

The Kids are Coming!

By William Rabinowitz

The phone rang once, then twice. I have been trained well. Do not answer the phone until the third ring even if I am standing next to the phone. Sheila insists that in Boynton Beach there are many wrong phone calls with no voices on the other end. Just wait for the third ring then pick up.

So I waited when the phone rang. One ring, two rings, and then I heard from the other room Sheila had picked up the phone violating her own prohibition on the rules of picking up the phone. God forbid if I had done that.

"Hello", I heard follow by a loud sigh of happiness. "Hello darling. I so love to hear your voice".

If I was a different sort of person, the sighing and the darling and I love to hear your voice part would have made me suspicious, but I know Sheila. If she was going to fool around she would not telegraph her liaisons for me to be within earshot, even if I am increasingly hard of hearing.

"Hello darling", could only mean one thing. One of the kids was calling.

"You are!" Another joyful squeal of happiness emerged from Sheila. "When? For how long? How nice. Do we have the what put in our car? You are flying in? Of course we do. Why would you doubt us darling? Especially since you are bringing our new grandbaby for a visit. We will pick you up. No, wait, your father will pick you up, I will have a beauty shop appointment to get my hair done just for you. You don't want my new five month old grandson to be ashamed when he sees me with my hair not done just right. This is such a wonderful surprise. I am so excited. We can't wait to see you. By, by and kiss, kiss the baby for us. We will see you next week."

A decisive bang as the phone was hung up told me the conversation was over.

"Who was that Sheila?" I asked.

"It was Jonathan. He is coming. He is bringing the new grandbaby and his wife is coming too."

"Did he want to speak to me to?"

"No, you will talk to him when he comes. I told him you are going to pick him up at the airport" she answered.

"What was he asking about?" I asked her.

"What was he asking about?" she said. "He wanted to know if you had the infant child safety seat he sent down six months ago professionally installed yet."

"You mean the seat that the seat belt goes around", I asked.

"William, don't be difficult" she said. "You know it is more than a simple seat belt that secures the seat. Jonathan told us these are the latest designs for child safety in cars. They do things differently now. They do things better than when we had children. When we had ours we strapped in the seats but today there are special studies on how to put a car seat in. Jonathan has long told us that what we did when they were small would be considered criminal today. You would get three years in jail for not paying attention to the latest in car baby seat designs. Everything is done differently and improved today."

"Sheila you mean after long government over funded studies by PhDs in child safety, psychology, physiology, nutrition and impactology, they finally concluded we did everything wrong. We diapered the wrong ends, fed them the wrong food, denied them the newest and most expensive I want, I need and I gotta have items or they will never be able to go to school again. We were just not sensitive to their needs for personal space in a private guest house room with their friends, no questions asked Just think Sheila, if we had not messed up so bad in raising Jonathan he would not be an insurance executive today making \$150,000 a year but the owner of the corporation at 28, ordering others around while he sits back and rakes in \$10,000,000 a year, all the while complaining about his terrible parenting and potty training to his group therapy session of fellow spoiled, ruined neurotics so his psychiatrist can make enough to send his kid to private boarding school in the Adirondacks and he only has to see his brat twice a year; drop off in September and pick up for summer camp before shipment in Southern France for the balance."

"William. I am not amused, so stop it. Jonathan is coming. Do you want your grandson to be exposed to danger, William? Go and see about having the seat installed properly."

Well, I had my marching order in place. There was no point in arguing or trying to reason. It was quite obvious we were all a bunch of dangerous incompetents. The world was and is clearly in a terrible place because we have screwed it up. Thank God, the new generation has been able to read the proper books on how to straighten the world out. With their enlightened help not only the world will be saved but their children will never say to them someday, "you screwed up my life and did everything wrong. We studied what you messed up and this is how things are going to be fixed."

Since I am not permitted to simply wrap the seat belt securely through the slots in the baby car seat, I called logical places to tell me where to go. I don't ask Sheila where to go at times like these, for obvious reasons – after all it is Thursday and Friday is coming up and Shabbat *ketubah* rights have to be considered.

Opening the phone book I looked up infant car seats. Buy, Buy Baby was a store we had purchased things from for the grandbaby, just after his bris up North. It was not just a store with thousand dollar changing tables made out of hand made solid mahogany with fourteen coats of hypoallergenic shellac and varnish, tested by Johnson and Johnson's baby research center for any potential chemical residue, it was a baby *Super store*.

The store was the size of Macy's department store, at least 15,000 feet on two levels. A department for strollers with 150 styles, colors, shapes and prices from \$100 to \$950. A department for cribs, that were so costly even the grandparents doing the buying had to take out a second trust on their houses. They had everything and anything. They even had wall to wall crying babies being escorted throughout the store with dazed grandmas and grandpas. The new parents and the babies were both drooling.

The grandparents looked on in shocked silence. Every department had chairs and benches to rest on. Not for the new parents, they were full of energy of look at this and look at that. It was for the worn down grandparents to recover from the distress of not knowing how to say no to their goo goo eyed children for fear of making their kids disappointed. All the grandparents have horror stories of friends who were cut off from their grandkids if the money did not flow just right.

The nearest Buy, Buy Baby is in Coral Springs, about an hour drive away. Boynton Beach might be the second fastest growing Jewish community in the country, behind Las Vegas, but it is growing super fast with the average age a spry 73 and older. There is not a great deal of demand for Buy, Buy Baby stores in Boynton Beach. Few of us were biblical Abrahams and Sarah's and had angels floating around telling our 90 year old ladies they are pregnant and will have a baby soon. If we did have a Boynton Beach lady who was 90 and insisted an angel told her she was going to have a baby – we have a lot of nice nursing homes around the area with padded rooms and large psychotropic drug supplies of Haldol or whatever is at the ready.

You know that if ever God really did speak to any of us in Boynton Beach and we tried to share God's message with our friends, we would be whisked away so fast... OY!

The nice lady at Buy, Buy Baby, Gladys, understood my dilemma. I needed to get the baby car seat installed before the kids arrived otherwise they would never come again because we cannot do anything right and might need to be placed in a nursing home.

"Where can I get a car seat installed, professionally and properly?" I asked Gladys.

"You are quite correct to ask Mr. Rabinowitz" Gladys answered. "The law has been improved. You cannot simply install a child car safety seat yourself."

"O.K.", I responded. "Where do I go? I will pay anything to get it done by next Friday".

"We don't install car seats ourselves Mr. Rabinowitz, because of legal considerations. We can sell you one but any police station or fire station or emergency response location can do it for you. They all do it for free. It is part of the community services that you are paying your tax dollars for", Gladys smiled with her answer.

I thanked her, very impressed that here I am paying super high property taxes on a house that is going down in value every day and it was comforting to know that anyone in Boynton Beach can get a child car seat installed for free.

With the gray plastic child safety seat in the back of the car, I headed out to the fire station house at Woolbright and Congress, to get it installed. Pulling up in front of the station house, I walked up to the front door. It was locked. O.k. security is security. I can't fault them for that. I rang the door bell. I rang the bell three, then four, then five times – no answer. I tried the voice intercom, no answer. Then I began wondering, what if I had pulled up in front of the fire house, my car engine on fire and rang the bell for help and no one was home. What would I do if I really had an emergency, standing in front of the fire department and they were all out to lunch?

Maybe they were out on a call. Maybe someone had locked their pet poodle in the car or a gator had sauntered into their backyard pool or Mrs. Himmelfarb had another gall stone attack and needed emergency transportation to her internist. There could be a dozen good reasons no one answered the door at the fire house.

Back home, I turned to my trusty search machine, my beloved computer. I typed in Boynton Beach, fire and rescue locations. I called the main number.

Boynton Beach fire and rescue, a voice response machine answered on the fifth ring. "If this is an emergency please stay on the line an operator will be with you shortly or dial", the recorded voice suddenly intoned very slowly and clearly, twice over, "dial 9 followed by the pound sign and then enter 66, after the beep." The message was repeated in Spanish for those trying to place an emergency call who do not speak English. Hope no one died while waiting. I hung on the line. After five minutes a human being answered. I explained my dilemma.

"No problem, just go to any fire and rescue station", the voice responded. "They can help you".

"I did" I quickly replied. "There was no one there".

"Hold please".

Two minutes later another voice came on. I explained the problem again.

"I see", she said. "Well, call Lt. Fabrize at this number. He specializes in installing car seats".

Great I was making progress. I called the number for Lt. Fabrize only to learn, from his answering machine, he was on vacation and would not be able to return calls until the next scheduled car seat installation day two weeks from now. Well, that did not work.

Undaunted, I called the Boynton Beach Police department who referred me to the Atlantis fire and safety squad, who said call Del Ray emergency services, who sent me to Greenacres volunteer fire and rescue, who said try Palm Beach County general services, who sent me to the Florida Highway patrol. Each had a special date for installation by appointment only and the scheduler was not in.

They were probably down at the Boynton Beach boardwalk watching the walruses working on their skin cancers, I thought.

The Florida Highway Patrol referred to the Palm Beach Precious Cargo Hotline number for car safety seat installation. I called the Precious Cargo Hotline greatly relieved to finally have found the right place to call.

"You have reached the Palm Beach County Precious Cargo Hotline", a recorded message began. "During the summer months we are closed. We will return all phone calls on Tuesdays and Thursdays to set up your Precious Cargo installations by appointment only. Leave your name and number after the beep". Then the same message was repeated in Spanish.

Not knowing what to do and not wanting Sheila to see me sitting on the phone screaming into the receiver, "I want to speak to a human being, something with a heartbeat, a living anything".... I left the house and started wandering from fire station to fire station hoping someone would be able to install a child car safety seat. Finally, finally at the Hagen Ranch fire station, a nice young man in a blue jump suit came out and talked to me. He had PBCFR, Palm Beach County Fire and Rescue, stenciled on his back. His name was Ted. It was embroidered on the front of his chest pocket.

He walked over to the car and picked up the car seat. He looked at it. He turned it over. He read the directions printed on the side, as I had done before. The directions were so clear only a person from the Philippines speaking Tagalog could understand them. Then he said.

"I installed my own car seat. But I can't install one for you. We are not permitted to help you here. The lawyers sue us over everything. If anything happened we would be liable. I can't help you. The man that installs the car seats is out for six weeks on maternity leave".

He did not have a suggestion as to what to do to get the seat installed before Jonathan and his family arrived. I thought about going back to the Boynton Beach police station, parking illegally in front of the station house and waiting to get arrested then throwing myself on the mercy of the station sergeant, derangedly asking for help in getting my child car seat installed.

Dejected, I drove slowly home. I pulled into the garage and closed the garage door behind me. We always close the garage door behind us otherwise Norman will run out as soon as the mud room door opens. I thought of all those Boynton Beachers who somehow forget to turn off their engines after closing the garage door behind them. But I had an idea.

"Sheila", I called out. "What airport are the kids coming in to?"

"Why do you ask?" she responded. "They will not be in for another week".

"I know", I said, "but what airport are they flying into?"

"I don't know. Ft. Lauderdale or West Palm, what difference does it make?" she was getting annoyed.

Ft. Lauderdale and West Palm are both serviced by Southwest airlines, our kids flying carrier of choice. They are also 65 miles apart. A quick call to Jonathan confirmed it was Ft. Lauderdale.

I opened my wallet and pulled out my trusty gold card to look up the phone number in tiny letters that I now need a magnifying glass to read.

"Hello, Hertz car rentals? I want to reserve a car in Ft. Lauderdale. Do you rent cars with infant child safety seats installed? Good. I need a car for two days next week. Jonathan Rabinowitz, his wife and my new grandson will be coming in.

\$126.23 for the two days.

Wonderful, put it on my card", I said.

Sheila called from the other room.

"William, did you take care of the car seat for Jonathan?"

"Yes dear", I said. "It has all been arranged".

Friday night ketubah rights are Friday night ketubah rights.

Norman just looked up at me. The green plastic squeaky ball lay at his feet. Can you play with me now was easily read in his eyes?