

Getting a Bargain

I may have written about this before. It is a subject that is constantly in my thoughts. It haunts me. I see it as both an affliction and an attribute. I am both ashamed and proud of it. Jokes are made about Jews seeking bargains. I can get it for you wholesale. It is the non-Jew who buys retail.

One way to approach the subject is to break it down into the basic needs of humans: food, clothing and shelter. Then we have other needs: transportation, medical care, entertainment, including movies, plays, concerts, museums, books, magazines, newspapers. I can write a book about getting a bargain in almost every aspect of life. Maybe I will. But for now-- buying day-old bread, and the setting in which it took place. Bread—the staff of life. The setting also involves transportation and medical care.

When I was around 11 or 12, and for several years after, I would go to the Lincoln Hospital for all my medical needs. Most of the time, I would walk, rather than take the trolley car, saving five cents. A bargain. (It was less than a mile away, and I enjoyed walking down Southern Boulevard, past the stores, Laudy's pool room, the movie house, and Samuel Gompers Vocational High School.) When I left the Lincoln Hospital, my mother instructed me to go the Wards Bakery Day Old Outlet which was on the next block. I would buy a few loaves of bread and a cake. They were sold at half-price. The fact is, we never bought Wards bread when we shopped in our neighborhood grocery store, but now it was a bargain.

It didn't occur to me at the time, but Lincoln Hospital was a bargain. It was a municipal hospital and we didn't pay anything. My mother used to say that, during the depression, the only people who were getting good medical care were the very rich and the very poor. All those people in between had to do without. For this piece, I have to make a distinction between getting charity and getting a bargain. So please ignore the above. Nor will I include any mention of the free food and clothing handed out to those of us on relief during the depression. Believe me, it was no bargain.

Staying with food: One of my favorite stories is how my mother found a bargain with regard to the purchase of meat. From the first days that we moved to Fox Street, around 1934, my mother bought all her meat from Mr. Margolies, the Kosher butcher around the corner. It was expensive, but what can you do? It was Mr. Margolies who told my mother (and I guess all his customers) that every piece of meat that he sold them was worth "a dollar a bite." Around 1940, the first A and P Supermarket opened in our neighborhood. My mother had mixed feelings about patronizing a supermarket rather than our local grocery store and fruit and vegetable store, but there is no harm in looking. She couldn't believe the size of the place. And you could help yourself to everything, and they cost less. What really overwhelmed her was the meat department. There were cases and cases of fresh meat of every variety, marked with prices that were one-third to one-quarter what Mr. Margolies charged. My mother decided to give it a try. The lamb chops, the liver, the ground beef, were every bit as good as the meat she bought from Mr. Margolies. And what a bargain! From that time on, she bought all our meat from the A

and P. Her rationale: It is better to buy non-Kosher meat at Kosher prices, than to buy Kosher meat at non-Kosher prices.

Going to the movies as a kid, we looked for bargains. Kids under 12 got in at half-price. And the prices were less before 5 PM. The only time most of us kids went to the movies by ourselves was on weekend matinees. And we really got a bargain: two full length features, a chapter, a couple of shorts, animated comedies, and lots of coming attractions. We were in the movies for around five hours. It didn't matter when we entered. We would leave when we realized we were seeing something for the second time. Sometimes we stayed because we met a friend who came in after we did, but most of the time, we went in as a group and came out as a group. We never bought the candy sold in the movie house; we brought our own food. They charged too much. And they still do. And I still bring my own candy.

My mother and I had a special, movie-related routine which we engaged in every couple months, and which continued for a few years, after she started working downtown. She left work at 4:30 PM and took the train which left her off at the Prospect Avenue station. There were two movie theatres nearby: the Prospect and the Franklin. I would go the box office before 5 PM of the one that we planned to go to, and buy two tickets, before the prices changed. I would then wait for my mother who would usually arrive about 5:15. We would then go to the Prospect Cafeteria for supper, an extravagant indulgence. And then to the movies, and home. A lovely night out.

As a teen-ager, I learned that there was an organization with a name that sounded like Leblanc-Gray that distributed special tickets to Broadway shows, that enabled you to get two tickets for the price of one. Now that's a bargain. The price of admission to Broadway shows at that time ranged from \$1.20 to \$4.80. The special tickets were called two-fers, and I found out later that they were given away at various places: stores, schools, and restaurants. I vividly remember the first time someone gave me one. It was Friday, and I was getting ready to leave work at the Newspaper Division. A reader asked me if I would like to have this ticket for the next day's matinee of a play I had never heard of. He explained that you present it to the box office and you can buy two tickets for the price of one. Wow! I thanked him profusely, went home, told my mother what a fantastic bargain I got and said that we are going to the theatre tomorrow. The first time I will be seeing a live Broadway play. At half price!