



Jocelyn Krieger

Ritual haircut from the other end of the room

Not every little 3-year-old boy has more than 100 people come to watch him have his haircut.

Yaakov Meir happens to be a very traditional young man. So he had his third birthday party at Lubavitch Center in Oak Park where he observed his first haircut, or "upsheerinisht" as it is called, following an ancient eastern European Jewish custom.

Yaakov Meir's paternal grandfather came from Russia. The haircutting ceremony marks the end of babyhood and the beginning of a time to learn.

Being his mother, I was naturally apprehensive of his reactions as Yaakov Meir sat contentedly on his father Byron's knee while rabbis and male friends snipped a lock from the long, golden curls unfurled on his shoulders.

I observed the ceremony from the opposite side of the room among the women guests. Separate seating is prevalent at Chassidic religious functions in order for both men and women to better concentrate on the religious duties being performed.

THE LINE WAS LONG since we belong both to Young Israel of Southfield and the Lubavitch movement.

Realizing the importance of the occasion, Yaakov Meir was both willing and cooperative. He looked like any other 3-year-old except for his "poyos" or sidecurls which remained uncut according to the biblical injunction: "You shall not cut the corners of the head."

The men began to dance and Yaakov Meir was hoisted onto his father's shoulder to lead the entourage. Tzitzis (ritual fringes) swung from beneath Yaakov Meir's suit coat. He began wearing the four-cornered garment beneath his shirt on this third birthday.

Each corner has fringes representing 613 commandments (mitzvos) to which a Jew is bound by the Torah (Five Books of Moses). Each morning he dons them with the appropriate blessing.

YAAKOV MEIR'S LONG blond hair never impaired his masculine identity during the last three years. Whenever anyone referred to him as a girl, Yaakov Meir would hastily correct them. When he was 2, he nearly sent two very elderly ladies into severe shock.

"Such a sweet, little girl," the gray-haired matrons cooed.

Despite his protestations to the contrary, the ladies kept repeating their feminine gendered statement.

"Me a boy!" he shouted for a final time, deftly pulling down the front of his diaper to reveal his evidence of being a fully equipped male.

LIFE WILL CONTINUE to be traditional for Yaakov Meir.

In September when he enters the Lubavitch Cheder in Farmington to begin his formal education, he will walk together with other boys and girls entering for the first time and pass under a prayer shawl (talit).

Candies will shower him from an unseen source, and he will be told the candies are from the angels who want to reward him for coming to learn.

When he is seated at his desk, a book containing the Hebrew alphabet will be opened before him and a drop of honey placed on the first letter, Aleph. The rabbi will tell Yaakov Meir to touch and taste the honey.

Commenting on its sweetness, he will be told to remember it because "Torah is sweet and learning is sweet."

Yaakov Meir will never forget his first haircut, and his trips to Sam Hornung's Barber Shop won't be anything like it. I still remember his brother Avram Zalmán's first haircut three years ago, but it wasn't quite as bittersweet. It took place one week before the birth of Yaakov Meir, so I knew I would soon be holding another baby in my arms.

This time, being an over-40 mother of six, when they placed Yaakov Meir in my arms after the festivities, I closed my eyes to savor a memory. I could feel the downy, soft, tiny baby head with flaxen ringlets that once rested on my shoulder.

Now, I placed a shorn and tired birthday boy's head on my shoulder as he shut his eyes and went to sleep.

Jocelyn Krieger is a free-lance writer and a former actress in off-Broadway productions. She is currently a teacher of piano and voice, is married to a tax consultant, and lives in Southfield.



Sheila Rosen Seitzman

Going to a restaurant with a leg grabber

I can't imagine walking up to someone who is almost 12 feet tall and hanging on to his leg for comfort. But then, if I loved that person very much and wanted to hold him in my arms, I suppose the most convenient way to show affection would be to hug a leg, unless of course, I had a ladder.

My youngest child is a leg grabber. At almost three years of age, she is just about half as tall as I am. I try very hard to see things through her eyes, which certainly makes me squat a lot. I think she sees numerous knees.

Dara must like my leg because she often hangs on to it. Sometimes I think this child is an appendage, and I have tried to walk while she's holding on.

Even though it feels as if you are pulling something, it's possible to walk a short distance this way.

AFTER A VAST amount of research in this area, I have discovered that most of the limb loving my daughter is doing occurs at three times: when she is tired, bored or in a new situation.

Most likely any of us in the same situation would not mind having something sturdy, warm and familiar to relate to.

In public places, however, there is a problem for children who tend to be calf cuddlers. With so many people wearing the unisex uniform of "jeans," a child who does not look up may grab an alien leg.

While waiting on line in a restaurant, on two occasions, we recently have had personal experiences in this area. Both times, my darling daughter grabbed the leg of a strange man.

The first "gentleman" simply shook his leg as if he were shoeing a fly. My child thought that someone she knew and loved was taking her for a ride.

She laughed out of enjoyment and looked up for approval. It was the looking up that clued her in to the error. She went and hid, this time definitely between my legs.

THE SECOND episode occurred while I was

talking to another daughter, and I have no idea how long the leg lover was at it again.

This "victim" was younger and much more patient. He just let her hang on. When I realized what was happening, I quietly murmured, "Dara, dear, that's not your daddy." I certainly wasn't going to say, "That's not your mommy."

On Sunday I wore a skirt — a nice soft, flowing skirt. Dara didn't hold on to my leg at all. She played hide-and-seek among its folds and her laughter, movement and touches were pure delight.

I think I'll wear a skirt more often.

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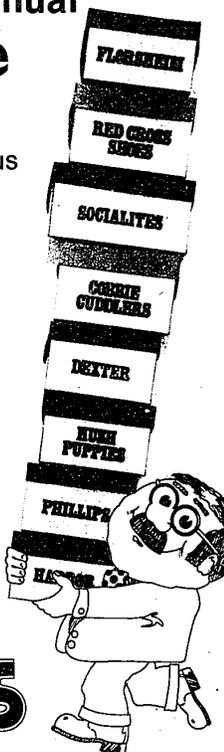
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