

“Mrs. Melnick”

A Snippet Inspired by a Lois Lutz Snippet

Peter Grumbacher February 2022

Let me just tell you that we had a beloved cat named “Zig” for eighteen years. She was spoiled and aloof, but she was OUR cat. Now before we had Zig...years and years before...we almost had an adorable black kitten who found her way onto our urban back porch.

I say “urban” not just because we first lived in the city of Wilmington but to give you an idea of the kind of house in which we lived. It was semi-detached as were all the houses on that stretch of 34th Street, and there must have been twenty such houses from Miller Road down to the next street, the name of which I completely forgot. But all of those houses faced the backs of the houses that were on 33rd Street. All in all, if my arithmetic is right, there were about forty semi-detached homes. We knew a good number of our neighbors and they knew us.

One evening we heard a purring. We opened the back door and there was an adorable kitten. We gave him milk and as the musical ditty says, “the cat came back the very next day.” After a few days of our home hospitality, we chose to adopt the cat, even taking the sweetie for shots. Now we believe it was a male. We named him Abelard (after Abelard and Heloise fame, a 12th century French couple, Peter Abelard and Heloise d’Argenteuil. We had just seen the stage play with the same name), but because of an incident that happened just before we named the cat, I almost had another name in mind, caring little as to the gender of the kitten.

Here’s what happened...

A young man came to me for the purpose of discussing conversion to Judaism. He seemed like a nice enough guy. We spoke for an hour; he told me about his background. I gave him something to read for our next appointment which was to be a week later. That day he called and cancelled.

We made another appointment for the following week. He had a flat tire on the way. And then we made another appointment. He came this time but he hadn’t read the material.

After a while I said to him, *“I’m going to give you a scenario. Don’t respond at all so that no one can say you’re the one who laid it out for me. We’ll talk about it when I’m finished, ok?”* He agreed.

I said to him, *“You told me you were engaged and you wanted to choose Judaism as your religion because your bride-to-be is Jewish. It’s not that you’re particularly interested in religion one way or the other but your future mother-in-law is driving you crazy. That’s why you’re here, right?”*

He looked at me in disbelief that I could figure that out. Well, I put two and two together. He told me he was engaged. He told me he was converting for his soon-to-be-wife. He cancelled two times. He didn’t do the assignment. I’m a pretty smart guy...and it sure wouldn’t be the first time that scenario came to pass.

“Rabbi,” he said, *“she’s driving me up the wall. I have no negative feelings about Jews or Judaism. I have no negative feelings about any group or any religion. I don’t care, quite frankly!”*

I had no problem with anything he said, and told him that I wouldn’t continue working with him towards conversion. I did tell him I’d study with him if he wanted (I knew he’d turn me down but he fascinated me so I made the offer).

Ok, the story is over, right? WAIT! As the late Paul Harvey used to say, "Now you'll hear *"the rest of the story."*

A day or two later I received a call at home.

"Rabbi, this is Mrs. Melnick, So-and-so's future mother-in-law. How DARE you insinuate that I'm putting pressure on him to convert!! You call yourself a rabbi?? I'm informing the president of your synagogue what an outrageous insinuation you made. I know the name of your president and the phone number."

So I invited her to call the president, and in parting I said, *"Mrs. Melnick, you just proved that I was right. Goodbye."*

I came home and told Suzy, *"Let's call the cat Mrs. Melnick whether it's a male or female,"* and I explained why. So his name is Abelard but whether it was Abelard or Mrs. Melnick didn't matter...it's owner came knocking at our door (she somehow proved she owned the cat). We let her have it telling her we gave him the shots not knowing if he already had them. She gave us some baloney as to why she didn't check the neighborhood earlier. I told her to take care of the cat better than she had. Big deal, *whoopdee do.*

And now *"the rest of the rest of the story."* Years later – I had forgotten the incident until it popped into my head, as is often the case – I asked the-then president, *"Did you ever get a call from a woman who said I was a so-and-so because I told her future son-in-law my theory as to why he was in my office."* Now remember, the incident must have happened ten or so years earlier, but the president said, *"Oh, sure...Mrs. Melnick! I told her that was not my business and got off the phone. I never forgot her, her miserable voice and her ranting and raving."*

So what happened to this guy? What happened as far as his relationship with Mrs. Melnick was concerned? No clue, but I'll bet either he never married her daughter or they're divorced, or that they're happily married with a thousand children and grandchildren. But I'll also bet he and Mrs. Melnick never ever ever ever got along...and she probably never got along with her husband, kids and everyone else in the universe! That's one man's opinion.

"Good night, Mrs. Melnick, wherever you are!!"