

Yours Until Niagara Falls
 By Claudia Haas
Claudiahaas12@gmail.com

July 12, 1964

Dear Lina,

Happy Birthday to me. I've been worrying about Junior High and how you're supposed to be cool. Should I use this summer to become a new person? I need to make myself pretty. Like you are. Seventeen Magazine says putting oatmeal on your face fights acne. But how do I explain wearing oatmeal on my face to my mother? Should I get a new haircut and wear blue all the time and be the "mysterious blue girl?" Can I be someone else in Junior High?

Yours until Niagara Falls,
 Izzy

LINA

Happy Birthday. I hope you had donuts and cake. Guess what? I came in third in the relay and am thrilled. I made believe I had long legs like you. So being you helped me in the race! Please don't become someone else. Be Izzy. I like Izzy. Skip the oatmeal. Buy stuff for oily skin.

Thank-you for saying I'm pretty. I'm really just okay.

Yours till the chocolate chips,
 Lina

IZZY

Thank you for that long, informative letter. You have been at camp for three weeks and I still have no idea what you are doing— besides running one relay. Did you sneak away and visit the Boy's Camp as planned?

I had a nice birthday. My parents gave me the new Beatles album and a small stereo with actual speakers. I can play music really loud. My mother was nice to me all day. I think she stored up all of her meanness for later.

Today is July 14 which means I have 46 more days until you come home. We are going to the Met to look at paintings tomorrow. I love that museum. I put myself in the paintings and make-believe I am someone else. I am going to Aunt Marie's Country Club and the World's Fair and Jones Beach. So I am busy for four whole days this summer and need to find something to do for the other 42 days.

How about if I write you a one-page letter to you every day for forty-two days and then when you come home, you'll have a forty-two-page letter to read! How does that sound? Miss you.

Yours Until Niagara Falls,
 Izzy

P.S. I just finished reading *Night* by Elie Wiesel. There's a chapter about his father that is super sad and I wish I could talk to you about it. It leads to a question about your parents which I know is not allowed but sheesh, shouldn't everything be allowed in a friendship?

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Whoa! Long letter! Please don't write me a forty-two-page letter and if you are writing one now – STOP! If you write it then I will feel like I have to read it and I don't want to read a forty-two-page letter. Write me a short one! I am good at archery. But it hurts my arms.

Yours till the chocolate chips,

Lina

P.S. Friendship doesn't mean that you can know personal stuff about things that don't affect you. You know the important stuff. They survived just like Elie Wiesel.

(Lights fade to black.)

Scene 2 – Junior High

IZZY

September 30, 1964

Dear Lina,

I miss writing you letters so I am going to keep doing it. Even if we talk on the phone every night. You can't save a phone call but letters are forever – like us. I still go crazy when I think about the fact that we are no longer in the same class. Sheesh, you'd think we'd at least have lunch together. I wish you were skipping eighth grade with me.

You said I should look at the school year with a better attitude. So here goes: we are reading "Twelfth Night" and after we finish it (I finished it) –we will see it at Stratford in Connecticut in May. We are going to work on the same play for eight months! I will go out of my mind! I already got in trouble for reading ahead. The bad: algebra. I don't care what "x" is. If I flunk out of algebra maybe they won't let me skip eighth grade and we'll be back in the same classes again. How does that sound? Write me!

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

Monday, October 12, 1964

It's funny writing to someone who lives three blocks away. We have to buy stamps and everything. Algebra is cool. Think of it as a puzzle. Or discovering a secret. You like secrets.

IZZY

October 16, 1964

I love getting mail! I just put some stamps in your envelope. Letters are good things because you can read them over and over again – like your favorite book. I have all your letters and school notes in a special blue box. I've been thinking. You know how I go to your seders and celebrate Hanukkah with you? And how you had Easter here and ate some lamb even though you hate lamb and worried about being mean to Bambi? I wonder if we should visit each other's religion. I can go to your synagogue and you can come to my church. You're going to have a Bat Mitzvah next year and I don't know what that means. So, what does that mean?

LINA

Dear Izzy,
Thank you for the stamps. If this keeps up I will also need envelopes. You keep my letters?????
Please don't show them to anyone.

So, the Bat Mitzvah....it means having "religious responsibility." I need to do good works and work in the synagogue at becoming a good Jewish woman. This is super-important to me. My Jewish faith is like – my blood and bones – it's part of me. I asked my mom about visiting each other's religion and she loved it! She said if the world did that maybe we'd all stop hurting each other. So thanks for that idea.

IZZY

November 29, 1964

Dear Lina,
Happy Hanukkah! It's pretty early this year.
I'm miserable about you moving a mile away. Is it really important to have your own bedroom? I like where you are now – two blocks away.

LINA

Dear Izzy,
My own room is important to me. I won't have to worry about Ari blowing up my records with his chemistry set. And I can keep everything tidy. Call me! I have news!
Happy-almost-Christmas,
Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,
I am super-excited about your move now. I will love having you spend Christmas with me while your parents set up their new home! We will eat cookies with every meal, trim-the-tree (don't get tied up in tinsel – my father uses a ton of it), sing Christmas carols (but not "Jingle Bells), open presents and take tons of photos under the tree. You will have lasagna at Aunt Marie's – she's making it kosher for you. And we need to get a cannoli early – they go fast. It will be the merriest Christmas ever and the happiest New Year!
Merry Merry,
Izzy

LINA

Iz,
May I bring donuts?
Love, Li

IZZY

April 1965,
Dear Lina,

I am sorry about Attila-the-nun ordering you to kneel when you came to mass with me. I told her you were Jewish and just visiting. And then – she told me to get a new friend! Who was

Catholic! So *then* I told her I'd get a new church! That wasn't Catholic! The people at your synagogue were much nicer to me. Maybe I should be Jewish. Or Buddhist. I wrote a story about how a nun runs a race with a Jewish Easter egg and the Easter egg won. Guess who you were?
Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

In-ter-est-ing story. To be honest, nuns scare me.
Love your friend-the-Easter-egg,
Lina

(IZZY writes a letter.)

IZZY

May, 1965

Dear Lina

Mazel Tov on your Bat Mitzvah. I have no idea what you said during your celebration but I was impressed. My mom could not figure out what to get you. I told her you would want donuts. So she went crazy with all the sweets and flowers and then you got the "Italian horn." It's protection from the "evil eye." It has a 5,000-year history. It's supposed to help with fertility. I know we are not supposed to say these things out loud but you're a woman now, right? Anyway, don't show it to any boys. You don't want to give them the wrong idea. Not that you would. You always do the right thing. You're perfect. When do you go to camp?

LINA

Sunday, June 20, 1965

Dear Izzy,

"Perfect?" Who's perfect? It can't be me. I just finished chasing Ari around with a spray bottle because he used all of my expensive bottle of my smoothing shampoo – which I paid for out of my own money! Then he looked at me with tears in his eyes. Which made me feel bad. I bet he was faking it. I bet the tears were from the spray bottle. I go to camp at the end of the week.

IZZY

Dear Lina,

So you chased Ari around with a spray bottle. Big whooping deal. Today, I told my sister I was turning into a werewolf and she should run away. When she didn't, I howled and scrunched up my face and you better believe she ran into her room. I have to find something better to do this summer than turning into a werewolf.

LINA

Dear Iz,

You win. You are a much more terrible person than I am.

IZZY

Dear Li,

I never said you were terrible. I said you were perfect.

LINA

Dear Iz,

Same difference. Go read a book. You're getting weird. But at least your letters are shorter.