

## “The Whole Bagel is the Best Part”

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What I really wanted for Hanukkah when I was 14 was an eating disorder.

Anorexia would have been ideal. It was the holy grail of eating disorders among Jewish American Princesses when I was growing up in Queens, New York in the 80's. Anorexia was virtue and rebellion all wrapped up in one. You don't want me to eat so much? Fine. I won't eat... AT ALL. I'll show you.

“No bagels for me, Mom, thanks. I'm not eating. At all.” Ha! How they'd worry. How they'd beg me to eat then! Please, Deb, have some ice cream, have some rugelah, have another bagel, PLEASE! “No,” I'd say, smiling serenely, or showing some cheekbone. “No thank you. I'm not eating.”

It never took, though. Starve! Please. I can barely fast for 24 hours on Yom Kippur. I love to eat, and I get mean when I'm hungry. Bulimia was an acceptable second choice, with its devil-may-care towards vomiting and tooth decay. “Where does she GO after every meal? And HOW does she stay so thin?” But chocolate laxatives aren't nearly as yummy as... well, chocolate. And vomiting freaks me out.

The other girls were fiercely competitive over their eating disorders. “I threw up FOUR times yesterday.” “Oh yeah? Well, I haven't eaten since last Thursday.” This type of conversation you'd overhear at Hebrew school. And then, “Are you eating... AGAIN, Deb?” I was just having half a bagel. Just half. “A whole half?!” I hadn't eaten since lunch. “You eat lunch?!”

I got mad. I got mad and became a punk rocker. A scandal! This was 1986, and so every third teenager did NOT have half their head shaved. My parents were absolutely against it, which was awesome. “You are NOT going out in that shmoteh!” Yeah. I hated when my parents came around and my mom started buying me black clothes at Bloomingdales. “MOM!”

“Put back the bagel, Debbeleh,” my grandmother would say. “You'll never get a husband if you don't lose weight.” A HUSBAND! I was sixteen! I was never getting MARRIED.

I was gonna date guys with Mohawks only – bigger and bigger Mohawks. And they would write me passionate punk rock love songs, but I'd leave them all behind to run off with my One True Love, Adam Ant, who would love me for my punk rock mind alone and wouldn't be bothered by the 5...10...OK, 20 extra pounds I carried in my midsection.

Married was what Jewish American Princesses got. To a nice Jewish boy – a doctah. A lawyah was fine too. No, yuck, I'd never do THAT, I'd never be like them.

But amount of denying that I am a Jewish American Princess and where my black clothes came from – and where I came from – can change the truth.

Jewish American Princess, though. It's such an ugly phrase, isn't it? I think that's because Jewish women haven't properly reclaimed it. Such shame over a little harmless shopping, a little innocuous whining. For this you want I should hate myself? No. I want the phrase back. I'm taking it. Or should I say, Princess-style... I'm BUYING it.

So, I admit it: I am a Princess. I am a proud, fabulous Jewish American Princess. I proudly admit that I love to shop. I did marry a nice Jewish boy. I still rebelled – he's not a doctah OR a lawyah (and neither am I), but he doesn't have a Mohawk at all. He's not Adam Ant. He's not even British. I know. I know!

As a Jewish woman, you're supposed to feed other people. "Eat! Eat!" But you are NOT supposed to eat yourself. You are supposed to take four bites, and then feel guilty. "I'm so bad, I had a sliver of pie and a whole half matzo ball."

Take my mom. My mom has this weird habit. She always scoops her bagels. She scoops out the fluffy doughy inside and eats only the bagel shell. Which she tells herself is the best part.

And it's not true.

The whole bagel is the best part.

"I bought bagels," she'll say "But not for us. We're being good. Well, maybe just a little bit. It smells so good. Maybe just half. Half of a half. Half of a half and I'll scoop it out. Do you want me to scoop one for you?"

It's bagel abuse is what it is.

I still want to be thin. Well, really, I want to be fit and healthy. I try to eat right. I work out. I'm still not thin.

But I have realized that I am something better than thin – yes! Better than thin and better than being married to a doctor or lawyer, and better even than BEING a doctor or lawyer. I am MYSELF. And I don't have to be who they say. I love my punk rock Jewish American Princess mind AND the extra 5 – OK, 40 pounds I'm carrying around.

And damn it, I want to eat the whole bagel!