

# **The Schmooze** **Stories with a Yiddish Twist**

## **ALLAN SHERMAN AND THE RONEY PLAZA HOTEL**

*by*  
**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe**



**Syosset, New York**

Winter tourism became a major factor in the development of Miami and south Florida from the 1920s onward. By 1940, Miami had about 2 million vacationers a year.

The Roney Plaza Hotel opened in Miami Beach in 1926. It was described as “one of Miami’s most beautiful and fashionable hotels.” The \$2 million project was the first large luxury hotel on the ocean.

N. B. T. Roney gained notoriety as a wheeler dealer or “Man with a Golden Touch.”

The hotel was located on Collins Avenue at 23rd and 24th streets and offered visitors elegant dining, tea dances every Sunday afternoon, 15 acres of formal gardens and gracious rooms. European royalty, high society, and Hollywood notables stayed there. N. J. Governor Morgan F. Larson was a guest at the hotel for his 3-week honeymoon (“honik-khoydesh”) during the 1920s. FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover also stayed at the hotel in 1936.

In 1931 Roney spent \$200,000 to build a pool and cabana colony. The hotel was sold to Henry L. Doherty, a financier, in 1933. There were a number of owners until it faded in the 1950s. The Roney Plaza was torn down in 1968, making way for Roney apartments.

Another glamorous hotel, the Fontainebleau competed for the limelight. The Fontainebleau was the largest hotel in Miami Beach, with 554 guest rooms and signature bow-tie marble floors, Russian and Turkish baths, and

250 cabanas surrounding its pool. In 1960, Frank Sinatra filmed a TV special at the hotel alongside Elvis Presley as the country welcomed the King home from the service,

Allan Sherman wrote the following humorous lyrics about the Roney Plaza. The Yiddish version is shown below. "Gib a kuk" (Give a look).

As I wandered out on the streets of Miami  
I said to mein self, this is some fancy ("fantazye") town  
I called up mein partner and said "Hello" ("sholem aleycham"), Sammy  
Go pack up your satchel and mosey on down"

I got me a bunk in the old ("alt") Roney Plaza  
With breakfast ("frishtik") and dinner ("mitog") included of course  
("avade")  
I caught 40 winks on mein private ("privat") piazza  
Then I rented a pinto ("oytomobile") from Hertz, Rent-a-Horse ("dinen a  
ferd") He rented a pinto from Hertz Rent-a-Horse.

My partner ("shutel") flew down on a non-scheduled airline,  
You never did see such a pale ("shvach")- looking man  
I recognized him from his receding hairline ("kherley'n")  
He recognized me from mein beautiful tan.

T'was then that I heard fighting words from mein partner  
He said, "Marvin, the Roney is no place to stay  
I'm going ("Ikh gey") to the Fontainebleau, partner, it's mod'ner  
("moderner")  
And I'll charge to the firm ("di firme") 60 dollars a day"  
He'll charge to the firm 60 dollars a day.

I said to him, "Paleface, you hanker for trouble ("tsuris")  
With the company ("firme") checkbook ("tshekbikhl"), you quick on the  
draw"  
He smiled (gave a "shmeykhl") and said, "Stranger, for me that goes  
double 'Cause west ("mayrev") of the Fontainebleau, I am the law ("dos  
gezets").

Next morning ("morgn"), the whole Lincoln road was deserted ("vist")  
And somewhere a hi fi was playing a tune ("nign")  
'Cause everyone knew someone's gonna be murdered ("merderd")  
A duel in the sun ("zun") on the stroke of high noon ("mitogtsayt")

A duel in the sun at the stroke of high noon.

I took careful aim with mein trusty revolver

(Note: According to Michael Chabon's Yiddish Dictionary, "a sholem is a gun--

a bit of wordplay, as 'sholem' in Yiddish means place and "piece" is slang for gun in English.)

The clock ("zeyger") in the Fontainebleau struck 12 o'clock

I shot and Sam crumbled, just like a piece ("dos shtik") halvah

And that's what they call a bad day ("shlekht tog") at Black Rock.

They came with a posse and took mein six gun away

The crowd ("der oylem") was too angry ("broygez") to leave me in jail ("turme")

The sheriff ("sherif") said, "Outlaw, I'm gon' let you run away ("antloyfn")

But don't ever be seen south of Ft. Lauderdale.

So now I can never go back ("tsurikkumen") to Miami

And New York is so cold ("kalt") that a person could die ("shtarbn")

I'd be better ("beser") off dead like mein late partner Sammy

'Cause he's in that big ("groys") Fontainebleau

'Cause he's in that big Fontainebleau in the sky ("himl").

Marjorie Wolfe reminds us that Miami Beach wasn't "perfekt." There was anti-Semitism dating as far back as the Fisher era and segregation up through the '50s and early '60s. There were top entertainers who had to go through the service entrance ("arayngang") of hotel, and they weren't allowed to spend the night. They had to be put up in Liberty City.

She also remembers those "vunderlekh" meals at Wolfie Cohen's Rascal House Restaurant on 172nd Street and Collins "Evenyu." Their menu said, "You'll be glad when you're fed, you "rascal" you!"

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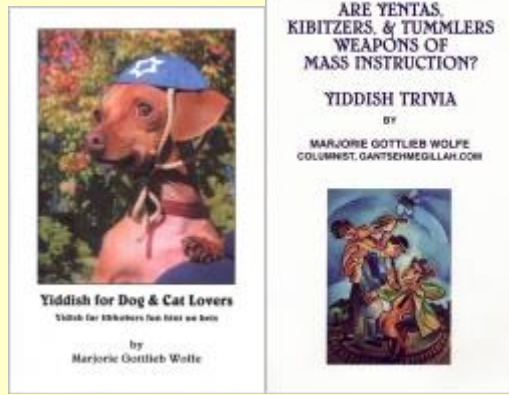
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**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of  
two books:**



**"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and  
"Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction?  
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