

BEL KAUFMAN--WE'LL MISS YOU

by
Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe

Bel Kaufman, author of the 1965 novel, "Up the Down Staircase," has died at the age of 103. The writer and humorist was the granddaughter of the Yiddish humorist, Sholem Aleichem, whose stories about Tevye the Milkman were the basis of the B'way show, "Fiddler on the Roof."

"Up the Down Staircase," was based on her experiences teaching in the New York City public schools. The book is made up of letters from the principal, administrative memos, student notes, and notes to the fictional new teacher, Sylvia Barrett. The book was made into a 1967 movie, which starred Sandy Dennis as Sylvia.

When Kaufman was 99, she taught a course at Hunter College on Jewish humor. In 2010, she told an audience, "I'm very glad to be so old, and I'll tell you why. Because I'm the only one alive who knew Sholem Aleichem."

In the book, Miss Barrett taught English in room 304 at Calvin Coolidge High School. If the book was updated, Miss Barrett would be called Ms. Barrett. Shown below is the 2014-2015 version of "Up the Down Staircase."

TO ALL FACULTY:

Welcome back. Our school has gone green. We've replaced old lightbulbs with energy saving fluorescent bulbs and we have new solar panels atop the roof. We hope that you will teach your students that it's a "mitzvah" to conserve resources.

We have installed alarms on Exit Doors to prevent tragedies like the disappearance and death of Avonte Oquendo. Oh, and there's no truth to the rumor that our English Department is offering a course titled, "The Fifty Shades Trilogy."

And, finally, please encourage your students to stay in school. In 2014, college graduates will earn at least \$800,000 more than the average high-school graduate.

To: Kitchen Staff

From: TB, Principal

Enclosed please find a copy of a 2011 article by Piper Weiss titled, "Prison food vs. school lunches: any difference?" She states that "School lunch is a lot like prison food, only worse. Both offer a calorie count of around 1400, and both cost more than \$2.60 per person per day. The average prison meal and the average elementary school lunch both consist of one bread item, one starch item and one beverage ("getrank"). But kids get an ounce less meat and they're usually skimmed on either veggies or fruits."

Starting 2014-2015, we are participating in a Universal Lunch and School Breakfast Program. Details to follow.

To: All Teachers

From: TB, Principal

As we begin the 2014-2015 school year, I would like to share two quotes:

#72 Remember what it was like to show up in "der klastsimer" (the classroom) on test day to see a substitute teacher and learn that the test was postponed? That should occasionally be duplicated at work.

Richard A. Moran, "Fear No Yellow Stickers"

"Teachers primarily learn to teach by recalling their memories of having been taught, about 13,000 hours of instruction during a typical childhood--a problem since their instruction wasn't very good."
(Adapted from "Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (And How to Teach It to Everyone), New York Times Magazine article titled, ("New Math) (New Teaching) = Failure" by Elizabeth Green.

To: Math Department

From: TB

I just came across a good S.A.T. word: "innumeracy"--the mathematical equivalent of not being able to read. It was coined by John Allen Paulos.

TO: MATH DEPT.

FROM: ART DEPARTMENT

Enclosed is a copy of a 1965 Peanuts cartoon which depicts the "yung" (young) blonde-haired Sally struggling to understand (farshteyn") her new math assignments: "Sets...one to one matching...equivalent sets...

sets of one...sets of two...renaming two..” After persisting for three valiant frames, she throws back her head and bursts into tears: “All I want to know is how much is two and two?”

TO: MATH DEPARTMENT

FROM: TB

Did you catch comedian Louis C. K. who parodied his daughters’ homework in an appearance on “The Late Show With David Letterman”?

“It’s like, Bill has three goldfish. He buys two more. How many dogs live in London?”

TO: ALL FACULTY

FROM: JJ, ADMINISTRATIVE ASST.

A directive from the Board of Ed. states that all teachers are to place the two pairs of latex gloves in the center drawer of their desk (“shraybtish”).

Just a reminder: In the event that any staff person should come in contact with blood (“blut”) or body fluids from an accident, please be sure to use the one-size-fits-all gloves. Have a good year.

Dear Ms. Barrett:

My son, Sammy, is in your homeroom (AKA “zombietime”). His “kompyuter” card lists a course titled, “Walking 296.” According to the description, “This course provides the student with ample opportunity to exercise and also to develop walking as a valuable lifetime activity.”

Is the prerequisite “Breathing 001”?

Mrs. Cohen

Dear Guidance Counselor

Please place Malka in the “Power Seat” in “khemye” (Chemistry). It’s easier for her to pay attention in this seat, and, according to Martin Nemko, Ph.D., “instructors make most eye contact with youngsters who are seated 25% of the way back and slightly to the side of center.”

Mr. & Mrs. Feinstein

TO: ALL ENGLISH TEACHERS

Here’s a new S.A.T.-type word: “curiosity gap” - n. the difference between what a person KNOWS and what a person WANTS to know.

KM, English Chairperson

TO ALL FACULTY:

We've removed one issue of Mad Magazine from the library. We disapprove of the PC term "scholastic'ly persistent," which is used for that clod repeating seventh grade. He's no knucklehead either."

FF, School Librarian

TO ALL FACULTY

We've just discovered a typo in last week's memo: "A faculty forum will be held to discuss the proposed changes in the grading policy and the proposed addition to the core curriculum. "ALL INTERESTING" faculty are invited to attend" should have read, "ALL INTERESTED faculty are welcome."

TB, Principal

Dear Principal:

Please inform your school nutritionist--the one who controls what lunch items are served--that First Lady, Michelle Obama, was caught in public eating a "kotlet" (hamburger), french fries, and a chocolate shake.

Marilyn Backman

TO ALL FACULTY:

Today I will announce over the PA system that all students who come to school with laser pointers--those pen-size pointers--will face suspension.

TB

Dear Librarian,

I'm just checking to see that your school library does NOT carry the nonfiction book titled, "Go TheTo Sleep" by Adam Mansbach.

Mrs. Normal Adler

TO ALL STUDENTS:

Please inform your parents that the first PTA meeting of the year will take place next Monday evening at 7:30 p.m. The topic: "Helicopter parenting vs. perimeter parenting."

TB

Dear Ms. Barrett:

Will you be teaching the basic "Noo Yawk" vocabulary: cockamamie, knish, noodge, poppy with a schmeer, schmooze, Bloomie's, egg cream, and stoop? I hope so.

Anon.

TO: ALL ENGLISH TEACHERS

Please note this new S.A.T.-type word: WIKIPEDIA KID--n. A student who has poor research skills and lacks the ability to think critically.

TB

TO ALL FACULTY:

A parent has filed a lawsuit against the Santa Fe school board and various officials for unspecified injuries suffered by their son from the act of cutting a jack-o'-lantern last October. The parent insists that her son was FORCED to carve the pumpkin, which violated his religious freedom because he does not celebrate Halloween. Oh, and watch out for that "DECOFFINATED" coffee served in our school cafeteria on Oct. 30. :-)

Dear Ms. Barrett:

Please refrain from referring me as "Bookman"--the tough-talking No Nonsense library cop who busted Jerry Seinfeld for his long overdue copy of "Tropic of Cancer."

FF, School Librarian

TO ALL SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

LARA CROFT, the heroine of the TombRaider games, is NOT a student at our school! Although she has appeared in exotic locations (Lara at the sphinx, The Great Wall of China, etc), our school is not one of them. Disregard all rumors to the contrary.

AR, Attendance Supervisor

TO ALL TEACHERS:

As you know, we are taking all of our seniors to see a B'way show next week. I want to caution you about the costumed entertainers in Times Square. Yes, Spider-Man, Batman, Spongebob, and many other characters are parading around taking photos; some have been accused of harassment. Any student who wants a picture taken with one of the characters should be prepared to give a hefty tip--\$5 or more.

TB, Principal

TO ALL STUDENTS:

The second PTA meeting will be held this Monday evening at 7:30. The topic: "Car-Schooling" - Educating or instructing a child while

driving a car.” Diane Flynn Keith, who coined the term, is the guest speaker.

TB, Principal

DEAR SYL:

FIRE DRILL today. Period 5. Pass it on.

Alyse

TO ALL FACULTY:

New S.A.T.-type vocabulary word: “teacup” - n. A college student with a fragile, easily shattered psyche. Also: “teacup kid.”

TB

DEAR MS. BARRETT:

RE: OBSERVATION, PERIOD 3

Good lesson on mondegreens--the technical term for misheard lyrics. Your students certainly enjoyed ‘Scuse Me While I Kiss This Guy and other Misheard Lyrics” by Gavin Edwards. For 25 years I thought the correct words to “Home on the Range” were, “Oh give me a home where the buffalo roam, and the deer and the CANTALOUPE play.” Keep up the good work.

TB

TO ALL FACULTY:

Please warn your students of the increasingly common practice of “lapjacking,” the stealing of unattended laptop computers.

FF, Computer instructor

DEAR MS. BARRETT:

There’s no truth to the rumor that the English Office will be furnished with two La-Z-Boy “Maxim” recliners. The “Maxim” is packed with six heat-massage motors, a cup holder, a built-in speaker phone, an extra jack for the computer modem, and an optional answering machine. Sorry! “A nechtiker tog.” (Not a word of truth in it.)

TB

TO ALL FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS:

Michele Bachmann has not brushed up on her Yiddish. On Fox News, she recently pronounced the word “chuzpah”--Yiddish for “audacity”-- as “choot-spa” (something she was accusing Obama of having.)

BTW, the Yiddish word “hazarai” is not just junk food. The colloquial meaning has shifted throughout the years to include “junk.” Many people today use the word when referring to “stuff” or “a little of this, a little of that.”

TB

TOO ALL FACULTY:

There’s a term that you should become familiar with: “achievement guilt.” This is one that goes like this: “I paid \$300,000 worth of college tuition for you to work at Macy’s? What ever happened to becoming a doctor or lawyer?”

TB

TO ALL FACULTY MEMBERS:

New S.A.T.-type word: “arsenic hour”--The time after parents arrive home from work and before dinner is served; an extremely hectic part of the day, especially when dealing with young children.”

TB

Dear Ms. Barrett:

Isn’t it just good common sense (“saichel”/”sekhel”) to have students in school first learn A, before they are taught AOL?

Martha Glibbons

TO ALL ENGLISH TEACHERS:

Please take a minute of your FREE period to check the bathroom in the English wing. We’ve been experiencing an increase in graffiti. Yesterday, the custodian removed a hand-painted sign above the fire alarm box which read: “Where there’ smoke, there may be smoked salmon.”

LL, Security

Dear JJ:

I read your memo on casual dress during my prep period. Linda Yoblonsky may be right: “Meanwhile back in New York they’re saying the next big color is brown. By fall, we’ll all look like we work for UPS.”
Nancy

Dear Ms. Barrett,

I’m the new school nurse. I’d like to alert you to a new and unique Jewish disease: “Pupikpartem.” Marnie Winston-Macauley named the illness and

described its symptoms: “A chronic ailment where the sufferer becomes instantly guilty and depressed when a) separated from parents or b) from their child. In both cases, the victim walks around in a general state of “krechtsation, moaning and groaning, even at fun events.....”

Sharon H.

Dear Ms. Barrett:

Have you noticed that Sheldon engages in “Bobblogesture”--n. The classroom activity of not knowing an answer but raising one’s hand anyway (after determining a sufficient number of other people have also raised their hands, thus reducing the likelihood of actually being called on)? If so, let me know.

Mrs. Crimmons

SYL:

What do you mean by WEDGE?

Alyse

ALYSE:

WEDGE stands for “Writing Every Day Generates Excellence.”

Syl

TO ALL FACULTY MEMBERS:

The late Erma Bombeck commented that “schoolchildren throughout the country are indulging in rituals to bring about heavy snows that will cause the schools to close.” She says that “one of the more popular ones is for a child to put on his pajamas inside out just before he goes to bed. Some believe in a musical chant for snow. A few spin around in a dance, and one girl turns statues of the Virgin Mary toward the window. As they say in Yiddish, “Es vet heifen vi a toiten bahnkes!” (It won’t help any!)

TB

TO ALL SCHOOL SECRETARIES

“Prairie-dogging,” the practice of standing up, looking, and often talking over office panels, is viewed as acceptable office behavior.

May I suggest that if prairie-dogging over two or more cubicles is attempted, don’t make direct eye contact with the occupant of the intervening cubicle. Secondly make some warning noise, so if the

person in the next cubicle is doing something embarrassing s/he has time to resume an attitude of intense work.

JJ, Admin. Asst.

SYL,

On the midterm exam, one of my students defined the word “naches” as a corn chip. Can I give him credit for his Jewish/Yiddish humor? BTW, another student defined a “Levite,” as “one who wears jeans religiously.”

Alyse

SYL,

Thanks for the suggestion for a mnemonic trick to help the students with the correct spelling of February: “Br! It’s cold outside.”

Suzanne

Dear Ms. Barrett:

Today was supposed to be Teri’s last day in your homeroom. Please do not remove her name from your Delaney Book. I’ve decided against moving to Taos, NM, because an article in The New York Times Magazine reported that almost every woman in Taos carries a gun. Do you remember when a “Saturday-night special” was a double-dip chocolate soda? Oh, you’re too young!

Miriam Douglas

Dear Ms. Barrett,

Sue-Ann is enrolled in a course called “Keyboarding.” Is this the same course as the old typing course offered at Far Rockaway High School in the ‘50s? Are the home keys still a s d f j k l ;?;

Beverly Cooms

Dear Ms. Barrett:

Seth, my “zuninkeh” (darling son), needs a double set of English textbooks. Since his dad and I have joint custody (Seth lives with me on M/W/F and every other weekend), duplicates of all texts are required. A dank.

Gail Poleman

Dear Ms. Barrett:

I thought you might like to know that one of your students was accepted at the Sy Syms School of Business at Yeshiva Univ. His winning essay

was titled, "Welcome to (Perry) Ellis Island."

LA, acting Guidance Director

Dear Ms. Barrett:

Thanks for leaving a message on my answering machine. We've been playing "telephone tag" for days. My question: "Do you know whether there's any truth to the statement that backpacks "are better than the one-arm, one-shoulder kind of carryall, because they distribute the weight evenly?"

Mr. Hodes-Adler

TO ALL FACULTY MEMBERS:

I'd like to share the findings of Toni Falbo, Ph.D.: "Being an only child has some advantage. 'Onlies' tend to score slightly higher on achievement tests have more self-esteem, and are high achievers."

SAT, School Psychologist

TO ALL ENGLISH TEACHERS:

Love the following definition of "intuition," given by Gail Elsent: "Knowledge that your salary won't cover the cost of your children's education."

Anon.

TO ALL FACULTY:

Enjoy your Christmas/Hanukkah vacation. For those of you who are heading south, remember how weatherman, Norman Dvoskin, defines Florida: A place where people go for the winter and it's where they usually find it. ("Weather Wit")

TB, Principal

Dear Ms. Barrett:

My daughter, Samantha, will be absent from your freshman English class for at least one week. She appears to be suffering from what some academics call INTERNET ADDICTION. Will you please fax me copies of class notes, assignments, etc.

Mrs. Hilda Williamson

Dear Ms. Barrett:

My son, Jonathan, has a free period next semester and is considering singing up for one of the following two new courses:

HULA HOOPING FOR HEALTH

HULA HOOPING improves cardiovascular health, muscle tone and overall flexibility.

LEARNING THE ABCS OF EFT (TAPPING)

EFT is short for Emotional Freedom Techniques, a natural finger tapping derived from the ancient healing technique of acupuncture without using needles.

Which one of the two courses do you think would be right for Jon. I'm from the generation who played Hop Scotch, Ring-A-Leeveo and even Johnny-on-A-Pony!

Mrs. Warner

TO ALL FACULTY MEMBERS:

The NYSUT Retiree, Summer 2014, shared "The Uncommon of Common Core." Here's a sample of what today's KINDERGARTNERS are taught and tested on. The lesson is about Presidents and American Symbols:

Lesson 1. capitol, liberties, monuments nation, president

Lesson 2. confession honest, legend, national, respect

Lesson 3. captured clever, colonel, general, supplies

Lesson 4. convince, defeated, monarchy, rule, spectacles

Lesson 5. admired, colonists, declaration, independence

Lesson 6. proclaim, reputation, serious

Lesson 7. compassion, education, expert, governor, judge

Lesson 8. accomplishment, ancestors, humble, politics

Lesson 9. carved, determined, mines, sculptor

TB, Principal

TO ALL FACULTY MEMBERS:

HELP! I'm suffering from "email fatigue, mental exhaustion caused by receiving a large number of email messages a day. Please have "rakhmones" (pity) and limit the number of emails sent to me.

TB, Principal

TO ALL HEALTH TEACHERS:

One issue of Brill's Content shows a 1977 photo of Bill Gates with a severe case of "zits." Perhaps you could take this opportunity to discuss

this slang word for “a pimple” and discuss the Yiddish word for pimples, “pristshikleh.” Thank you.

LT, School Nurse

Dear Ms. Barrett:

One of your 9th grade students complained today that he’s suffering “chalktrauma”--n. the body’s reaction to someone running his fingernails down the chalkboard. Do you need a manicure?”

LL, Guidance Dept.

TO ALL SENIORS:

Please don’t become “INTEXTICATED”--adj. preoccupied by reading or sending a text message, particularly while driving a car.

JJ, PTA President

TO ALL STUDENTS

Please remind your parents to attend tonight’s PTA meeting. Topic for discussion: “TECHNOLOGY AS A SERIOUS CLASSROOM DISTRACTION.” Yesterday’s bored students distracted themselves with doodling, passing notes and whispering. Today, between text messaging and surfing the Internet, there’s literally an endless amount of material available to keep their minds out of the classroom.

JJ, PTA President

TO ALL STUDENTS:

The last PTA meeting will be held tonight. Won’t you join your parents as we discuss “silent soccer,” a form of soccer in which spectators are NOT ALLOWED to yell, cheer, or coach from the sidelines. “Silent soccer” has taken hold with a handful of clubs and leagues in Canada and other countries.

JJ, PTA President

TO ALL FACULTY MEMBERS:

You’re all invited to attend graduation this Sunday. Our guest speaker is Kermit the Frog, the world’s best-known amphibian, whose signature song is “It’s Not Easy Bein’ Green.” Rumor has it that he’ll be giving this advice to our 970 graduates:

“The time has come for you to drop your tails and leave this swamp. But I am sure wherever you go as I travel around the world I will find

each and every one of you working your tails off to save other swamps and give those of us who live there a chance to survive. As we may say in the wetlands, 'Ribbit-ribbit-kneedeep-ribbit,' which means 'May success be yours even when you're knee deep in the sticky muck of life.'

Have a wonderful summer.

P.S. On the first Saturday in October, we offer the first SAT exams. Start worrying NOW! :-)

TB, Principal
