

**Mark Sherman**

# Rent-a-Kvetch

**I am an inveterate saver.** Not a hoarder, exactly, since what I save are never things like food. And there are no piles of stuff blocking hallways or anything else. What I typically save are things that interest me, and, unfortunately, many things interest me.

Mostly what interests me are myself and my thoughts, so much of what I have saved are the millions of words I have written, and many of those proceed when I got a computer and could file things away invisibly.

But it's not just my own ideas that intrigue me, as fascinating as they are, but those of others. And when I hear about something that seems especially interesting, I will write it down.

And save it.

Recently, I was going through a box of stuff that sits on the floor of our bedroom closet and found a little piece of paper, which simply had the words "Rent-a-Kvetch" on it, and an address in New York City. I immediately understood why I had saved it. I tend to kvetch quite a bit (and for those who don't know, I will soon explain what that means), so to hear about a company with the word "kvetch" in it certainly would have caught my attention.

"Kvetch" is a Yiddish word, which essentially means "to complain," but not really about big

things. If you've just lost your job and you complain about this to a friend, that would hardly be called kvetching. Similarly, for your concerns about the world ending because of global warming. But if the washing machine you just bought is having problems, and you complain about that, now you're kvetching.

Also, the word can be used as a noun. If, like me, you are frequently complaining about things, you *are* a kvetch.

By the way, the word "kvetch" is pronounced without a vowel between the "k" and the "v" sound. It is not "kuh-vetch." This is hard for those few of us who grew up without hearing Yiddish from our grandparents, but if you work on it, you can get it. As you make the "k" sound, at the same time put your lower teeth against the top of your lower lip, along with making the "eh" sound. And if you still have trouble, don't kvetch to me about it!



Anyway, I decided to check on "Rent-a-Kvetch" to see what it was all about. I found it immediately when I Googled, and discovered that the company was founded in 1981, and was getting attention from publications like *People* magazine as early as 1982 (though the then rather staid *New York Times* didn't report on it until 1984). No surprise about the years. The way this little piece of paper looked, it had to be from at least 30 years ago, and in my world of saving things, that's recent.

In interviews, the founder of Rent-a-Kvetch, B.L. Ochman described the moment she had the idea. Ms. Ochman, who was running a public relations firm at the time, said she was at a party, when a friend asked her if she could write a complaint letter on her behalf. "What am I?" she asked, "Rent-a-Kvetch." And there it was, like so many good ideas -- the lightbulb going off.

As she tells it, having nothing else to do, she wrote a press release about it, and to her amazement it was soon picked up by all kinds of national media. To my mind, it was as if the whole country wanted to kvetch and had found a spokesperson to do it for them.

I have a kvetch: I've had lots of good ideas, but none of them have taken off the way hers did. But to whom can I kvetch about this? God? I don't think so. Remember, the expression is "God helps those who help themselves," not "God helps kvetches."

Of course, like so many other brilliant ideas, this one had its day and then faded. But B.L. Ochman was never one to let grass grow under her feet, and she has done all kinds of things since. But I don't know if any of them has ever reached had the immediate success that Rent-a-Kvetch did. My guess is that she kvetches about this all the time.

help. If we could have done something differently, we would have. If we now see something we would like to do differently in the world after Maya's death, that new knowledge and understanding is a blessing.

What do we do, as a community, with our loss? We open our hearts to it and begin to carry it. We help each other. We continue to connect with our children, with other parents, with teachers and administrators, with police, with drug intervention specialists and counselors and with our state and federal representatives. We remember the words of Rabbi Jonathan and make sure we offer an outstretched hand to our children. If they feel self-blame, or doubt themselves, we might not be able to take that away, but we can help them carry this burden, for it is too great for a young person to carry alone. It's too great for anyone to carry alone. We must bear it together. We do whatever brings us comfort and makes our world a little kinder, as Maya wanted it.

**Linda Brotman  
Robin Perls-Shultis**  
New Paltz

## Unethical ethics complaints

There is something wrong with the way our ethics complaints system is working. It seems that it is too easy for a person to file baseless complaints to harass/punish a town official they have a political difference with. This has happened in the past and appears to have recently happened again.

Kevin Barry, of our New Paltz Town Board, generously offered his assistance to Springtown homeowners during this last year. I and other members of the floodplain community asked him to help us reform the dramatically unfair town codes that seemed to aim at destroying the value of our homes and eventually reducing our neighborhood to a street of deserted wrecks.

Our success at uncovering the nonsense behind these laws has upset a former member of the Town Board. Kitty Brown still supports these devastating laws not found in the standards of FEMA, New York State's DEC or the town codes of other communities with far greater flood problems.

A few weeks ago, she took an additional step to punish those who questioned her stand by filing an ethics complaint against Mr. Barry, which is totally unjustified by New Paltz's own ethics code. Since she is a knowledgeable former town official, it is strange

that she would file such a complaint. Since Mr. Barry was advocating for the good of a large group of citizens, the fact that he owns some Springtown farmland that is predominantly wetlands is not an issue.

The exception in 15-7 A 2 (b) allows him to represent a group of residents or taxpayers from an area (Springtown Road residents) even though he is part of that group. The text of the town's code is as follows.

This code's prohibition on use of a municipal position (§ 15-4), disclosure requirements (§ 15-5), and requirements relating to recusal and abstention (§ 15-6) shall not apply with respect to the following matters:

- (2) Any matter requiring the exercise of discretion that directly affects any of the following groups of people or a lawful class of such groups:
  - (a) All municipal officers or employees;
  - (b) All residents or taxpayers of the municipality or an area of the municipality; or
  - (c) The general public

Right now, a person can use the system of ethics complaints to tar the reputation of a town official with unfounded charges without incurring negative consequences. Is it any wonder that our town's committees have many open positions that few want to volunteer for?

Some kind of vetting process can be added to the filing of an ethics complaint. For instance, all citizens wishing to make such a charge may be required to first meet with a member of the ethics committee to determine whether the charge has merit. If a citizen wishes to file the complaint even though he has been told that the complaint is baseless, he may be advised that he may be risking a charge of slander.

I ask that some kind of reform be made to decrease the possibility of another such incident in the future and that Mr. Barry be officially cleared of these charges with all possible speed.

**Caroline Paulson**  
New Paltz

## Food for fines

As a community, we have many shared priorities and many things that need support. All of us at the Elting Memorial Library are aware of this. It makes us all the more grateful for the support of our friends and neighbors on the recent library funding referendum.

In the nine years since opening our significantly enlarged building -- something that was long overdue for our community -- the usage of the library

has grown substantially. It is heartening to see our library as a hub of activity and an anchor in our vibrant downtown.

In the spirit of gratitude and community, we will be offering "Amnesty Days" on Friday, November 20, Saturday, November 21 and Sunday, November 22. Called "Food for Fines," during these days, patrons can bring in overdue Elting library materials and, provided they bring a non-perishable food item to donate, all fines will be forgiven. Food donations will go to Family of New Paltz.

Thank you.

**Richard Heyl de Ortiz, President**  
Elting Memorial Library

## Barbara Rosenblat to be part of One Book One New Paltz

One Book, One New Paltz is proud to announce that Barbara Rosenblat, the actress who portrays Miss Rosa in the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black* is joining our week of exciting programming. Ms. Rosenblat will speak about the development of her character, Miss Rosa, her experience on the series and her thoughts about connections between the series and the book. She will also read from *Out of Orange*, a memoir by the woman who engaged Piper in drug smuggling. Join us for this engaging and exciting presentation on Saturday, November 21, at 7 p.m. in SUNY New Paltz's Studley Theatre.

**Robin Jacobowitz**  
New Paltz

## Veteran's Day 2015

Youth's blood fills the veins of every war. Politicians rage at the enemy, but like heat lightning never pull the trigger themselves. Our youth fly the planes, load the guns and dig the graves.

Front line veterans ask historians to never forget the holocausts we've made or the ones we've survived.

The brutal truth is our cultural memory lasts no longer than the pulpwood paper the pages our histories printed on.

The poverty of morality in our county has more to do with the inhumane weapons we make for our youth to kill third world enemies.

Every new war surrounds our collective hearts