

## A LOOK ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

# An answer to what could happen

The year was 1976. Back before cell phones or the internet, in the days of typewriters and carbon paper, I had landed my first job in television, as a script typist for the MacNeil/Lehrer Report.

I was three months in the Big Apple, but had yet to see any of its sights, not even its fabled lunch spots. Every day since being hired, I had stayed at my desk all through lunch, subsisting on delivery coffee and grilled-cheese sandwiches, answering phones.

No one made me do that. I was simply still so new – to the job, and to New York – that I think I was afraid it might all evaporate if I left my desk for as long as an hour.

My friend Carla was determined to rectify this situation. “You’ve been eating the same darned sandwich every day for three months now! There are so many famous places that are just a few steps from here: The Russian Tea Room; Rumpelmayer’s; the Carnegie Deli.... Tell you what: Lunch will be my treat, if you’ll come with me today. What do you say to that?”

“But who will answer the phones?”

“The same person who would answer them every day if you just took the lunch hour you’re entitled to: the receptionist!”

“I’d love to, you know that. But...”

“But what?”

“Well, they might need me..”

“Tell me something. You’re the script typist, right?”

“Right.”

“So they need you whenever they broadcast, right?”

“Right.”

“But the studio is dark tonight, isn’t it? MacNeil isn’t even in the country, and Jim Lehrer is doing the show entirely out of Washington all week ...so all you have to do is catch up on some filing and go home early – isn’t that right? So surely you can spare one measly hour for lunch?”

“Well, when you put it that way.... Still, what if something happened?”

Carla lost all patience with me. “What could happen?” she barked.

I rose to the challenge. “Well,



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there could be one of those freak summer thunderstorms in Washington, and lightning could hit the WETA studio building, and it could burn to the ground, and they’d have to send Jim Lehrer up to do the show out of New York. That’s what.”

My friend stared at me for almost a minute. Then she cracked up. “You’re nuts, you know that?! You’d have a better chance of winning the lottery! You don’t really believe all that, do you?”

“I guess not,” I said, sheepishly.

“All right. Let’s go then!”

So I set off to discover the phenomenon of triple-decker sandwiches at the Carnegie Deli, whose motto may as well have been, “Bet you can’t eat both halves!”

An hour later, I was indeed only halfway through my mountain of pastrami when I suddenly came up for air. “I’ve gotta go!”

“Judy, you’re getting paranoid again. Anyway, you can’t leave till you’re finished.”

And so it was that two hours later, I waddled back to my office, fat but happy.

The smile quickly faded from my face when I spotted the line of co-workers stretching from the elevator all the way back to my desk. Every one of them looked worried.

“Here she comes!” yelled the first one.

“At last!” said the second.

“Where have you been?” scolded three, four and five, as they hustled me to my chair.

“What’s wrong?” I managed to yelp. I was starting to panic, and it was all I could do to keep all that pastrami where I had put it.

“You won’t believe it,” said the senior-most producer in the office. “There was a freak summer storm in Washington, and lightning hit the WETA studio, and Jim Lehrer is already on his way up to do tonight’s show out of New York. Everyone else is busy re-booking guests and calling in camera men, but there’s a lot of script to type – where have you been?”

I barely had time to shoot an “I told you so!” look at my friend before she took off. “Hey, where are you going?” I yelled after her.

“To buy a lottery ticket!” she yelled back, over her shoulder.

Ever since that day, I can’t hear the phrase “What could happen?” without also knowing the answer:

“What could happen? Anything could happen! This is New York!”

Judy Epstein swears if this isn’t true, may she be hit by a bolt of lightning...or a winning lottery ticket... whichever comes first! E-mail her your own incredible story at [jepstein@mail.com](mailto:jepstein@mail.com).

## FROM THE DESK OF SENATOR JACK MARTINS

## The Heroin Highway on Long Island

I ask any parent reading this column to read it all the way through.

Don’t put it down and think it doesn’t pertain to you, because it does. And if it makes you uncomfortable, that’s great. If we’re lucky, a little discomfort now will spare you a lot of heartache in the future.

We Long Islanders have an immense problem on our hands which, if it hasn’t already, will make its way onto your personal radar soon. The problem is heroin and all indicators point to Long Island being the regional epicenter of a growing epidemic.

It’s not Manhattan, the Bronx, or Brooklyn – it’s Long Island. So much so that experts have unofficially dubbed the Long Island Expressway the “Heroin Highway.”

While heroin used to be considered primarily an urban problem of street addicts, it has now crossed over into all kinds of communities, especially here. Several factors contribute to this trend.

Last year I wrote about Long Island’s continuing battle with prescription drug abuse and the “I-STOP” law we passed to create a statewide, real-time prescription tracking database.

The good news is these efforts worked. There’s been a dramatic decrease of prescription opioids on the black market.

The bad news is that the scientific principle that “nature abhors a vacuum” is holding true. In this case, it’s being filled by heroin, one of the world’s most dangerously addictive drugs.

When you add the fact that this stuff is readily available and cheaper than a pack of cigarettes, it spells disaster.

How bad is it?

Heroin killed 121 people in Nassau and Suffolk in 2012 and at least 120 last year -- the two highest totals ever recorded. (By comparison, there were 23 DWI deaths in Nassau County last year.)

These numbers are just the heartbreaking fatalities. In Nassau County alone there were



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*State Senator*

more than 821 non-fatal heroin and opiate overdoses in 2013.

Worse still: Nassau police recorded 500 heroin arrests in 2013, more than double the 228 arrests in 2011!

Long Island addiction experts are counseling users as young as 12 years old.

As shocking as those numbers are, statistics tend to roll right out of our minds after we read them. As human beings it’s usually personal stories that alarm us.

As a member of the Joint

Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, I’ve heard the painful testimony of young addicts and heartbroken parents alike. It absolutely scares the hell out of me and it should scare you too. As I write this column I have an official police breakdown of these fatalities in front of me.

There’s not one neighborhood in Nassau County – not one – that has emerged unscathed. Neighbors everywhere are working through the harsh reality of addiction, overdoses, and so many are burying their dead.

Nobody knows why this is happening to our kids. Some young addicts say they experimented with heroin because there was simply not enough for them to do.

But I can’t help but wonder what emotional void our kids are trying to fill. These are good kids – straight A students, athletes, cheerleaders – from good, hardworking families and yet, here we are. It could happen to any of us.

We’re working on ways to

combat this scourge. We fought back on prescription drugs and we’ll find a way to fight heroin addiction too.

But I beg of you, not as your senator but as a fellow parent, please, please, pay careful attention to your kids and the company they keep.

No lawmaker, police officer, or counselor loves them more or knows them better than you do. And for your own sake, have the “drug talk” and keep on having it. Ask them outright about heroin usage among their peers.

It’s uncomfortable, but “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” A few moments of awkwardness now just might save you from a heartache that never ends.

If you or a loved one needs help, or even if you suspect a problem, don’t wait. It will not go away on its own. Make the call to the Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence at (516) 747-2606 or the Long Island Crisis Center’s 24/7 hotline at (516) 679-1111.