

Yours Until Niagara Falls
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Yours until Niagara Falls was developed and given a reading through a 3-day writing residency at Utah Valley University.

The playwrights gives thanks to Dr. John Newman, Professor and director of the play. Thanks also to the Theatre Class for Children and Youth for insight and to my stellar cast who asked a lot of questions and strengthened the play. They are as follows:

Scene 1: Izzy: Emma Muavesi
Lina: Anika Auman

Scene 2: Izzy: Carly McBride
Lina: Brooklyn Cordner

Scene 3: Izzy: Lexi Goldsberry
Lina: Brooke Hall

Scene 4: Izzy: Emily Wennerholm
Lina: Alexa Wood

Scene 5: Izzy: Mika Beck
Lina: Isa Lewis

Thanks also to Kevin T. Houle, director, Twin Cities, for reading an early draft and telling me to ditch the phone calls.

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CAST: 2-10 females*

LINA ZENES (pronounced “Leena” and “Lee” when shortened) (female) age 9-49; self-assured, trendy, has a stick-to-it-iveness that will serve her well. She craves a well-ordered life, shoes for every outfit, donuts are an important part of life. Shorter than Izzy. Jewish - which is important to her. She writes when it is necessary. She’d rather talk face-to-face but she will write to please Izzy. She knows endings are not always happy. She likes things tidy.

IZZY ROSS (female) age 9-49; insecure; dreamer, clueless as to trends, has acting aspirations, can be clingy. Taller than Lina. Sometimes lives in her own drama-filled world. Catholic - which is meaningless to her. She loves to write things down – she believes it will help her dreams become reality and she can deal better with the conflicts in her life if she writes them. She wants to be someone else. She believes in happy endings. She seems to thrive in chaos.

*Two actresses can portray the characters all through the play – or – you can divide it up into the “elementary school,” “junior high years,” “high school,” “college” and “all grown up.” Or any other way that suits your fancy. As with A.R. Gurney’s amazing *Love Letters* (inspiration for this play), this does not need to be memorized. But it should be rehearsed.

Unlike *Love Letters*, the actresses can look at each other when they pass school notes. Later, when they are not in class together, the play is about listening. They will not look at each other during the letters and emails. But they can react. It’s as important to see LINA and IZZY listening to the letters as they’re being read as it is for the actress reading. Some letters are long. Do not get caught up in the writing of the letter. Assume most of it’s been written. Maybe we see the character correct something or just add their signature or proofing it.

SET: 2 desks for passing notes which can double as their bedroom desk.

PROPS: Paper, pens, and later a keyboard for emails.

COSTUMES: Simple skirts and a blouse or sweater – which was the public school uniform at the time. If using multiple actresses can change with the times but keep it simple.

Feel free to embellish, sets, costumes, props – or not. Be as simple or detailed as you wish.

SCENE BREAKS:

Prologue

Scene 1: Elementary School

Scene 2: Junior High

Scene 3: Early High School

Scene 4: Later High School

Scene 5: College

Scene 6: All Grown Up

Epilogue

SYNOPSIS: LINA and IZZY are best friends – “LINA-AND-IZZY-ONE-WORD” best friends. They differ in all ways – background, faith, and their aspirations - but somehow fulfill a gap in each other’s life. They’re always there for each other – for each important day in their lives until one day – they aren’t. Lina and Izzy must figure out what to take from the friendship and what is left behind even if it’s painful. With thanks (and apologies) to A.R. Gurney for inspiration and structure, and to the Zenes family for inviting this playwright into their lives.

BLOCKING: Feel free to have the actresses move around a little bit, turn upstage, etc. if it helps note passage of time, or makes a point, turn upstage, etc. They just don’t deal directly with each other unless it is school notes.

TIME: 1962-2001

COSTUMES: If using multiple actresses, you can dress appropriately for the times – or tie them together with one style. If using only two actresses, let the costume be as classic as possible.

Music (public domain or where you have the rights) can be used to bridge scenes where/if you deem necessary.

Yours Until Niagara Falls

(Lights up. IZZY and LINA are by their desks and chairs. IZZY's desk has a blue box filled with letters and notes. She might be going through them. They may begin standing.)

Prologue

IZZY (as an adult)

Once upon a time there were two little girls. They were best friends. They vowed that they would stay best friends forever. And they tried. They really tried.

Scene 1

(IZZY and LINA should now be seated. LINA writes a note. IZZY opens the note. It should not be physically passed between the two. It is Monday, February, 1962. They are age 9.)

LINA

Hello, Isobel-The-New-Girl. Will you be my friend? We can sit together at lunch. Lina.

(IZZY tears paper from her notebook and scribbles and scribbles and scribbles. LINA looks at her – what is she writing? It's a school note!)

IZZY

Thank-you. Nobody has ever passed me a note in school. I would love to be your friend. Please don't call me Isobel. It's my grandmother's name. I'm not an old lady. Call me Izzy. Not Dizzy. Not Fizzy! But Izzy!

Don't look at my hair. My mother thought I would be more popular if I had curly hair so she gave me a perm last night. Now my hair smells terrible and I look like a poodle.

Do you think John Glenn is done going around the earth? Will they make an announcement? In my old school, they would give you news. I hear you can burn up when you come back down from space.

(IZZY passes the note back. LINA writes.)

LINA

Wow, Izzy. You write long notes. (So, you're "Fizzy?") You have terrible penmanship. Poodles are cute. My blue and yellow striped sweater is not. I look like an Easter egg and I don't celebrate Easter. John Glenn will not burn up but they won't tell us. They don't tell fourth graders stuff. See you at lunch.

(They return to school work. It is now Friday. IZZY writes.)

IZZY

Thanks for letting me come over every day. The boxes are gone so my mom will let people in the house. Can you come over tomorrow? My sister will follow us around but she's only five and easy to ignore. I love the Bobby Rydell record you lent me. I don't know if he is a dreamboat like you said because I never think about boys as being anything but yucky and punching each other like The Three Stooges.

LINA

Ari loves The Three Stooges. It's a boy thing.

IZZY

So can you come over? I've been practicing the mashed potato dance. My mother says I look like an ostrich.

LINA

Everyone looks like an ostrich when they do that dance.

IZZY

I have records, too. My favorite is "The Wizard of Oz." Please say you'll come over. Otherwise my mother will drag me to Aunt Marie's and I'll be stuck watching "Godzilla Meets the Three Stooges" with my cousins.

LINA

You're lucky you have cousins. I don't have any.

IZZY

Take mine. Vinny and Rocky are always poking each other. I thought everyone had cousins.

LINA

Nope. Not even one. Maybe we can go to the movies. "The Parent Trap" is at the Utopia.

(Of course IZZY has to answer.)

IZZY

I love Hayley Mills! I want to be Hayley Mills. Thank-you for teaching me things like rock 'n roll and dancing. I can teach you munchkin voices.

LINA

Munchkin voices?

IZZY

From the Wizard of Oz. You'd be good at it.

LINA

I'm only good at "dippy" things. Are Munchkin voices dippy? MaryAnn calls me "teacher's pet."

IZZY

I will never ever talk to MaryAnn. When I know who she is.

LINA

But you still have to be nice. It's expected. DON'T ANSWER!

IZZY

Do you always do what's expected?

(LINA just looks at the note and gestures "enough.")

(IZZY writes a letter.)

IZZY

April 19, 1962

Dear Lina,

Thank-you for inviting me to your seder. It's my first one. Everything was super tasty. I tried to not eat just the raisins in that carrot dish. I am trying to learn more about Passover. What an interesting holiday. Especially the bread stuff. All I can find is that it "celebrates the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt." That's what the World Book says. So I learned a new word – "exodus." Ari reads very well for a little kid. I wrote a story about last night called "My First Seder." You're the star of it. Thank-you again.

Sincerely,

Izzy

P.S. I am super excited about your birthday next week. I've never been to a restaurant in the city.

LINA

Sunday, April 22, 1962

Dear Izzy,

Thank you for coming to my birthday yesterday. And thank-you for sneaking me a jelly donut in the restaurant. I like them better than birthday cake. I don't love frosting. I am sorry that I had to write "Isobel" on the envelope but my mom says you should use proper names there. Thank you for the framed photo of Bobby Rydell for my birthday. I love it.

Your friend,

Lina

(IZZY passes a note.)

IZZY

Can you come over after school?

LINA

Are you okay?

Yes. IZZY

What did the nurse say? LINA

To come back down if I get a headache. But I won't. IZZY

But how's your eye? LINA

Oh that. I rubbed it a lot to turn it red. IZZY

Why? LINA

I knew Mrs. Scott would call on me to do long division, I don't know long division so I rubbed my eye until it looked like I was in pain. It worked. She sent me to the nurse. IZZY

Wow. LINA

I'm going to be an actress when I grow up. I think I will need to read music like you do. Can you teach me? I loved that music you played yesterday. Your music makes me happy. IZZY

Thank-you. It's called Hungarian Rhapsody. It's the easy version. LINA

July 5, 1962 IZZY

Dear Lina,

I am writing to your house because I don't know your address in the Poconos. The Fourth of July was boring. I even cleaned my room. It almost looks like yours.

And now you are away at camp for two weeks! Suppose something happens in July and we aren't best friends anymore? Suppose I get hit by a bus? My mother says that a lot. Or my father decides he hates his job and takes us to live in a swamp where we'll never see each other again and there are swamp monsters?

I've been thinking. I am going to tell you my most secretest secret ever. So you know how much I like being friends with you. It's something I have never shared. I read that if you do that, it shows that you are best friends.

IZZY (cont'd)

Remember Puddles? You saw her under my pillows and thought she was a stuffed rat. She's really my stuffed duck. She used to have a beak which came off. And then her webbed feet fell off and now I guess she is a duck-rat. I can't go to sleep unless I sleep with her. I know it's babyish and my mom hates Puddles but I need her.

If you want to share a secret with me, I would never tell a soul. Please keep this somewhere like in your dirty socks and underwear where nobody would peek. Tell me about camp. What is the funnest thing you do? Write a really long letter.

Yours until Niagara Falls (Isn't that cute? I saw that in a book and liked it),

Izzy

Thursday, July 12, 1962

Dear Izzy,

Happy Birthday! I wish I could be there with you. Now you are in the double-digits just like me! Ten is almost grown-up. Thank-you for sharing your secret. It's fizzy and fuzzy like you.

I do have a secret. You know the birthday present my mom dropped off at your house? That's my secret. After you read it, I will tell you more.

I will not keep your letter with my dirty socks and underwear. Sheesh! It's safe inside my striped shirts that make me look like a Jewish- Easter-egg. I will never wear those tops. Don't tell my mother.

Yours.... until the chocolate chips (A counselor made it up.)

Lina

IZZY

Dear my-friend-the Jewish-Easter egg,

I just finished "The Diary of Anne Frank" and I am super sad. I think it's the first book I read that doesn't have a happy ending. It made me think a lot so I will go to the library to find out more. I have stuff in common with Anne. She did not get along with her mother, did she? Like me and my mother. I have hundreds of questions. Well, twenty-seven so far. I want to know what happened to her. The ending says she died. How did she die? She was so young. I am happy that Mr. Otto Frank lived. Is he still living? I want to know how he is doing now. Did he come to America like your parents? What does the book have to do with you? I still don't know the secret. But thank-you for giving the book to me. Even though the ending is so sad.

I am sitting here in my tiny backyard thinking of how you are having fun at camp. You could play "Wizard of Oz" in the woods or "Peter Pan" down by the lake. They should have a pirate ship in the lake. Wouldn't that be the best?

I miss you. I wish my parents would get me a dog who will listen to me like you do. I play "The Wizard of Oz" record a lot. Even my sister knows it by heart. She wants to be the lion. She's pretty good at doing the lion when he cries for a six-year-old. I'm really good at doing the witch laugh. I will teach it to you. Maybe you can get some "Wizard of Oz" music and you can play the piano while I sing. I want to be the Scarecrow. Is it okay if the Scarecrow dances like an

IZZY (cont'd)

ostrich? Dorothy would be the best part but I'm not cute enough. My hair is too short to do those cool braids. My sister puts tights on her head when she wants braids. It's pretty funny. How about if you play the piano and I sing and then we could enter talent shows? I really miss you. So I wrote you a poem.

My hair, how it crumbles
 My teeth squeak and crack.
 My knees make me stumble
 My words sound like "quack."

My ears, how they tingle,
 My nose says "ahhh-chooooo!"
 I can't feel my fingers
 Because I miss you!

Yours Until Niagara Falls,
 Iz

LINA

Dear my-friend-the-ostrich-dancer,
 Thank-you for the funny poem. I like the squeaking and cracking teeth part. I am glad that you read "The Diary of Anne Frank." I will send you my secret soon. The woods have poison plants and biting bugs everywhere. I itch all over. They have a piano in the rec center so sometimes I practice. I also like ping pong. Ping pong balls don't bite.

I don't think the counselors want a pirate ship. The boys would start pirate fights.

I don't want to be in a talent show. Sorry.

Please don't compare me to a dog.

If I learned the witch laugh, would it scare Ari?
 Yours until the chocolate chips,
 Lina-the-Jewish Easter egg

IZZY

It's been two days since your letter and I still don't know your secret! If you don't want to tell me, that's okay. But I really hope you tell me. Pretty please!

I am good at secrets. I scared my sister with the witch laugh so you could probably scare your brother. Nothing has happened in the last two days. Because nothing ever happens to me. I have to make-believe something happens to me. Last night I dreamed about a witch and a fairy and the fairy saved me from the witch only I can't remember the rest and I really wanted to write it down. I think my mother was the witch. More things happen to me when I am asleep than when I am awake. Please write!!!!

Yours until Niagara Falls,
 Izzy

LINA

TOP SECRET! FOR YOUR EYES ONLY! DO NOT SHOW THIS TO ANYONE

Dear Iz,

THE SECRET. It's funny that you started this secret-stuff - because before I left, my mother said I could tell you some things. She said if we were going to be together all the time, there are things you should know. But I didn't know how to tell you. I am glad I am writing this to you because whenever we talk about it at home, I cry. I am writing this in the shower where no one can see me. I bet you went to the library and took out a hundred books about this. I bet you know about the camps and the gas chambers. Which were worse than dying in quicksand. I know you worry about quicksand.

My father was in a Russian prison. That's all I know – he won't talk about it and I don't ask. And you can never, ever ask!

My mother and her family were arrested from their home in Hungary because they were Jewish. They really arrested you for that. They were told they would be going on a train ride and they could take a suitcase. So they took sweaters and socks and probably underwear. They were put on a train for a whole week – with no water. They were brought to Auschwitz - where Anne was. And no, they never met and please no questions. My mom says you like to ask lots of questions and you do. But it's hard for me to talk about.

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Li

IZZY

Dear Li-who-needs-to-finish-the-story,

I am trying to not ask questions. Maybe just one? I can't find anything about Anne Frank after she was discovered or anything about Auschwitz. The librarian threw me out of the World War Two adult section. All I know is Anne died and her father didn't and your parents didn't. (A good thing.) How did they survive? It sounds like no one did. I want to know more because some of this is a happy ending and I like that. All I know is that they took a suitcase that had underwear.

LINA

Dear Izzy-with-the-questions,

You are getting one answer and that's it, deal? Yes, it's sort of a happy ending. And sort of – not. You know how I have no cousins? I should have had tons. There were nine people in my mother's family. My mother had six little brothers. (Oy vey! Imagine six Ari's.)

At Auschwitz, they were put into two lines. The slave line and the to-be-killed line. My mother, and her parents were put in the "slave line." Because they looked strong enough work. My mother's six little brothers were put in the "to be killed line" because they were too little to work. When my grandparents saw what was happening, they ran to their little boys. They were not going to let their babies go into the gas chambers alone. Then my mother followed. The guards laughed and said, "Stay. We're happy to kill all of you." But my grandmother pushed my mother away and said, "No, my hertzeleh,* (*translation: little heart*) it is not your time yet. Live." So my mother ran back to the slave line and watched her family get murdered but she did live.

LINA (cont'd)

No one is left from my father's family or my mother's family. Before I go to sleep, sometimes I see my grandmother carrying my two-year-old uncle and she looks at me and I - look away. This is my most secretest secret ever and I am trusting it with you. BUT WE WON'T TALK ABOUT IT. Now I am going to shower so no one will know I was crying. I will be home soon and we will listen to music, dance and maybe do munchkin voices. My mother says that's important.

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

P.S. This is the longest letter you will ever get from me.

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I want to say things. Lots of things. But I don't know what to say. Except, I'm sorry and I will never tell anyone ever. I won't even tell my diary or Puddles – and I tell them everything. I really want to know how they lived – you know the happy part. Maybe someday you'll tell me?

Love,

Izzy

(October 1962. IZZY and LINA are back in school. Maybe they take out composition notebooks to show that. They are in an air raid drill. Perhaps they pull their jackets or a sweater over their heads. They pass notes – 5th grade.)

IZZY

What's the point of these dippy drills?

LINA

To save our lives.

IZZY

Sitting in the hallway and covering our heads won't save us. We're in fifth grade now and know stuff. I read about nuclear bombs in the World Book. They melt you. I used to think quicksand would be the worst way to die and then I found out about gas chambers and now it looks like nuclear bombs are the worstest.

LINA

I don't want to talk about dying, okay? Or gas chambers. P.S. Stop writing.

IZZY

I'm sorry. I'm just scared. Maybe a bomb really is coming.

LINA

Stop worrying. *Stop writing.*

IZZY

I don't worry that much.

(LINA looks at IZZY and nods as if to say, "Yeah, you do.")

(They take the coats off their head and are back at their homes. IZZY is writing a card.)

IZZY

November 22, 1962

Happy Thanksgiving! Do you like my turkey? I drew it by outlining my hand. I can draw three things: a turkey, a cat and a rabbit. I'm sorry I rushed you off the phone yesterday. The Monroes was on. I want to be in a TV show like that -with lots of other kids. I want to be Barbara Hershey. She's so pretty. But you have to be really pretty and cute to be on TV.

LINA

Happy Thanksgiving! Here's my turkey! I think it looks like an ostrich. I am thankful you are not Barbara Hershey but my friend Izzy. My mom says a lot of people in Hollywood are weird.

Lina

P.S. I like your turkey! Did you glue real pigeon feathers on it? Cause they have fleas.

IZZY

Christmas Eve 1962

I know you won't see this till later but I miss you. It's Christmas Eve and everyone is being merry. Except me. I love Christmas. Usually. I really love Christmas carols except Jingle Bells.

Yesterday, I found a book about Hannah Senesh. Do you know who she is? I love reading about heroines. You never hear about them in school. She was so brave. She was trying to smuggle Jews out of Hungary when she was caught and killed. Maybe if she wasn't caught, she would have been able to save your family.

These are not Christmas thoughts. But maybe they are. It is the season of "goodwill towards men." I want to do good – I want to help with "peace on earth" but I'm not always a good person. Sometimes I think mean things about others. But never about you. I can't wait to see you "next year in 1963!"

Yours Until Niagara Falls,

Iz

LINA

Happy 1963, Iz,

Isn't this a funny postcard? It's weird seeing palm trees decorated with colored lights. Miami's weird. Please don't write me about Hannah Senesh or anything about those days. They're over. Let's go see "Bye Bye Birdie" when it comes out. I'm sure it has a happy ending!

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Li

(February 1963. LINA and IZZY pass notes.)

LINA

Izzy! It's Valentine's Day. You're supposed to wear red. You're still wearing your pajama top!

IZZY

I stayed up late last night reading. So, I was in a rush this morning. Do you think anyone will notice?

LINA

Yes.

IZZY

But it kind of matches my skirt.

LINA

It doesn't. I wish it did.

IZZY

Will you still sit with me at lunch?

LINA

Yes.

IZZY

Please don't tell Renu and Debbie.

LINA

They have eyes. Did you remember your valentines?

(IZZY gives LINA an "oh no!" look.)

(Change. IZZY is writing a letter.)

IZZY

April 14, 1963

I am sorry you have laryngitis and cannot speak. I know you love to talk! But that means we can write more letters! There is something I want to tell you. I never said it in person because you always "pooh pooh" compliments. Isn't that a cute phrase? "Pooh pooh?" I read it in an Agatha Christie book. I love Agatha Christie. The bad guys always get found out.

I've been thinking. About the good stuff and the not-good-stuff. And for me – you are the good stuff. I want us to be best friends forever. And it's okay if you don't want to talk about some stuff. They say best friends tell each other everything but I also think best friends can tell you when to shut up. From my first day in school, you made me feel like I belonged somewhere.

Like you put a spell on me! I hope we're friends when we're old and look like Whistler's Mother. But we'll dress better. Maybe someday when we're gone, we'll be ghosts and haunt

IZZY (cont'd)

anyone who was mean to us – like MaryAnn. I hope you get your voice back for your birthday next week. Write me!

LINA

Sunday, April 14, 1963

It's weird writing you when we talk on the phone all the time. I don't know what to say. I tell you everything. So, here – I'll try. I put a spell on you? Am I a witch? I hope I am Glinda, the Good Witch. Please don't write about being ghosts or about being dead. I don't like to think about that. Who do you think is cuter? Bobby Rydell or Frankie Avalon? That's the important stuff. We'll talk about it.

Sunday, April 21, 1963

Happy Birthday, Lina! I made the card. Too much glitter? My letter is inside.

Li,

I love letters. When we talk, we always talk about things we are doing or wearing or eating. Or who are the cute guys in Tiger Beat. But we never talk about feelings. I think letters are good for that. So, I'll start. You know how I listen to Wizard of Oz and Broadway shows all the time? I think it's because they take me out of my little room that I use as a hide-out and let me be in other worlds. How do you feel when you play the piano?

Yours until Niagara Falls.

Iz

Iz,

I don't think about my feelings. I just feel. I don't know how I feel when I play the piano. I'm always concentrating on getting the timing right. Some pieces are tricky.

Li

(June 1963. Notebooks out. Passing a note in school. It's the last day before summer break.)

IZZY

Yay! Last day of fifth grade. What does your report card say? I got three "excellents."

LINA

It says I talk too much and pass too many notes. All excellents.

IZZY

You always get all excellents! Who's your teacher?

LINA

Mrs. Villaverde.

IZZY

Hooray! We're together. I hear Villaverde is a witch.

LINA

You shouldn't put that in a note. Now you need to eat it.

IZZY

July 15, 1963

How's camp? Miss you. Thank-you for the Wizard of Oz poster for my birthday. It's above my bed. Nothing is going on here. I must be the only kid in the world who misses school. Except for arithmetic. And penmanship. And the no-reading ahead rule. But the rest is good.

I think this may be my shortest letter ever because I have nothing to report. I am reading all these gothic mysteries and they're all the same. The mysterious, rude guy turns out to be the good guy and the happy-go-lucky, sweet guy is the murderer. They all take place in Cornwall, England. I want to go there. But I wouldn't be the "damsel in distress." Maybe I should write one where the heroine saves herself. For a change, I stayed up reading the World Book and learned about the Black Death. Do you know about it? It's pretty scary. In the middle of the night, I started checking my arms for signs of the plague.

Please send me a happy letter. Do you play the piano for everyone? Do you sing songs around the campfire? I would love that. Please send me a letter telling me everything you do.
Yours until Niagara Falls

(LINA writes a letter.)

LINA

Sunday, July 21, 1963

Dear Izzy,

That was not a short letter. Please find a "happy" book to read. What do I do? I swim and play ping pong. In the last week we have color wars. Everyone is divided into two colors and we are in competition. Some kids go crazy with wanting to win and get mean. Like MaryAnn. See you soon.

Yours until the chocolate chips,
Lina

(Change to school mode. IZZY writes a school note. It's early November 1963.)

IZZY

It's almost Thanksgiving so The Wizard of Oz should be on TV soon. Can I watch it at your house? 'cause you have the new color TV.

LINA

Sure. Just don't go into a tizzy when the witch does the hourglass thing.

IZZY

I don't get into a tizzy.

LINA

You totally do. Like you don't know the ending. Don't answer. Villaverde is watching us.

IZZY

Hi Li,

You are so lucky to be away. I wish my parents would take me to the Poconos. Everyone is glued to the TV and President Kennedy's funeral. I am amazed that Jackie doesn't cry. I feel sorry for Caroline and John John. To honor President Kennedy, I bought *Profiles in Courage*. It's pretty good but it's all about men. All we do is learn about men.

Everyone's sad. Is that what happens when you live in the real world? I like my make-believe world better. Let's go live in a magical kingdom where nobody is sad.

LINA

I just got home and read your letter. I am writing this because you always say you should write things down. So thank-you for inviting me to live in a magical kingdom. And thank-you for never making me feel dippy. And never calling me "Teacher's Pet." You're fun to be with. You jump into things. You dance when I play the piano. It's neat.

IZZY

December 10, 1963

Happy Hanukkah, Lina. I loved celebrating it with you. I want a menorah. Can Catholics have a menorah? Thank you for being my friend.

LINA

Merry Christmas, Izzy! Ditto.

P.S. I think anyone can have a menorah. Debbie has a Hanukkah Bush.

(Switch to school mode. IZZY and LINA are passing notes. February 1964)

IZZY

Best Ed Sullivan show ever!

LINA

The Beatles forever!

IZZY

I Want to Hold your Hand!

LINA

Sooooo cute!

IZZY

I know! George is the best.

Paul! LINA

George! IZZY

No way! She Loves You! LINA

Yeah, yeah, yeah! IZZY

I want to hold your hand! LINA

(They look at each other and dance to the beat of the song in their seats for a moment.)

(Change. June 1964.)

IZZY

June 25, 1964

I've been thinking. Can you talk your parents into doing the special progress two-year program with me? It's neat that we both got into it. It's not neat that we are not doing the same one. If you stay in the three-year one and don't skip eighth grade, we'll never ever be together again. I've begged my parents to let me do the three-year one with you but they won't budge. I think they want to get rid of me a year earlier.

Love-worried-Izzy

LINA

Dear Always-Worried-Izzy,

My parents are as stubborn as your parents. Don't worry about being in different grades. We'll still be best friends!

Love-your-best-friend-Lina

P.S. MaryAnn is doing the three-year program. I'm stuck with her. Be grateful you're not.

IZZY

July 12, 1964

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? Others say to put egg whites on your face. But what do you do with the egg yolks? 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. Guess what? I came in third in the relay and am thrilled. I made believe I had long legs like you. Please don't become someone else. Be Izzy. I like Izzy. Skip the oatmeal and egg whites. Buy stuff for oily skin. Thank-you for saying I'm pretty. I'm really just okay.

Yours till the chocolate chips!

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

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

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,

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,

IZZY (cont'd)

Thank-you for (occasionally) writing (short) letters. 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's the good: we are reading "Twelfth Night." I loved it! I want to be Olivia and Viola someday. 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 my attitude sound? Write!
Yours until Niagara Falls,

LINA

Monday, October 12, 1964

It's weird 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

I love getting letters. Even if it's just a few sentences. Look - I 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

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

Oh Iz,

You said to write about feelings – so here goes. 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.

Now, call me! I have news!

Happy-almost-Christmas

IZZY

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, Niagara Falls!

LINA

Iz,

May I bring donuts? Do you like this Christmas card? I made it with my new calligraphy kit.

Love, Li

IZZY

Happy New Year! 1965 will be wonderful and that is because I spent the holidays with my best-friend, Lina. Thank-you for waiting on line for an hour so I could see the Lord and Taylor windows. Aren't they magical? They're all like little dioramas but better. Did you know that designers who work on Broadway do those windows? And thank-you for letting me play "Silver Bells" seventy-five times Christmas Eve. It always reminds me of Christmas in New York City – which is the best. See you soon. Write me!

LINA

Happy New Year!

You only played "Silver Bells" sixty-seven times. I counted.

Li

IZZY

April 1965,

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 wasn't supposed to kneel. 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,
Li

IZZY

May, 1965

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 but nothing with frosting. So she went crazy with all the sweets and flowers and then you got the “Italian horn.” Everyone in my family has one. It’s protection from the “evil eye.” It has a 5,000-year history. A lot of it is about sex. (My cousin told me that. Not my mother. Look it up.) 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

“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. Yep. The day after school ends.

IZZY

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

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.
P.S. Is this my shortest letter ever?

LINA

Dear Iz,
Yes. Go read a book. You’re getting weird.

IZZY

August 14, 1965
Dear Lina,

IZZY (cont'd)

I've been reading all summer. And now, summer is coming to an end and I'm scared about going back to school. It's strange going from 7th grade to 9th. I don't like it. And there's nothing I can do about it. Except worry. Which I am very good at. I don't think I am ready for ninth grade. It sounds – too grown up.

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

School will be fine. Stop worrying. I'll be back home before this letter arrives.

IZZY

November 9, 1965

Dear Lina,

Isn't this blackout great? I hate ninth grade. I love that there's no school. It's funny that your mother called my mother because she thought that Ari caused the blackout. I don't think chemistry sets for eleven-year-olds can take out thirteen states and part of Canada! I'd love to talk to you about it but I can't get my mother off the phone.

All the neighbors are talking to each other. Next door, they think the blackout was caused by aliens. Up the block, they're saying it's the Russians.

The only downside to the blackout is there is no tv and I will miss The Patty Duke Show. I just love her and I want her to be her. Why couldn't I be short and cute like Patty?

Iz

LINA

I think Ari wishes he caused the blackout. You don't want to be Patty Duke. You read Tiger Beat - she doesn't even live with her mother. She lives with her agents. I would hate that. Do you like my new stationery? It's small so we can write short letters. I will give you some.

IZZY

Thank-you for the pretty stationery. For the record, I would love to live with my "agent." I would love to have an agent. I would love to be in a TV show. I would love to be Patty Duke. I am boring and awkward with bad skin.

LINA

You are crazy-imaginative and you listen to me practice the piano even when I'm bad. I'd rather be friends with Izzy Ross than Patty Duke.

IZZY

December 26, 1965

Dear Lina,

Happy Almost New Year, to Lina in Miami! I've been thinking. You know how we're reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* in school? I've been wondering to myself if all the terrible things that happened in Europe happened here – would I hide you? The first time I read it years ago, I was

IZZY (cont'd)

sure I would. I even made a plan that I would put your family in our attic. I would feed you all my broccoli and even my ice cream and lots of donuts. It would be freezing cold in the winter and hot in the summer but you would be safe. But today, I was wondering – would I be brave enough? I'm scared of everything. Change, high school, my mother. I'd want to save you. Does that count?

Yours until Niagara Falls – I really mean that.

LINA

It counts. I'd want to save you, too. Happy New Year, Izzy. See you soon. Look, I even bought my own stamps. I knew there'd be a letter waiting.

IZZY

January 5, 1966

Dear Lina,

Can you save me from ninth grade? The other ninth graders hate our class because they know we are imposters and should be in eighth grade. I am trying to “act” like a ninth grader. Do you have any advice as to how a ninth grader acts?

LINA

I'll tell you next year when I'm in ninth grade! Seriously, as I always tell you – just try being Izzy. You might like her. I do.

IZZY

Why do you like me?

LINA

You are doing what they call “fishing for compliments.” Who knows why anyone likes anyone? We must give each other good feelings. (See, I am writing about feelings).

The reason I sent you this sympathy card is because I saw in Tiger Beat that George Harrison married Patti Boyd. I am sorry. I am sure if he knew you existed, he would have waited for you. Yours until the Chocolate Chips

IZZY

Thank you for the sympathy card. I still keep George's poster on my wall because he is (ahem) the handsomest Beatle and very deep. I hold out hope for you and Paul. I know he is engaged to Jane Asher and she is very pretty but so are you. I wonder if he would convert for you.

LINA

Paul would probably not convert. And it doesn't matter. Paul and George are just part of our make-believe world. I think we have to start focusing on real guys. Are you going to the spring dance? Please say you will go. We can go shopping and get new dresses and shoes. It will be fun.

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I am never going to go to another school dance again. Only Eddie asked me to dance and he is short. All the boys are shorter than me. When I danced, I saw MaryAnn and her “team of cool” laughing at me. That’s why I stayed in the bathroom until my dad picked us up. I think I will always be an ostrich. I do think it’s funny that Rocky asked you to dance. If you two got married, we would be related for reals. And then you would have lots of cousins.

LINA

Friday, July 1, 1966

Dear Izzy,

Here’s a postcard of my camp just like I promised. I know it’s ugly. Why they have a postcard of the rec center and the parking lot is beyond me. You’d think they’d have a picture of the lake. Anywhoos, I wrote you first! Are you impressed? Tomorrow is my first day as a junior counselor. Ari gave me a rabbit’s leg for luck. (Don’t get in a tizzy – it’s not real.)

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

IZZY

July 10, 1966 was the BEST day ever. I saw my first Broadway show. My mother said I can go on my own to Saturday matinees as long as I just go to the theatre and back. I saved up my babysitting money and saw “Fiddler on the Roof.” I was in the last row and it cost \$5.00. I did my arithmetic and that was ten hours of babysitting but it was worth it. They had to throw me out of the theatre. I couldn’t move. I wrote ten pages about it in my diary. I love Broadway!

I cannot figure out if it had a happy ending or not. They are all forced to leave their home (so not happy and Tevye has to leave his cow which is very sad). But then they are coming to America where your parents had a happy ending, so does that make it a happy ending? Or is it both a happy ending and a not-happy-ending. There’s a lot for me to think about. Maybe growing up means you have to accept that things can have a happy-ending and a sad-ending at the same time.

Is it all true? That story about Chava marrying a gentile and then she was dead to the family? If you married Rocky or any gentile, would your parents throw you out? I cannot picture your parents doing that. If you don’t want to talk about it – you don’t have to. I am just trying to understand. Now, your turn. Tell me everything. How is it being a junior counselor? Do you get to boss the little kids around? Is it fun?

Yours until Niagara Falls,

LINA

I am sorry I am writing so late. Being a junior counselor is exhausting. I don’t boss anyone around. The “real” counselors boss me around. But if you see MaryAnn, make sure you tell her I got the best bunk and the biggest dresser. She’s still mad that they picked me to be a junior counselor over her. Iz, my parents would never understand if I married a gentile – even your cousin. They’d sit shiva for me. It would break their hearts. But I would never do that. Paul McCartney would have to convert. It’s just how it is. I like to think you understand this but

LINA (cont'd)

sometimes I think that you think my life is some sort of tragic fairy tale that you secretly want to be a part of.

Lina

(Lights change or fade to black.)

Scene 3 – High School

IZZY – 10th Grade

LINA – Junior High 9th Grade

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I hate high school. You told me to give it time and it's been three days. Also, my mother yells at me all the time. Yesterday, she called me rude names in front of her friends and I just bolted.

They found me under the bleachers at school just sobbing away. I want to run away. But I don't know where to go. I wrote my grandma in California and asked if I could live with her and she called my parents and now they are both mad at me. Can I live in your house? I can hide under your bed and be a giant dust bunny for four years. You can feed me after everyone's in bed. Just don't feed me broccoli. Remember when you said you'd want to save me? Here's your chance. Will you hide me?

In anticipation of your valued response (I read that somewhere).

Niagara is Falling

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I wish you didn't hang up on me. I did think about hiding you. But Suzette cleans every day and she would not think you were a giant dust bunny under my bed. I really miss talking to you. You like to live in your imagination - so can we get together and make-believe we live in a world that's perfect? Like Emerald City? But that wasn't perfect. Maybe no place is. Maybe we need to accept that.

Yours until the Chocolate Chips (but maybe it chipped already),

(IZZY tears up the letter and puts it into a new envelope.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

Thanks for nothing.

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Can we talk? I'm worried about you. Look! I bought stamps and matching stationary and everything. I'll write more. I promise. That way you will have something to look forward to when you get home from school. Or maybe you can come here every day and just sleep at home? I miss you and your ideas. I bought the music to "Somewhere over the Rainbow" so I could play it for you. Please don't shut me out.

LINA (cont'd)

Yours until the chocolate chips,
Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,

Thank-you for your letter. I miss you, too. I was blaming you for not saving me. But I really was blaming my mother for not liking me. I finally talked to my father who talked to my mother who talked to me and she (maybe) realized that telling me I was unplanned and not ready for me was not the best thing she could have said. Loudly. They both mentioned that maybe I should stay with Aunt Marie for awhile. But then my sister cried and even my mother cried so that idea didn't work.

My mother says she yells at me because I am messy. She even said, "Why can't you be more like Lina?" I love you but I'm not you. Even if sometimes I wish I was. Even if my mother wishes I was. You have a place for everything and I just – have everything everywhere. My dad thought maybe she should hang up a sign on my door saying, "Do not enter: a teenager lives here." And just leave me alone. Yeah ... that would never work. I'd really love to hear you play "Somewhere over the Rainbow."

LINA

I am glad you talked to your father. I'm good at finding places to put stuff if you need help. Are things back to normal?

IZZY

...What's normal? I walk on eggshells. My mother won't talk to me. (See I can write a two-sentence letter, too.) ...

LINA

...That was three sentences. It's hard being in two different schools. Let's go find a funny movie with a happy ending. We need to laugh...

IZZY

...It's a date. (One sentence. I always need to write an aside.)...

LINA

Tuesday, December 27, 1966

Dear Izzy,

This is where we are staying in Miami for the holidays. Isn't it gorgeous? Wish you were here. As Gidget says, "Toodles,"

Lina

IZZY

"Wish you were here?" Really? That's all I hear from you is "Wish you were here?" Let's just say, I wish I was there, too. Christmas was not merry. Everyone argued about Vietnam. It got louder and louder and then we were all eating our lasagna in silence. You could hear everyone

IZZY (cont'd)

chew in unison. Which is very scary when you're Italian. It's almost 1967. I hope the year goes by really fast so I am closer to going to college.

----- (Snippets of letters)

LINA

Happy New Year! Let's make 1967 the best year ever! Here's some advice from your elder of three months: Don't wish your life away.

IZZY

That's what my mother says. Don't sound like my mother. Happy 1967 to you, too. What would you like to happen for the New Year?

LINA

...I want a really cool pair of bell bottoms. You should get them, too. You're tall – you'd look good in them. Like Cher. Let's go shopping together for them! And - I want to learn to play the cello...

IZZY

...You can't give up on your piano after all these years! You are going to be a famous pianist. Or did you decide to become a famous cellist? I have such plans for us – I'll be on Broadway and you'll be in Carnegie Hall. And we'll have late dinners after our shows and discuss the arts and cute musicians. Doesn't that sound like fun?...

LINA

...STOP! I do not want to be a famous anything. Don't you know that about me by now? I just like music. Can't someone like something without having to become famous? Don't give me your dream. Yours is a huge grand one and my dreams are smaller. I just want to have a family and play them music and make them happy. Sometimes I practice Brahm's Lullaby because it's easy and I know it by heart. That's what I'll play for my babies... yes, I want babies.

IZZY

...I hope you also play "Somewhere over the Rainbow" for your babies...

LINA

March 15, 1967

Dear Izzy,

I really do wish you were here. The beach is super-crowded with college kids. Plus, I don't fit into my swimsuit. I must stop eating donuts. And, we never should have ironed our hair. Now I have short hair because my mother wanted the burned parts out and I look like a dweeb. I will be home soon Toodles,

Lina

P.S. Before I left, Rocky called and asked me out on a date. Did you know that? I told him I can't date yet. Was that all right? I know he's your cousin and I don't want to be insulting. And he's

LIINA (cont'd)

kind of cute and everything but you know... as much as I love your family, I don't think an Italian-Catholic is in the cards for me.

IZZY

What? Rocky never told me. Call me as soon as you get home! To tell the truth, I wouldn't date him, either. He's too loud. But he's good to play cards with. My parents had a long talk with me about dating. No, not the "sex" talk. (Whew!) Just dating. How old I should be. (Sixteen.) How old the boy can be. (The same age.) How I should never get in a car with boys. I told them they had nothing to worry about since no one wants to date me.

P.S. I know Rocky's not Jewish but I don't think a date with Rocky means you have to marry him. Anyway, he's now going out with Michelle.

Dear Izzy,

I'm glad you're not upset that I'm not going to date Rocky. That was a good phone call. All is right in our world.

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

P.S. "Born Free" is coming to the Utopia soon. Do you want to go? It's about friendly lions. Ari says the ending is happy but you cry first.

IZZY

Your parents came over. I don't want to discuss this on the phone in case you put your "Now, now, Izzy" voice on. That just makes things worse when I'm upset. (And I am.) They're worried that I'm going to change you. Change you? You're the most stubborn person I know. I can't even make you want to be a famous musician. Even though you should and you could. That dating stuff? *What are they worried about? We can't even date until next year when we are sixteen.*

I don't get the stuff about not dating outside of your religion. Doesn't that separate people more than bring them together? Don't your parents want to bring people together?

Yours truly,

Izzy

LINA

I don't know what to say. I know what I want to say. "Don't get in a tizzy, Izzy!" But you'll think I am trying to be cute (I am). I wish you would come to the phone so we could figure this out.

My parents are worried that you'll introduce to me to more Christian boys – like Rocky. They're worried I might fall in love with one like Chava did in "Fiddler." They have a different history than your family. Six million Jews were murdered. My family was murdered. My parents didn't survive so that they could have Christian grandchildren. Can you understand that?

Jeez, Iz! We visited each other's religion. We shared holidays. Don't let religion divide us. Then, we're going in the wrong direction.

Yours until the chocolate chips (I'm trying here)

Lina

IZZY

Lina,

I don't think I am doing the dividing. I think that's your family. Sorry. It's how I feel. I don't even know any Christian boys except for my cousins. All the boys I know are Jewish. And for the record, my mother would be thrilled if I married a nice, Jewish doctor. I don't get why all this pressure is on you. Are you living for others? Don't you want to lead your own life? The terrible things that happened to your parents did not happen to you. Do you feel like your parents that you should just date Jewish boys? Is this because of the Holocaust? This thinking won't ever bring us closer to a one-world. Maybe you should talk about it more so you can finally move on.

LINA

Move on? *Move on?* Are you serious? Those terrible things did happen to me. These "things" get passed down. They're in my dreams. I told you I see my Grandma carrying my baby uncle to the gas chamber. My mother was fifteen at Auschwitz. I will be fifteen in three weeks. Believe it or not, when my parents were liberated, my mother *did* want to talk about it. Nobody would listen. All she heard was "We all suffered. We don't want to hear about you." So she and my father bottled everything up. I guess I do, too. But my parents worry that no matter where we live, we are all just a few steps away from the gas chambers. You don't "move on" from that.

I one told you that being Jewish is part of me. It's not some "residual" from the Holocaust. I believe in what we are taught – that we are ALL made in the image of God and should treat everyone – not just other Jews – *everyone* - with the utmost respect and kindness. I love my faith and try to practice it. After all these years together, I can't believe that you don't understand me. I will date, marry and raise my children in my faith. Even though there are some in the world who would kill me for who I am.

IZZY

...The world is different. You are not a few steps away from the gas chambers. Remember that even while in hiding Anne Frank said that she still believed people are good at heart...

LINA

...I wonder what Anne Frank would have written if she lived. You read. You have to know that there are many people who wish the Nazis would have won. I told you my family's story. I gave you my most sacred memories. My parents lived and because of that I am here. And I am going to use my life by being the best daughter, sister, friend, wife, someday-mother that I can be. All within my faith. But I will never move on from the past. I carry my murdered family with me everywhere I go. I think that you may never understand that...

Lina

IZZY

...I can't understand things that I don't know. For years, all I've heard is "I don't want to talk about it." I don't think it's fair that you are blaming me for not understanding things you never explained. ..

LINA

Izzy!

LINA (cont'd)

Please use your intelligence to think. I told you everything. Pardon me for not going into morbid detail. I have no intention of becoming the “tragic heroine” in your little drama. The “How Did my Parents Survive Story?” Who knows? They just did. Enough!

We need a break from each other.

Lina

-----Optional Intermission-----

Scene 4 – High School Continues

IZZY

June 10, 1967

Dear Lina,

I’ve written you ten letters during April and May. They’re sitting on my desk. There may even be forty-two pages of them. I hope you got my birthday card and didn’t tear it up. And I wrote a story. About friends talking to each other and not listening. Simon and Garfunkel’s “Sounds of Silence” has been running through my brain for months.

You know how winter break lasts two weeks. And spring break is only one week and summer break is three whole months. It’s almost been three months. How long is this Lina-Izzy break? I want to break the silence. Can our break from each other be over? I know sometimes I go overboard with stuff. And it’s true that I like endings – especially happy ones. I’m the person who sometimes reads the end of the book first. I miss you. I like walking home with Renu and Gigi but they are always so serious. You always find the positives when I go negative. As someone in fourth grade once wrote me, I am now writing you to say:

“Hi, Lina. It’s Izzy. Will you still be my friend?”

Izzy

LINA

Thursday, June 15, 1967

Dear Izzy,

Thank-you for your letter. Yes, you do go overboard and yes, I can get prickly. My parents are taking Ari and I to Italy for two weeks after school ends. And then I’m home for the rest of the summer. My mother said I could have one last free summer before I go to work at sixteen. So let’s get together before I go and see where we are and more importantly - how we are.

IZZY

June 20, 1967

...Best day ever with Lina! I wrote a story about us. It’s called “The Story of Us.”

Yours until Niagara Falls,

-or-

Ciao for now,

Izzy

LINA

Wednesday, July 12, 1967

Happy Birthday, Izzy. I am writing this on your actual special day so you will get it late. Venice is beautiful. We go everywhere by boat. And all the boat-rowers are gondoliers who sing to you. You would love it. You probably would sing back! I hope you get here someday. My mother lets me wear a little make-up so I bought some Italian lipstick called "rossa."

Yours till the lips-stick (Did I make you laugh? I made it up!)

Lina

P.S. I'd love to read your story.

IZZY

September 1967

Dear Lina,

August was wonderful catching up and sun tanning in your yard. Somehow you managed to get light streaks in your hair from the lemon and I just got burning eyes. I am sorry I won't let you read my story yet. It's just not finished the way I want it to be. I keep changing it. Also, I'm afraid you won't like it. But you don't need to worry. There's nothing bad in it about you. Just some not-so-good-stuff about me. (I try to tell the truth when I write. It's hard.)

What do you think of high school? It's not the Patty Duke show – with all the cancellations of sports and theatre because of "the times." I didn't get into shows last year but I was hoping as a junior I might get a small part. But shows are a no-show. What do you think of the split shifts? I did like school starting at 10 a.m. last year. Now I have to be there at 9 a.m. I'm a night-owl.

Izzy

LINA

Tuesday, October 10, 1967

Dear Izzy,

Why didn't you warn me about all the homework there is in high school? I feel like I'm underwater all the time. See you this weekend.

IZZY

Dear Lina,

Do you really do your homework every evening? I know I should but I'd rather read. Want to dress up and collect donations for UNICEF on Halloween?

LINA

Christmas 1967

Dear Izzy,

Look, Izzy! An actual real letter from me from Miami. (And it's long – for me!) Merry Christmas! I hope you get some Christmas magic this year. I have something to tell you that I can't put into a postcard because other people might see it. I met someone. He lives in New York so I could date him – if I was allowed to date. It's a secret because he's in eleventh grade and I'm just in tenth. Maybe I should have skipped! Then I would be in eleventh grade like you. Still, I don't think my parents would approve. I think Ari knows I have a crush on him but he is keeping quiet. I'm starting to appreciate Ari a lot more.

LINA (cont'd)

He's really cute. Maybe not as cute as Paul McCartney (who still hasn't married Jane Asher – what's up with that). But different-cute – funny with a big smile. He's a fabulous swimmer. Nice arms! We met during a snorkeling class and talk about music a lot. I wonder if he has a girlfriend. Ari volunteered to ask but I put the kibosh on that. And yes, he's Jewish. Anyway, it's fun having a crush on a real person and not a picture in a magazine.

Not-in-love-but-in-crush,

Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I'm happy for your "crush." Does "crush-boy" have a name? So the arms are good, what else does he look like? Tall, dark, and handsome like Paul? Swoon-worthy like Bobby Rydell? What happens when snorkeling class is over? Do you know where he in New York he lives when he's not snorkeling? What do your parents think? Can I get some details?

George Harrison forever!

Izzy

LINA

Monday, January 1, 1968

Dear Izzy,

Happy 1968. We will be "Sweet Sixteen" this year. Almost a grown-up. Crush-guy's name is Michael. He lives in Brooklyn so not too far. I still don't know if he has a girlfriend and it may not matter because I'll probably never see him again. Sorry the letter is so short. I have tons of homework and cello practice and piano practice and I may give up the piano. I'll be home before this letter reaches you. Let's plan on a sleepover next week to catch up.

IZZY

April 5, 1968

Dear Lina,

They're riots everywhere. My Dad talks about what a tough world this is for my sister and me to grow up in. But your parents' world was tougher.

How does all this happen? How does a man who preaches non-violence get murdered? Is this what happens to good people? I want to be a good person but it seems like the good die young and the bad live forever. Which doesn't mean I want to be a bad person. I just don't want to die young or be murdered like Dr. King.

Is Niagara falling?

Izzy

LINA

Friday, April 12, 1968

Can we make a pact that we will not write anymore about dying young or being murdered? I hope Dr. King's story is not over. You know what we need? We need to dance again. Dance away

LINA (cont'd)

the world for an hour. It won't solve anything but it would be fun to be kids for the day – like we used to be. Come over.

Yours until the chocolate chips,
Lina

IZZY

April 22, 1968

Dear Lina,

Guess what? I signed up to work for Eugene McCarthy. I will finally have something to do this summer. And maybe I will be doing good. Does that make me good? I want to do good even if I am not always good. But I don't know. I think being good also means you have to be nice to your mother.

Your Sweet Sixteen Party was so fun. I can't believe my mother is letting me have my party early so all my friends can come. I am looking forward to Ari's Bar Mitzvah. Does that mean he's a grown-up? Oy!

Friday, July 5, 1968

Dear Izzy,

Israel is amazing. And guess what? All the teenagers here love the Beatles and think Paul is really cute. (Ha ha!) I guess teens are teens everywhere. Why people like to focus on differences instead of what brings us together is a mystery.

There's so much history in this tiny country. It's not much bigger than New Jersey! We visited the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea - which has so much salt you can float without trying to float. I don't know why they call it the Dead Sea – because you can't drown in it – you have to float! And then there's Jerusalem – where all these religions come together. And I cried. Because wouldn't it be wonderful if the people in all these religions could also come together? Hope things are well in NYC and you are enjoying working for Senator McCarthy. We are all sad about Robert Kennedy.

Lots of love and chocolate chips,
Lina

IZZY

August, 1968

Dear Lina,

Welcome home. It was great to talk to you like we were real people. Well, you're real. I'm never sure about me. I just saw that Paul McCartney and Jane Asher broke up this summer? That leaves room for drumroll you! I even wrote a story about Paul McCartney coming to the USA and meeting you and even thinking about converting for you. Want to read it?

LINA

...Your story sounds like a fun fairytale but I may not be available....

IZZY

December 14, 1968

Dear Lina,

Happy Hanukkah tomorrow. It was fun seeing you for all of ten-minutes to exchange gifts. Will there ever be enough time to be together and just “be?” And Happy New Year.

Yours until Niagara Falls and lots of love,

Izzy

P. S. It’s hard to believe you’ve given up on Paul McCartney for crush-boy aka Michael. He must really be something. I must meet him.

LINA

December 25, 1968

Dear Izzy,

Merry Christmas, Izzy! Just “be?” Do you want a “Be-in” like in the musical “Hair?” (See, I can keep up with Broadway musicals like you.) By the way, would you ever take your clothes off onstage? Please say, “no.” My parents could be in the audience.

We are crazy busy, aren’t we? Happy New Year!

Lots and lots of good wishes and love,

Lina

P.S. Yeah, done with Paul McCartney. He was “Yesterday.”

IZZY

March 1969

Dear Lina,

I saw *Hair* over the holiday and loved it. I’d LOVE to be in it. For the record, when they take their clothes off – the lights get really dim and you can’t see anything. But I think I would hide backstage during that scene.

“Let the sunshine in!”

Izzy

LINA

April 1969

Dear Izzy,

For your eyes only. Michael’s here on spring break. He doesn’t have a girlfriend. I am now seventeen and he is eighteen and my parents said I could date him!

IZZY

Dear Lina,

Tell me more about Michael and what it’s like to date. Inquiring minds want to know. Guess what! I saved enough from my horrible retail job and am going to go to the summer program at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. I have to be careful with telling my parents. They are not thrilled that I am not getting into one of those ivy colleges because my math grades were not exactly stellar. Maybe I should have done my homework.

So, you know I’m going to that Lutheran University in New Jersey. But they don’t care about religion. They even hold Saturday services for their Jewish students. Maybe I will go to those.

IZZY (cont'd)

Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

Izzy,

I am glad you are finally getting to do some theatre. I'd love to know more about how a Lutheran University conducts a Jewish service. Let's get together a lot before you go away.

Lina

SCENE 5 – College

IZZY

August 16, 1968

Dear Lina,

I leave for orientation tomorrow. My address is below. Please write. Believe it or not I am worried about college. It was always a place to get away from my mother but now it is a real place with real things to do. You won't be there. Will I make friends? I'm scared. Write!

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

...You will do great! Just be yourself. I am excited for senior year. Let's tell each other everything. Send me your dorm phone when you know it...

Lina

IZZY

September 4, 1969

I am writing because there is just one phone in the dorm and there's is always a long line. I hope senior year is being good to you. College is promising. My mother's not here.

The theatre department held auditions. Twenty guys showed up and a gazillion girls. The first play is "The Fantasticks." One female role. The next play is "The Caretaker." All male roles. Then there's "A Streetcar Named Desire." Three female roles. The director had me read Stella a lot. But everyone says they don't give freshman leads. Plus, as I found out at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts – I have gorilla arms. They just hang there like dead wood. I don't have my hopes up about getting into any shows this year.

The only downside is my roommate has a boyfriend. I don't care that she has a boyfriend. I do care that he lives in my dorm room on weekends. I don't much like sleeping in a tiny room with a strange guy – who is really strange by the way - so I go home every weekend. That was not the plan when I decided to go away to college. My mother thinks I miss her.

Niagara falls ? Or just "love" because I am in college now?

Izzy

LINA

Monday, December 1, 1969

Dear Izzy,

I am sorry it has taken me so long to respond – but there's so much happening. I spent Thanksgiving break touring colleges. Applications are due in January. Michael's a freshman in Syracuse but comes home every other weekend to see me. Let's stay young forever with ending our letters with Niagara Falls and chocolate chips. Let's always remember how we were when we were little. Phone number?

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

IZZY

December 10, 1969

Dear Lina,

There's always a huge line to use the dorm phone. Keep writing! Guess what? College got better! My roommate dropped out to live in some commune with her boyfriend and nobody has taken her place. And I got the lead in the spring play! Which has made some of the students mad because I am just a freshman. What colleges are you looking at?

Yours till Niagara Falls (because I am feeling young again),

Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Happy 1970! I'm sick of looking at colleges. They are all blending into one. So far I've been to Smith College, Vassar, Boston University, Marymount, Cornell, Brandeis, Yeshiva and NYU. What is the school play you are in? (Congratulations!) Your letters have gotten shorter. I think that means you're happy.

Yours until the butter flies (for a change in pace),

Lina

IZZY

January 15, 1970

Dear Lina,

I have to get used to writing "1970." After writing the 1960's years for so long. Do you have that problem? Are you trying to get into the Guinness Book of Records with how many colleges you have visited? I visited three.

I am Stella in "A Streetcar Named Desire." There's a lot of – what? Sexiness in a way that is sexy but not overtly and I have never been kissed, so what do I know? My first kiss ever – will be onstage. Can you write me about kissing Michael and how you do that? I worry about teeth clashing. And I hear things about "lizard tongues?" which does not sound inviting – even with George Harrison. The guy playing Stanley said we should practice kissing after rehearsal ... hmmm ... I don't think so. Also, I still have an arm-problem. My arms belong to some gorilla. And I have to light birthday candles on a cake and I cannot light a match. In acting classes, they have you do a lot of breathing but really – I wish they did more practical stuff – like how to light a match. And how to make your arms move so you don't look like a robot.

IZZY (cont'd)

Think about New York University. Then I can take the train to the city and we can be two die-hard New Yorkers hanging out in the greatest city in the world.

My show runs the last two weekends in March. I'd love for you to come and see the show. My parents would drive you back and forth. PLEASE COME!!!!

Yours till Niagara Falls,

Izzy

P.S. I know it's a longer letter. Didn't want you to think I changed.

LINA

Thursday, March 26, 1970

Dear Izzy,

I am not going to write you about what's it's like to kiss Michael – it's personal. I am sorry I missed your show. We had the spring orchestra concert and then it was spring break in Miami. Michael's not here so I guess I really will study. I hope the show went really well and you were able to light a match. Call me on April 1. No fooling around.

Yours forever,

Lina

IZZY

May 1, 1970

Dear Lina,

Guess what? I have a boyfriend. And he's Jewish. Yes, I found a nice Jewish boy at a Lutheran college. And my parents hate him. Which is fine by me. We have nothing in common but he is a good kisser. Yep.... I figured out the kissing thing. It was easier than I thought. Of course, we don't like the same foods, music or type of theatre which makes for interesting, sometimes heated conversations. (He's never seen *The Wizard of Oz!!!*) But kissing is a big plus.

Congratulations on Cornell. Is that near Michael? I'm home after Memorial Day. Let's catch up and be silly. Brush up on your Munchkin voice.

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

P.S. We can double date this summer!

LINA

Sunday, September 20, 1970

Dear Izzy,

Summer went by fast, didn't it? You're looking all grown-up these days. Does college do that to you? Will I finally start to look grown-up?

Cornell is okay. It's not as much fun as being silly with you but college is not supposed to be silly, right? We did have fun this summer even if the double-dating did not work out. Michael and Josh are soooo different!

LINA (cont'd)

I like my roommate and my classes. I have no idea what to major in. Nothing is jumping out at me. I have to study a ton. Sometimes I go into the music building and just play the piano. It relaxes me. I really miss Michael. But it is cool that he's just an hour away by car. (Shh... this is a secret – even from Michael but you know what? I just want to get married and start my life and not have to wait four more years.) Michael is taking a ton of classes to graduate early and save money. Maybe I should do that.

Love until the lips stick, (seems appropriate)

Lina

IZZY

February, 1971

Dear Lina,

It was really great seeing you over the holidays. You really only have three-and-a-half years until you graduate. Remember when I had to wait all that time to get out of the house? Time does go by. Of course, you will need a major someday (did I just sound like a grown-up?).

You're right about Europe. I LOVE studying here. It's gorgeous – like living in an artsy calendar. I wake up every day and tell myself, "You are really here." I am broke – I'm doing this on five dollars a day. My parents can't send me much money. I know they are doing this because they hope I break up with Josh. (Maybe you're thinking the same thing.) I went to Salzburg and imagined I was in "The Sound of Music" I restrained myself from dancing in the Alps singing "Do Re Mi." I didn't want anyone to think I was deranged.

I went to Amsterdam and visited The Anne Frank House. After reading the Diary many times, I could hear the long-ago voices come alive in the tiny rooms. There is so little space, I could feel the walls closing in. I wondered, "Could I hide here for two years?" My first instinct was "no." But then I thought, "Izzy, could you stay inside here if everyone on the outside wanted to kill you?" I'm getting emotional writing about it. What would it be like to be "the hidden?"

Last week we went to Munich. We stopped into some random rathskeller and there were these men – singing loudly. They were scary. My friend who speaks German said, "let's go." And later he told me they were singing Nazi songs – which is forbidden. I guess the war isn't as far away as I thought. It's hard to believe there are people alive who miss those days. I am just starting to understand things that you already know. I won't be writing a ton of letters because airmail is expensive. I just heard your sigh of relief.

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

Monday, May 31, 1971

Dear Izzy,

I am home for the summer. Can we get together? I want to hear about your semester abroad. I am amazed that you did not sing the entire score of "The Sound of Music" in the Alps.

IZZY

June, 1971

Dear Lina,

Did you forget I was applying to be an apprentice for summer stock? I'm already in North Carolina at an equity (means "professional" ahem...) theatre for the summer. I love it – except for the ticks. There are mountains everywhere and wildflowers and it's a great break from the sweltering City. But then, there's something else that I found out about...

On my first morning, a little girl who is the daughter of one of the theatre-owners asked if she could see "my horns." She thought that because I was from New York - I must be Jewish and if I was Jewish – I must have horns! You can bet I didn't let her know I wasn't Jewish. And I let her check my head for horns. And the thing is – she goes to a private school and is from a well-educated family. The past is never far away, is it? You tried to tell me but as usual, I had to learn these things for myself.

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

Monday, February 14, 1972

Dear Izzy,

Happy Valentine's Day! Remember when you wore your pajama top to school for Heart's day? It was fun spending the holidays with you. I haven't played Dreidel in years. Thanks for indulging Ari and me and Michael. It's the first time I ever played it with real money...

Jackie brings Michael to Cornell once a month (she's at Syracuse and has a car). She drives us around while Michael and I make-out in the backseat. I don't think my parents sent me to college for this. I still don't have a major. Too bad I can't major in Michael!

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

IZZY

February 1972

Dear Lina,

Sit down! I am cast as Miep in "The Diary of Anne Frank. Of course I wanted to be Anne. I knew that would never happen. I am "The Helper" and feel a lot of gratitude to portray such a noble character. I have to do a ton of research. About Amsterdam in the war. About Auschwitz. Can you help me? Did your parents know people who went into hiding?

Miss you. Miss your letters. A ton.

Love, Izzy

LINA

Thursday, March 2, 1972

Dear Izzy-with the-questions,

My parents never were able to go into hiding so I know nothing about that. They were snatched from their homes. The Diary of Anne Frank does not deal with Anne's experience at Auschwitz and Miep never was there. You don't need me for research. (Stop fishing.) I do need a major.

LINA (cont'd)

Yours truly,
Lina

IZZY

March 1972

Dear Lina,

So from my research into Anne Frank (there's not a lot beyond the Diary), it was noted that everyone got really skinny while in hiding. Food was scarce so even "the helpers" went hungry. They ate tulips! The director thinks we all look well-fed, So the entire cast is on a diet. We are all on this no-carbohydrate diet. You cannot eat fruits or vegetables. But you can have steak every night. My uncle-the-cardiologist is rolling his eyes. I miss pasta. Would it be nagging if I told you that you should major in music?

LINA

Dear Nagging Izzy,

Yes, you are nagging. I am told that models swallow cotton balls to lose weight. Apparently the liquids in your stomach makes the cotton balls expand so you think you are full. Please don't do that.

IZZY

...I promise to not go on the cottonball diet. Are you home this summer? I will be working but am around in the evenings. Josh and I broke up. For the tenth time – but the tenth time's the charm. You know when I went abroad for the semester? I didn't miss him. I think if you're in love you are supposed to miss your boyfriend when you go away. I didn't. My sister said that my parents celebrated. Their plan worked. It kills me when they are right...

LINA

...I won't be around this summer. I will be working in a kibbutz. I am excited for that except that I will be away from Michael. Now I know what you mean about letters. I hope he writes me every day. And I will try to do the same...

IZZY

...Aha! For years, I have had to nag you to write me letters and now you are planning on writing Michael every day? I guess you really must be in love. Maybe you'll figure out your major...

LINA

...I just dream about marrying Michael and playing music for him and kissing him – a lot. I just can't focus on picking out something to study that will work for me for the rest of my life. Michael and babies would work for me though. You were so focused even when we were little. I mean, what nine-year-old knows what she wants to be when she grows up?...

IZZY

...A nine-year-old who wanted to be anyone but who she was. I miss us. It's getting harder, isn't it? To stay best friends. It's not just us. We're in the world now...

LINA

August 25 1972

Dear Izzy,

It was great spending the weekend with you. Let's make sure we do an overnight over Thanksgiving. Let's do girlie-girl stuff with facials and manicures so that we return to college looking our best.

Lina

IZZY

September 1972

Dear Lina,

Do you watch the news in college? Or watch the Olympics? You must. Munich! All those Israeli athletes murdered by terrorists? I can't bear it. Everyone's crying. The world is spinning out of control.

LINA

Dear Izzy,

My parents and Ari came to Ithaca to be with me. I was a wreck. The Olympics haven't been in Germany since it was controlled by Hitler. The Germans were calling these games "The Cheerful Games." There's lots of talk on campus - is it ever safe to be Jewish? Is it ever safe to be in *any* minority? Ari and my father say no. It doesn't matter where you are, being in a minority is never safe. I want to talk about something cheery but am now in the mood.

IZZY

October 1, 1972

Dear Lina,

I had to write you right away. Because I have news and it's not about our sad, topsy-turvy world. The school just built a new Black Box Theatre and they are doing a new play by Tony-award winner Howard Stein! And I am the female lead! I will be working with a bona-fide Broadway writer. Whoo hoo! They say networking is everything and if my do my job well... well ... who knows? Next stop, Broadway?

Love, Izzy

LINA

Wednesday, November 1, 1972

Dear Izzy,

Congratulations on being a step closer to Broadway. I have two things and one is HUGE. I tried to call but no one answers the phone in your dorm. I'm leaving school in December. I have all good grades so I could go back if I ever want to. THE NEWS! I am getting married. Michael proposed. He graduated early, is going into business with his father and ready. I feel ready, too. Yes, I said "yes." My parents hemmed and hawed but they realized that Michael is a good man. I am madly in love with him and have been since I was fifteen. That's five whole years! His parents are also Holocaust survivors. There really are no black spots to count against us. It's hard to concentrate on finals when you are dreaming about your wedding.

Love is everywhere,

Lina

IZZY

Wow Dear Lina,

Congratulations. This is such a grown-up thing that you are doing. Part of me asks, “why are you in such a hurry to grow up” and part of me thinks, “is this Lina’s happily-ever-after?” You’re the first person not related to me to get married. But you are kind of related to me, aren’t you? As you used to say, if you’re happy, I’m happy. I’m glad you are following your heart. Just as I am doing. We are going to have so much to say to each other in the coming years as we see where our lives go.

Rehearsals are interesting. I am learning that even Broadway people aren’t perfect. I noticed some inconsistencies in my dialogue about my feelings for my “theatre family” and mentioned them to Mr. Stein. He kind of gave me a sour look like, “how dare I?” But he changed the dialogue. I probably should have kept my mouth shut. Maybe I just nixed my networking attempt. But, it’s still going to be a great show and since you won’t be in Ithaca, you can come to the show!

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

(IZZY opens a wedding invitation. LINA reads it aloud.)

LINA

December 1, 1972

To Miss Isobel Ross.

Mr. and Mrs. Josef Zenes along with Mr. and Mrs. David Goldblum

LINA and IZZY

Request the honor of your presence to the marriage of their children

IZZY

Lina and Michael

On Sunday, January 29, 1973...

(IZZY fills out the “reply” card and stuffs into an envelope.)

LINA

Friday, December 8, 1972

Dear Izzy,

What do you mean that you “regret” not being able to come to my wedding? This is me, Izzy. The one who played *The Wizard of Oz* with you – how many times? I did munchkin voices for you!

IZZY

Dear Lina,
I know and I'm sorry. Very, truly sorry. But I have a matinee that day. It's the lead, remember? There's no understudy. If I'm not there, there would be no show. I can't let everyone down.

LINA

Dear "Best Friend" Izzy,
But you can let your best friend down?

IZZY

Dear Lina,
I think best friends see each other more than once a year. I think best friends ... are asked to be in the wedding.

LINA

Izzy,
It's a Jewish wedding. We did this quickly. And to be truthful, I see Jackie a lot more than I see you. She always drives to Ithaca to visit me.

IZZY

I don't drive.

LINA

Isobel Ross,
I was afraid there wasn't time to get you up to speed for the service. You're always in rehearsal. I can never reach you by phone.

IZZY

Lina Zenes,
You certainly did do this really quickly. I thought it took months to plan a wedding. I was thinking it would be in the spring and then I wouldn't audition for a show if it was. Or the summer. Summer weddings are beautiful. You seem to be in such a rush? Is there a reason for it?

LINA

Dear Miss Ross:
I am NOT "in the family way" if that's what you are implying. All the venues are booked until next October and I don't want to wait that long. How can you even ask? Who are you these days? There's still time to change your mind.

IZZY

I'm sorry. I can't. Can we ... meet later and celebrate?
Yours truly,
Izzy

LINA

It's a wedding! Not a birthday celebration. You celebrate your wedding at your wedding

IZZY

Where are you registered?

LINA

January 1973

Miss Isobel Ross,

Thank-you for the china place setting.

Lina and Michael

(The lights fade to black. Time passes.)

Scene 6 – All Grown Up

(IZZY has the box of LINA'S letters and is going through them. She pulls out a letter that was returned and addresses a new letter.)

IZZY

December 12, 1977

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Zenes,

Happy end of Hanukkah. I have a letter to Lina that was returned to me because she must have moved and she is unlisted. If you get this and still like me a little bit, could you forward this to her?

Sincerely,

Izzy

(LINA reads the letter as IZZY speaks it.)

IZZY (cont'd)

Hanukkah, 1977

Dear Lina,

It's a milestone year. We will be twenty-five. A quarter of a century. I've been thinking about different milestones and how I screwed up. A role in a play is not a milestone. Milestones are births, deaths, marriages and for you a Bat Mitzvah. A role in a play is a shiny brass ring and I chased shiny brass rings for a long time.

I'm sorry. I didn't even try to see if I could get the afternoon off from the play. I had – a false sense of my own importance. Maybe the director would have figured out a way that I could get to your wedding – maybe not. But I'll never know because I didn't try. I'm trying now. Does friendship have an expiration date? I know it's been five years and a lot happens in that time. I also know that in the span of a life time, five years is just a small portion of this "grown up" life – especially if we're lucky and get to live a long one.

It's Hanukkah. I think about you every Hanukkah, and on your birthday.... I wish you a year filled with light. How is Michael? Do you have babies? (I bet you have at least one.) Do you

IZZY (cont'd)

play them Brahms Lullaby? I remember. Everything. I used to think you were in a hurry to grow up. Now I wonder if I was afraid to grow up.

I moved to Iowa City. Surprised? Let's just say doing theatre in New York did not go the way I planned it. I never did hear from Mr. Stein after the show ended. I did try to contact him. I gave up your wedding for a pipedream.

Today, I call myself a writer. But really I'm more of a "wanna be writer." We shall see. Maybe it's another pipedream. There have been so many times, I wanted to reach out to you – thinking – "Lina would understand," "Lina would say the right thing." Which is my way of saying, I've missed you. A lot. I also miss the person I used to be. And maybe want to be again. My address is below.

Love,

Izzy

P.S. My family is doing well. My parents moved to Minnesota for work and my sister is married and lives in Denver. How are your parents and Ari?

(LINA writes a letter.)

LINA

January 1, 1979

Dear Izzy,

Happy 1979! I am sorry it's taken so long to answer – but to be truthful. I didn't know what to say ... or think ... or write. Yes, it was a lovely surprise to hear from you. I appreciate your honesty about the wedding. The truth is – somewhere in this "growing up" we let each other down. I never even made it to one of your productions.

I, too, have thought about you over the years. I have grand memories of us boosting each other up. As children. You're in my childhood memory folder (I still like things nice and tidy) and I wonder about the wisdom of expanding it into adulthood. Will we disappoint each other again? Or worse – hurt each other?

Think of this letter as a baby step. Are you interested in a grown woman who spends her days smeared with baby food on her clothes? A woman who's greatest delight is when her daughter tries to be a penguin and waddles?

But you have piqued my curiosity. What is in Iowa besides corn?

Still loving my chocolate chips,

Lina

IZZY

January 10, 1979

Dear Lina,

I was thrilled to get your letter. Absolutely thrilled! Yes, Miss New Yorker – do you know there are forty-nine other states besides New York? There is more to Iowa than just corn. (Although

IZZY (cont'd)

the corn is pretty good.) The Writer's Workshop is amazing – I get my MFA in another year. My days and eves are spent writing and analyzing writing. I love it. All expenses are paid. I am amazed I got in. Of course, expenses don't cover things like haircuts and new clothes. Thank heaven for Goodwill.

I updated my old story "The Story of Us." (The one I wouldn't let you read.) They said my writing "had energy." But it still doesn't have an ending. I know I nagged you for an ending once-upon-a-time. Now I know, I need to figure out my own ending.

Ahhh, baby food and penguin waddles tells me you have your baby (or babies?). I'm sincerely glad for you. Tell me more. Do they do munchkin voices? Is this awkward?
Yours until Niagara Falls

(The following is a collage taken from longer letters. We just hear snippets. IZZY takes out a letter and a photo falls out. It's similar with LINA.)

LINA

March 2, 1980

Here's a photo of me and Julianna. I am chubby because Baby #2 is on the way.

IZZY

Sometime in April 1980

So here's a photo of me in a cornfield being all corny.

LINA

May 10, 1980

Introducing Baby Elise. Seven pounds, twelve ounces with a full head of hair!

IZZY

Sometime in May, 1980

I finished "The Story of Us." Graduating in a week with my M.F.A. King me!

LINA

Aw shucks, Izzy. Thank-you for the popcorn, bagged corn soup, and corn-husk dolls for the girls. You are a-*maizing*! I want to read your story. I'm all ears.

IZZY

Moving to Des Moines. Teaching high school students. I hope they're like you were and not like I was at that age.

LINA

Found a three-bedroom house. It has a sun room! Still waiting for the story.

IZZY

Looking for a publisher.

LINA

I have a new phone number. Send me yours. I know long-distance is expensive but maybe we can talk over the New Year. Publisher?

IZZY

It was great talking to you. I think 1981 will be “rejection year.” “The Story of Us” has been rejected three times. Should I revise it?

LINA

Maybe I can help. Can I read it? (Hint, hint.)

IZZY

Moving to Madison. It’s a pretty city with a lot of theatres Still teaching teens. I like it. Maybe because part of me is still a teen. Happy Birthday, thirty-year old. Can I trust you now that you’re thirty?

LINA

Introducing Jacob Goldblum. Born June 3, 1983. Nine pounds, 10 ounces. Yes, a big guy.

IZZY

Congratulations, Lina, Michael, Julianna, and Elise on your new family member. Do you like the blanket? It’s a corn maze! Moving to Minneapolis. Working in the lit department of a theatre. It combines my theatre background with my writing. Seven rejections on “The Story of Us” and counting.

LINA

Dear Izzy,
Happy 1984! I tried calling for the holidays but there’s no answer. Where are you?

IZZY

Minneapolis. I have news.

LINA

I am still waiting for the news. My news? Julianna collects bugs, Elise has memorized “Ding Dong the Witch is Dead” and Jacob is a runner.

IZZY

Here it us! Fresh from the Publisher! “The Story of Us.” I hope you enjoy! Happy 1985!

(LINA takes out a slim novel “The Story of Us” and begins to skim it. We hear IZZY’S voice as she reads.)

IZZY (cont’d)

“Once upon a time there were two little girls. They were best friends. They vowed that they would stay best friends forever. And they tried. They really tried.

IZZY (cont'd)

It was a dreary February day when Patty met Rachel. Patty was the “new girl” in a over-crowded fourth grade class. Tall and awkward with newly permed hair that still smelled like chemicals, she stared at her scuffed saddle-back shoes as she was introduced to the class. When she was allowed to go to her desk, there was a note waiting for her. It read, “Hello, Patricia-the-new-girl, will you be my friend?”

“I have no cousins.”

“It was at Auschwitz that my mother discovered...”

(LINA is pleased at the opening. But soon her curiosity gets the better of her and she skims ahead. The more she skims, the more upset she gets. She may slam the book down or throw it offstage. She may get up and leave and IZZY’S next dialogue is to an empty desk.)

IZZY (cont'd)

January 1, 1986

Hi Lina,

It’s been a few months. Have you had time to read the book? What do you think? Curious minds want to know.

IZZY (cont'd)

February 1, 1986

Lina, are you there?

(Time passes. LINA and IZZY put a laptop computer on their desks. IZZY is scanning photos. LINA is reading IZZY’S book – but really reading it this time. She starts searching for IZZY on the computer. It is Christmas 2000. She sends an email.)

LINA

Merry Christmas, Izzy! Surprised? I have thought about you a lot over the years. I just finished your book. I know. I’m a slow reader. Also, I am still growing up. How is the new century treating you? I want to explain. But only if you want to listen. Are the roles reversed? It’s usually me who doesn’t always want to listen.

Chocolate chips? My email is below.

Lina

(An email is quickly answered. LINA’s surprised.)

IZZY

Lina?????? From Queens, New York? Married with children? Is that you? I thought you hated me.

LINA

You answered quickly. I don't know where to begin. But there's no hate.

(Waits a moment for a response.)

IZZY

Wisdom says to start at the beginning. But story editors say to start in the middle. How did you find me?

(Waits a moment for a response.)

LINA

You have an actual website.

IZZY

For writing and teaching. I freelance. I still need all the help I can get. How are you?

LINA

Do you have AIM? I want "to talk."

IZZY

Call me?

LINA

I like the distance the computer gives me. It makes me feel safe. I just don't want to feel like I am writing letters again. Here's my AIM address.

IZZY

Got it. Wait a second.

(IZZY sends a message.)

LINA

Hi!

IZZY

Awkward?

LINA

Awkward.

IZZY

Is this really you? Lina-whose-hair-I-burned-and-you-had-to-get-a-shaggy-dog-haircut....

LINA

Says the girl who wore a pajama top to school.

George Harrison! IZZY

Paul McCartney forever! LINA

My friend the Jewish Easter egg! IZZY

My friend the ostrich! LINA

Where do we begin? IZZY

We just did. I finished your book. LINA

It took you fourteen years to read my book? IZZY

I like to take things slow. Julianna loved it. LINA

And... IZZY

I did, too. Once I got over the fact that you revealed secrets. LINA

I didn't. IZZY

Disguised. LINA

Very. IZZY

I never really read it when you first sent it. I skimmed it. LINA

And ... IZZY

LINA

I assumed stuff. Incorrectly. Julianna said it reminded her of her friendship with Marissa. And ...

IZZY

And...

LINA

She appreciated the chapters where you discovered anti-semitism because she experienced it in high school. And she says it is good if young people read these things. And the chapter on Auschwitz was told with love which is unusual. And people are forgetting about the camps and the survivors and the book spoke to her. Elise is reading it now.

IZZY

Thank her for me. It's funny to talk about it. It was fourteen years ago and did not exactly shake the literary world.

LINA

Julianna said she'd like to meet you.

IZZY

Ditto.

LINA

I have to go ... I didn't expect ...you know... that I'd find you so quickly ... and talk ... so quickly.

IZZY

This was nice. I'd like to hear more.

LINA

Me, too. I have a heavy workload in the coming weeks.

IZZY

Work?

LINA

Lawyer stuff.

IZZY

Whaaaaat?

LINA

Yeah, I'm a lawyer. It turns out if you want to have babies – they don't stay babies. The kids grew up and I had to do something. I wanted to be a mother and a wife but never just a housewife.

IZZY

Lawyer! *Lawyer?* “Order in the court and all that jazz?”

LINA

So tell me one big thing about yourself before I go.

IZZY

Married with children! Surprise! Noah’s in seventh grade and Sophia’s in fifth.

LINA

That’s my mother’s name!

IZZY

Duh. Know that. I always loved it. There’s so much to talk about, isn’t there? How did you decide on law school? How’s Michael’s business? Do the kids play the piano -

LINA

Whoa. Slow down. I still like to go slow and think about stuff.

IZZY

And you’re still Lina. Thank goodness! Family?

LINA

My dad passed. He hung on long enough to see my graduate from law school.

IZZY

I am so sorry. I still care about your parents.

LINA

I know. It was a tough one. And your family?

IZZY

My Dad’s retiring this year. But guess what! My mother went to Weight Watchers and got skinny and is finally happy. She had no idea that all those diet pills she took forever was making her crazy. My sister is happy as a clam in Denver. *I can’t believe we’re talking!*

LINA

I really, really have to go. There’s a family gathering and I’m already late. I guess I still talk too much. Send me your real address. Julianna wants to send you something. Talk later?

IZZY

Definitely.

(THEY close the computers. Maybe LINA looks at the book. Maybe IZZY retrieves her blue box containing her correspondence with LINA over the years. It was a good exchange. They’re happy. Lights change. IZZY opens a thick envelope.)

IZZY

To Mrs. Isobel Ross-Johnston and Mark Johnston
Mr. Michael Goldblum and Ms. Lina Zenes-Goldblum

Together with

Joseph Markovitz and Leah Markovitz

Request the honor of your presence and your family to the marriage of their children
Julianna Goldblum and David Markovitz

On Sunday, November 4, 2001

(Izzy has a moment of emotion. SHE writes on the "reply card.")

IZZY

September 1, 2001

Dear Lina, Thank-you for believing in second chances.

Dear Julianna, My family of four will all be there with bells on.

(IZZY and LINA are on the computer.)

LINA

I got your reply card and I am thrilled that our families will meet each other. After corresponding all these months, it seemed the next logical step. Julianna is excited! All three kids love their signed copies of the book. Ari is thrilled we've reconnected. I think he wants a book.

IZZY

It'll be in the mail tomorrow. I have too many copies sitting in my closet. Now, I must prepare for November. I must buy all new clothes. And dye my hair. *(Beat.)* I need to tell you something.

LINA

Everything okay?

IZZY

I'm chubby. Can I lose ten pounds from now until November?

LINA

Sheesh, Izzy – we're pushing fifty. We're all chubby! There's a Krispy Kreme down the block from my office. You know I'm a frequent visitor. Just don't go on the cottonball diet.

IZZY

So much has happened since our days together. I'm scared... we're different.

LINA

We were always different. We'll talk about everything when you're here.

IZZY

Everything? As in *everything*?

LINA

Is that code for, “You still want to know how my parents survived?”

IZZY

No. I like the ending I made up in my book. It satisfied me. Which is why I included the chapter on “Rachel’s” mom in the camps. It wasn’t to betray you. Even if you were the inspiration.

LINA

It is beautiful. I did love the three friends sharing their meager rations and giving an extra portion to whomever needed it most that day. I especially loved the friends holding a Seder from memory with make-believe food. It made me cry. Let’s talk tomorrow night. I have a really early meeting tomorrow. Cantor-Fitzgerald thrives on 8 a.m. meetings. Chocolate Chips!

IZZY

Niagara Falls!

(Lights change.)

EPILOGUE

(LINA stands and either exits or stands behind IZZY. A computer ding. IZZY reads an article from the computer.)

IZZY

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, Associated Press
Snippets of papers from Cantor-Fitzgerald littered the streets below. The plane hit at 8:48 a.m. just below the Cantor Fitzgerald Headquarters at World Trade Center One. All 658 employees perished.

(IZZY is writing a letter. September 12, 2001)

IZZY

September 12, 2001
Dear Mr. and Mrs. Zenes:
Dear Ari:

I just heard *(crosses out)*. I want to express my sincere *(crosses out)*... Words cannot express *(crosses out)*.

(IZZY opens a box and takes out notes and letters.)

LINA’S VOICE

(IZZY hears LINA’S voice as she scans old letters and notes. Maybe LINA is above her.)

“Hello, Isobel-the-new-girl. Will you be my friend? We can sit together at lunch.”

IZZY (Reading a letter.)

“I’m here and I intend to make my time here count. I am going to be the best daughter, friend, sister, wife, mother that I can be.”

(THEY face each other.)

IZZY (cont’d)

I’d want to save you. Does that count?

LINA

It counts.

IZZY

I will always be yours. Until Niagara Falls ... and the chocolate chips.

END OF PLAY