

# The Schmooze

## Stories with a Yiddish Twist

### HOLIDAY SHOPPING/GIFT GIVING FROM 1842 - 2014

In Yiddish, “Black Friday” is “shvarts fraytik.”  
“Groy donershtik: is “Gray Thursday.”  
“Shporevdik” means “economical.”

*by*  
**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe**



**Syosset, New York**

“Gray Thursday” (a day when big-box stores open early to maximize profits over the holiday weekend) is over. Black Friday is over. Retailers want to hear “Jingle Bells at Registers.”

Let’s examine the Economics of Christmas and Hanukkah from 1842 to 2014.

1842 Historians report that the pages of The New York Times did NOT contain a single example of advertising with a Christmas/Hanukkah theme.

1843 The New York Tribune carried ads for “Christmas Trees.”

1851 Mark Carr set up the first tree (“boym”) concession in NYC, paying one dollar to rent sidewalk (“tretar”) space.

1867 Macy’s in NYC stayed open until midnight (“halbe nahkht”) on Christmas Eve, taking in over \$6,000.

1870 December had become the merchant's single largest selling month ("khoydesh") of the year.

1894 Bloomingdale's, no "shlock joint," took out a full-page ad to announce ("onzogn") that it would stay open late for holiday shoppers.

Best and Company suggested that "while busy buying 'things for Christmas' for your own children, you might think of other children you know who are less fortunate ("mazldik") than your own."

1912 "Tate-mameh" photographed "der kinder" (the kids) with an Eastman Kodak Brownie camera (\$1 - \$4) or a folding Brownie (\$5 - \$12).

1913 Erector sets were very popular and sold for \$.50 for the "No. 0" set all the way up to \$25 for the "No. 8" set. Tinkertoys are very popular, too.

U. S. Congress asks Americans to put Christmas money into war ("milkhome") bonds, and considers embargoing all holiday gifts.

1925 Heading "di rehim" (the list) of popular gifts with "Noo Yawkahs" were "fancy schmancy" hats, ascot mufflers, and radiator covers.

1930 Betty Boop dolls and toys are very popular.

1936 - 38

20% of the Christmas gift ads in the Ladies' Home Journal and Saturday Evening Post contained illustrations of St. Nick.

1937 The first Santa Claus school opened. Students paid \$150 each for a week-long course in showmanship, salesmanship, child psychology, the economics of the toy industry, and Santa history. (By 1939, graduates of the school anticipated earning a minimum of \$75 a week.)

1938 Santas were asked to join ("baheftn") the newlyformed Nat'l Assoc.

of Professional Santas.

Kids spend Christmas Day building houses, buying railroads, renting property, etc. with the White Box Edition of Monopoly. Cost: \$1.69 from the Sears Roebuck catalog.

Macy's NYC was guaranteeing that purchases made on Dec. 24 would be delivered within the city ("shtot") on the same day or, if desired, on Christmas Day.

1940 Santa Claus had so infiltrated the business of selling that one magazine ("zhurnal") credited him with yearly sales of \$500,000,000.

1941 A holiday subscription to Life Magazine is \$3.65.

1944 The be-all-and-end-all gift was a Frank Sinatra record ("plate"/"disk")--78, of course.

1946 Christmas dinner at Rosoff's in NYC went for \$2.10.

1955 The "bukh," Marjorie Morningstar, by Herman Wouk, is a popular holiday gift.

1958 The cost of mailing a Christmas/Hanukkah card increased from 3 cents to 4 cents an oz.

The Hula Hoop, which sold for \$1.98 in the "zumer" (summer), was marked down to "fuftsik" (50) cents by Hanukkah as the craze was fading. It was "billik vi borsht"--cheap as borsht.

1968 Shoppers searched the stores for ("fus") foot warmers, self-winding watches, and peace symbols fashioned from any and every medium.

1970 Shoppers spent \$79.95 for a Sony Superscope. Sony's ad read: "What does Mrs. Claus do on that one lonely ("elnt") night? She tapes her favorite Christmas carols right off the air with her brand new Sony CF-100 tapes. A Christmas present ("matone") from her husband."

1973 President Nixon asked people to curb (“tsamen”) their Christmas lights displays on account of the energy crisis.

1975 The Hallmark Christmas Ornament “Betsy Clark #250-QX157-1” sold for \$2.50. (In 1993, it sold for \$350.)

Cyril Ritchard in “A Musical Jubilee,” at the St. James in NYC, offers the best seats for \$15.

1976 Christmas dinner at the White Turkey in NYC costs \$8.95.

1978 The average price of a box of Xmas cards was \$2.71.

1979 Chuck Latham started a group called SCROOGE--the Society to Curtail Ridiculous, Outrageous and Ostentagious Gift Exchanges. They advocate sensible spending at Christmas.

1980 The Gucci catalog offers a lizard handbag with an eighteen-karat-gold handle that can be detached as a necklace for \$11,500.

1982 Neiman Marcus sells a His and Hers robot for \$15,000. Shall we call him “Robot Redford” or “Humphrey Robot”?

1983 Cabbage Patch doll sales were estimated at 1 billion dollars. The late Jackie Kennedy came up short when an aide phoned the headquarters of the FAO Schwarz toy firm in NYC and asked for a Cabbage Patch Kid.

1984 Leo Rosten (“Hooray for Yiddish”) tells the Hanukkah necktie joke: A boy hurried into his bedroom ripped off the tie he was wearing, put on one of the ties his mother had bought him, and hurried back. “Look, Mama! Isn’t it gorgeous?” Mama said, “What’s the matter? You don’t like the other one?”

The bill for the Mike Dukakis’ Christmas party for the press came to \$1,358.

1986 A popular Christmas gift in NYC was a \$12 deck of Leona Helmsley playing cards.

(August 28) Santa Claus, wearing his North Pole snowglasses, arrived at Radio City Music Hall. His bag contained tickets for the annual Xmas spectacular that had just gone on sale. "Der oylem" (the crowd) is sprayed with machine-made "shney" (snow) to promote the Xmas season.

George Burns told columnist, Cindy Adams, "When I was 7 I got one skate [for Christmas]. I came from a very poor ("oym") family."

1987 Diane White, newspaper columnist, wrote, "Don't buy anything advertised as a Christmas Special. It probably isn't."

Ritter's Cleaner in North Syracuse, NY, offered to clean soiled Santa suits for FREE ("umzist").

1988 Macy's, NYC, has six Santa houses in its 2,000,000-square foot store.

Saks Fifth Avenue, NYC, translators help shoppers in nine foreign languages.

The Old Homestead restaurant, NYC, has a last-minute gift idea-- a live 10-pound lobster packed in ice and sent anywhere--for \$250.

1989 USA Today reports that Americans spent \$460 on holiday gifts.

1990 Harry Lipsig, personal-injury lawyer, sent 60,000 holiday cards to everyone he had ever buttonholed during his last 60 years of city practice.

1991 A two-oz. bottle of Recession, a cologne, sold for \$22.50 at Bloomingdale's.

The estimated number of cookies that were left for Santa Claus on Christmas was 84 million.

NY card shops sell crosscultural greeting cards which combine Jewish and Christian themes.

Santas on Long Island receive \$60 a shift or \$600 a week for those

working two shifts a day, five days a week.

Molly Katz (“Jewish As A Second Language”) wrote about wrapping “papier” (paper): “Gifts are opened carefully, using a pencil to lift the tape, so the paper can be saved. It isn’t reused; that would be cheap. (A cheapskate or “shnorer” does that!) But it’s a crime to throw away such lovely paper.”

1992 A holiday gift budget of \$1,100 is the average for this year for Americans with household incomes of \$50,000 or more.

The Fur (“pelts”) Vault of Lyndhurst, NJ, promises a 50% refund on coats if it snows at least 3” on Christmas Eve and a 100% refund if snowfall exceeds 6 inches.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr. wrote: “Instruction Number 384: “Never give a loved one a gift that suggests they need improvement.” No “shtoybzoyger” (vacuum cleaner) or Swiffers!

A customer phoned FAO Schwarz, NYC, looking for a piggy bank. “We don’t sell piggy banks, sir,” came the reply. “Our children don’t save--they invest.”

1993 One of the hottest-selling items is expected to be a \$20 FAKE portable cellular phone (“tselularer telefon”).

Security-minded individuals are investing \$49.95 for “Mr. Carmind,” a car security device. The latex dummy head is meant to be attached to a shirt and then tied to the seat of a parked car. It’s realistic enough to scare away car thieves, who don’t want to mess with an occupied car.

For its holiday window displays, the Macy’s flagship store in Manhattan chose to create White House Christmas scenes. One tableau, featuring Chelsea Clinton reading in bed, is missing: the White House objected to it, and the store had it removed.

1994 Orchestra seats to the B’way show, “Show Boat” are \$75.

The cost of all the gifts in “The Twelve Days of Christmas” was

\$15,944.20.

1995 Chelsea Clinton posed with nearly 10,000 guests at White House Christmas parties.

1996 Theatergoers pay \$100 to see the B'way show, "Chicago."

Big Onion Tours conducted its fifth annual Christmas Day Walking Tour of Jewish history on the Lower East Side.

1997 Psychotherapist, Janet Daman, continues to treat people who face the problem of binge buying.

Joshua Halberstam ("Schmoozing") wrote about the elevation of Chanukah from the relatively minor holiday it was in Europe to the major Jewish holiday it is in the U. S. today. "The Talmud devoted a scant two pages to Chanukah while dedicating an entire volume to Purim," said Halberstam.

The Salvation Army's standard red ("royt") kettle will be linked to a credit-reading device.

Long Islanders plan to spend an average of \$1,041 on holiday gifts this year, according to Stephanie Bushey of Hofstra University.

Vicki Madden leads a workshop called "Unplugging The Christmas Machine," aimed at weaning New Yorkers from their charge cards.

For "der kinder," happiness is a cyberpet named "Tomagotchi" and "Sing & "Khropen" (Snore), Ernie.

1999 Harry Potter books are a favorite, as well as Millennium/Y2K items. The Millennium DC215, pocket-size digital camera in matte gold with 2000 embossed on it, sells for \$499. "Say "Cheese"!

2000 Per-household holiday spending will be approximately \$490.

The British supermarket chain, Tesco, has a problem with thieves stealing Christmas trees from their store lots. So the store hired security guards for the trees. Not just any guards: retired army

commandos who will wear full camouflage gear and be equipped with night vision goggles.

2001 J. Levine Judaica sells a Chanukah "Fiddler on the Roof" Menorah for \$85. A "Chanukah at Bubbe's"--a video--sells for \$29.99.

Anymenorah.com expects to sell about 1,000 menorahs this year.

Santas in more than 300 malls can earn \$20,000; a star performer can get \$30,000 for the short holiday season. (Source: Santa Plus)

KMart Corp. opened its doors at 5 a.m. on Nov. 23 and kept them open for 66 straight hours--until 11 p.m. Sunday.

2002 Jewish websites state the No. 1 reason why Hanukkah is better than Christmas:

1. Blintzes are cheaper to mail than fruitcakes.

2004 A Hallmark Tree of Life card was inscribed, "On Hanukkah, remember the wise words of the ancient sages, 'Let the good times scroll.'" Price: \$1.99.

For more than 20 years Christmas has been a bit merrier for folks in the Kansas City area, thanks to a secret Santa who passes out \$100 bills each holiday season. The mysterious philanthropist ("bal-tsdoke") in the red shirt, gave away \$40,000 last "sezon" (season). He said, "I've been at rock bottom myself."

The book, "Yiddish With Dick and Jane" sells for \$12.

2005 The holiday gift book, "Curious George," Zackary Berger's Yiddish translation, sells for \$18 ("Chai").

2006 The iPod and its caravan of accessories are expected to be top sellers.

ChristmasDecorators.com offers to install exterior lighting and holiday decorations, residential and commercial, at prices starting at \$999.00.



Consumers will spend \$791.10 on holiday gifts.

2007 Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe publishes, "Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers."

Another "bukh" for "hunt" (dog) lovers: Weiner & Davilman publish "How To Raise a Jewish Dog." Price: \$12.99.

2008 A Channukah doggie gift box from the "Bow Wow Dog Bakery" costs \$9.95.

A gift subscription to JDate costs \$3999 for 1 month and \$33.33 a month for a 3-month subscription.

An El Al Airlines ad reads: "Consider This An Early Hanukkah Gift." Nonstop NY To Tel Aviv, Economy Class Companion Fare: \$831; Business Class: \$3,331.

2009 Greeting card from Designer Greetings.com says, "Happy Hanukkah. Love You a Latke." Cost: \$2.75 USA.

A CNN poll says that "More Americans are cutting their gift-giving budget than are cutting back in any other category of spending from leisure activities (movies or restaurants), to clothing to major purchases (furniture, appliances).

Toys "R" Us hired 35,000 seasonal employees nationwide.

2010 Newsweek reports that 6 million Americans are still juggling debt ("khoyv") from last year's shopping season.

Coach thinks consumers are ready to spend. They're rolling out new products, including a line of \$298 to \$1,000 Sophia bags.

Retailer Dollar General heavily promoted a \$12 Bobbie Books women's jeans during Christmas.

2011 During the holidays, B'way tickets to see Hugh Jackman sing and dance cost \$175. In October they sold for \$155.

2012 Wal-Mart doubled the number of tablet computers it's bringing in for

the holidays.

Lord & Taylor, which closed on Thanksgiving last year, has decided to open its NY flagship on the holiday. Kohl's and Macy's throw open their doors at midnight ("halbe nahkht") following Thanksgiving.

"Christmas creep" brings sightings of Christmas trees and inflatable snowmen in LATE SUMMER. On August 21, Walmart announced new terms for its lay-away program. And on Sept. 9, Kmart promoted its lay-away program. The ad aired almost a month earlier than its holiday TV ad in 2012.

12% of shoppers surveyed said they start holiday shopping before September.

The "bukh," Sadie's Almost Marvelous Menorah, by Jamie Korngold, makes for a wonderful gift. PJ Library brings this book to Jewish children in a partnership with local philanthropists and the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. For more information, call (413)-439-1981.

2013 The Neiman Marcus Christmas Book offered one-of-a-kind gifts: a \$344,500 Aston Martin Vanquish Volante and an opportunity to design your own diamond ring. Then you can travel to Africa to see where the stone came from.

2014 For the first time in more than a decade, the blonde Barbie doll is no longer the No. 1 holiday gift for girls. Disney's "frozen" franchise has taken the top spot.

Don't look for the book, "Barbie" I Can Be a Computer Engineer." It was pulled by Mattel after being blasted by critics who said the book portrayed Barbie as incompetent around technology.

Studies show that those who make less than \$50,000 a year plan to spend \$377 for the holidays, down from \$435 last year. Those who make \$50,000 or more plan to spend about the same as last year-- about \$978.

The one good thing about this holiday season is that gas and fuel ("brenvarg") prices are down, which means consumers have more

money in their pockets to spend.

-----  
MARJORIE WOLFE's philosophy: "Buy Now, PRAY LATER."

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



"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and  
"Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish  
Trivia." To order a copy, go to her  
website: [MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com](http://MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com)

**NU, what are you waiting for? Order the book!**



[Yiddish Stuff](#)  
[Jewish Humor](#)  
[Schmooze News](#)  
[More Majorie Wolfe](#)

[Principle](#)  
[Jewish Stories](#)  
[All Things Jewish](#)  
[Jewish Communities of the World](#)

**Site Designed and Maintained by  
Haruth Communications**