

the beginning of

**CLOSE CALL** (from **OY!**)

a short comedy by Rich Orloff

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*Places:* A radio station and an apartment.

*Time:* Morning.

*Characters:* CHAIM, an old man  
DAVID, around thirty  
IRVING and SADIE, heard on the radio

On the stage are two areas. In each area is a table. Behind one table sits CHAIM, an elderly, disgruntled man. In front of Chaim is a microphone and a telephone with several buttons on it. Sitting next to the other table is DAVID, an introverted, anxious man of about thirty. On David's table is a phone and a radio, to which he is listening.

As the scene begins, Chaim is in the middle of his daily radio broadcast.

CHAIM

...Remember, that special good this week only at Hyman's Kosher Delicatessen, where the matzo balls always wear a smile. You're listening to WKVH\*, Kvetchradio, 68.5 on your dial. This is "Chaim in the A.M.". My bunions are killing me, my rent is ridiculous, and my son is a bum. But enough about me. Let's go back to the phones.

(\*or KVCH, west of the Mississippi.)

Chaim pushes a button on his phone.

CHAIM (cont'd)

Hello. This is Chaim in the a.m.  
You're on the air.

IRVING

Am I on the air?

CHAIM

You're on the air. What's your name?

IRVING

My name is Irving.

CHAIM

Hello, Irving. And how are you today?

IRVING

I'm not a complainer. I'm sure that somewhere in the third world, someone is feeling worse.

CHAIM

What's the problem?

IRVING

Whatever happened to bagels? A new bagel shop opened in my neighborhood, and I went in the other day and asked for a bagel. The clerk asked me, "What kind of bagel do you want?" "What kind of bagel?" I replied. "The doughy kind, with the hole in the middle. The kind the Jews didn't take out of Egypt because they weighed too much."

"But what kind?" he asked. "Whole wheat, multi-grain, cinnamon raisin, sun-dried tomato, blueberry, jalapeno." And I'm thinking, when did the Gentiles take over bagels?

CHAIM

I know, I know.

IRVING

Not that I'm complaining, mind you. I'm sure that things were worse in Fourth Century Poland.

CHAIM

I'm sure.

IRVING

There's only one good thing about modern bagel shops.

CHAIM

What's that?

IRVING

When I'm in one, I get so upset I forget how awful my children are.

CHAIM

Children, children...

IRVING

Why did we have them?

CHAIM

We were young. Who knew?

IRVING

My kids only call when they want money.

CHAIM

You're lucky. My only son makes  
a good living. He never calls.

IRVING

And to think, for them, for half my life,  
I worked twelve hours a day, six days a  
week, in my "Going Out of Business" store.

CHAIM

It's a shame.

IRVING

You said it.

CHAIM

So, what can you do?

IRVING

What can you do?

CHAIM

So live and be well.

IRVING

Live and be well.

David starts to dial a number on his phone and then changes his mind.  
Chaim pushes another button on his phone.

CHAIM

Hello, this is Chaim in the a.m.  
You're on.

SADIE

Hello, Chaim. This is Sadie.

CHAIM

Sadie, it's been so long. How are you?

SADIE

If you twist my arm, I'll tell you.

CHAIM

I'm twisting.

SADIE

I'm telling. I feel awful. I have a pain that's on my left side Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and it moves to my right side Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

CHAIM

And what happens on Sundays?

SADIE

My children don't call; that's what happens.

CHAIM

Children.

David, angered and frustrated by all that he's heard, picks up his phone again and dials a number. This is not easy for him to do.

SADIE

I've invited my son over for Sabbath dinner every Friday night for fifteen years, and not once has he said yes.

CHAIM

He should be ashamed.

SADIE

He claims it's because of work.

CHAIM

What does he do?

SADIE

He's a rabbi.

CHAIM

Oh, well. It could be worse.  
My son's a jogger.

SADIE  
A jogger?

CHAIM  
He must be. Every time I call,  
he says, "Sorry, Dad. Gotta run."

SADIE  
That's terrible.

CHAIM  
So, what can you do?

SADIE  
What can you do?

CHAIM  
So live and be well.

SADIE  
Live and be well.

Chaim pushes another button on his telephone.

CHAIM  
Hello. This is Chaim in the a.m. You're on.

David's anxiety increases.

DAVID  
Hello, I – um...

CHAIM  
Hello?

DAVID  
Hello.

CHAIM  
You have a name?

DAVID  
David. I – I'd like to – I'd like to discuss  
the difficulties of the grown child/parent  
relationship from the viewpoint of the child.

CHAIM  
I suppose you want to tell the world  
how awful your parents are...

DAVID

My mother's dead.

CHAIM

So you only want to complain  
about your father then.

DAVID

(getting irritated)

I didn't call to complain; I called to talk.

CHAIM

So talk.

DAVID

(sighs, then:)

Look, everyone I know wants a good  
relationship with their parents, but –  
well, I never hear anyone on your show  
say that maybe sometimes it's the parent  
who prevents a relationship from working.

CHAIM

So you did call to complain.

DAVID

(losing his temper)

I'm not complaining! Can't a person make an  
observation without the other person assuming  
it's a complaint?! Is that too much to ask?!

CHAIM

Why are you screaming? If people  
want you to be louder, they can turn  
up the volume on their radios.