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COLD BEET SOUP

by

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Seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, borscht was served at Grossinger's, one of several hundred hotels in the resort area known as the Catskills in upstate New York. Because of this, an editor at *Variety* dubbed the area The Borscht Belt.¹ Many New Yorkers look back with nostalgia to what is typically remembered as a vacation paradise of the 1940s, '50s and '60s, and America's most famous summer playground. A now bygone era to be sure, but an era nevertheless. Beyond its significance as a pivotal cultural experience for millions, the Borscht Belt also served as the training ground for some of America's most beloved entertainers and provided a virtual template for standup comedy to this day.

At the end of the nineteenth century, some Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe, a few of the multitudes that came to New York between 1880 and the start of the First World War, left the Lower East Side of Manhattan and moved up to the farmlands of the southwestern Catskill Mountains in Sullivan and Ulster counties. They looked to settle, to farm, to escape the unhealthy environment of tenement life. The message got back to the

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Lower East Side: the scenery was beautiful, the air was fresh and clean, the climate in July and August was pleasant.

The Catskills came into being as a resort area at the turn of the century when immigrant farmers started taking in boarders to make ends meet. People from the same region in Europe began coming up to spend a summer week or two of simple pleasures—meals of farm-fresh foods, a stroll down a shady lane, a mid-afternoon nap on a grassy lawn, and nice views from a gazebo or veranda. The area offered a fresh-air escape for the predominantly first-generation east European and Russian Jews who sought relief from their congested neighborhoods. As the comedian Joey Adams pointed out, "... clannishness was ... a selling factor."² Immigrants naturally hang together. Many of these settlers couldn't speak English and all of them ate only kosher food; consequently, Jewish families went on vacations where they could find other Jewish families. They felt comfortable and secure talking the same language and eating the same food. Known as well as "The Mountains," the area was first little more than a place where these recent immigrants would feel welcome and could get fresh eggs and milk. As the farmhouses started to prosper, farmers with anything from a muddy horse pond to a water hole started advertising 'Swimming and Boating.'³

After World War I, these boarding houses multiplied. Many evolved into hotels and clusters of cottages called bungalow colonies, and the region became a quasi-official vacation site for thousands of Jews from New York City and its environs. Vacation itself was a novel concept, an American concept, for a population that had been historically impoverished and oppressed. In its heyday, as many as five hundred resorts catered to visitors of varied interests and incomes. The evolution of the region, especially the evolution of those resorts that grew elaborate and luxurious, mirrored and crystallized a two-fold process:

the Americanization of the Jewish population on the one hand, and the impact of Jewish culture on America on the other. As American Jews began relaxing in their newfound freedoms and enjoying, for once, the fruits of their labors, pleasures once decidedly reserved for others seemed within reach.

The O & W Railroad was the main source of travel in the beginning and the owners would gather at the station and compete with each other to get the customers. "Come to our place, only \$12" or "I'm charging \$13 but with three delicious meals a day." The guests went where they thought they would get the best deal. Robert Merrill remembered that driving up could take the whole day. Cars overheated and people would spend all their time filling the radiators. One summer his car wouldn't go any farther so he sold it and hitchhiked the rest of the way. Either way, it was worth the effort because of conditions in the city. Mothers would put their babies in carriages outside their tenements and the cinders from the elevated trains would fall all over them. So the mountains, however hard to get to, offered fresh air and hospitality. Ironically, many of the early resorts were run by Gentiles but the clientele was largely Jewish. As the popularity of the area grew, the guests bought out the original dwellings. And as competition grew, larger, grander accommodations appeared.⁴

In those early years, nostalgic reminders of the old country were enough—berry patches for picking, a lake or pond for bathing and boating, some klezmer tunes played on a piano and fiddle. Later, games learned on city streets and in schoolyards, like handball, basketball, and baseball, were transplanted to vacation settings, and home grown entertainers bridged the transition from the Old World to the New with a repertoire of both Yiddish and American songs and inside humor. Before long, however, greater prosperity and notions of leisure-class activities demanded "all-American" facilities such

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as tennis courts, swimming pools, and golf courses. The Flagler, for instance, as early as 1918, had eighty rooms, fifty baths, hot and cold water, and a telephone in every room. The hotel had an elevator, its large lobby had a sun parlor and a writing room, and the grounds included a nine-hole golf course.

Grossinger's became probably the most famous resort in the area. Selig and Malke Grossinger were farmers from Poland. Selig tried to make a go of it in the needle trade in New York City but found it hard to pull off and so opened a restaurant instead. Farmers at heart, they then decided to buy a farm in Ferndale, New York, because an Orthodox community was already there. They bought a nine-room farmhouse and started growing potatoes but the soil wasn't good for crops. So they got the idea of renting out the rooms. The first year, 1914, the Grossinger Kosher Farm grossed eighty-one dollars from nine guests, each of whom stayed a week. The next year so many people wanted to come that they stayed in tents scattered around the property. In 1919, the Grossingers bought a farm that was situated on the top of a mountain that had a lake and most important a real hotel with indoor plumbing, electric lights, and a lobby. With that, the now famous Grossinger's was on its way. Selig and Malke's son, Harry, and his wife Jennie, took over from his parents. During the summers, over time, the guests became part of one big family with Jennie as the gracious and loving matriarch. She became famous in that role, pretty much remembering all the regulars by name and greeting them personally as they returned year after year. Once when a guest's daughter was in school, the teacher asked the class, "How does your mother get ready for Passover?" The girl answered, "My mommy writes out a check to Grossinger's."⁵

In 1926, they hired Milton Blackstone, who became the public relations man for the hotel, and it was Blackstone who made Grossinger's an international symbol of hospitality, "the single

best-known hotel in the world." In the early '30s, a taxi driver named Moe Weissberg foiled a holdup attempt in New York City and became a local hero. Blackstone invited him and his wife for a two-week vacation as Jennie's guest. Grossinger's made all the newspapers. In 1934, he got the idea of having lightweight boxing champ Barney Ross train at Grossinger's. Jennie's mother-in-law at first resisted—"A fighter on my grounds? Never," she said—but Blackstone explained that Ross was an Orthodox Jew, ate strictly kosher, and didn't work on the Sabbath. She agreed.⁶

Ross brought Damon Runyon with him, as well as all the American press that covered boxing, and Grossinger's was again in the daily papers, with Grossinger's as the dateline. Runyon tagged the resort "Lindy's with trees."⁷ Blackstone would also target budding celebrities in New York and invite them up as guests—Milton Berle, who was a nobody at the time, Richard Tucker, Alan King, Red Buttons, Eddie Cantor. They would vacation, hang around with the guests, entertain.

Blackstone was also responsible for changing the hotel's postal address from Ferndale, New York, to Grossinger's, New York. He also set up the hotel as a post office and installed an airport on the property. Blackstone then hired Robert Towers as the social director and together they lead Grossinger's to enduring fame for its ability to attract A-list celebrities in various fields—writers, artists, politicians, sports figures, entertainers. Nine boxing champions trained at the resort, including Rocky Marciano. Chaim Weitzman, who later became the first president of Israel, was a guest in 1942 for his birthday, and Grossinger's became the telephone exchange for the world as he took calls with birthday wishes from internationally known figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Debbie Reynolds came to Grossinger's, Elizabeth Taylor came to Grossinger's; unfortunately they both came with Eddie Fisher.

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At its peak, Grossinger's, which wasn't the largest of the hotel resorts, covered eight hundred acres, had six hundred hotel rooms, took in more than one hundred thousand guests a year, and was unrivaled in its reputation for entertainment, food, and romance. Guests would come back to the same rooms year after year. Some families didn't even return their keys and out of habit would go to their rooms first and then let the front desk know they had arrived. Food, more food, and then even more food became the hallmark of Grossinger's hospitality. When Selig Grossinger, the founder, died, his last words were, "Abie, make sure that everybody eats."⁸

On an even grander scale, the Concord came to epitomize the Catskills era. Lavish food, that never seemed to end—seven kinds of herring at breakfast, ten-course dinners, three or four main dishes at every meal, and you could have one of each if you wanted. It had extravagant surroundings and constant activities and entertainments, including swimming, tennis, canoeing, Ping-Pong, horseshoes, horse riding, dancing, games such as the enormously popular (and surprisingly risqué) Simon Sez, and golf, which included a 7,672-yard, world-class golf course known as The Monster. The hotel's nightclub had one thousand seats and was the largest nightclub in the country. The Concord dining room was the size of five football fields and could accommodate three thousand guests at one time. When asked if he could serve their table, a waiter reportedly replied that their table was not in his state.⁹

The Concord spent more money on entertainment than any resort in the world, and spent more than that on food. The Concord's owner, Arthur Winarick, who never graduated from high school, came out of Russia with memories of the palatial buildings of the upper classes. He came from a place where poor kids like him aspired to live in palaces, so he fashioned all the huge buildings at the Concord to meet that dream. The

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Concord represented the full run of the spectrum that started from the early days of cold-water bungalows with outdoor bathrooms.

The Borscht Belt was where everyone wanted to be and where everyone was welcome. Billy Eckstein was the first black headliner in the Catskills, appearing in 1949. His recollection reflects on the cultural status that the Catskills had achieved. "I don't want to sound naive," he said, "but [racial bias] was something I was never aware of. I don't remember breaking down walls—there were no walls to break down."¹⁰ Nipsey Russell recalled that when he headlined at the Concord, it was like a black entertainer scoring at the Apollo, a classical pianist performing at Carnegie Hall, or an actor winning an Academy Award. Once you scored at the Concord, you were set. Everyone wanted you. Judy Garland started her comeback at the Concord in 1961 after not working for a long time. She then went on to her famous Carnegie Hall concert. Sports figures were common—Joe DiMaggio, Pete Rose, Tom Seaver, Willie Mays, Bob Gibson, George Steinbrenner. Muhammad Ali trained at the Concord. Winarick's dream was deep-seated though and mindful of history in that he also established many fundraising events for the support of Israel. One of the most memorable was a reunion he sponsored for survivors of the Lodz Ghetto. Sam Winarick's son, Gordon, recalled that "They wore indentifying tags that said things like 'I had a sister' People met friends, neighbors, even relatives they thought were dead all these years. You heard their stories, saw them with their children, grandchildren. It was unforgettable. For three days, we were telling the world we will never forget."¹¹

While in the beginning, it was enough to be able to get away from the city and take in the mountain air and fresh food, little by little the guests began to expect more to do than sit on a porch or play horseshoes. The owners began appointing "tummlers" to

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organize social events that would stimulate and entertain. The word tumbler is derived from a Castilian Yiddish word for someone who creates excitement in a crowd—a tumult maker—and as such became a source of competitive advantage.¹² The tumbler would organize games, hikes, and any number of social events. To keep costs down, however, the hotel owners pressed the tumblers to use staff for their events. Busboys doubled as entertainers, waiters doubled as dance partners, and musicians doubled as comics.

Tumblers, who later became even more prominent as social directors, were the guys whose job it was to neutralize a bored or sometimes angry mob of guests, by parlaying staff into double duty—first with events such as square dances, quiz shows, treasure hunts, or Ping-Pong tournaments. This then elevated to minstrel shows, concerts, champagne hours, dance lessons and dance contests, handwriting analysis, tea-leaf readings, crap games for the boys and knitting for the girls, and then ultimately to staged entertainment. The busboys, bookkeepers, and waiters were often characters in their own right and looked for opportunities to show their stuff. Jerry Lewis, for example, started out as a busboy at the Concord and Sid Caesar played clarinet in the band at the Avon Lodge.

Alan King was a Catskills drummer who engineered what turned out to be an unfortunate chance to show his comic potential. To get attention, he would fall off swayback horses, throw himself into the pool in a tuxedo, clown for the guests in rocking chairs on the porches—and finally got a tryout at the Hotel Gradus where he opened with the line, “When you work for the Gradus, you work for gratis.” Fortunately for him, getting fired the next day didn’t interfere with his career.

Another popular staffer-turned-comic was Jan Murray, who worked out an audience-engagement routine built around a waiter-customer conversation. As the waiter, Murray would say

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we have two kinds of soup: chicken and pea. The volunteer/customer was told to first order chicken and then change his mind. "I'll take the chicken soup," the customer would say. And Murray would say, "Okay, one chicken soup coming up." A moment later, the customer would call him back and say, "Wait, I've changed my mind. I'll have the pea soup instead." Murray would then yell offstage to the kitchen, "Hold the chicken and make it pea."¹³

Henny Youngman was in a band that was playing in a small combo at the Swan Lake Inn. One day the social director got drunk and didn't show up. Henny, who was a frustrated comic to begin with and had been thrown out of Manual Training High School for clowning, stepped out of the band and into the spotlight, firing off what became his signature one-liners punctuated by screechy violin interludes.¹⁴

Youngman was an immediate smash. Four hotels took him on as head tumbler and his style started a trend. But the rapid delivery of numerous one-liners left everyone joke broke and always on the lookout for new material. Eddie Cantor once had a long taxi ride with a driver who entertained Cantor with his own spiel. The driver got the biggest tip of his life when Cantor hired him as one of his writers. When a comic got out of the business, he might put his repertory up for auction. Comics started compiling their jokes and selling them to other comics who might then sell parcels to yet other comics. The usual method of obtaining material, though, was to lift it directly from their peers.

In that regard, Milton Berle was famous for stealing jokes without compunction under the belief that a joke was not told well until he told it. At a roast toward the end of Berle's career, Jackie Mason cracked, "We're all here paying tribute to our own material."¹⁵ Red Buttons stole his "Sam, You Made the Pants Too Long" routine from Joey Adams, who had taken it from Joe

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E. Lewis, who had borrowed it from Milton Berle, who copied it from a tailor in Brownsville.¹⁶

In that guests often came back to the weekly Saturday night shows, fresh material was at a premium and drove the creation of supermarkets for gags. Here, at places like the Theatrical Drugstore in Manhattan, comics could swap their "commodities": two Berle "blackouts" for one Red Skelton "Guzzler's Gin" routine, or twelve "Bob Hopes" for a Willie Howard sketch.¹⁷ Heckler lines were especially valuable. Berle had the corner on that market, with lines like "You heckled me twenty years ago. I never forget a suit."

Opportunities for talented and ambitious staff were numerous, since the owners didn't have to pay them anything extra, but there was still an issue in that the entertainers would be working at one hotel the entire season and guests who stayed more than one week would begin seeing the acts repeated. Boredom would set in and guests demanded more or threatened to cut their stay short. The hotel owners would bargain with each other for the most popular acts—one would use an act early in the evening and another would use the same act for the late show. This arrangement then led to the creation of booking agents, or "10-percenters" as they came to be known; the running joke among performers was that their agents were annoyed because the performers were getting 90 percent of their money.

The agents at the time, in particular a man named Charlie Rapp, and the agency team of Al Beckman and Johnny Pransky, began developing packages of entertainers working in the Catskills, but also in New York City, that were then cycled through several hotels—or booked into a "circuit" so to speak—which gave rise to the term the Borscht Belt Circuit. This arrangement provided the owners with different acts throughout the summer season. Same act, different hotels, different guests. And in the bargain the owners no longer had to house and feed

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the entertainers. Such a deal. The local staff talent warmed to it also as it elevated their status—they were no longer just bellhops, they were entertainers.

In addition, both for the established New York City entertainers and the up-and-comers on the staffs in the Catskills, this practice provided more exposure for the talent—good reviews in the Catskills, good reviews on Broadway—and so largely propelled the careers of the likes of Sid Caesar and Danny Kaye, who was known as the King of the Catskills.

Like Rodney Dangerfield, sometimes the agents got no respect in the presence of the vaunted egos of hotel owners who would think of themselves as big-time producers simply because a Henny Youngman or Jan Murray came from their staff. Charlie Rapp tells a story of an owner who demanded Jack E. Leonard, well known as an insult comic, for his Saturday-night show. The owner didn't know much about Leonard except that he was a hot property. Rapp tried to convince the owner that Leonard wasn't a good choice because the owner's resort catered to a strictly Orthodox family audience that wouldn't appreciate or even get his type of humor. The owner took umbrage. "I had stars here before you were born," he huffed. "Do you know that Buddy Hackett worked for me for ten dollars? Do you know that I discovered Sidney Caesar? Only this week I had lunch with Milton Berle—and you're telling me about show business? Get me Jack E. Leonard or forget you knew me."

So Rapp got him Jack E. Leonard. When Leonard arrived and saw all the men with yarmulkes, his opening crack was "Welcome Legionnaires" and things went downhill from there. "If Moses saw you he would have invented another commandment," Leonard snarled. After thirty minutes of insults he left with "Thank you, opponents." An ordinary Jack E. Leonard audience would have been roaring with laughter at this point

but this audience just stared in disbelief. The next day the outraged owner was on the phone to Rapp. "What the hell kind of comic you sent me? You ruined me with this insulter, this, this . . ." "But," Rapp interrupted, "you are the one that insisted on Leonard." "So," said the owner, "you couldn't talk me out of it?"¹⁸

The advent of World War II added to the pressure. By 1941, *any* act with a car was working. But when America entered the war the coin of the realm changed from cash to gasoline and the *only* acts working were those with a car. To be a booking agent in the Catskills you now had to be a travel agent as well. The first question was not what do you do, but do you have a car. When a guest asked the social director at one hotel "What acts are coming up for the weekend?" the social director replied, "It looks like a great show. We've got a Buick and two Caddies on the way."¹⁹

The Catskill resorts rose to prominence just as vaudeville was dying out and gave comedy a place to grow. The Catskills were in effect the comedy clubs of the 1930s and 1940s. The list of great talents who emerged from the Borscht Belt is telling—Joey Adams, Woody Allen, Milton Berle, Shelly Berman, Mel Brooks, Lenny Bruce, Myron Cohen, Sid Caesar, Rodney Dangerfield, Buddy Hackett, Moss Hart, Danny Kaye, Alan King, Jerry Lewis, Jackie Mason, Carl Reiner, Allen Sherman, Neil Simon, Jonathan Winters, Henny Youngman, and many more. This is where standup comedy got its start.

Reflecting the influence of its roots in vaudeville, Borscht Belt humor refers to the rapid-fire, often self-deprecating style common to many of the performers and writers of the time. Routines typically included topics such as bad luck, impoverished childhoods, physical complaints, marriage, nagging wives, and annoying relatives. The jokes gained appreciation as much by virtue of their rapid proliferation as by

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the mounting impact of the groan factor. Here is a sampling.

Henny Youngman: I was so ugly when I was born, the doctor slapped my mother.

I made a killing in the stock market.
I killed my broker.

My wife said to me, "I want to go somewhere I've never been before."
I said, "Try the kitchen."

Most girls are attracted to the simple things in life. Like men.

My wife and I went back to the hotel where we spent our wedding night. Only this time I stayed in the bathroom and cried.

She got her good looks from her father. He's a plastic surgeon.

The doctor gave a man six months to live. The man couldn't pay his bill so the doctor gave him another six months.

Rodney Dangerfield: My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met.

Buddy Hackett: As a child my family's menu consisted of two choices: take it or leave it.

Lenny Bruce: I won't say ours was a tough school, but we had our own coroner.

Mel Brooks: Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die.

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Alan King: If you want to read about love and marriage, you have to buy two separate books.

Jackie Mason: My grandfather always said, "Don't watch your money; watch your health." So one day while I was watching my health, someone stole my money. It was my grandfather.

As the resorts continued to prosper, Jewish culture was making its mark on American life. A legion of comedians had grown up in the neighborhoods of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Their humor, anchored in the shetls, may have been sharpened by the crassness of freewheeling life on street corners and outside of candy stores. And their shtik, delivered in the nasal cadences of New York Jewish speech, may have debuted on the vaudeville circuit and in Coney Island saloons. But they were nursed and nurtured and cut their teeth in Catskill resorts. It was here that these vigorous comedians delivered their particular view of life—with its pathos, irony, self-mockery, sarcasm, and vulgarity—that would, by way of radio, television and movies, reach the nation at large to the point that, as Lenny Bruce put it, you didn't have to be Jewish to be Jewish.²⁰

In an NBC series titled "Remembering the Catskills," Carl Reiner notes that all the great comics of the twentieth century came through and from the Catskills. The form that developed there—standing on a stage and telling jokes—still abides in monologues and interviews. At the time, in the '30s and '40s especially, the consciousness of being Jewish was a factor seen especially in both the practice of changing names and in the strength of the community in those many resorts. David Kaminsky became Danny Kaye, Aaron Chwatt became Red Buttons, Jerome Levitch became Jerry Lewis, Milton Berlinger became Milton Berle, Bernard Kniberg became Alan King,

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Joseph Abramowitz became Joey Adams. Adams tells a story about a Madison Avenue advertising agency executive who approached him. He was wearing a gray-flannel suit, black tie, homburg hat—a typical New England Gentile. “My name is Wendell Adams,” he said. “I’ve seen your name in the papers recently and I’ve wondered if we are related in any way.” Joey Adams replied, “I don’t know—what was your name before?”²¹

With steadily passing time the Catskill comics set the standard for virtually all comedy that came after. The Jewish-American experience became the American experience as the comedy spectrum moved from The Mountains to the television shows of Sid Caesar and Milton Berle, to the bohemian nightclubs of Mort Sahl and Shelly Berman, to the black humor of Lenny Bruce and what Alan Cooper called the “sit-down comedy” of Philip Roth and Bruce Jan Friedman.²²

The Catskills were the training ground, the bridge from Borscht Belt to Broadway, from Yiddish to English, from Jewish comic to American comedian. Before the 1950s, most comedians who reached prominence grew up in large, Yiddish-speaking immigrant families in Brooklyn and Manhattan’s Lower East Side. About 80 percent came from kosher homes and 90 percent later changed their names. Younger comedians by comparison are better educated, have less contact with Jewish religious ritual, and are more likely to break away from traditional Jewish humor to deliver social or political messages in their acts.²³

When Jon Stewart won an Emmy in 2005, he commented that “When I first said that I wanted to put together a late-night comedy-writing team that would only be 80-percent Ivy-League-educated Jews, people thought I was crazy. They said you need 90, 95 percent. But we proved ’em wrong.”²⁴

Humor has become a common bond. At the same time, it’s difficult to imagine what would remain of American humor without its Jewish component. Gentile comedians such as Robin

Williams and Danny Thomas found it advantageous to include some Jewish material in their repertoires. Steve Allen's material was so Jewish that audiences were often surprised to learn that he wasn't.²⁵ Turn to any TV variety show today, await the standup comic, and chances are good that he or she will come on with accents and gestures and usages whose origins are directly traceable to the Borscht Belt.²⁶

As Lenny Bruce explained, himself at one time a Catskills comic, being Jewish is not only a religion, it is a state of mind, a condition, a way of looking at the world. "Dig: I'm Jewish. Count Basie's Jewish. Ray Charles is Jewish. Eddie Cantor's goyish. B'nai B'rith is goyish. Hadassah, Jewish. If you live in New York or any other big city, you are Jewish. It doesn't matter even if you're Catholic; if you live in New York you're Jewish. If you live in Butte, Montana, you're going to be goyish even if you're Jewish."²⁷

As the jokes and the style became more assimilated into an American context, the one-liners became more episodic, more conversational, more observational, wherein nuanced delivery, pacing and timing played a larger part. The standup comedy of a Henny Youngman and the sit-down comedy of a Philip Roth merged into the conversational style of the present-day comics. The Catskills legacy lives on.

Myron Cohen had a foot in both the joke-based world of the Catskills and the conversational, situational comedy that emerged in the fifties. Here's one of his classics that he was still using in the 1970s:

A Jewish grandmother is watching her grandchild playing on the beach when a huge wave comes and takes him out to sea. She pleads, "Please God, save my only grandson. I beg of you, bring him back." And a big wave comes and washes the boy back onto the beach, good as new. She looks up to heaven and says, "He had a hat!"²⁸

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We can see the Catskills legacy even in today's humor preferences. Here's a clip from a YouTube video called "A Catskills Comedian" that ran in 2008.

A man drives into a gas station and tells the attendant to fill it with regular. While the attendant pumps the gas, he says, "Sir, I notice you have Michigan plates on your car. Where're you from in Michigan?" The gentleman says, "Detroit." And his wife says, "What'd he say?" "He wanted to know where we're from in Michigan. I told him Detroit." The attendant says, "Detroit! I was there when I was in the army and I had the worst sexual experience of my life in Detroit." And the wife says, "What'd he say?" "He said he thinks he knows you."²⁹

In a book entitled *A Summer World*, Stefan Kanfer, a contributing editor for *Time* magazine, summarized the point as follows: "The influence of the Catskills on our culture has been incredible. It's been pervasive. There are certain places you can't eat and certain jokes you can't tell and certain attitudes you can't have without acknowledging what the Catskills were."³⁰

And as one who lived there, Arthur Shulman seems to have spoken for a generation as he reflected on the times: "It will never be duplicated. Unless you lived through it, you can never quite know what it was like. It was an atmosphere, a time, an era."³¹

Today the Borscht Belt is no more. Grossinger's (in 1985), the Concord (1998), the Nevele (2009) have all gone the way of what they call the three As: air conditioning, air fares, and assimilation. TV, Vegas, and the Americanization of humor have eclipsed the unique outlet that was the Catskills. But the world that came out of it will probably live on to the last comic standing.

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