

# The Schmooze Stories with a Yiddish Twist

## GRETA FRIEDMAN'S ICONIC KISS

The Yiddish word for “kiss” is “kush.”  
To “kiss” is “kushn.”

*by*  
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Joyce Newman said, “Kiss-kiss gets you out of a lot of things. You don’t have to remember their name.” The communications specialist also said that the number of kisses in the U. S. tends to be industry-specific. She has clients ranging from health-care executives to clothing manufacturers. “Usually it’s one cheek—unless it’s my fashionista clients, and they do two.”

Source: [wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com), March 27, 2008

Burt Bacharach and Hal David wrote the song, “I’ll Never Fall in Love Again.” Four of the lines go as follows:

What do you get when you kiss a girl  
You get enough germs to catch pneumonia  
After you do, she’ll never phone you

I'll never fall in love again.

Yes, Greta Zimmer Friedman got kissed by an ecstatic sailor (“matros”) in Times Square on Aug. 14, 1945 (V-J Day)... and died of pneumonia on Sept. 8, 2016. She was 92 years old.

Greta Zimmer Friedman was born in Austria in 1924, and traveled to America in 1938, with two younger (“yinger”) sisters. They were fleeing Hitler and the Nazis. Her parents never made the trip. On the day that “yung” Greta was photographed, she did not know if her parents were even alive. It was later determined that they had both died in the Holocaust.

As a “yung froy” (young woman), she was involved in the New York Theater Community. She studied costuming at the New School’s Dramatic Workshop. There she befriended actors like Harry Belafonte and Rod Steiger.

On the morning (“der frimorgn”) of Aug. 14, 1945, Greta Zimmer reported to work as a dental assistant on Lexington Avenue. She heard a rumor (“shmue”) that the Japanese had surrendered, ending W. W. II. In the afternoon (“der nokhmitog”) she wandered west to investigate (“oysforshn”). People spilled out into the streets from bars, restaurants, and movie theaters.

As she entered Times Square, she found herself grabbed and kissed by George Mendonsa. He spun her around and planted a kiss on her lips. The two were complete strangers. (Note: The Yiddish word for stranger is “fremder.”) They had never met.

Mondonsa was on a date with a nurse (“frankn-shvester”), who would later become his wife. The sailor was on leave and overjoyed by the war’s end.

Greta Friedman said in an interview, “It wasn’t my choice to be kissed. The guy just came over and grabbed!” Friedman’s son, Josh, said his mother “didn’t assign any bad motives to George, in the circumstance, that situation, that time.”

Unbeknownst to either, Life magazine (“zhurnal”) photographer, Alfred Eisenstadt, captured the moment and took a photograph (“fotografye”) of the event. He published it a few weeks later in Life magazine. It was buried deep within the magazine’s pages.

In 1956, Greta married a doctor, Misha Friedman, and moved to Maryland. There she raised a son and a daughter.

Friedman first saw Eisenstadt’s photo in a book in the 1960s. She contacted Life, but the magazine wasn’t interested in determining the subject. In 1980, Life inquired details, asking for the sailor and nurse (dental assistant) to come forward. Dozens of people claimed to be the couple.

It was later proven that Friedman and Mendonsa were indeed the couple. A tattoo on the sailor’s right arm and Friedman’s height and hairstyle matched other photographs of her taken at the time.

That photograph has become one of the most famous (“barimt”) photographs of the 20th century.

Friedman was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, next to her late husband (“man”), Dr. Misha Friedman. Mendonsa, 93, is a retired fisherman, living in Rhode Island.

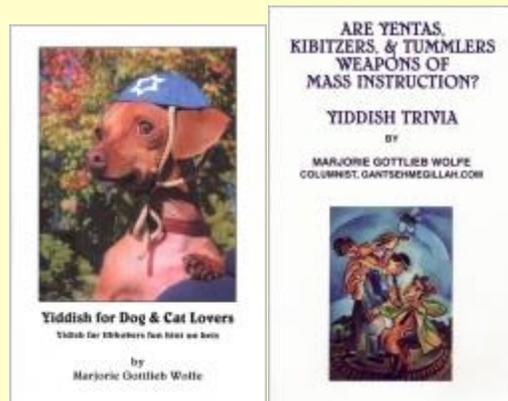
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MARJORIE WOLFE is glad to read on WebMD that “kissing does burn a small number of calories. During a very passionate kiss, the body can burn up to 2 calories a minute.” Compare that to running on a treadmill, which burns an average of 11.2 calories per minute. Kissing has been shown to reduce stress (“druk”), increase relationship satisfaction, and lower cholesterol levels. Say “Goodbye” to Crestor, Lipitor, Zocor, and Zetia. Say “Hello” to “der kush.”

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



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