

And now for something completely different:

HEEBONICS

Behind the scenes of the Cool Jew book tour

By LISA ALCALAY KLUG
Special to The CJN

This Hebrew month, Adar, is best known for the holiday of Purim. It's another great example of that ancient wisdom, "They tried to kill us. We survived. Let's eat." Thus our ancient sages taught, "When Adar arrives, joy increases."

That makes this an opportune time to look back on what we've been doing the past few months and give it a high five. What have I been up to? Traveling around North America telling jokes. I'm not a standup comedian. I just play one on book tour.

Truth is, my agenda is much wider than merely making Jews laugh. I'm celebrating how cool it is to be Jewish and sharing thoughts on what I call the Jewish cultural revival. You might call it, showing Judaism a good time.

My book, *Cool Jew: The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe* (published by Andrews McMeel) is a comprehensive, loving and irreverent look at Jewish life.

It covers everything from identity, Jewish diversity, cuisine, gear and language to life-cycle events, holidays and spirituality - what I call *Kabba Lah Lah for Non-Dummies*.

It's been said *Cool Jew* does for gefilte fish and matzah balls what *The Official Preppy Handbook* did for plaid and polo, only with much more chutzpah.

We've had a few parties to celebrate. Forty-two to be exact. Soon after Sukkot, I left my home in California for a whirlwind tour that continued through much of January. And I just want to say, dear Canadians, your country has been good to me.

My Canada tour started out at the Ghetto Shul in Montreal, continued at Toronto's Indigo bookstore and was capped off with an amazing night of local talent, a few stolen moments inside the Incredible Bar Mitzvah Machine, an interactive installation created by artist Charles Katz, and some jokes I told at the original *Cool Jew Cabaret* at the Koffler Centre of the Arts in Toronto.

But that's not all. Random strangers gave me a subway token, carried my things through the turnstile, and even walked me through the Yorkdale Mall to Indigo's door, where another stranger introduced herself to me as "Lisa Klug" - her real name.

The Koffler Centre served adorable blue and white "Cool Jew" cookies, happy-face sugar cookies with rainbow sprinkle yarmulkes and gingerbread Yidden with tallit stripes of white icing.

And the good people at the Koffler are continuing to showcase local artists at ongoing *Cool Jew Cabarets* (No. 2 was slated for Feb. 15).



Lisa Alcalay Klug

CBC Radio One invited me for a live interview with honorary Heeb Jian Ghomeshi, host of Q TV, Arts, Culture, Entertainment, who grew up in Thornhill, Ont.

Our interview is now immortalized on YouTube. And the local Costco stocked *Cool Jew*, reportedly next to a stack of Art Scroll prayerbooks, which my book jacket spoofs. Now that's divine providence.

Because I keep kosher, friends had warned me, "You're going to starve." Are you kidding me? This was a Jewish book tour. With a dessert bar that kept appearing everywhere I did. I ate gingerbread in Toronto, brownies in Kansas City, chocolate fondue in Scottsdale, Ariz., and cotton candy in San Francisco. I gained 10 pounds. (The curse of the "Book Tour Ten.")

When I wasn't busy snacking, people asked me all kinds of questions like, "Do you have a day job?" Yes, of course. I'm a stay-at-home mom. But without the husband and kids. Actually, I'm a freelance journalist. In other words, my day job requires another day job. Do you need any one-liners in your office?

Being on tour is its own Twilight Zone. You visit so many places (and eat so much sugar) in such a short period of time that some days you wake up forgetting you're in a foreign country. You know how it goes. You're walking down the street and things feel familiar, but suddenly you're really tripping because those red hexagonal signs you've read all your life as S-T-O-P suddenly say Arret.

Once I realized I was in that one part of North America known as "Kabeck," I figured I'd play along. I started reading all the signs as if I were Lumiere. You know, that talking candelabra from *Beauty and the Beast*? It was fun. "Park Olympique. Jardin Botanique. Irrigation Colonique." You French know how to make anything sound good.

As the tour continued, people started calling me

cool Jew. It's been kind of uncomfortable. I'm not that cool. I'm the dork who wrote the book. But that hasn't stopped people from asking me to evaluate their coolness. They say things like, "Lisa, my name is Mordechai Lefkowitz. Does that make me a cool Jew? Lisa, I'm Moroccan and I speak Yiddish. Am I a cool Jew? Lisa, I'm a shiksa and I love knishes. Does that count?"

My labour of love has done all right. In June, *Cool Jew* won Honourable Mention in the New York Book Festival. In October/November, I was named Erma Bombeck Humor Writer of the Month. And just weeks ago, *Cool Jew* was named a finalist in the 2008 National Jewish Book Awards in the category of contemporary Jewish life.

It appears to be the first humour/pop culture title honoured in the 50-year history of the awards. And this month, the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco is debuting an installation I created called *Matzo Ball Disco*, which incorporates light, music and holograms of flying Jewish stars. It's my Heebster interpretation of a seder plate.

The tour has changed me, perhaps forever.

I've become... emboldened. One night, after a reading in Baltimore, I used lipgloss to sticker my book logo onto a massive sign and the image of a tranquil reader in lotus position.

The first full day of the new U.S. president's in office, I slipped *Cool Jew* into the hands of an Obama puppet at the Washington Monument. I even risked the reprimands of the Secret Service to sneak a giant semblance of my book onto the White House lawn to snap a photo. That's part of the joy of having written this book. Now, nearly every day has the potential of a little Purim... with a lot more chutzpah.

When your book comes out, Alcalay Klug is available for hire... to be you. Learn more about her *Cool Jew* adventures at her website, www.cooljewbook.com.



A true Heebster knows where to be. As Americans celebrated the inauguration of President Barack Obama in Washington, D.C., *Cool Jew* was there.