

# Streets of Life

## How Sweet It Is

JUST DESSERTS

Somewhere in the deep abyss of a freezer in Cedarhurst, Long Island, lies an ice cream cone. It has been there since 1965. It is still frozen and there are little squirrel-like nibbles in it.

It is waiting for me to come back and take another bite. But it has been waiting for close to 47 years, and by now I am sure it has given up. It's possible that its rightful owner, Mrs. Renah Bell, gave up on me and threw it out. Truth be told, I hope they threw it out 47 years ago. But I am not sure. Maybe every year her husband, Rabbi Alexander Bell, ob"m, sold it with the *chometz*, waiting for my return, to come back, take a little nibble, and say, "Thank you, Mrs. Bell, but I will finish it later."

Rabbi Bell has since tragically passed away, and his wife Rena would now be the guardian of the cone.

You see, when I was growing up the only sound more exciting than the last day of school's bell was the ubiquitous sound of the *niggun* of the ice cream truck.

Back in 1963 when that sound chimed, everyone came out. Everyone, that is, except my brother and me.

My brother and I never asked for ice cream. We were not *tzaddikim*. We were not *perushim*. We were not even worried about *chalav Yisrael* in those days. We simply did not like ice cream. Or candy. Or cake. Or soda. It made us nauseous.

I am not sure if I remember, or my parents recounted the story a hundred times

in my presence, but it happened at a birthday party. I was five or six years old. All of the kids were busy *fressing* their ice cream, slurping their sodas, and eating their cake. The host noticed that I was sitting quietly in front of a half-empty plate. I am sure that there must have been some potato chips on it, but clearly, for me there was not much else I liked.

"Muttu," he said. "What can I get you? Don't you want some ice cream? Soda? Candy?"

In a five-year-old voice I answered the question as an 80-year-old would have. "Maybe you got some cottage cheese and a glass of seltzer?" Honest, that's what I drank, and that's what I still drink.

Well, the man and his wife, laughing, looked at me as if I was crazy. Which six-year-old asks for cottage cheese and seltzer? Then they told the story to my father in front of me. I think they even added the accent of an 80-year-old man, "*Mebbe you got a cottejeese and a beesel seltzer.*"

I was so embarrassed that I changed my life strategy.

I won't go into detail, but my brother and I share a certain rare food allergy that causes a strange reaction. Whenever we eat a certain type of sugar, we become nauseous and sleepy.

It does not seem to be hereditary, as no one from either of our parents' sides ever heard of it, and none of our hundreds if not thousands of cousins have this quirk of nature, in which a certain type, out of all the many complex sugars in the world,

cause an allergic reaction. As my brother and I never were sick because of it, and no one, unless they were told, knew we had this reaction, we never really paid attention to it, and we never really cared. Meat and potatoes, *lokshen* and cheese were just fine. Lots of cheese. We just didn't eat ice cream or drink soda. I would not then, and still don't, even sweeten things with artificial sweeteners. I have an aversion for that type of sweetness.

Even as a teen, when I would go into *frummie* mode, I would love the "*prishus act*," telling my peers, "*Miyom omdì da'ati* [From the day I began to mature] I have never eaten cake, ice cream, or soda." My friends would marvel!

I didn't tell them how many bags of potato chips and pretzels I devoured and how much seltzer and milk I drank.

However, we are the specimens that researchers love to spend their millions of grant dollars on. My brother and I were offered a free, first-class round-trip ticket to San Francisco to meet Dr. R. Curtis Morris, a nephrologist who was doing research in San Francisco.

While my brother took Dr. Morris up on his offer, I at first did not. I explained to him that although I am slightly interested in why eating a hundred dextrose-laden Winkie lollipops doesn't give me an upset stomach, whereas eating a candy that contains accumulated fructose-1-phosphate causes inhibition of a glycogen breakdown and a stomachache, it still gave me "absolutely no reason to fly to San Francisco for

you to study me and my metabolism.

"I'll tell you what," I said. "If I ever need to be on the West Coast, I'll give you a call."

I eventually did, and that call, like so many others, led to a different story. For another time.

For a child who doesn't always like to eat what his friends eat or play what his friends play and still remain normal is quite a challenge. I did not want to be a weirdo. After that birthday party I hated saying "I don't like ice cream" or "No, thank you," to the hostess who had just served her most delicious and most sugary concoction. I would always accept the candied food graciously and mush it around the plate in the hope that somehow it would disappear. For some reason, people get highly offended if you turn down the chance to eat their latest (*and greatest*) recipe.

I am not really interested in explaining that I don't like sweets and no, I don't have a sugar problem, and can eat as much dextrose as I want, and it is only one type of compound, etc., etc. So I maneuver around it.

People really tend to take "No, thank

chocolate cake that everyone raves about. And she basically makes two menus for every meal. But I must admit that I am really lucky because the (pretty salty) water *challahs* she bakes are the best in this country! My kids have to suffer through the dry wines that I use for *kiddush*, but they have developed sophisticated palates, and can appreciate the bottle of a really dry and equally delicious Chateau Leoville-Poyferre that I was given as a gift for Pesach.

And so, as a *bochur*, at the end of a meal I would walk out, my pockets filled with crushed cake and other desserts that my hostess thought I devoured as I nibbled, hid, and complimented. It is not so hard to squirrel away cake and let them think you ate it. Ice cream, however, was a problem. Trust me. It does not preserve well in suit pockets. But for some reason, probably because of the old man at the party seltzer story, I was always embarrassed to say "No, thank you."

And that is why, even at seven or eight years of age, I, like Mrs. Bell's children, Meir and Reuven, did not turn down her treat. I just nibbled and said, "You know, I'm really not so hungry right now. Can

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**I answered the question as an 80-year-old man would have. "Maybe you got some cottage cheese and a glass of seltzer?"**

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you," personally and you have to be careful. I was also tired of hearing, "It's really not that sweet," or "Just try it," or "I don't use sugar. I only use honey."

To me there's no difference. So as a *bochur* dependent on the graciousness of hosts, I just accepted it and dealt with it accordingly.

I really feel bad for my wife, who could never make me happy with her amazing

you put it away and I'll continue eating it next time I come to play?"

Another day. Another nibble. Back into the freezer. Another day. Another nibble. Back into the freezer. I assume it's still there.

You see, last December I visited Mrs. Bell, who was sitting *shiva* for her mother, Rebbitzin Magda Mescheloff, *a"h*. As I got up to leave, she called me over and coyly



whispered, "If you'd like another bite, your ice cream cone is still in the freezer."

How sweet it is. ●

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