
Earth to Andrew O. Blechman

by

Jane Breskin Zalben

What great fun it would be to live next door to Andrew O. Blechman. When you read this book, you do. It's full of laughs and warmth and good times! Earth to Andrew O. Blechman –Johanna Hurwitz

Jane Breskin Zalben's graceful narrative sparkles with the real-life values of family, friendship and laughter. –Rahel Musleah, Contributing Editor, *Long Island Jewish World*

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“Special thanks to Mrs. Donahue and Mrs. Lupoletti, teachers in John J. Daly School in Port Washington, for inspiring Mrs. Donoletti; to Susan Isaacs, for inviting my family to her eighty-three-year-old father-in-law's Bar Mitzvah; to Rabbi Michael Klayman, for being “scholar-in-residence”; and especially to Alexander Zalben, who at nine years old told Henny Youngman jokes the first night of sitting shiva for my father. I'm sure he would have laughed.”

*In memory of my father,
and to Alexander, who warmed my insides with laughter
when I needed it the most,
and to Jonathan, who was always there for me with a hug,
“editing” our jokes,
with love*

Contents

Copyright

ONE *Earth to Andrew O. Blechman*

TWO *The Green Group*

THREE *101 Jokes*

FOUR *The Offer*

FIVE *Comedy Correspondence Course*

SIX *The First Lesson*

SEVEN *Indoor Noontime*

EIGHT *Phil the Rabbit*

NINE *Moonlight Ride*

Earth to Andrew O. Blechman

TEN *The Oinker's Party*

ELEVEN *The Class Trip*

TWELVE *Our Buried Treasure*

THIRTEEN *An Archaeological Expedition*

FOURTEEN *The Consequences*

FIFTEEN *Stage Fright*

Earth to Andrew O. Blechman

SIXTEEN *"Take my grandmother, please"*

About the Author

CHAPTER ONE

Earth to Andrew O. Blechman

“I was in the lobby of the Sherman Hotel ...”

“What?” My mother looked distracted as she emptied a box of spaghetti into a pot of boiling water.

“I was in the lobby of the Sherman Hotel, and ...”

“Andrew O. Blechman, what are you talking about?” She always added the O., which stood for Owen, when she became annoyed and impatient. Owen was my grandfather, who died the year before I was born, and Mom gave me Earth to Andrew O. Blechman the Earth to Andrew O. Blechman same middle name out of respect for him. Earth to Andrew O. Blechman “Where were you? And why didn’t you call?”

“It was only the beginning of a joke,” I mumbled as she squatted down to turn over four baby lamb chops in the broiler. Two for me, and two for my little brother, the “Oinker” Jason, who was at the kitchen table coloring ten ducks on his homework sheet. He could have polished off all four lamb chops easily if my mother didn’t make me eat the other two.

The phone rang and she picked it up, dragging the cord to the stove so that it dangled over Jason’s head. “Oh, hi, hon. It’s Dad,” she said to us as if we didn’t know who “hon” was by now. “He’s coming home late,” she said to Jason, who was tugging at the receiver to talk.

I went Earth to Andrew O. Blechman into the living room, sat in the armchair near the heating vent, and continued to read from my favorite Henny Youngman book. My father referred to it as the “bible” when he found me reading it the other night under the covers with a flashlight. Henny Youngman Earth to Andrew O. Blechman is the comedian who came up with the famous line “Take my wife, please.” During the Chanukah party two months ago in my Hebrew School class, I tested some of his jokes out on the ten-year-old crowd—like the one where the doctor opens Earth to Andrew O. Blechman a window and says, “Stick out your tongue.” “Why?” I ask. And the doctor says, “Because I’m mad at the neighbors.”

I leaned over and scratched my cat, Snowball, as she rubbed her head on the leg of my sweatpants, getting white fur all over the patches on my knees. “What do you think of this one?” I asked Snowball. She rolled over like Earth to Andrew O. Blechman a dog and I massaged her belly. “Last night at dinner my mother asked me if I wanted a bite. I said yes. And she bit me.” Snowball stretched her paws and closed her eyes. “Well, I’ll have you know

Earth to Andrew O. Blechman that that joke had them rolling in the aisles when I was in third grade last year. Since that one didn't go over with you, how about this one? What do you call a carton of ducks? You give up? A box of quackers." Snowball purred and began to snore. She sounded like my grandmother's friend Mr. Pearlstein when he fell asleep in Grandma's armchair in the sun. As they say in the business, the crowd was dying on me.

Actually, my interest in comedy began a few months ago, when Mr. Pearlstein, Earth to Andrew O. Blechman our neighbor upstairs in 5B, started coming down to have a glass of tea and *mandlebrot* cookies with my grandmother. Grandma lived on the first floor of our brownstone. She moved in after Grandpa died, but insisted on having her own place and paying rent, so she could be "completely independent." Sometimes I'd hear Mr. Pearlstein's footsteps thumping past our front door and I'd make some excuse to join them. Other times, they'd babysit for Jason and me after school if Mom was still at work.

I don't know if it was Mr. Pearlstein, his jokes, or both, that made me want to be with him. Maybe it Earth to Andrew O. Blechman was his bright-blue eyes? They'd get all watery when he laughed. Tears would come out of the corners, and he'd wipe them with the white handkerchief he always kept in his shirt Earth to Andrew O. Blechman pocket. His eyes reminded me of my grandfather's as they looked in the photographs of him Grandma kept on her dresser. Anyway, he'd do his routine for us from the old days—a vaudeville act. He had a partner, Hymie Lindenbaum, who now lives in Miami Beach because of the arthritis in his hands. Hymie used Earth to Andrew O. Blechman to juggle while Mr. Pearlstein told jokes. My grandmother would stand in the kitchen holding her side, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Lou, stop, I can't take it," she'd cry with laughter as he'd go on with his repertoire. "Have pity on an old lady."

"Old? I don't see an old lady here? Do you?" he'd say to me, and my grandma would blush. Then he'd lean down, pinching my cheeks Earth to Andrew O. Blechman hard. "I'll teach you everything I know, *boychik*. I was once the warm-up act for Henny in the Catskills."

"Henny who?" I asked the first time, in ignorance.

"Henny ... 'Henny who?' he asks." Mr. Pearlstein and my grandmother looked at each other knowingly, as though I were a fool. "Does water exist? And air? And life itself?" He went on as if I weren't there. "Oy, what a boy. Have I got a lot to teach you."

"We know Pee Wee Herman," Jason had said, looking at him with five-year-old Earth to Andrew O. Blechman innocence.

"Pee Wee, Schmee Wee, who cares?"

"What about Eddie Murphy?" I asked.

"Murphy Schmurfy, give me the old days," he continued as Grandma poured him more tea. "Rose, a little lemon," he added, putting his forefinger against his thumb, "and a bit of honey. You have?"

“Do I have? Do bees buzz?”

They were an act themselves. And the more I watched them, the more I knew that I wanted to be like Mr. Pearlstein and make people laugh. “There’s enough *tsores*—trouble, misery—in the world,” he’d often say. “Laughter is good for the soul.”

“Dinner’s ready,” my Earth to Andrew O. Blechman mother called into the living room. “I told you ten minutes ago.” She sort of sang the words louder and louder by the time she got to the end of the sentence. “Earth to Andrew Earth to Andrew O. Blechman O. Blechman, do you read me? It’s your mother; I’m waiting.” She shook her head back and forth, one hand on her hip, tapping her foot, Earth to Andrew O. Blechman and swinging a dish towel with the other hand. I put my book down on the ottoman and followed her into the kitchen.

“Ma, I didn’t hear you. Sorry.”

“You always say that. I had your ears tested. They’re fine,” she said as she spooned some sauce over the noodles. “Totally ignored, that’s what I am.”

Earth To Andrew O Blechman

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