronted store filled with bristling bakery display cases gorgeous in color and whispering of sugar rushed fantasies of flavor. Remember, the bakery on the yellow trays is milchick and the plain trays are parve. You must take a green pull number from the ticket dispenser on the right side of the store. It stands on a pedestal five feet above the floor, high enough for the older, shrinking Yentas to be unable to reach a ticket. If you don't get a number you can be there until the Moshiach comes. Only the Moshiach will get there first before you get waited on without a ticket.

The masses of gray swaying bodies and walkers is three rows deep, waiting to get their hearts delight. Everything is delicious shouts the owner in her loud, nasally – why do so many New York Jews speak with a nasally or cigarette smoker gruff voices? Her voice is very, very New York and she smiles pleasantly at her pushing audience of bakery pursuers. How she puts up with the experience day in and day out must signify some sort of Sainthood. Do Jews have Saints?????

A woman, in mismatched purple shorts and a green top, considerably overweight with her varicose veins bulging purple to match her shorts, cries out my number is next and muscles up to the front.

“I want to buy some prune Danish.”

The prune Danish, I personally can verify, is delicious. Just cut off the excess crust and eat the rest – it melts in your mouth. I don't recommend freezing as it never tastes the same – so you always have to go back for fresh. Anyway, this lady wanted to buy Prune Danish.

“Which one” the Hispanic counter person says.

“I don't know, take it out so I can see better.”

“Take what out?” the counter person says.

“The tray, the whole tray I can’t see well it is on the bottom of the display counter” she says.

So out comes the entire tray of prune Danish – stacked six deep with beautiful glistening samplings.

“How many do you want” asks the counter person. Do you need a bag or a box?”

“I am not sure,” she says. “I have to see which ones look good”.

After studying the huge stacked tray of identical looking prune Danish for a good three minutes, she points and says,

“I want that one on top that one two layers below the top and one in the back buried at the very bottom but sticking its pruney little head out from the corner”.

With hardly a blink, but definitely a grimace, the counter person gets the three Danish out from the pile of sixty rejects.

A little old counterman, gray, spry for his 5’2” size, waits on another couple who want another flavor of Danish. He takes it one out with a wax napkin and puts it on the counter. The couple reaches out to touch the Danish to poke it for freshness.

With dazzling speed the 90+-year-old counter man grabs the Danish out of reach of the pokers and sharply responds,

“Please don’t touch the merchandise.”

The pokers back away and buy the Danish anyway. I think it was an apricot cigar swirled in apricot jelly and white icing on the outside. It is guaranteed to put anyone into diabetic shock.

“How much is that” the pokers ask.

“I don’t need a computer,” the old counterman says. “I can count in my head,” he sharply answered.

No one is fazed by the rude interactions. They seemed used to it. Not being from New York I might be aghast but it can also be very entertaining. As long as it is perceived as entertainment, by us non New Yorkers, it is tolerable.

“Number 16” is called out, the next number being served. A button is pushed on the shelves next to the dozens of stacked seeded ryes, non-seeded ryes, and black bread near the cardboard tasting Shabbat Challahs. Number 16 lights up on the scoreboard above the breads with bright red, foot high numbers. A harsh voice calls from row two, “speak out louder some of us can’t hear.” He waves his cane in the air menacingly. “Number

16” is called out again only loud enough for people three blocks away to hear. The cane waiver wobbles up to the counter and orders from the colorful array before him.

Sorry to say so much of the beautiful bakery is only beautiful. It is beautiful parve bakery and does taste like cardboard. Stick with the Danish and milchick products or the rye breads. Skip the rest of the stuff unless you must keep kosher. Don't let one of the products on the yellow milchik trays touch any of your purchases if you are having a Fleischik meal. You will have to fast twice on Yom Kippur.

We remember, the Star is going to close early today. It is erev Christmas. The season of peace, good will and kindness is almost upon us. No Jew is rude to a non-Jew on erev Christmas— God forbid we should leave them with a bad taste of us. The bills are paid and all exchange *Happy Holiday* greetings to each other: Jew to goy and Jew to Jew.

So life goes in Boynton. We have our Star bakery – remember it is closed on Christmas – but don't worry it will be open on Shabbat, the goy will have fresh bakery for us after Shul.

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Translations:

Mishpocheh – Family

Chabbadnicks – Hassidic religious sect (Chabad)

Dreidle – A small spinning top toy for Chanukah

Shuckle – To sway

Yeshivah bucher – A boy who attends religious school

Yiddin – Yiddish for Jews

V'aad d'Rabbanim – Association of Rabbis

Yom Tov – Holy Days

Shul – Synagogue

Halachic – Religious ruling or law

Kashrut – Kosher rules

Erev – Evening

Ruggy – Ruggalah – a small pastry

Milchik – Milk product

Parve – Neither milk nor meat product – such as beans

Moshiach – Messiah

Challah – Egg bread

Fleishik – Meat product

Goy – Non Jew