

## THE UNETHICIST

Some time ago, I wrote a couple of pieces called “Things of which I am ashamed.” It was a form of “Confession.” Jews don’t go to Confession, but on Yom Kippur we spend a large part of the day running through “Al Kheyts,” asking forgiveness for the many sins we have committed over the past year. I have been thinking of the many ways I have been unethical, dishonest, and have cheated, and taken advantage of various institutions.

When I was a kid and went to the movies with my mother, I would try to beat the movie house three ways: First, I would buy two tickets before the price changed at 5 pm, even though we would not go into the theatre until after 5 pm. In fact, my mother would not arrive at the Prospect Av. station until closer to 5:30 pm. Then we would go to the Prospect Cafeteria and have supper, which meant that we would not be entering the theatre until close to 6 pm. Second, we would take our own candy into the movie house, not buying it at the candy stand. And third, when we arrived home, I would try to glue the two stubs together, making it appear as if it were a whole ticket, which I would use at a later date. The fact that I never used the glued movie ticket is irrelevant. The thought and the act of gluing were wrong, and though it is 75 years later, I feel ashamed.

In college, in my late teens, I would, from time to time, do my homework at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street library. When the library closed at 9 pm, I would walk over to Broadway and look for theatres which were breaking for intermission. The Theatre District was between Broadway and Eighth Avenue from 43<sup>rd</sup> Street to 50<sup>th</sup> Street. The curtain went up at 8:40 pm, and the end of the first act usually occurred between 9:15 and 9:30 pm. I would stroll up one street and down the other until I found an intermission crowd outside a theatre. I really did not care what the play was. I mingled with the crowd, and entered the theatre with them. Standing in the back of the theatre, I would pick up a Playbill. I would then figure out where there were empty seats, usually in the last few rows at the extreme left or right of the orchestra, sometimes in the boxes. I seldom bothered with the mezzanine or balcony.

The challenge was to figure out what took place during the first act after reading the Playbill, and from the first few minutes of second act dialogue. I claimed that I developed the skill because my mother insisted on listening to the 15 minute news, broadcast on the hour, depriving me of listening to my half hour programs from the beginning. I saw scores of second and third acts, and still have the Playbills. And I saw them from better seats than when I bought balcony tickets to the theatre. Though sneaking into the theatre was unethical, I was hardly troubled by it. I did not feel I was stealing anything.

I would take pens, pencils and stationery from my places of employment, from my first to my last jobs. I would also make personal calls, both local and long distance, from the phone on my desk. It was in the mid-70s, I was visiting a friend at another Federal agency, and as we were talking, a colleague of his came over to tell him he would be gone for a few minutes. When I asked him what that was about, he told me that he does

not use his phone for personal calls, but goes down to the lobby to use the pay phone. Unbelievable!

More recently, I rented a car when Fran and I were on a trip. One morning, I decided to explore the area, and drove down a narrow road where there was a beautiful vista—a lake and a breathtaking view of the nearby mountains. I did not realize that some of the branches of trees rubbed against the rented car. When I returned to the main road, I was shocked to see that the branches left scratch marks on the car, a late model, black Ford. Realizing that if I saw it, so would the rental agent, I began thinking about ways to hide it. Rather than own up to having scratched the car, I, unethically, decided that I would go into town and buy some spray paint to cover the scratches. There was no hardware, paint store or auto supply store that carried what I wanted. When I passed a stationery store, I decided that a black marker might do the trick. I bought a “King Size Sharpie—Permanent Black Marker.” I carefully applied it to the scratches, and voila! They were gone, at least to the casual viewer. When I returned the car, nothing was said. I was not charged for the body damage, and I still have the marker to be used for its intended purpose.

Finally, I have even passed on my unethical behavior to my son David. A number of years ago, Fran and I obtained Senior T passes, which enable us to ride Boston’s public transportation system at a reduced rate. We add money to the pass, tap something, and it deducts the cost of the ride to seniors from the pass. Fran hardly ever uses her pass, so whenever David and I go someplace together, like to a Red Sox game, I give him Fran’s pass. I even encourage him to use her pass when we are not going someplace together. I realize, and I am sure David realizes, that we are cheating the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and it is unethical. Oh well.

Through this document, I confess my unethical behavior, but I am not going to promise that I will never do anything unethical again. It is too ingrained.

11-24-14 (updated)