

Life in the Fast Lane

By William Rabinowitz

I could have argued that I am the simple, normal snowflake and could not do all the honey do things on the list. I might have said no. But being a dutiful loving, understanding hubby who still wished to have Friday night *Ketubah* rights, at least, I knew when not to talk back and do what honey tells me to do. It did not matter that my flight, from my working world up north, did not get in until 12:30am Thursday morning. The plane did bring me back from snow and sleet to the warm bright sun of Florida. I had only a few days before commuting back to the snow, sleet and grind of paying for the wife's time in Boynton Beach.

When I opened the door to our home Norman, our Cockastzu - the name sounds like a chicken sneezing - came running up, tail wagging and a look of thank God you are here. Take me for a walk immediately. I need someone to play with. The wife was waiting up and smiling also. She was glad I made it back safely. With a gentle caress of her left hand and kiss of welcome she handed me my honey do's for the morning with her right hand. My delusions of sleeping in, reading a book on the lounge, basking in the warmth of the sun, napping after an afternoon beer receded quickly. The first thing on the list was taking Norman to get groomed.

Norman has never been groomed. His fur has grown long, fluffy, cute, cuddly and adoringly attractive. It bunches up and cascades in near braids over his face. We love his look because it comes along with his sweet personality. He had to get groomed, the matted fur behind the ears and on the tummy needed attention. Until we drove south we were afraid to give him a haircut because it is cold up north when he goes out. But now in the warmth of Boynton Beach he needed a haircut.

My mother in law told us where to go. As mother in laws go, she is o.k. She knows not to tell us where to go when she feels like telling us where to go. She said she tried the Puppy Palace Groomery on Boynton Beach Blvd. with not good results. She left her toe biting white Multi-Poo, yap dog with the groomers leaving instructions to take a little off the top so he can see better. For \$14.00 how much work can that entail? She picked up her loving little yap dog a few hours later. He was all white from his shampoo, a blue bow scotch taped to his head and shaved from top to bottom. If a dog can be embarrassed by being shaved naked this one sure was. He must have caught a sideways look at himself in the mirror and been shocked. When she picked him up, his eyes said, take me home quick before someone sees me. It took a few weeks, the fur grew back and he returned to his loving toe biting ways. She never returned to the discount Puppy Palace Groomery but decided to go for the expensive grooming of \$48.00 a shampoo and trim hair cut at Philips Pet Hair Salon. Philips is two doors down from Flakowitz's delicatessen on the corner of Haagen Ranch and Boynton Beach Blvd.

Not wanting Norman to be shaved naked, the wife made an appointment at the Salon asking specifically for Philip. We understand he even sings to the dogs while working to help them settle down. Or is it that he sings with the dogs? Whatever, Philip took his appointments on a first come first serve basis. The doors open at 8:00am. By 7:30am I was standing outside Philip's Pet Hair Salon, first in line, waiting.

It felt terrible watching Norman being led down the hall by the attendant. His little face kept looking back at me over his shoulder with – why are you doing this to me in his eyes. Haven't I been good? I don't take a dump in the house or pee on mom's favorite carpet anymore. O.K. so I have had a few accidents, but is that a good reason to have me taken away? I waved goodbye with the same anxiety that any other parent saying goodbye to their child the first time they get on the big orange school bus and head off to the kindergarten's world of higher learning.

The girls at the desk must have seen the look on my face. "Don't worry he will be fine. Philip will sing to him. What is your cell phone number if there is a problem? He will be ready about noon". Noon, I thought, how long does it take to get a shampoo and trim? It is not like he was going to get his nails painted, color added to his fur and a facial.

Because it was Norman's first time, Philip did come out so talk with me, somberly and seriously about the mornings procedures. We talked about styles of fur cutting, shaping and arranging. Actually, Philip talked, I had no idea. I was not listening much as he may be a dog to Philip, he is Norman to me.

At first, I thought I would walk into Flakowitz's deli and have a nice breakfast of scrambled eggs lox and fresh baked bagels with a cup of Sweet Touchney Tea, but a quick trip in changed my mind. It felt dark and the tables seemed largely to be filled with single men escaping their wives. Not willing to waste time, I had my honey do list with dreams of snoozing on the lounge in the afternoon sun after a nice cold Corona washed away the week's cares.

The next thing on the list was picking up the ramp we had ordered made so my mother in law's scooter can shoot out the living room French door's one half of one step down, to the covered area by the pool. She always drives at full throttle. The wife had me on hands and knees measuring the degree of pitch, length, width, and probable load bearing weight for the ramp.

A month earlier I had been sent out to reconnoiter and arrange for the wedge to be built. Steve at MaxUrban – a wood shop in Lower Boynton, whose motto is Excitement is Building, said he would do the project. Actually, excitement would be when the mother in law careens out of the living room at full speed through the French doors hitting the ramp and not skidding into the swimming pool a few feet further on. I just had a devilish thought... what if I waxed the ramp so the brakes would not, as they say in Hebrew – *tafuss* (grabb). That mirthy idea quickly had to be abandoned – if she had had her hair done that day... the shrieking would be worse than when my cat leaped for the window in the bathroom, missed and fell in the toilet instead. It was funny as anything. The cat did not think so. Talk about an indignant look.

Steve did not answer his phone and the staff there does not answer it for him. They only speak Spanish and I, and most of Boynton Beach, do not speak Spanish. The wife reminded me why I did not directions, "you will know where to go, you where there one a month ago". Of course, I never forget anything. That is what I tell her. I always know where I am going. I have an instinct for direction. If I had advised Moses I would have told him to turn left for the oil fields and not right to the sand dunes. Moses never asked me.

Driving down Woolbright to Congress I could not remember it is was left of right on Congress to Steve's. I chose left. It should have been right but once in the left only lane you are stuck. So, I made the left turn and then tried to make a u-bee a block up after the oncoming traffic passed.

In Boynton Beach oncoming traffic never stops coming. It is not that there is so much traffic but the seniors drive slowly and quite far apart from each other to give the term margin of safety, from tail gating, a new definition. The senior drivers, some with heads who could see over the dashboard and some without, came at me in a never ending slow flow. I dared not pull out even when there was a reasonable break because the fright might scare them into some sort of radical behavior like hitting the brakes at hard as possible 300 feet from me careening from lane to lane and coming to a terrifying sideways full stop, from 20 miles an hour, in the middle of a three lane road. They would sit grasping their chests, their wives pushing nitro pills into their mouths. The cry, *Shema Yisroel*, (Hear O Israel) would be heard plaintively on the wind as they narrowly avoided death by a quarter of a mile.

God's road angel must have smiled. A break in the flow opened up a ½ mile wide. I went for it and u-bee'd southward. Driving in the left lane, scrutinizing every left turn street, I resembled a proper Boynton Beacher, I must have been going 20 miles an hour but I was not careening from lane to lane. With the luck of the Irish, yes there are Irish Jews, I spotted the street and turned left after waiting for the light to change first. A few blocks down, a right turn into the industrial park where MaxUrban is located, I parked and went in.

"Steve.... ", I called out.

"Sorry – Steve no here", was the reply.

"I am looking for a ramp that we ordered". The man looked at me sympathetically, shrugged and asked someone else in Spanish to help me. The second man spoke some English but he knew nothing of a ramp. I asked about Steve.

"Steve ? Steve no here".

"I know. When will Steve be back?" I asked.

"In a few hours, maybe".

"Do you have his phone number?"

"No..."

"Do you have a business card with his phone number?"

We went into the office and he rummaged over the desk. Then he went outside and found the first guy who spoke less English to come in and rummage around the desk – finally a card was found. They both smiled and said "you call him".

Nothing much to do but call or come back later. I am enterprising guy and do not let wet moss grow under my butt very long. After the Palm Beach Water and Sewer people sent us a bill for water use for \$500 when we were not even home the wife called an investigative plumber to determine if we had a leak in the house. The PBWS people insisted we had a huge leak and it was running almost 8,000 gallons a day of use. With premonitions of opening up the house to discover it had been turned into a ten foot deep aquarium we asked her father to check it out. Nothing to report, everything dry and tight. The PBWS was not interested. They wanted a plumber to investigate. We contacted Rinaldi's Plumbing and Heating, No Job too small or sat on too long, the add read. The PBWS had shut off the water line while we were gone because of the excess water usage. They refused to turn it back on until the plumber had done his investigative plumbing. Eddie Rinaldi checked the place out. He could not find a leak anywhere. The water was turned back. PBWS didn't care as long as they got their \$500.00. It was either pay the bill or lug water from the lake to fill up the toilet tanks and the swimming pool when needed. We paid. Eddie did notice the broken whole house water filter on the side. He told Sheila about it and that he would come to remove it when we were there. Then he proceeded to do some plumber marketing. Have we considered putting in a water filter under the sink? It would only cost another \$187.00. Somehow having a water filter under the sink to help the mice and rats with their personal hygiene did not appeal.

"We have a filter in the refrigerator but it has not been changed for almost two years".

"Oh', said Eddie, 'I can replace that for you if you get one when I return".

Line three on the honey do list – get water filter for Eddie. The wife dutifully called around and found that the Appliance King in Boynton carried water filters for refrigerators. Stop three, get a new filter. The street address she wrote out for me was a bit vague. Go out Woolbright to Seacrest turn right. First left and straight to where the street dead ends into a parking lot. Minor problem, she did not put the name of the store, the address, the filter or the make and model of the refrigerator on the instructions. The left from Seacrest took me by the Boynton Beach city hall and the main Boynton Beach police station. Good thing I was going slowly. It was like out of a movie, this tall, young sultry long blond haired woman was leaning up against a concrete pillar next to the police station. Her legs must have gone from here to there and she had a look about her face as she talked on her cell phone. As my gaze passed her belt buckle things changed – a large gold shield hung on her leather belt, a black pistol the size of a small cannon tucked into a holster on her hip. I kept driving slowly, and carefully, past the station.

Sure enough, the street dead ended into a small parking lot. It was a rundown strip center of about four stores each barricaded with heavy iron grates on the windows. Grass grew up between the cracks in the sun faded pavement. Proximity to the police did not seem to be a factor with the neighborhood's under-life. My choices were simple, Wu's Take Out House of Ribs and the Appliance King. I chose the latter. Only I wasn't sure, the door was one way silver colored glass. Nothing said it was open, not even a flashing outline of yellow lights around the darkened windows as you might expect on an adult video store. I pushed the door open and went in to a cubby hole of a business. There was only room for two people to stand up in front of the desk, appliance spare parts, a full stove and a refrigerator blocked everything else. A very old man sat

hunched over behind the counter. I felt guilty, like I might have awoken him from his nap. At least he was getting one.

Hi my name is and my wife said you have a filter for our refrigerator. He did not know the name and had no idea what I was talking about. But in back of him on some wooden shelves, bending with age and weight from unsold inventory, were two rows of boxes of water filters. A call to the wife to ask what kind of refrigerator and what was the model number. Fortunately Sheila is sometimes capable of doing amazing things. She found the make and the model which I read off to him. The old man moved very slowly from his chair, his hand shaking slightly as he reached over to a computer keyboard and plugged in the numbers. It must have been five minutes of his staring at the screen and pecking one key at a time before he looked up and said – no such model number. But he said, there are only two water filters for that type of refrigerator. They each remove, lead, magnesium, selenium, strontium 90, copper, zinc, iron oxide, and any other types of nefarious metals in your ice water, ice maker. To think I have been living all these years drinking from the public water system and ingesting all of these metals. I did wonder how the filter was going to remove strontium 90 as we have not had an atmospheric hydrogen bomb test in 50 years.

"Is it a long filter or a short round one" he asked. Now I had a tough choice, did I ever really examine the inner workings of the water filter system of the refrigerator? I had two choices. I said I think it is fat and round. Good choice, he only had one long filter and twenty three fat round ones. Since the wife arranged with Eddie to return and install the filter, I asked if it is very difficult. He eyed me funny and said – "nope. Just push up and turn half way – it pops out, the same to install the new one". \$44.95 later I had a new water filter to install that will extract any trace metal and strontium 90 from our water and ice.

Nothing more to do for now but drive home and hope the long blond haired bombshell of a cop was still leaning on the pillar talking on the cell phone when I drove, slowly and carefully, by. She was.

Back home I displayed plumber skills to the wife's amazement and replaced the water filter. The water tastes the same to me.

I was turning toward the lounge when I heard the voice. "Bill, the pool water heater is not working properly go check it out. I can't use the pool. It is too cold". Off to the tool box to retrieve the pliers to loosen the timing lugs on the pool's heater.

Sometimes you are not aware of time. It could not have been long enough to have had a nice cup of English breakfast tea with milk and sweet and low before the phone rang. It was Philip's – Norman was ready.

Walking out the garage, I hear "don't forget to go to the post office with the mail".

"Where's the mail?"

"Over there".

"Where's over there?"

"Near the front door".

"Where near the front door?"

"On the foyer table".

"The car is in the garage why did you put the mail near the front door?"

"I didn't want you to forget it."

Firing up the engine in the garage I did remember to open the garage door first. Some older folks in Boynton have forgotten and left the engine running after closing the garage door with unfortunate results. Some say it was the Alzheimer's, others say it was clear thinking.

Down Jog, left on Woolbright past the Beth Israel Memorial Chapel. Every time I go this way I wonder, why does the funeral home have to be called the House of Israel? Is our house a funeral chapel? Jews are smart, why can't they come up with a better name? Do Christians name their memorial chapels the House of Baptists or Home of Pentecostals Memorial Chapel? Why can't Jews call it, Sam Cohen's Lamentation and Send Off Sanctuary, anything but the House of Israel. We are not the living dead.

Actually, there is a change coming. There is an empty lot next to the Beth Israel Memorial Chapel. It is zoned for an upscale restaurant. We might have just come from Memorializing Uncle Henry but isn't it nice to know that we will be able to walk next door for a nice lunch and a good strudel or maybe a canoli?

Hanging a right on Haagen Ranch my mind wandered to the creamy richness of Haagen Daz strawberry ice-cream. I keep looking for the Haagen Daz ice cream plant, it is not there, Flakowitz is and so is Norman.

Philip did not come out to greet me. He was washing, trimming and prettying a whole slew of "happy" doggies. The girls at the front desk chatted on the phone while I waited.

"We will have three slices of pepperoni pizza, a side order of onion rings and a large bottle of diet coke".

"Nothing for dessert?" I asked.

"No, not today, we are on a diet. Yesterday we pigged out and ordered fried Oreo cookies".

"Fried Oreo cookies?" I asked.

"Yeah, they are great".

"No really, fried Oreo cookies? I never had them. I have to get the name of your lunch place".

One of the girls disappeared in the back and out came Norman. He recognized me but I had to look twice to recognize the straining little fellow on the leash lunging to me with a look of save me – you have no idea – they shaved my private areas.....

His bangs were gone, his face was squared away. The loose ringlets that made him so adorable were left in some back room. He was the right size and his fur was still long. A red, white and blue starred kerchief hung from his neck. Norman lunged for me jumping up on his hind legs, his front two wrapped tightly around my leg, an imploring face looking up – save me, save me. The \$48.00 became \$55.00 and of course I asked "is it customary to tip" – "but of course it is your choice, most people do" was the reply. \$65.00 later Norman was out the door, looking the same as far as his coat length, the bangs gone, the matt on his tummy gone, smelling like the wet Norman that I knew; A jump in the car and safety.

Next stop, the post office and the drive through mail box. Most drivers approach it from the driver's window on the left side. You know, roll down the window, put your left hand out to the big open slot and mail your letters. In Boynton some of the folks, who thanks to the AARP still are driving while legally blind and suffering from dementia, approach it from the wrong side. This one home aqua blue hair colored elderly lady parked her car next to the box. She had approached it from the wrong side. Five minutes of fiddling with things in her car she opens the driver's door and balances precariously on the side of the car. Carefully, she opened the passenger door in back of her and takes out her pink flowered walker. She "walks" around the rear of the car to the mail box and stops. She had forgotten to take the envelopes with her. With a deft movement she opened up the front passenger side door removes the envelopes, a ballerina turn and she shoves them into the gaping maw of the drive-through postal box while making a swift grab for the walker to reestablish her balance. A reversal of the walker back around the car, shoving it again in the back seat, plunking herself into the driver's seat, five minutes of searching for the keys and she honks her horn at me to get out of her way so she can pull out.

There would have been no point in saying anything to her. Chances are she was hard of hearing as well. Norman and I just looked at each other and then backed the car up so she could pull out into the parking lot going the wrong way.

Us males, Norman and me, completed our mailing mission free to return home.

Norman was so happy to be back. Sheila cuddled and cooed at his wonderful new look but agreed that he looked better with the ringlet bangs. Hair grows back for Norman, not for me anymore.

It was enough trauma today for Norman. His doggy dream was to lounge at home and bark his head off at the ducks, golfers and lizards in the back yard.

The day was part way gone but I still had my hopes for the afternoon lounge. The phone rang as I sat down. Steve from Urban Max was on the line. The ramp was ready. Picking up the keys I headed for the garage without further instructions.

Back down Woolbright I must have been lost in thought as I crossed Congress missing the turn to Steve's. I did not wake up from my daytime sonambulescence until I was turning onto Seacrest heading for another look at the tall, blond, female cop by the city hall talking on her cell phone. As I turned into the Appliance King again, I woke up to realize she was gone and I was really in the wrong place.

Back to Congress I made it to Steve's. He was there waiting. He is a nice, young guy with pictures of his wife and new baby on his desk. We went out to the shop and he picked up the ramp – for a quick wipe down and instructions.

"Just take a wet towel and wipe it down. The surface is finished with a glossy slightly slippery laminate. Do not wax or put oil on the ramp it will making it very slippery" he warned me.

Nodding my head with understanding, Steve carried the ramp to the van and put it in the back. We went back to his office. I pulled out my credit card to pay the \$261.00 for the ramp.

"Sorry, but I don't take credit cards" he said. "Do you have a check? I told your wife it was cash or checks only".

Looking in the secret wallet compartment where I might keep a spare check, I knew there was nothing there. The gesture was futile.

"Is there an ATM nearby" I asked remembering I had an ATM card on me that I almost never used.

"Sure there are ATM's everywhere", he replied.

"Great – where?"

"Right at the corner of Woolbright and Congress" Steve instructed.

Trusting me with the ramp in the back of the van, I pulled out and headed for the ATM. I had neglected to ask where or which corner of Woolbright and Congress. There are four corners.

At the designated intersection, eagle eyed, I spotted a gas station on one corner, a McDonalds on the another corner and the Walgreen on the third corner. I never noticed the fourth corner. I must have been day dreaming about the tall, blond cop with the gun again. I turned left onto Woolbright wondering where could there be an ATM. That was when I spotted the National City Bank and ATM service center on the fourth corner in back of me; another u-turn, after the usual interminable wait for a break in senior rushing traffic, a left to the Bank. Parking the car out front, I walked up to the bank. The side I parked on did not have an ATM. I walked around to the other side. It did not have an ATM. The other two sides, one was a driveway and the other side was the back of the building. Breaking with male tradition, I went into the bank to ask for directions to the ATM machine. In the lobby I spotted a machine that looked like a tall grey ATM – I realized it was a coin counter after a few minutes of looking for where to stick my debit

card for cash. Everyone was working; a line was at the counter so I wandered outside again wondering where did they hide the ATM? The bank sign said ATM Bank.

From the corner of my eye I read the directions to the back of the bank – ATM drive through. Walking around the side, and patiently waiting my turn in line after the two cars in front of me, I retrieved \$300 plus a \$3.00 fee from the bank to get my money out.

Completing the circumnavigation of the National City, I made it back to the van, returned to Steve's to pay the bill. Home free.....

The ramp fit perfectly. The sun was still out and my beer has been cooling.

"Honey", by the very sound of the word and tone, I knew not to look up. Quickly, I plunked down, burrowing myself as invisibly as possible in the lounge. "Honey", the sound came again. I tugged my baseball cap's bill down over my closed eyes. "Honey", the sound became louder. "I need you to do something".

It was no use, the baseball bill came up, my eyes popped open and I looked up. Sheila was there smiling, or was it grimacing at me. "Honey, I need you to go to the Publix grocery store. I need a few things".

The sky was clouding over.

"Thank you for doing all those things honey, I know you wanted to lay on the lounge and have a snooze. You can do that tomorrow. My parents are coming tonight for dinner.

Extra floor wax..... why do you ask?"

Tomorrow is Friday, the holy Sabbath. Will it be worth having my Ketubah rights cancelled this week, I wondered?

Who said Jewish men do not think with their heads?