



The Schmooze

Stories with a Yiddish Twist

A YIDDISH GUIDE TO BETTE MIDLER

by

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Syosset, New York

Bette Midler is a Grammy award-winning “zinger” (singer), Academy-award nominee, Broadway star, “aktrise” (actress), and author. Her book, “A View From A Broad” was originally published in 1980, and a new edition was published in 2014.

Shown below is a Yiddish Guide to Midler:

“geboyrn” (born)

Midler was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on Dec. 1, 1945. She was one of the first Jewish families in a mostly Asian “shkheyneshaft” (neighborhood).

“akhzoryesdik” (cruel)

Midler writes how she hated school. “I was an alien, a foreigner even though I was born there [Hawaii]. I remember children being so cruel. You don’t forget these things.”

“tata-mame” (parents)

“One of the thrills of [my parents’] life - because they had so little Jewish contact - was to see someone like Myron Cohen or Sam Levenson on the Ed Sullivan Show, being very Jewish.” (quote) Her father thought show-

business was a waste of time. He thought she should have been a teacher or a nurse (“krankn-shvester”).

“ananas” (pineapple)

Midler worked in a pineapple cannery when she was 13. She liked the routine; she could sing on top of the noise (“tuml”) They couldn’t hear her. (Source: “What I Know Now,” People magazine, Nov. 10, 2014)

“kind” (child); “kindhayt” (childhood)

“I didn’t belong as a kid, and that always bothered me. If only I’d known that one day my differentness would be an asset, then my early life would have been much easier.” (quote)

“rirn” (to move)

After moving to New York, one of Midler’s first gigs was taking over the role of eldest daughter (“tokhter”), Tzeitel, in the original B’way production of “Fiddler on the Roof” in 1967. She played the role for three years.

“khasene” (marriage)

Midler said [of her marriage], “We used to fight bitterly.” (She says she stayed with Martin von Haslberg for the sake of their daughter, Sophia.)

“flien” (to fly); “fligl” (wing)

The website, “Jew or Not Jew” published profiles of Jewish people: “What do we know about this Midler? She was born on a beach in Hawaii. (We believe it to be on Archiplago off the coast of Colorado that sank in the 24th century.) Apparently, she could fly, as various recordings mention her wings. (We have no way to confirm this. Winged humans first appeared in the 29th century, so either Midler was 900 years ahead of her time, or this is some kind of mistake (“toes.”) A sect known as “the gays” considered her “divine.” (We cannot explain that one.)

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“Ruchel” (Rose)

Midler was the monomaniacal Mama Rose in the 1993 TV movie adaptation of “Gypsy.”

(di) meydlekh” (the girls)

Midler is now promoting “It’s the Girls,” her first record in eight years.

“muter” (mother)

“My daughter is my best friend (“fraynd”). She thinks I’m hysterical. She’s my toughest critic, yet she’s so kind (“frayndlekhkayt”). She’s kind to both my husband and me, which makes us think, ‘Oh my God!’ She likes us!” (quote) Note: The Yiddish has been added by the writer.

Sophie, Midler’s daughter, is trilingual. She went to college in China, and graduated from Yale Drama School.

“druk” (stress)

“gliklekh” (happy)

“matone” (present/gift)

“Everybody needs to forget about their stresses. When we bought 52 gardens in 1999 [for my New York Restoration Project], it was a present for people who are not used to getting presents. That makes me really happy.” (quote)

“hatslokhe” (success)

“The worst part of success is trying to find out who is happy for you.” (quote)

“reybn” (to scrub)

“My idea of superwoman is someone who scrubs her own floors.” (quote)

“genetsn” (to yawn)

“Cherish forever what makes you unique, cuz you’re really a yawn if it goes.” (quote)

“likhtik” (bright light)

“Find your Light; they can’t love you if they can’t see you.” (quote)

“a zeyger” (o’clock)

“When it’s three o’clock in New York, it’s still 1938 in London.” (quote)

“emes” (true)

“I never know how much of what I say is true.” (quote)

“pyane” (piano)

Barry Manilow was Ms. Midler’s pianist and later a producer on her album, “The Divine Miss M.” “When he [Manilow] left me, I was pretty devastated

because I really liked what he brought to the table...but I don't blame him for wanting to have a solo career." (quote)

"frayhayt" (liberty)

"I don't think the real Jewish experience has ever been captured, the real historical experience of wandering through the desert ("midber") and what the Zionist movement was all about and how Jews had no liberty at all. And the pogroms, they've never covered the pogroms--has there ever been a movie about the pogroms? I've never seen one. Have you?" (quote)

"zingen" (to sing)

When Midler first heard "Wind Beneath My Wings," she thought, "I'm not singing that." Marc Shaiman insisted, and it was her biggest hit of her career.

Midler said, "I'm no Whitney Houston. I mean I'm a good singer, and the thing that I have that a lot of people don't have is that I can communicate the essence of the song's lyric." (quote)

"alt" (old); "folk" (people); "yung" (young)

"sholem aleykhem" (hello)

"There's 'Hello In There,' that John Prine wrote that I still sing. In fact, it's a song about old people, and when I started singing it, I was very young and now I'm one of the old people." (quote)

Let's share the beautiful lyrics to "Hello In There":

We had an apartment in the city.
Me and my husband liked living there.
It's been years since the kids have grown,
a life of their own, left us alone.

John and Linda live in Omaha.
Joe is somewhere on the road.
We lost Davy in the Korean war.
I still don't know what for, don't matter any more.

You know that old trees just grow stronger,
and old rivers grow wilder every day,

but old people, they just grow lonesome
waiting for someone to say,
“Hello in there. Hello”

Me and my husband, we don't talk much anymore.
He sits and stares through the backdoor screen.
And all the news just repeats itself
like some forgotten dream
that we've both seen.

Someday I'll go and call up Judy.
We worked together at the factory.
Ah, but what would I say when she asks what's new?
Say “Nothing, what's with you?”
Nothing much to do.”

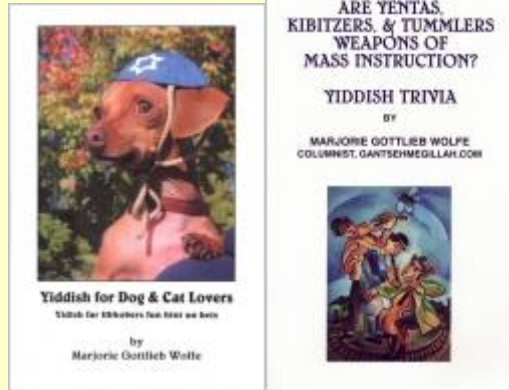
You know that old trees just grow stronger,
and old rivers grow wilder every day,
ah, but, but old people, they just grow lonesome
waiting for someone to say,
“Hello in There. Hello.”

So if you're walking down the street sometime
and you should spot some hollow ancient eyes,
don't you pass them by and stare
as if you didn't care.
Say, “Hello in there. Hello.”

Writer: John Prine

Walden Music Inc., Sour Grapes Music Inc.

**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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