

Did someone move Chelm to Israel?

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By Danny Bloom



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CHIAYI CITY, Taiwan— Daniella Ashkenazy is a seasoned journalist, born in Washington and raised in Silver Spring, Maryland, and living in Israel since 1968. For over two decades she published article in Israel’s leading print media and in newspapers and periodicals abroad including features in Israel’s second-oldest Hebrew newspaper *Davar* and the Hebrew news weekly *Haolam Hazeih*. She has also written for the *Jerusalem Post* and *Washington Jewish Week*. Much of her work comes with her trademark tongue-in-cheek humor, and one piece she wrote she dubbed “Sabbath Piece of Mind”.

Ashkenazy is currently writing an online humor column titled “Chelm-on-the-Med”(www.chelm-on-the-med.com). She tells *San Diego Jewish World* that she gets her material from what journalists call “soft news” — actual items published in the Hebrew press in Israel.

“I’m an odd-news junkie,” she says in an email exchange from Israel.

When asked how her column came to be, she replied: “Israeli news is far too conflict-driven and Israel advocacy is far too cerebral. The fact is, beyond life and death issues, Israel is an outrageously amusing and lively place to live, and I found that many Jews overseas don’t have a clue about the humorous side of Israeli life. So, I decided to cull and collect the silly, the outrageous and even incredibly stupid things that happen here for my online column.”

On a roll, she continues: “These odd news stories are only reported in the Hebrew press here. Some Israelis, no doubt, sigh with relief about this, but the fact is, we Israelis do countless unbelievable, nutty and chutzpadik life-embracing things. While many things here could happen only in Israel, others ‘unite’ us with the rest of the world.”

“Let’s face it: Israel needs a Laughter Brigade! We need to use humorous incidents to drive home serious points,” she says. “Moreover, one can neutralize hecklers on campus with a few well-placed shots of humor that can also win over an audience and make people curious to hear more. We underestimate the power of a good chuckle!”

When asked why she calls her column “Chelm-on-the-Med,” Ashkenazy explained: “The title was chosen because in so many ways, Israeli public and private life seem modeled after Chelm — an actual Jewish town in Poland that for generations served as the butt of Yiddish folk humor, as you know. Nobody knows when or why Chelm got tagged with the role of being ‘a paradise filled with life-embracing fools’ but reading in the Hebrew papers about the IDF draftee who was afraid of the dark, whose ultimate Jewish mother snuck into boot camp to accompany him on nighttime guard duty, slipping out undetected at dawn; the senior Israeli minister who chose to enchant the press by hypnotizing a chicken, leaving the bird on its back looking like an oversized zapped cockroach; and a court ruling on a divorce settlement requiring the divorcee to pay his former spouse one pregnant goat a year for the next 35 years — raising serious questions over ‘who got whose goat’ — I knew if there truly was a Chelm, it was here at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean — in Israel.”

With humor her guide, and with a good steady hand to type out her stories, Ashkenazy hopes to attract readers far and wide. Here’s a sample of what she does. Enjoy! www.chelm-on-the-med.com

Bloom is a freelance writer based in Taiwan