

And now for something completely different:

HEEBONICS

Defining the hipster Jew for the new generation

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Staff Reporter

On Sept. 1, award-winning U.S. journalist and proud Heebster maven Lisa Alcalay Klug released her book *Cool Jew: The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe* (Andrews McMeel Publishing).

Described as "a field manual for 21st-century Jews and the people who love them, [it] decodes contemporary Judaism and its hippest forms of cultural expression," *Cool Jew* is 250 pages of new Jewish lingo and imagery and has been on Amazon.com's Top 10 bestseller list for humour/religion since its release. It's now in its second print run due to heavy demand, according to Klug.

Though she's been living out of a suitcase for the last month while promoting the book on a whirlwind North American tour, Klug kindly took time out for an e-mail Q&A last week with *Heebonics* to kibbitz about how it came together and her thoughts on the new Jew. Now that's menschkeit.

And before you ask, Klug has decided to coin the term "Heebster," defining it as such:

Heebster \heeb-stur\, noun (circa now):
1: A cool Jew.

2: An honorary Member of the Tribe.

3: Those who not only know what it is to be Jewish, they know it, flaunt it, dig it and love it.

Heebonics: *Why write Cool Jew?*

Klug: I wrote *Cool Jew* because I love being Jewish and I care passionately about how we relate to our identity, tradition and community.

H: *How did you go about researching it? How long did it take?*

K: About 15 years crammed into two. I've been collecting and noticing fun and innovative forms of Jewish expression for a long time. I spent a much shorter period actually writing the book, gathering images, working with an illustrator, designing the cover and working on the layout. I share the design credit on the book.

H: *On your dedication page you write that without your parents "I might never have known I am Jewish." Can you explain?*

K: Are you kidding me? I was kidding you! Like all good jokes, there is truth to this one. Why else would any sane toddler start eating gefilte fish?

H: *You come from a "mixed" marriage, Ashkenazi and Sephardi. How would you describe your Jewish upbringing?*

K: We followed a lot of my father's Ashkenazi traditions and ate a lot of my mother's favourite tropical fruits. My school lunches were weird combinations like gefilte fish and coconut. In other words, our home was a cultural Cuisinart.

My dad's accent is a lot like Dr. Ruth's and my mom's is more like Ricky Ricardo. My book is in no way autobiographical, but once you know my background, you can read some of that between



Cool Jew author Lisa Alcalay Klug says a true Heebster is ageless.

the lines.

H: *Your book seems directed at a North American Jewish youthful demographic somewhere between ages 18 and 40. Is this the "Heebster" range as you see it?*

K: The book has garnered amazing response from all ages, from teens to octogenarians. And as it happens, many Jewish organizations have been inviting me to share *Cool Jew* with groups ranging from teens to 20s, 30s and 40s.

But I'm also speaking to women's divisions and Hadasah. As I say in the book's introduction, it doesn't matter if you're old or young, a true Heebster is ageless.

H: *Did you speak to any Canadian Heebsters in the making of your book? (We have some nice gefilte fish up here, you know.)*

K: So I've heard. I'm looking forward to sampling it on my Canada tour. I love the music of [Montrealer] Socalled [a.k.a. Josh Dolgin] and enjoyed shmoozing with him during his tours of the Lower

48. Now that's one fresh Heebster.

I'm also a fan of the Hunderts, Rabbi Leibish and Dena, at the Ghetto Shul in Montreal. I met them at the Jewlicious festivals, and we're planning a Montreal launch party for *Cool Jew* on Oct. 30.

(Note: Klug will throw a launch party and book signing for *Cool Jew* in Toronto at Indigo in Yorkdale Shopping Centre on Nov. 2 and has a scheduled book event at the Koffler Centre of the Arts on Nov. 3.)

H: *How old are you?*

K: A true Heebster is ageless. Didn't I just say that?

H: *What stream of Judaism do you subscribe to? Orthodox/Reform/Conservative/Reconstructionist/other?*

K: You might say I'm an Ashekardic Neo-Chasidish Carlebachian Shomeret Shabbat Post-Labelficationist Sheebster... You know, the usual.

H: *You have an extensive writing/journalism portfolio. How has your work as a journalist influenced your own Heebsterism?*

K: First of all, thanks, Heebro. And for shizzy, I've spent years covering Jewish topics, travelling to Jewish communities around the world, spending time in Israel, and writing up Jewish museums, artists, historic sites, newsmakers, festivals, launch parties and much more.

It's led me to some amazing experiences, judging the Simply Manischewitz Cook-Off, teaching at the Jewlicious festivals, attending the Downtown Seder [held annually at the Knitting Factory in New York] and broadened my understanding of what it means to be a cool Jew. When you're a Heebster, you don't have to work hard to be cool. You just got to be Jew.

H: *Where do you currently reside? Where did you grow up?*

K: I grew up in Southern California. I currently live in a suitcase and can be found at www.cooljewbook.com.

H: *Are you planning any followup books in the same vein?*

K: I have a few things in development. Stay tuned!

