

Yours Until Niagara Falls
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CAST: 2-10 females*

LINA ZENES (female) age 9-49; self-assured, trendy, has a stick-to-it-iveness that will serve her well. She craves a well-ordered life, shoes for every outfit, donuts are an important part of life. Shorter than Izzy. Jewish - which is important to her. She writes when it is necessary. She'd rather talk face-to-face but she will write to please Izzy.

IZZY ROSS (female) age 9-49; insecure; dreamer, clueless as to trends, has acting aspirations, can be clingy. Taller than Lina. Sometimes lives in her own drama-filled world. Catholic - which is meaningless to her. She loves to write things down – she believes it will help her dreams become reality and she can deal better with the conflicts in her life if she writes them. She wants to be someone else.

*Two actresses can portray the characters all through the play – or – you can divide it up into the “elementary school,” “junior high years,” “high school,” “college” and “all grown up.” Or any other way that suits your fancy. Initially, I pictured it with two but as the characters progress in age, it can work with more actresses. If using multiple actresses, they can look at each other during the exchange. As with A.R. Gurney’s amazing *Love Letters* (inspiration for this play), this does not need to be memorized. But it should be rehearsed.

Unlike *Love Letters*, the actresses can look at each other when they pass school notes. Later, when they are not in class together, the play is about listening. They will not look at each other during the letters and emails. But they can react. It’s as important to see LINA and IZZY listening to the letters as they’re being read as it is for the actress reading.

Some letters are long. Do not get caught up in the writing of the letter. Assume most of it’s been written. Maybe we see the character correct something or just add their signature or proofing it.

SET: 2 desks for passing notes which can double as their bedroom desk.

PROPS: Paper, pens, and later a keyboard for emails.

COSTUMES: Simple skirts and a blouse or sweater – which was the public school uniform at the time. If using multiple actresses can change with the times but keep it simple.

Feel free to embellish, sets, costumes, props – or not. Be as simple or detailed as you wish.

SCENE BREAKS:

Prologue

Scene 1: Elementary School

Scene 2: Junior High

Scene 3: High School

Scene 4: College

Scene 5: All Grown Up

Epilogue

SYNOPSIS: LINA and IZZY are best friends – “LINA-AND-IZZY-ONE-WORD” best friends. They are always there for each other – for each important day in their lives until one day – they aren’t. Lina and Izzy must figure out what to take from the friendship and what is left behind even if it’s painful. With thanks (and apologies) to A.R. Gurney for inspiration and structure, and to the Zenes family for inviting this playwright into their lives.

*Dates are provided for context and should not be spoken unless it’s in the body of the dialogue.

BLOCKING: Feel free to have the actresses move around a little bit, turn upstage, etc. if it helps note passage of time, or makes a point, turn upstage, etc. They just don’t deal directly with each other unless it is school notes.

TIME: 1962-2001

COSTUMES: If using multiple actresses, you can dress appropriately for the times – or tie them together with one style. If using only two actresses, let the costume be as classic as possible.

Music (public domain or where you have the rights) can be used to bridge scenes where/if you deem necessary.

Yours Until Niagara Falls

(Lights up. IZZY and LINA are by their desks and chairs. IZZY's desk has a blue box filled with letters and notes. She might be going through them.)

Prologue

IZZY

Once upon a time there were two little girls. They were best friends. They vowed that they would stay best friends forever. And they tried. They really tried.

Scene 1

(IZZY and LINA should now be seated. LINA writes a note. IZZY opens the note. It should not be physically passed between the two. It is Monday, February, 1962. They are age 9.)

LINA

Hello, Isobel-The-New-Girl. Will you be my friend? We can sit together at lunch. Lina.

(IZZY tears paper from her notebook and scribbles and scribbles and scribbles. LINA looks at her – what is she writing? It's a school note!)

IZZY

Thank-you. Nobody has ever passed me a note in school. I would love to be your friend. Please don't call me Isobel. It's my grandmother's name. I'm not an old lady. Call me Izzy. Not Dizzy. Not Fizzy! But Izzy! This school is old-fashioned. It's so old – my mother went here! I asked her if she ever travelled by covered wagon and she did not like that question.

Don't look at my hair. My mother thought I would be more popular if I had curly hair so she gave me a perm last night. Now my hair smells terrible and I look like a poodle.

Do you think John Glenn is done going around the earth? Will they make an announcement? In my old school, they would give you news. I hear you can burn up when you come back down from space.

(IZZY passes the note back. LINA writes.)

LINA

Wow, Izzy. You write long notes. (So, you're kind of "Fizzy.") You have terrible penmanship. I am sure John Glenn will not burn up but they won't tell us. They don't tell fourth graders stuff. Only sixth graders. See you at lunch. Don't answer. Mrs. Scott is watching.

(They return to school work. It is now Friday. IZZY writes.)

IZZY

Thanks for letting me come over every day this week. We are finally unpacked. Can you come over tomorrow? I love the Bobby Rydell record you lent me. I don't know if he is a dreamboat like you said because I never think about boys as being anything but yucky and punching each other like The Three Stooges.

LINA

Ari loves The Three Stooges. It's a boy thing.

IZZY

So can you come over? I've been practicing the mashed potato dance. My mother says I look like an ostrich.

LINA

Everyone looks like an ostrich when they do that dance.

IZZY

I have records, too. "The Wizard of Oz," "Oklahoma," "The Sound of Music." My favorite is "The Wizard of Oz." Please say you'll come over.

LINA

Mrs. Scott is getting suspicious. Be extra careful with the notes.

IZZY

Can you come over?

LINA

I have Susan's birthday party tomorrow. Everyone's going.

IZZY

I'm not.

LINA

I'm sure you would have been invited if you moved here before. I can come over Sunday. Or we can go to the movies. "The Parent Trap" is finally at the Utopia. We'll talk about it over lunch. You don't have to answer.

(Of course IZZY has to answer.)

IZZY

I love Hayley Mills! I want to be Hayley Mills. I even worked on her English accent. Thank-you for teaching me things like rock 'n roll and dancing. I can teach you munchkin voices.

LINA

Munchkin voices?

IZZY

From the Wizard of Oz. You'd be good at it.

LINA

I'm only good at "dippy" things. Like penmanship and arithmetic. Are Munchkin voices dippy? MaryAnn calls me "teacher's pet."

IZZY

Then, I won't talk to MaryAnn ever. When I know who she is.

LINA

But you still have to be nice. It's expected. DON'T ANSWER!

IZZY

Do you always do what's expected?

(LINA just looks at the note and gestures "enough.")

(IZZY writes a letter. April 1962))

IZZY

April 1962

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Zenes,

Thank-you very, very much for inviting me to your seder. It's my first one. I am not sure about the horseradish but you made the carrots taste good. I shall have to tell my mother about adding raisins to carrots to make them not boring. I really loved the matzo ball soup. I love chicken soup with anything in it - I think I would even love chicken soup if it had mouse tails in it. I am trying to learn more about Passover. All I can find is that it "celebrates the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt." That's what the World Book says. At least I learned a new word - "exodus." You are a wonderful cook and Ari reads very well for a little kid. Thank-you again.

Sincerely,

Izzy

P.S. Just kidding about the mouse tails.

P.P.S. I am super excited about Lina's birthday next week. I've never been to a restaurant in the city.

(LINA writes a letter.)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I am sorry that I had to write "Isobel" on the envelope but my mom says you should use proper names there. Thank you for the framed photo of Bobby Rydell for my birthday. I really love it.

Your friend,

Lina

(IZZY passes a note.)

Can you come over after school?
IZZYY

If you're okay.
LINA

I'm fine.
IZZYY

What did the nurse say?
LINA

To come back down if I get a headache. But I won't.
IZZYY

But how's your eye?
LINA

Oh that. I rubbed it a lot to turn red.
IZZYY

Why?
LINA

When Mrs. Scott called on me to do the long division, I didn't know how so I rubbed my eye a lot so it looked like I was in pain. It worked. She sent me to the nurse.
IZZYY

Wow.
LINA

I'm going to be an actress when I grow up. I need to learn music. A lot of actresses sing. I loved that new music you played yesterday.
IZZYY

It's one of the Hungarian Rhapsodies – a really easy version. My pinkie finger does not love all the low notes.
LINA

I can listen to you practice piano all day. Your music makes me happy.
IZZYY

Thank-you. You're funny.
LINA

(IZZY is writing a letter. July 5, 1962)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I am writing to your house because I don't know your address in the Poconos. The Fourth of July was boring. We didn't see the fireworks because of the rain. And I had to clean my room twice to stop my mother from yelling.

And now you are going to sleepaway camp for two weeks! Suppose something happens in July and we aren't best friends anymore? Suppose I get hit by a bus? My mother says that a lot. Or my father decides he hates his job and takes us to live in a swamp where we'll never see each other again and there are swamp monsters?

I've been thinking. I am going to tell you my most secretest secret ever. So you know how much you mean to me. It's something I have never shared. I read that if you do that, it shows that you care about the other person a lot. My family knows my secret because you can't keep secrets from your family. They find out everything.

Remember Puddles? You saw her under my pillows and thought she was a stuffed rat. She's really my stuffed duck. She used to have a beak which came off. And then her cute, webbed feet fell off and now I guess she is a duck-rat. I can't go to sleep unless I sleep with her. I brush her fur over my lips to sleep. It makes me feel snuggly and when her fur touches my lips, I can sleep. I know it's babyish and my mom hates Puddles but I need her.

If you want to share a secret with me, I would never tell a soul. Please keep this somewhere like in your dirty socks and underwear where nobody would peek.

Tell me about camp. Write a really long letter.

Yours until Niagara Falls (Isn't that cute? I saw that in a book and liked it),

Izzy

(LINA writes a letter. July 1962)

Dear Izzy,

Happy Birthday! I wish I could be there with you. Thank-you for sharing your secret. It's fizzy and fuzzy and cute like you.

My parents brought me your letter. I do have a secret. You know the birthday present my mom dropped off at your house? That's my secret. After you read it, I will tell you more.

I will not keep your letter with my dirty socks and underwear. Sheesh! It's safe inside my shirt with all the stripes in different colors that I hate and will never wear. Don't tell my mother.

Yours.... until the chocolate chips (A counselor made it up.)

Lina

IZZY

I just finished “The Diary of Anne Frank” and I am crying. Thank-you for giving the book to me. The Diary made me think a lot so I will go to the library to find out more. I have stuff in common with Anne. She did not get along with her mother, did she? It sounds like me and my mother. I have a hundreds of questions. Well, twenty-seven on my list so far. What does the book have to do with you? I still don’t know the secret.

I am sitting here in my itzy-bitsy backyard thinking of how you are having fun at camp. You could play “Wizard of Oz “in the woods or “Peter Pan” down by the lake. They should have a pirate ship in the lake. Wouldn’t that be fun?

I miss you. I wish my parents would get me a dog so I could have someone to talk to. Sometimes I talk to my cousin’s dog and he really listens – like you do. I listen to “The Wizard of Oz” a lot. I’m really good at doing the witch laugh. I will teach it to you.

Maybe you can get the music to it and you can play the piano while I sing. I want to be the Scarecrow. Dorothy would be fun but I’m not cute enough. We could enter talent shows. *That* would be fun.

Yours Until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

(LINA writes a letter.)

LINA

I am glad that you read “The Diary of Anne Frank.” The woods have lots of poison stuff in them. I itch all over. Also, all the bugs bite. They have a piano in the rec center so sometimes I still practice. Or play ping pong. Ping pong balls don’t bite.

I don’t think the counselors want a pirate ship. The boys would start pirate fights.

I don’t want to be in a talent show. Sorry.

And please don’t compare me to a dog.

If I learned the witch laugh, would it scare Ari?

I will send you the “secret” when I am alone.

Yours until the chocolate chips,
Lina

IZZY

It’s been two days and I still don’t know your secret. If you don’t want to tell me, that’s okay. But I really hope you tell me. I am good about keeping secrets.

I scared my sister with the witch laugh so you could probably scare your brother.

IZZY (cont'd)

Nothing has happened in the last two days. Because nothing ever happens to me. I have to make-believe something happens to me.

Please write!!!!

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy.

LINA

TOP SECRET! FOR YOUR EYES ONLY! DO NOT SHOW THIS TO ANYONE

THE SECRET. It's funny that you started this secret-stuff - because before I left, my mother said I could tell you some things. She said if we were going to be together all the time, there are things you should know. And I should give you The Diary for your birthday. But I didn't know how to tell you. I am glad I am writing this to you because whenever we talk about it at home, I cry. I'm crying now. I am writing this in the shower where no one can see me. I bet you went to the library and took out a hundred books about this. I bet you know about the camps and the gas chambers. Which were worse than dying in quicksand. I know you worry about quicksand.

My father wanted to be a doctor. He couldn't finish medical school because the Nazis threw the Jews out of all the schools. He was in a Russian prison. That's all I know - he won't talk about it and I don't ask. And you can never, ever ask! I think he would have been a good doctor.

My mother and her family were arrested from their home in Hungary because they were Jewish. They really arrested you for that. There was no time to go into hiding like Anne Frank. They were told they would be going on a train ride. And they could take one suitcase each. They all took lots of sweaters and socks. They probably took underwear. They were put on a train for a whole week - with no water. A week later they arrived at Auschwitz - where Anne was. And no, they never met and no, no questions about that. There were nine people in my mother's family. At Auschwitz, they were put into two lines. The slave line and the gas chamber line. My mother, her sister and my grandmother and grandfather were put in the "slave line." My mother's five little brothers were put in the "to be murdered line." Everyone knew what was happening. My grandparents were not going to let their babies go into the gas chambers alone. They ran to the other line to hold their sons. My mother also ran from the "slave line" because she wanted to carry her two-year-old brother into the gas chamber. The guards were amused and said, "Stay. We're happy to kill all of you." But my grandmother pushed my mother away and said, "No, my hertzeleh,* it is not your time yet. Live." So my mother ran back to the slave line and she and her sister watched their family get murdered.

*(translation: *little heart)*

No one is left from my father's family. My mother has her sister. Before I go to sleep, sometimes I see my grandmother on a line carrying my baby uncle and she looks at me and I - look away. This is my most secretest secret ever and I am trusting it with you. BUT WE WON'T TALK ABOUT IT. Now I am going to shower so no one will know I was crying. I will be home soon and we will what we always do when we're together. Listen to music, dance and sometimes even munchkin voices. My mother says that's important.

Yours until the chocolate chips,

LINA (cont'd)

Lina

P.S. This is the longest letter you will ever get from me.

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I'm crying. I want to say things. Really important things. But I don't know what to say. Except, I'm sorry and I will never tell anyone ever ever. I won't even tell my diary or Puddles – and I tell them everything. I really want to know how they survived. Maybe some day you'll tell me?

Love,

Izzy

(October 1962. IZZY and LINA are back in school. Maybe they take out composition notebooks to show that. They are in an air raid drill. Perhaps they pull their jackets or a sweater over their heads. They pass notes – 5th grade.)

IZZY

I can't believe we're doing this. My Dad says that Cuba is not far away and if they bomb us – we're goners. So, what's the point of these dippy drills?

LINA

To save our lives?

IZZY

Sitting in the hallway and covering our heads won't save us. I read about these bombs in the World Book. They melt you. I used to think quicksand would be the worst way to die and then I found out about gas chambers and now it looks like nuclear bombs are the worstest.

LINA

I don't want to talk about dying, okay? Or gas chambers. P.S. Stop writing.

IZZY

I'm sorry.

LINA

Stop worrying. *Stop writing.*

IZZY

I don't worry that much.

(LINA gives a "yeah, you do look at Izzy.)

(IZZY is writing a card.)

IZZY (cont'd)

November 22, 1962

Happy Thanksgiving, Lina. Do you like my turkey? I drew it with my hand. I can draw three things: a turkey, a cat and a rabbit. I'm sorry I rushed you off the phone yesterday. The Monroes was on and I want to be in a TV show like that -with lots of other kids. I want to be Barbara Hershey.

LINA

Happy Thanksgiving! I am thankful you are not Barbara Hershey but my friend Izzy. P.S. I like the turkey! Did you glue pigeon feathers on it?

(IZZY is writing a letter. December 24, 1962.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I know you won't see this until you return but I miss you. It's Christmas Eve and everyone is downstairs being merry. I wish I was in the mood. Usually, I love Christmas. I like to watch *A Christmas Carol* on tv and play my own Christmas carols. But not Jingle Bells.

Yesterday, I found a book about Hannah Senesh. Do you know who she is? You probably do and you probably don't want to talk about it. But I love reading about heroines. You never hear about them in school. She was so brave. I wonder if I could ever be that brave. She was trying to smuggle Jews out of Hungary when she was caught and killed. Maybe if she wasn't caught, she would have been able to help your family escape.

It's probably not what I should be thinking about on Christmas Eve – but maybe it is. Since it's the season of "goodwill towards men." I want to do good – I want to help with "peace on earth" but I'm not always a good person. Sometimes I think mean things about others. But never about you. I can't wait to see you "next year in 1963!"

Yours Until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

Merry Christmas, Izzy.

Isn't this a funny postcard? It's weird seeing palm trees decorated with colored lights. Miami's weird. Please don't write me about Hannah Senesh or anything about those times. They're over. Let's go see "Bye Bye Birdie" when it comes out. That would be fun.

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

(February 1963. LINA and IZZY pass notes.)

LINA

Izzy! You have your pajama top on!

IZZY

I was in a rush this morning. I stayed up late reading and got up late. Do you think anyone will notice?

LINA

Yes.

IZZY

But it kind of matches my skirt.

LINA

It doesn't. I wish it did.

IZZY

Will you still sit with me at lunch?

LINA

Yes.

IZZY

Please don't tell Susan and Debbie.

LINA

They have eyes.

(Change. IZZY is writing a letter. She keeps crossing stuff out and starts again.)

IZZY

April 10, 1963

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Zenes,

Thank you for inviting me to your seder. (again). I understand more now than last year. I wish my mother kept a Kosher home so I could have soda with my meal. We always have milk. I really love that you have black-raspberry soda. I never heard of that flavor before and I like it a lot. Could you tell my mother where to buy it?

Thank you also for showing me pictures of your family. I tried saying stuff in my first note but I kept crossing it out because my words were wrong. Your baby brother was so cute. I'm sorry your home got robbed of stuff but glad nobody took the photos. You had such a big family. I wish they were all here for your holidays. I hope you think of me as family when I come over. Sincerely, (Can I say "love?")

Izzy

IZZY (cont'd)

Dear Lina,

I am sorry you have laryngitis and cannot speak. I know you love to talk! But that means we can write letters! There is something I want to tell you. I never said it in person because you always

IZZY (cont'd)

“pooh pooh” compliments. Isn't that a cute phrase? “Pooh pooh?” I read it in an Agatha Christie book.

I've been thinking. About the good stuff and the not-so-good. And for me – you are the good stuff. I want us to be best friends forever – even into that thing they call eternity – you know beyond. And it's okay if you don't want to talk about some stuff. They say best friends tell each other everything but I also think best friends can tell you when to shut up. You make me feel part of this world – not just our New York City world – but the “everywhere world.” From my first day in school, you made me feel like I belonged somewhere. I always thought I belonged in Oz. Maybe, you put a spell on me! I hope we're friends when we're old and in a rocking chair - like Whistler's Mother. But we'll dress better than she did. Maybe someday when we are – you know - gone – we'll be ghosts together and haunt anyone who was mean to us. I hope you get your voice back for your birthday next week.

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I put a spell on you? Am I a witch? I hope I am Glinda, the Good Witch then.

Please don't write about being ghosts or anything about being dead. I don't ever want to think about that stuff. When we talk again, we can talk about who is cuter – Bobby Rydell or Frankie Avalon. That's much more interesting.

(June 1963. Notebooks out. Passing a note in school. It's the last day before summer break.)

IZZY

Did you peek at your Report Card? Did you get all “Excellents” as usual?

LINA

It says I talk too much and pass too many notes.

IZZY

Who's your teacher?

LINA

Mrs. Villaverde.

IZZY

Yay! We're in the same sixth grade class. I hear Villaverde is a witch.

LINA

Do not write that down in a note. Now eat it.

(IZZY writes a letter. July 1963.)

Dear Lina,

How's camp? I miss you a whole lot. Thank-you for the Lesley Gore album for my birthday. Nothing is going on here. I must be the only kid in the world who misses school. Except for arithmetic. And penmanship. And the no-reading ahead rule. But the rest is good.

My parents have the news on a lot. It's all sad. We live in a sad world. All that stuff about civil rights. Don't we all have civil rights? I thought in this country "all men are created equal." That's what we learned last year in school. Do you follow the news at camp?

I think this may be my shortest letter ever because I have nothing to report and I think if I sent you a list of my books you would roll your eyes.

Please send me a happy letter telling me everything you do.

Yours until Niagara Falls

(LINA writes a letter.)

LINA

July 21, 1963

Dear Izzy,

I love getting letters. I really like short letters. Your letter wasn't short. We don't have a tv at camp so I know nothing. That's probably good. I swim, play ping pong, and do crafts. In the last week we have color wars. Everyone is divided into two colors and we are in competition. Some kids go crazy with wanting to win and get mean. Like MaryAnn. See you soon.

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

(Change to school mode. IZZY writes a school note. It's early November 1963.)

IZZY

Do you think it would be all right if I watched *The Wizard of Oz* at your house on Sunday? 'cause you have the new color TV.

LINA

I'll ask but it's probably okay. Just don't go into a tizzy when the witch does the hourglass thing.

IZZY

I don't get into a tizzy.

LINA

You totally do. Like you don't know the ending. Don't answer. Villaverde is watching us.

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I wish my parents would take me to the Poconos. Everyone is glued to the TV and President Kennedy's funeral. I am amazed that Jackie doesn't cry. It's so sad. I feel sorry for Caroline and

IZZY (cont'd)

John John. To honor President Kennedy, I bought *Profiles in Courage*. It's pretty good but it's all about men. All we do is learn about men.

I really wish you were here so we could talk. You know how we talk about what we will do when we're all grown up? The more I watch the news, the more I want to be Peter Pan and never grow up. Or live in your magical, kingdom with you.

LINA

Hi Izzy,

I just got home and read your letter. I am writing this because you always say sometimes you should write things down. So thank-you for thinking I have a magical kingdom. And thank-you for never making me feel dippy. And never calling me "Teacher's Pet." You're fun to be with. You jump into things. You dance when I play the piano. It's neat.

IZZY

Happy Hanukkah, Lina. Thank you for being my friend.

LINA

Merry Christmas, Izzy! Ditto.

(Switch to school mode. IZZY and LINA are passing notes. February 1964)

IZZY

I Want to Hold your Hand!

LINA

Sooooo cute!

IZZY

I know! George is the best.

LINA

Paul!

IZZY

George!

LINA

No way! She Loves You!

IZZY

Yeah, yeah, yeah!

(Change. May 1964. IZZY opens a formal letter and then passes a note.)

IZZY

I opened the letter. I couldn't wait. I always worry I'm going to be left back because of my penmanship. Did you open it? Open it!

LINA

We're supposed to show it to our parents first.

IZZY

There are times when you should not follow rules. Open it.

LINA

Well, this is neat. Did you get this, too?

IZZY

Yep.

LINA

Neat.

(IZZY is writing a letter. May 1964.)

IZZY

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Zenes,

Hi, It's Izzy. So Lina and I both got into the "special progress" program which is I guess a compliment. We have a choice of doing the honors program for three years or just for two because we could just skip eighth grade. I spoke to my parents about not skipping eighth grade and doing the 3-year-program like Lina but they will not listen. Is there any way you can have Lina also skip eighth grade so then we will still be together in junior high and high school? Otherwise, I will be a grade above her and we won't be together. I will miss her too much. She's like my sister. Only better.

(IZZY stares at the letter for a moment. Finally, she tears it up.)

IZZY (cont'd)

July 1964

Dear Lina,

Yay! Summer letters. Boo! Lina's back in camp. The Dave Clark 5 is singing "Glad All Over" but I'm feeling "Sad All Over." I've been thinking. I thought about trying to go to your camp. I know all about being Kosher and the Mezuzah. If I changed my name from Ross to Rosinski nobody would know I wasn't Jewish.

And - I've been thinking about junior high and how we will never ever be in the same class again. I think in Junior High, you're expected to be cool. Maybe I will use this summer to become a new person. I need to get prettier – especially for when I am a real actress. They're all really pretty. Like you. Or maybe I will always be the funny character? Seventeen Magazine says putting oatmeal on your face helps with acne. After you take the oatmeal off your face, you're

IZZY (cont'd)

supposed to put on egg whites to close your pores. But what do you do with the egg yolks? And how do I explain the missing eggs to my mother?

Maybe I'll get a new haircut and wear all blue clothes and be like – the “mysterious blue person?” Can I be someone else in Junior High? Who should I be?

Yours Until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

Happy Birthday. I hope you had donuts and cake. Thank you for printing your letters. Guess what? I came in third in the relay and am thrilled. I made believe I had long legs like you. So in a way, you helped me in the race! Please don't become someone else. Be Izzy. I like Izzy. Save the eggs. Buy stuff for oily skin. Thank-you for saying I'm pretty. I'm really just okay.

Yours till the chocolate chips,

Lina

IZZY

Thank you for that long, informative letter. You have been at camp for three weeks and I still have no idea what you are doing– besides running one relay. Did you sneak away and visit the Boy's Camp as planned?

I had a nice birthday. My parents gave me the Beatles album and a small stereo with actual speakers. I can play music really loud. My mother was nice to me all day. I think she stored up all of her meanness for later.

Today is July 14 which means I have 46 more days until you come home on August 29. We are going to the Met to look at paintings tomorrow. I love that museum. I put myself in the paintings and make-believe I am somewhere else. I never put myself in the “battle” paintings. They're scary. I am going to Aunt Marie's Country Club one day. And we will be going to the World's Fair. And we go to Jones Beach one day each summer. So I am busy for four whole days this summer and need to find something to do for the other 42 days.

How about if I write you a one-page letter to you every day for forty-two days and then when you come home, you'll have a forty-two-page letter to read! How does that sound? Miss you.

Yours Until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

P.S. I just finished reading *Night* by Elie Wiesel. There's a chapter about his father that I can't stop thinking about and I can't talk to you about it even though you're the only one who would understand. It leads to a question about your parents which I know is not allowed but sheesh, shouldn't everything be allowed in a friendship?

LINA

Dear Izzy,

LINA (cont'd)

Please don't write me a forty-two-page letter and if you are writing one now – STOP! If you write it then I will feel like I have to read it and I don't want to read a forty-two-page letter. Write me a short one! I am good at archery. But it hurts my arms.

Yours till the chocolate chips,

Lina

P.S. Friendship doesn't mean that you can know personal stuff about things that don't affect you.

(Lights fade to black.)

Scene 2 – Junior High

IZZY

September 30, 1964

Dear Lina,

I miss writing you letters so I am going to keep doing it. I still go crazy when I think about the fact that we are no longer in the same classes. Sheesh, you'd think we'd at least have lunch together. I wish you were skipping eighth grade with me.

You said I should look at the school year with a better attitude. So here goes: The best part: English. We are reading "Twelfth Night" and after we finish it (I finished it) –we will see it at Stratford in Connecticut. In eight months! We are going to work on the same play for eight months! I will go out of my mind! I already got in trouble for reading ahead. The worst part: algebra. I don't care what "x" is. Maybe if I flunk out of algebra they'll kick me out of this horrid program and I can go to junior high for three years instead of two and we can go to high school together.

Write me!

Yours until Niagara Falls, (I think we're not supposed to capitalize the preposition. So when my mother asks, "what did I learn in school today," I have something to tell her.)

Izzy

LINA

It's funny writing to someone who lives three blocks away. We have to buy stamps and everything. Algebra can be cool. Think of it as a puzzle.

IZZY

I love getting mail! I just put some stamps in your envelope. Letters are good things because you can keep them forever. I have all your letters and school notes in a special blue box and reread them. And I've been thinking. You know how I go to your seders and celebrate Hanukkah with you? And how you had Easter here and ate some lamb even though you hate lamb and worried about being mean to Bambi? I wonder if we should visit each other's religion. I can go to your synagogue and you can come to my church. You're going to have a Bat Mitzvah next year and I don't know what that means. So, what does that mean?

LINA

Thank you for the stamps. If this keeps up I will also need envelopes. You keep my letters????? Please don't show them to anyone.

So, the Bat Mitzvah....it means having "religious responsibility." I need to do good works and work in the synagogue at becoming a good Jewish woman. This is super-important to me. My Jewish faith is like – my blood and bones – it's part of me. I asked my mom about visiting each other's religion and she loved it! She said if the world did that maybe we'd all stop hurting each other. So thanks for that idea.

IZZY

November 29, 1964

Dear Lina,

Happy Hanukkah! It's pretty early this year.

I'm still pretty miserable about you moving a mile away. How could you do this to me? I like where you are now – two blocks away. I am trying to look on the bright side. Cause right now, that mile away feels like it's across a really high mountain and everything will be harder for us because now we have to climb a mountain. I don't want to climb mountains. My life has enough mountains. Take my mother. (Really, take her.) But the fact that you're moving over Christmas and will be spending Christmas with me instead of in Miami is super-exciting. I have a schedule for us.

CHRISTMAS EVE:

- Bake cookies.
- Trim Christmas tree with family and don't get tied up in tinsel. My father uses a lot of it.
- Eat cookies.
- Sing at least one Christmas song with me. Not "Jingle Bells!"
- Eat more cookies.
- Eat Pizza from Dantes. We will make sure that we don't order meat so its kosher.
- Eat another cookie.
- Watch Alistair Sims A Christmas Carol on channel 9. It's a good one.
- Maybe have some milk with the cookies.

CHRISTMAS DAY

- Open presents.
- Have breakfast.
- Get all dressed up and take pictures under the tree.
- Go to Aunt Marie's where there will be tons of noisy Italians and too much food. Uncle Roberto will try to give you wine. Aunt Marie says she will make a special plate for you where there is no meat so you can have the lasagna.
- Make sure you get a cannoli. They go really fast.
- Go home really late and sneak some cookies into the bedroom.

It will be the merriest ever.

LINA

Dear Izzy,
 Everything sounds too wonderful. A small question? Can we also eat donuts?
 Don't take my move so personally! Be happy that I am moving. Ari and I will finally have our
 own room and I won't have to worry about him blowing up my records with his chemistry set.
 Yours until the Chocolate Chips,
 Lina

*(You could interject Christmas music in the back ground. Or
 "Auld Lang Syne.")*

IZZY

May 1965
 Dear Mr. and Mrs. Zenes,
 Thank-you for inviting me to Lina's Bat Mitzvah. It was a perfect day and all the tulips are in
 bloom! Like the world was celebrating with Lina. The service was beautiful. Sometimes I think I
 even understood what was going on. But even when I didn't – I loved it. It was like going to a
 special world that was far away but right next to me at the same time. That was how I felt when I
 went to your synagogue last month. I don't think Lina was invited to a special world when she
 came to church with me. Attila-the-Nun (that's what the kids call her) asked me why my friend
 wouldn't kneel in church and I told her that's because she was Jewish. And you know what she
 said??? She said, "Get another friend." And you know what I said??? "I'll get another church." I
 think that was probably disrespectful but I was mad. Anyway, I loved the Bat-Mitzvah.
 Sincerely yours truly,
 Izzy

LINA

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Ross,
 Thank-you for coming to my Bat Mitzvah. I love the flowers you sent and the sweets and the
 cute Italian horn. I especially loved the donuts. You all made me feel very special.
 Yours truly,
 Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,
 Mazel Tov on your Bat Mitzvah. I have no idea what you said during your celebration but I was
 impressed. My mom could not figure out what to get you. I told her you would want donuts. So
 she went crazy with all the sweets and flowers and then you got the Italian horn. Everyone in my
 family has one. It's protection from the "evil eye." And in this world – you never know. It has a
 5,000-year history. A lot of it is about sex. (My cousin told me that. Not my mother. Look it up.)
 It's supposed to help with fertility. I know we are not supposed to say these things out loud but
 you're a woman now, right? Anyway, it's not religious so you can wear it without anyone
 thinking you're Catholic. Just don't show it to any boys. You don't want to give them the wrong
 idea. Not that you would. You always do the right thing. Sometimes I want to be you. Perfect
 Lina who pleases everyone. When do you go to camp?

LINA

Could you introduce me to this “Perfect Lina?” It can’t be me. I just finished chasing Ari around with a spray bottle because he used one-half of my very expensive bottle of my smoothing shampoo – which I paid for out of my own money – and he had tears in his eyes. Which made me feel bad. I bet he was faking it. I go to camp at the end of the week.

IZZY

So you chased Ari around with a spray bottle. Big whooping deal. Today, I told my sister I was turning into a werewolf and she had better run away. When she didn’t, I howled and scrunched up my face and you better believe she ran into her room. I have to find something better to do this summer than turning into a werewolf.

LINA

You win. You are a much more terrible person than I am. Happy now?

IZZY

I never said you were terrible. I said you were perfect.

LINA

Same difference. Go read a book. You’re getting weird.

IZZY

I’ve been reading all summer. And I think I’m getting weirder. And now, summer is coming to an end and I’m so sad about going back to school. It’s strange going from 7th grade to 9th. It’s like someone forgot the number “eight” should be there. I don’t like it. And there’s nothing I can do about it. Excerpt worry. Which as you know, I am very good at.

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,
School will be fine. Stop worrying.

IZZY

November 1965

Dear Lina,

Isn’t this blackout great? I hate ninth grade. I love that there’s no school. It’s pretty funny that your mother called my mother because she thought that Ari caused the blackout. I don’t think chemistry sets for eleven-year-olds can take out thirteen states and part of Canada!

All the neighbors are talking to each other. Next door, they think the blackout was caused by aliens. Up the block, they’re saying it’s the Russians.

We’ve all got our ears glued to little transistor radios but nobody knows anything. I don’t know what we’ll do when the batteries run out because you can’t get batteries anywhere. You also can’t get milk. Maybe I can have soda with my meals!

IZZY (cont'd)

The only downside to the blackout is there is no tv and I will miss The Patty Duke Show. I just love her and I want her life. I wish I was Patty Duke.

Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,

1. I think Ari wishes he caused the blackout.
2. You don't want to be Patty Duke. Do you read Tiger Beat? She doesn't even live with her mother. She lives with her agents. I would hate that.

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I would love to live with my "agent." I would love to have an agent. I would love to be in a TV show. I would love to be Patty Duke. I am boring and awkward with bad skin.

LINA

Dear Izzy,

You are crazy-imaginative and you listen to me practice the piano even when I'm bad. I'd rather be friends with Izzy Ross than Patty Duke.

(And IZZY is writing another letter. December 1965.)

IZZY

Happy Almost New Year, to Lina in Miami! I've been thinking. You know how we're reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* in school? Please don't go into a frenzy – this is not about your family.

I've been wondering to myself if all the terrible things that happened in Europe happened here – would I hide you? The first time I read it years ago, I was sure I would. I even made a plan that I would put your family in our attic. I would feed you all my broccoli and my ice cream. It would be freezing cold in the winter and hot in the summer but you would be safe. But today, I was wondering – would I be brave enough? I'm scared of everything. Change, high school, my mother. I'd want to save you. Does that count?

LINA

It counts. I'd want to save you, too. Happy New Year, Izzy. See you soon. Look, I even bought my own stamps. I knew there'd be a letter waiting.

(LINA writes. February 1966.)

LINA (cont'd)

Dear Izzy,

I am sending this sympathy card to you because I saw in Tiger Beat that George Harrison married Patti Boyd. I am sorry. I am sure if he knew you existed, he would have waited for you.

LINA (cont'd)

Yours until the Chocolate Chips,
Lina

IZZY

Thank you for the sympathy card. I still keep George's poster on my wall because he is (ahem) the handsomest Beatle and very deep. I hold out hope for you and Paul. I know he is engaged to Jane Asher and she is very pretty but so are you. I wonder if he would convert for you.
Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

Paul would probably not convert. And it doesn't matter. Paul and George are just part of our make-believe world. I think we have to start focusing on real guys. Even though there's no guy in school I want to focus on. Are you going to the spring dance? Please say you will go. We can go shopping and get new dresses and shoes. It will be fun.
Yours until the chocolate chips,
Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,
I am never going to go to another school dance again. Only Eddie asked me to dance and he is very short. All the boys are shorter than me. When I danced, I saw MaryAnn and her "team of cool" laughing at me. That's why I stayed in the bathroom until my dad picked us up. I appreciate that you have showed me all the latest dances but I think I will always be an ostrich.
Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

(LINA writes a postcard. July 1966)

LINA

Dear Izzy,
Here's a postcard of my camp just like I promised. I wrote you first! Are you impressed? It looks better in person. Tomorrow is my first day as a junior counselor. Ari gave me a rabbit's leg for luck. (Don't get in a tizzy – it's not real.)
Yours until the chocolate chips,
Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,
July 10, 1966 was the BEST day ever. I saw my first Broadway show. My mother said I can go on my own to Saturday matinees as long as I just take the subway to the theatre and then come right home. I saved up my babysitting money and saw "Fiddler on the Roof." I was in the last row and it cost \$5.00 – and I did my arithmetic and that was ten hours of babysitting but it was worth it. They had to throw me out of the theatre. I couldn't move at the end. I wrote ten pages about it in my diary. I love living in New York and can do this! I'm going to live here forever!

IZZY (cont'd)

Is it all true? That story about Chava marrying a gentile and then she was dead to the family? If you married a Gentile, would your parents throw you out? I cannot picture your parents doing that. If you don't want to talk about it – you don't have to. I am just trying to understand.

Now, your turn. Tell me everything. How is it being a junior counselor? Do you get to boss the little kids around? Is it fun?

Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I am sorry I am writing so late. Being a junior counselor is exhausting. I don't boss anyone around. The "real" counselors boss me around. But if you see MaryAnn, make sure you tell her I got the best bunk and the biggest dresser. She's still mad that they picked me to be a junior counselor over her.

I will answer your question because it is about a musical in Russia and not the war. My parents would never understand if I married a gentile. They might even sit shiva for me. As if I were gone. Dead. It would break their hearts. But Izzy, I would never marry a gentile. Paul McCartney would have to convert. It's just how it is. I like to think you understand this but sometimes I think that you think my life is some sort of tragic fairy tale that you secretly want to be a part of. My life is **not** "Fiddler on the Roof," okay?

Lina

(Lights change or fade to black.)

Scene 3 – High School

IZZY – 10th Grade

LINA – Junior High 9th Grade

IZZY

September 1966

Dear Lina,

I hate high school. I know you told me to give it time and I did. Three days. Also, my mother yells at me all the time. I want to run away. But I don't know where to go. I wrote my grandma in California and asked if I could live with her and she called my parents and now they are both mad at me. Can I live in your house? I can hide under your bed and be a giant dust bunny when everyone's home and then when you are all gone, I can clean your house. It'll only be for four years until I am eighteen. You can feed me after everyone's in bed. Just don't feed me broccoli. Remember when you said you'd want to save me? Here's your chance. Will you hide me? In anticipation of your valued response (I read that somewhere).

Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,

LINA (cont'd)

I wish you didn't hang up on me. I did think about hiding you. But Suzette cleans every day and she would not think you were a giant dust bunny under my bed. Do you know why your mother yells at you? You get good grades. You don't sneak around. I don't get it. But for now, the grown-ups are in charge. I really miss talking to you. You like to live in your imagination - so can we get together and make-believe we live in a world that's perfect? Like Emerald City? But that wasn't perfect. Maybe no place is. Maybe we need to accept that.
Yours until the Chocolate Chips (but maybe it chipped already),
Lina

(IZZY tears up the letter and puts it into a new envelope.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,
Thanks for nothing.

LINA

Dear Izzy,
Can we talk? I am worried about you. Look! I bought stamps and stationary with matching envelopes and everything. I'll write more. I promise. That way you will have something to look forward to when you get home from school. Or maybe you can come here every day and just sleep at home? Do you want me to ask my parents?

Or – you know what I really think? I really think you need to talk to your dad. Maybe he doesn't know everything that's going on because he's at work.

I miss you and I want to see you. I even bought the music to "Somewhere over the Rainbow" so I could play it for you. Please don't shut me out.

IZZY

Dear Lina,
Thank-you for your letter. I miss you, too. I was blaming you for not saving me. But I really was blaming my mother for not liking me. I finally talked to my father who talked to my mother who talked to me and she (maybe) realized that telling me I was unplanned and they weren't ready for children was not the best thing she could have said at the top of her lungs. They both mentioned that maybe I should stay with Aunt Marie for awhile. But then Dana cried and my mother cried so that idea didn't work.

My mother yells at me because I am messy. I am. You've seen my room with books and magazines and candy wrappers all over. My dad thought maybe she should hang up a sign on my door saying, "Do not enter: a teenager lives here." And just leave me alone. Yeah ... that would work for about a week.

I'd really love to hear you play "Somewhere over the Rainbow."
Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,
I am glad you talked to your father.
Are things back to normal?
Yours until the chocolate chips.
Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,
What's normal? I walk on eggshells. My mother doesn't talk to me. (See I can write a two-sentence letter, too.)
Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,
That was three sentences. It's hard being in two different schools. Let's go to the movies over Thanksgiving. *The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming* is at the Utopia. Ari says it's pretty funny. You need to laugh and so do I.
Yours until chocolate chips,
Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,
It's a date. (One sentence. I always need to write an aside.)
Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

December 27, 1966
Dear Izzy,
This is where we are staying in Miami for the holidays. Isn't the beach gorgeous? Wish you were here.
As Gidget says, "Toodles,"
Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,
"Wish you were here?" Really? That's all I hear from you is "Wish you were here?" Let's just say, I wish I was there, too. Christmas was not Christmas. Forget the "merry merry" and "ho ho ho." There was lots of talk about the Vietnam War and not any about peace on earth. One of my aunts was nagging my cousin that if he didn't get his grades up, he'd never get into college. (That's a great Christmas topic, don't you think?) And if he doesn't get into college, then he would be drafted and go to Vietnam. And then another uncle chimed in and said, "What's wrong with that?" And then more uncles and aunts chimed in and it got louder and louder and soon everyone was eating their lasagna in silence. You could hear everyone chew in unison. Which

IZZY (cont'd)

can be very scary when they're all Italian. It's almost 1967. I hope the year goes by really fast so I am closer to going to college.

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Happy New Year! Let's make 1967 the best year ever! Here's some advice from your elder of three months: Don't wish your life away.

IZZY

That's what my mother says. Don't sound like my mother. Happy New Year. What would you like to happen for the New Year?

LINA

I want a really cool pair of bell bottoms. You should get them, too. You're tall – you'd look good in them. Like Cher. Let's go shopping together for them! And - I want to learn to play the cello.

IZZY

You can't give up on your piano after all these years! You are going to be a famous pianist. Or did you decide to become a famous cellist? I have such plans for us – I'll be on Broadway and you'll be in Carnegie Hall. And we'll have late dinners after our shows and discuss the arts and cute musicians. Doesn't that sound like fun?

LINA

No. I do not want to be a famous anything. I just like music. Can't someone like something without having to become famous? Don't give me your dream. Yours is a huge grand one and my dreams are smaller. I just want to have a family and play them music and make them happy. Sometimes I practice Brahm's Lullaby because it's easy and I know it by heart. That's what I'll play for my babies.

LINA

March 1967

Dear Izzy,

I really do wish you were here. The beach is super-crowded. Plus, I don't fit into my swimsuit. I must stop eating donuts. Plus, we never should have ironed our hair. Now I have short hair because my mother wanted the burned parts out and I look like a dweeb. I will be home soon

Toodles,

Lina

(March 27, 1967)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

My parents had a long talk with me about dating. No, not the "sex" talk. Thank goodness. Just dating. How old I should be. How old the boy can be. How I should not ever get into cars with boys. I told them they had nothing to worry about since no one wants to date me. And they said

IZZY (cont'd)

your parents are coming over to talk about this. Why do your parents want to talk with my parents about dating?

LINA

Dear Izzy,

My parents had a long talk with me also. It's no biggie. It's what parents do. "Born Free" is at the Utopia. Do you want to go? It's about friendly lions.

IZZY

Your parents did come over. I listened from the top of the stairs. They're worried that I'm going to change you. Change you? You're the most stubborn person I know. I can't even make you want to be a famous musician. Even though you should and you could. That dating stuff? *What are they worried about? We can't even date!* I can't date until I am sixteen when I am a senior in high school.

I don't get the stuff about not dating outside of your religion. Doesn't that separate people more than bring them together? Don't your parents want to bring people together?

Yours truly,

Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I don't know what to say. I know what I want to say. "Don't get in a tizzy, Izzy!" But you'll think I am trying to be cute (I am) and ignore me.

My parents are worried that you'll introduce to me to Christian boys. They're worried I might fall in love with one like Chava did in "Fiddler on the Roof." They have a different history than your family. Six million Jews were murdered. My parents didn't survive so that they could have Christian grandchildren. Can you understand that?

Jeez, Izzy! We visited each other's religion. We shared holidays. Don't let religion divide us. Then, we're going in the wrong direction.

Yours until the Chocolate Chips (I'm trying here)

Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I don't think I am doing the dividing. I think that's your family. Sorry. It's how I feel. First of all, I don't know any Christian boys except for my cousins. All the boys I know are Jewish. And for the record, my mother would be thrilled if I married a nice, Jewish doctor. I don't get why all this pressure is on you. Are you living for others? Don't you want to lead your own life? The terrible things that happened to your parents did not happen to you. Maybe you should talk about it more so you can finally move on.

LINA

Move on? *Move on?* Are you serious? Those terrible things did happen to me. These “things” get passed down. They’re in my dreams. My mother was fifteen at Auschwitz. I will be fifteen in three weeks. Believe it or not, when my parents were liberated, my mother *did* want to talk about it all. Nobody would listen. All she heard was “We all suffered. We don’t want to hear about you.” So she and my father bottled everything up. I guess I do, too. But my parents worry that no matter where we live, we are all just a few steps away from the gas chambers. You don’t “move on” from that.

IZZY

The world is different. You are not a few steps away from the gas chambers. Remember that even while in hiding Anne Frank said that she still believed people are good at heart.

LINA

I wonder what Anne Frank would have written had she not been killed in Bergen-Belsen. You read. You have to know that there are many people who wish the Nazis would have won. I would have thought that you would understand. I told you my family’s story. My mother showed you the pictures of her family. We invited you inside to our most sacred remembrances. My parents lived and because of that I am here. And I am going to use my life by being the best daughter, sister, friend, wife, someday-mother that I can be. All within my faith. But I will never move on from the past. That, too, is sacred. I carry my murdered family with me everywhere I go. I think that you may never understand that.

Lina

IZZY

I can’t understand things that I don’t know. For years, all I’ve heard is “I don’t want to talk about it.” I don’t think it’s fair that you are blaming me for not understanding things you never explained.

Izzy

(LINA is writing.)

Dear Izzy,

Please use your intelligence to think. I told you everything. Pardon me for not going into morbid detail. I have no intention of becoming the “tragic heroine” in your little drama.

We need a break from each other.

Lina

(IZZY is writing. April 3, 1967.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

It’s been a week. That’s how long a school break is. Can we talk? Or write? Or sit next to each other in your kitchen and pass notes?

Don’t let Niagara Fall....

Izzy

(LINA is writing.)

Dear Izzy,
 All right. You made me smile. I'll call. Let's not go nuts talking about this. We probably both learned a few things.
 And then we'll eat chocolate chips,
 Lina

(IZZY is writing. May 1, 1967.)

Dear Lina,
 So only two more months before I am done with my first year in high school. One down two to go. I finally found someone to walk home with. Her name is Tanya and her parents are from Russia. She's smart – even in algebra like you and she wants to be an actress like me. Plus she wears scarves all the time and looks cool. Maybe I should wear scarves all the time.

But then yesterday, she said something which made me think, “Uh oh. This is not good.” She talked about how all the Jewish students in school stick together so she was glad she met me. She said Jewish kids don't make friends outside of their religion. I told her about how we are still friends even though we're not in the same school. She said, “You two won't be friends forever.”

So now I wonder about staying friends with her. Can you change someone's mind? I thought I liked her. But can I like her if she doesn't like *you*? Maybe she would like you if she knew you?
 Yours until Niagara Falls,
 Izzy

Dear Izzy,
 Do you want to wear scarves all the time? Is that an “Izzy-thing” or an “Izzy-trying-to-be-someone-else (yet again) thing?”

I told my mother about what Tanya said to you. I hope you don't mind but usually she's smarter than me. She said that this could be an “opportunity to show Tanya that human beings are human beings and it has nothing to do with religion.” Do you know what I think? I think you are discovering that people think a lot of weird things about us. Maybe someday we can change that.
 Yours until the chocolate chips,
 Lina

(LINA is writing a postcard. July 12, 1967)

LINA

Happy Birthday, Izzy. I am writing this on your actual special day so you will get it late. We are just figuring out the post office. Venice is so beautiful. We go everywhere by boat. And all the boat-rowers are gondoliers who sing to you. You would love it. You probably would sing back! I hope you get here someday. My mother lets me wear a little make-up so I bought some Italian lipstick called “rossa.”

LINA (cont'd)

Yours till the lips-stick (Did I make you laugh? I made it up!)

Lina

(IZZY is writing a letter – July 25, 1967.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

Since I can't write you in Italy (Italy! Color me jealous. A little.) I am sending this to your home. What do you think of my typing? I got a typewriter for my birthday and now everyone can read my "penmanship."

Venice looks so dreamy and romantic. You're so far away! That mile to your house doesn't seem so long anymore. We haven't seen each other in eons and I wonder – is this what happens when friends grow up? That time runs out for seeing your friends because you are busy – doing – I don't know – grown-up stuff?

This is a good time to be out of the country. There is rioting all over. In June, the news kept talking of the hippie movement and how this would be the "summer of love." But really, it's the "summer of riots." You would hate it. Was the world always crazy and we were just too young to notice?

Yours until Niagara Falls (because even though we are older and that phrase is babyish – it's still true),
Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Thanks for your letter. I am home but nobody answers at your home so you must be away. To answer your question, yes the world was always crazy. You know my family's history so you know it's true. Call me when you return from wherever you are and I can tell you about Italy and we can talk.

Yours until the Chocolate Chips,
Lina

IZZY

December 19, 1967

Happy Hanukkah a week early! May your candles burn extra bright this season. Even in Florida.

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Look, Izzy! An actual real letter from me from Miami. Not a postcard! Merry Christmas! I hope you get some Christmas magic this year. I have something to tell you that I can't put into a postcard because other people might see it. I met someone. You'd like him. He lives in New York so I could date him – if I was allowed to date. It's a secret because he's in tenth grade and I'm just in ninth. Maybe I should have skipped! Then I would be in tenth grade like you. Still, I don't

LINA (cont'd)

think my parents would approve. I think Ari knows I have a crush on him but he is keeping quiet. I'm starting to appreciate Ari a lot more.

So, the important stuff. He's really cute. Maybe not as cute as Paul McCartney (who still hasn't married Jane Asher – what's up with that). But different-cute. Really funny with a humungous smile. He's a fabulous swimmer. We met during a snorkeling class. I wonder if he has a girlfriend. It seems forward to ask and I can't date anyway. Ari volunteered to ask for me! I hope Ari keeps his mouth shut. And yes, I know what you are wondering. He's Jewish. Anyway, it's loads of fun having a crush on a real person and not a picture in a magazine.

Not-in-love-but-in-crush,

Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I'm happy for your "crush." Does Florida boy have a name? What happens when snorkeling class is over? Do you know where he lives when he's not snorkeling? What do your parents think?

George Harrison forever!

Izzy

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Happy 1968. We will be "Sweet Sixteen" this year. Almost a grown-up. Florida-guy's name is Michael. He lives in Brooklyn so not too far. I still don't know if he has a girlfriend and it may not matter because I'll probably never see him again. Sorry the letter is so short. I have tons of homework and cello practice and piano practice and I may give up the piano. Don't try to talk me out of it.

(IZZY is writing a letter: March 4, 1968.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

They're riots everywhere. My parents now get the New York Times in addition to the Long Island Press. We all read the papers, watch the news and get sad. My Dad talks about what a tough world this is for my sister and me to grow up in. But your parents' world was tougher. I'd like to talk to you about it but my mother's on the phone with family members and they're all talking about the news – as if that could change anything.

How does all this stuff happen? How does a man who preaches non-violence get murdered? Is this what happens to good people? I want to be a good person but it seems like the good die young and the bad live forever. Which doesn't mean I want to be a bad person. I just don't want to die young or be murdered like Dr. King.

LINA

Can we make a pact that we will not write anymore about dying young or being murdered? We don't know the future and it's better if we write about "the good." Some people believe that if you focus on that you can make "the good" a reality. I know that did not work for Dr. King. But I hope his story is not over.

You know what we need? We need to dance again. Dance away the world for an hour. It won't solve anything but it would be fun to be kids for the day – like we used to be. Come over.

Yours until the Chocolate Chips,
Lina

(IZZY is writing a letter.)

IZZY

April 22, 1968

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Zenes,

Thank you for letting me be part of Lina's Sweet Sixteen Birthday at that amazing restaurant on Top of the Sixes. It made me feel like a society lady in the Henry James novels. (I just finished reading "Washington Square" for school and I hope I have a better ending than poor Catherine.) The food was delicious and the views were better than the ones at the Empire State Building. I will never forget it. Thank-you again.

Sincerely yours truly,
Izzy

Dear Lina,

Guess what? I signed up to work for Eugene McCarthy. I will finally have something to do this summer. And maybe I will be doing good. Does that make me good? I want to do good even if I am not good about it. But I don't know. I think being good also means you have to be nice to your mother.

Your Sweet Sixteen Party was so fun. I can't believe my mother is letting me have a party early so all my friends can come. The only one who declined was Tanya. Remember Tanya-with-the-scarves? She's busy. I am overthinking if she is. But it doesn't matter. What matters is you will be there.

(Izzy is writing a letter. June 2, 1968.)

IZZY

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Zenes,

Thank-you for my beautiful circle pin for my Sweet Sixteen Birthday It's just like Lina's. We will match and nobody will be able to tell us apart – except for the fact that I am four inches taller than her and she is prettier with better hair. I also am grateful that you invited me to Ari's Bar Mitzvah. I guess he's all grown up. Kind of?

Thank-you again.

Yours, Sincerely, Best Wishes,
Izzy

(LINA is writing a letter.)

July 5, 1968

Dear Izzy,

Israel is amazing. I got to visit with my only aunt and two cousins. We hardly ever see them because of where we all live. And guess what? My cousins love the Beatles and think Paul is really cute. (Ha ha!) I guess teens are teens everywhere. Why people like to focus on differences instead of what brings us together is a mystery.

There's so much history in this tiny country. It's not much bigger than New Jersey! We hiked Masada National Park. And then there was the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea - which has so much salt you can float without trying to float. I don't know why they call it the Dead Sea - because you couldn't drown in it - you have to float! And then there's Jerusalem - where all these religions come together. And I cried. Because wouldn't it be wonderful if the people in all these religions could also come together? Hope things are well in NYC and you are enjoying working for Senator McCarthy. We are still sad about Robert Kennedy.

Lots of love and chocolate chips,

Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,

Welcome home. It was great to talk to you like we were real people. I just saw that Paul McCartney and Jane Asher broke up this summer? That leaves room for drumroll you!

Dear Izzy,

I may not be available....

(IZZY is writing a card. December 14, 1968)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

Happy Hanukkah tomorrow. It was fun seeing you for all of ten-minutes to exchange gifts. Will there ever be enough time to be together and just "be?" And Happy New Year.

Yours until Niagara Falls and lots of love,

Izzy

P. S. Not available for Paul McCartney??????

(LINA is writing a card. December 25, 1968)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Merry Christmas, Izzy! Just "be?" Do you want a "Be-in" like in the musical "Hair?" (See, I can keep up with Broadway musicals like you.) By the way, would you ever take your clothes off onstage? Please say, "no." My parents could be in the audience.

We are crazy busy, aren't we? Happy New Year!

LINA (cont'd)

Lots and lots of good wishes and love,
Lina
P.S. Yeah, done with Paul McCartney.

IZZY

Dear Lina,
I saw *Hair* over the holiday and loved every bit of it. I'd LOVE to be in it. For the record, when they take their clothes off – the lights get really dim and you can't see anything. But I think I would hide backstage during that scene.
Let the sunshine in!
Izzy

LINA

April 1969
Dear Izzy,
For your eyes only. Michael's here on spring break. He doesn't have a girlfriend. I am now seventeen and he is eighteen and I am going to work on my parents to see if they will let me date him.

IZZY

Dear Lina,
Tell me all about Michael and if you can date him when you get home. Inquiring minds want to know.

Guess what! I saved enough from my horrible retail job and have enough money to go to the summer program at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. I have to be careful with telling my parents. They are not thrilled that I am not getting into one of those ivy colleges because my math grades were not exactly stellar. Maybe I should have done my homework.

Today, I found out I got into a college in New Jersey and I will go there. It's Lutheran but they don't care. Which is good because I never found a religion. Remember when I thought about becoming a Buddhist? That didn't work out. Can you have religion without belonging to a religion? I read somewhere that some Holocaust survivors became atheists in the camp. But your parents didn't. Did they survive because of their religion or in spite of their religion? I wish I knew the ending to that part of the story.
Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy

LINA

I am glad you are finally getting to do some theatre. And I respect that you are still looking for a way to finding something spiritual that will help you through life. The ending to my parents' story is "they survived." That's all you need to know.
Enough!
Lina

(Lights fade.)

INTERMISSION

SCENE 4 – College

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I am writing because there is just one phone in the hallway of the dorm and you can't really talk because there is always a line and everyone is saying, "Hurry up." I hope senior year is being good to you. I hear they may reinstate the prom. Will they finally do shows, too? So, you know how good is followed by bad. I am going to tell you the good first.

GOOD: The American Academy of Dramatic Arts was the best thing ever. I wish I could go to college there but they don't offer a degree and my dad is fixated on degrees and I am not great at the "big rebellion." There are a lot of talented kids out there. A LOT. And arms are a huge problem. Do you ever think about your arms when you are going through your day? Never, right? When I'm onstage, my arms just hang there – like dead wood. At the end, we had a recital and even my father came. I just loved it all so much, The best thing – I did a scene where my character was from England and some teacher told my teacher that the British girl had promise. He thought I was British! He thought I was someone else! Score one for me.

BAD: My roommate has a boyfriend. That's not the problem. The fact that he lives in my dorm room is. She sneaks him into the room every weekend. I don't much like sleeping in a tiny room with this guy I don't know and I won't go into anything else. I've never been on a date and now I'm sleeping in a room with some strange guy – who really is strange by the way. So what do I do? I take a bus, two subways and another bus and go home every weekend. Every weekend! That was not the plan when I decided to go away for college. My mother thinks I miss her.

I know I am kvetching. I wish I could take a class in kvetching because I do that well. Niagara falls ? Or just "love" because I am in college now?

Izzy

(LINA is writing a letter. December 1969.)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Whoa – long letter. I am sorry it has taken me so long to respond – but there's so much to answer. We keep missing each other. I spent Thanksgiving break touring colleges. I have to make up my mind soon. Applications are due in January. I hope college gets better for you.

I am dating Michael. My parents finally gave in. It only took a year of begging. He's a freshman upstate in Syracuse but comes home every other weekend to see me. I only play the cello now so I'm not nutty practicing everything. Send me your dorm phone number. Let's stay young forever with ending our letters with Niagara Falls and chocolate chips. Let's always remember how we were when we were little.

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

(IZZY is writing a letter. December 10, 1969)

IZZY

Dear Lina,
There's always a huge line to use the dorm phone. Write me!

GOOD: Guess what? College got better! My roommate dropped out to live in some commune with her boyfriend and nobody has taken her place. And I got the lead in the spring play! Which has made some of the students mad because I am just a freshman.

BAD: Biology. Why does a theatre student need Biology?

What colleges are you looking at?

Yours till Niagara Falls (because I am feeling young again),

Izzy

P.S. Is this short enough for you?

(LINA is writing a letter. January 2, 1970.)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I'm sick of looking at colleges. They are all blending into one.

What is the school play you are in? (Congratulations!)

We looked at Smith College (but I don't want to go to an all-girl's school), New York University (but I don't want to go to go to a school in the City unless Michael was in the City (he's upstate). and Cornell University (I wanted to check out the winter in Ithaca. I liked Cornell a lot but it is cold). And I know what you're thinking – Michael's college is not nearby.

Yours until the butter flies (for a change in pace),

Lina

P.S. Your letter was the perfect length.

(IZZY is writing a letter. January 15, 1970.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I have to get used to writing "1970." After writing the 1960's years for so long. Do you have that problem?

THE GOOD: I am Stella in "A Streetcar Named Desire." There's a lot of – what? Sexiness in a way that is sexy but not overtly and I have never been kissed, so what do I know? My first kiss ever – will be onstage. Maybe you should write me about being kissed. The guy playing Stanley said we should practice our kissing after rehearsal ... hmmm ... I don't think so. Also, I still have an arm-problem.

THE SEMI-BAD: I have to light birthday candles on a cake and I cannot light a match. Who knew that when I finally got in a play, I'd have to worry about lighting a match? In acting classes, they have you do a lot of breathing but really – I wish they did more practical stuff – like how to light a match. And how to make your arms move.

IZZY (cont'd)

I hope you think about New York University. Then I can take the train to the city and we can be two die-hard New Yorkers hanging out in the greatest city in the world. Think about it. My show runs the last two weekends in March. I'd love for you to come and see the show. My parents would drive you back and forth. PLEASE COME!!!!

Yours till Niagara Falls,

Izzy

P.S. Is this too long?

(LINA is writing a letter. March 26, 1970)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I am not going to write you about what's it's like to kiss Michael – it's personal. I am sorry I missed your show. We had the spring orchestra concert and then it was spring break in Miami. Michael's not here so I guess I really will study. I hope the show went really well and you were able to light a match. I am home April 1 for a family celebration – no fooling. Call me.

Yours forever,

Lina

P.S. How about we make a deal? I won't criticize your long letters if you don't criticize my short ones?

(May 1, 1970. IZZY writes a letter.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

THE GOOD: I have a boyfriend. And he's Jewish. Yes, I found a nice Jewish boy at a Lutheran college. My mother always said I should marry a Jewish doctor. Of course, he's not a doctor. And he's not going to be one. And my parents hate him. Which is fine by me. But he loves theatre and we see shows at discounted prices all the time. Of course, we never agree on what show to see.

Izzy

P.S. Regarding our letters: You have a deal. Although you have to proud of me – this was really short.

(From LINA. September 20, 1970.)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

Cornell is okay. I like my roommate and my classes. I have no idea what to major in. Nothing is jumping out at me. I have to study a ton but sometimes I go into the music building and just play the piano. It relaxes me. I am going to learn to cross-country ski which is what they do in Ithaca in the winter. I really miss Michael. I just want to get married and start my life and not have to wait four more years. Michael is taking a ton of classes to graduate early and save money. Maybe I should do that.

Love,

Lina

(From IZZY. February 1970.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

It was really great seeing you over winter break. You really only have three-and-a-half years until you graduate. Remember when I had to wait all that time to get out of the house? Time does go by. Of course, you will need a major someday (Oy! I just sounded like a grown-up.).

ALL GOOD: I can't believe I am in Europe. I LOVE studying here. It's gorgeous – like living in one of those classy calendars. I wake up every day, put my feet on the ground and whisper to myself, "You are really here." I am broke – I'm doing this on five dollars a day. My parents can't send me much money. I know they are counting their pennies to do this for me. I also know they are doing this because they hope I break up with Josh. I went to Salzburg and imagined I was in "The Sound of Music" I restrained myself from dancing in the Alps singing "Do Re Mi." I didn't want anyone to think I was deranged.

The school took us to Amsterdam over Easter. Yes, I visited The Anne Frank House. They really rush you through it so I got permission from the school to do it again. After reading the Diary many times, I could hear the long-ago voices come alive in the tiny rooms. There is so little space, I could feel the walls closing in. I wondered, "Could I hide here for two years?" My first instinct is "no." But then I think, "Izzy, could you stay inside here if everyone on the outside wanted to kill you?" I'm getting emotional writing about it. What would it be like to be a helper? What would it be like to be "the hidden?" I wish everyone could travel and see the world as it is and not just what the glossy magazines say it is. All of it: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

NOT GOOD: Last week we went to Munich. We stopped into some random rathskeller and there were these men – standing and singing loudly. They were scary. My friend who speaks German said, "let's go." And later he told me they were singing Nazi songs – which is forbidden. I guess the war isn't as far away as I thought. It's hard to believe there are people alive who miss those days. I am just starting to understand things that you already know. Which makes me want to know more.

I won't be writing a ton of letters because airmail is expensive. I just heard your sigh of relief.

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

(From LINA. May 1971.)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I am home for the summer. Can we get together? I want to hear about your semester abroad. I am amazed that you did not sing the entire score of "The Sound of Music" in the Alps.

(From IZZY. June 1971.)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I am in North Carolina being an apprentice at an Equity Summer Stock for the summer. I love it – except for the ticks. We do a new show every week and the apprentices do a children’s show.

VERY GOOD: We are doing The Hobbit and it is great fun. I get to sing – loudly. And it’s fine if I go flat because it is a funny song. There are mountains everywhere and wildflowers and it’s a welcome break from the City. But then, there’s something else that I found out about...

HORRIBLE: On my first morning, a little girl who is the daughter of one of the theatre-owners asked if she could see “my horns.” She thought that because I was from New York - I must be Jewish and if I was Jewish – I must have horns! You can bet I didn’t let her know I wasn’t Jewish. And I let her check my head for horns. And the things is – she goes to a private school and is from a well-educated family. The past is never far away, is it? It’s taken me awhile to learn that. You tried to tell me but as usual, I had to learn these things for myself.

I hope your summer is as special as you are.

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

(IZZY writes a letter. February 1972)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

Where are you? I haven’t heard from you in months. Sit down! I am cast as Miep in “The Diary of Anne Frank. Of course I wanted to be Anne. I knew that would never happen. I really thought I would be Mrs. Van Daan because she is old and loud. Nope. I am “The Helper.” I have to do a ton of research. Can you help me? You know a lot more than you let on.

Miss you. Miss your letters. A ton.

Love, Izzy

(LINA writes a letter and they continue to alternate. February 1972.)

LINA

Dear Over-Dramatic Izzy,

What are you talking about? We saw each other over break and on New Year’s! It’s been all of three weeks. Jackie brings Michael here once a month. Then, she drives us around while Michael and I make-out in the back seat. I don’t think my parents sent me to college for this. I still don’t have a major. Too bad I can’t major in Michael. My parents think I should take education classes. Do all parents think their daughters should take education classes?

My parents never were able to go into hiding so I know nothing about that. They were snatched from their homes. The Diary of Anne Frank does not deal with Anne’s experience at Auschwitz and Miep never was there. You don’t need me for research.

Love until the lip-sticks,

Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I am taking education classes so I have “something to fall back on.” And yes, all parents think their daughters should take education classes or learn to type or become a nurse. They’re burning bras all over the country but our career options are stuck in the 1950’s.

So from my research into Anne Frank (there’s not a lot beyond the Diary), it was noted that everyone got really skinny while in hiding. Food was scarce so even “the helpers” went hungry. The director thinks we all look well-fed, So the entire cast is on a diet. We are all on this no-carbohydrate diet. You cannot eat fruits or vegetables. But you can have steak every night. I’m half Italian. I miss my pasta.

Would it be nagging if I told you that you should major in music?

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

LINA

Yes, that would be nagging. I am told that models swallow cotton balls to lose weight. Apparently the liquids in your stomach makes the cotton balls expand so you think you are full. Please don’t do that.

IZZY

I promise to not go on the cottonball diet.

Are you home this summer? I will be working but am around in the evenings. Josh and I broke up. For the tenth time – but the tenth time’s the charm. You know when I went abroad for the semester? I didn’t miss him. I think if you’re in love you are supposed to miss your boyfriend when you are away. That told me something. My sister said that my parents celebrated. Their plan worked. You know I hate writing that.

I went on a date with someone from the music department. He’s going to Julliard and wants to be a conductor. My mother loves that. She loves telling her friends that my boyfriend is going to graduate school at Julliard. But he’s not my boyfriend. He has lizard eyes and they started to creep me out. And I kind of miss Josh. It’s probably too early after our break-up to date again.,

LINA

I think it’s a good call to stay away from boys with lizard eyes. I won’t be around this summer. I will be working in a kibbutz. I am excited for that except being away from Michael. Now I know what you mean about letters. I hope he writes me every day. And I will try to do the same.

IZZY

Aha! For years, I have had to nag you to write me letters and now you are planning on writing Michael every day? I guess you really must be in love. Maybe you’ll figure out your major.

LINA

I just dream about marrying Michael and playing music for him and kissing him – a lot. I just can’t focus on picking out something to study that will work for the rest of my life. You were so

LINA (cont'd)

focused even when we were little. I mean, what nine-year-old knows what she wants to be when she grows up?

IZZY

A nine-year-old who wanted to be anyone but who she was. I miss us. It's getting harder, isn't it? To stay best friends. It's not just us. We're in the world now.

LINA

I'll write a longer letter later. Michael will be here soon and my hair is a rat's nest. It's one of our last visits before I leave for the summer.

Yours until the lip-sticks,
Lina

IZZY

September 1972

Dear Lina,

Do you watch the news in college? Or watch the Olympics? Did you see what happened in Munich? All those Israeli athletes murdered by terrorists? I can't bear it. Everyone's crying. The world is spinning out of control.

LINA

Dear Izzy,

My parents and Ari came to Ithaca to be with me. The Olympics haven't been in Germany since 1936 when it was controlled by Hitler. It's ironic that Germany was trying to redeem themselves and then this happened. The Germans were calling the games "The Cheerful Games." There's lots of talk on campus - is it ever safe to be Jewish? Is it ever safe to be in any minority? Ari and my father say no. Ari pointed out that of the 102 countries participating - a lot of those countries don't like each other. But they weren't murdering each other's athletes. Just the Jewish ones. I don't know what else to say.

(More letters. October 1, 1972)

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I had to write you right away. Because I have news and it's not about our sad, topsy-turvy world. The school just built a new Black Box Theatre and they are doing some Sean O'Casey one-acts. And I am the female lead! We will be doing it in January. I am brushing up on my non-existent Irish brogue. I don't want to sound like an Irish Spring soap commercial.

Love, Izzy

(From Lina. November 1, 1972.)

Dear Izzy,

Congratulations on being an Irish mother. I have two things and one is HUGE. I tried to call but no one answers the phone in your dorm. I'm leaving school in December. I have all good grades

LINA (cont'd)

so I should be able to go back if I ever want to. The BIG news? Sit down. I am getting married. Michael proposed. He graduated early, is going into business with his father and ready. I feel ready, too so naturally I said yes and my parents hemmed and hawed but they realized that Michael is a good man. I am in madly in love with him and have been since I was fifteen. He's Jewish and devoted to his faith. His parents are also Holocaust survivors. There really are no black spots to count against us. It's hard to concentrate on finals when you are dreaming about your wedding.

Love is everywhere,

Lina

IZZY

Wow Dear Lina,

Congratulations. This is such a grown-up thing that you are doing. But you were always more grown-up than me. Part of me asks, "why are you in such a hurry to grow up" and part of me thinks, "why not?" You're the first person not related to me to get married. But you are kind of related to me, aren't you? As you used to say, if you're happy, I'm happy. I am kind of amazed that you are striking out on your own and doing this. But I'm glad you are following your heart.

Rehearsals are going great. I'm going to nail this Irish mother. I even get to cry!

Yours until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

(IZZY opens a wedding invitation. LINA reads it aloud.)

LINA

To Miss Isobel Ross.

Mr. and Mrs. Josef Zenes along with Mr. and Mrs. David Goldblum

LINA and IZZY

Request the honor of your presence to the marriage of their children

IZZY

Lina and Michael

On Sunday, January 22 1973...

(IZZY fills out the "reply" card and stuffs into an envelope.)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I have been calling and calling. Are you avoiding me? What do you mean that you "regret" not being able to come to my wedding? This is me, Izzy. The one who played *The Wizard of Oz* with you – how many times? I did munchkin voices for you!

IZZY

I know and I'm sorry. Very, truly sorry. But I have a matinee that day. It's the lead, remember? There's no understudy. If I'm not there, there would be no show. I can't let everyone down.

LINA

But you can let your best friend down?

IZZY

I think best friends see each other more than once a year. I think best friends ... are asked to be in the wedding.

LINA

It's a Jewish wedding. We did this quickly. And to be truthful, I see Jackie a lot more than I see you. She always drives to Ithaca to visit me.

IZZY

I don't drive.

LINA

I was afraid there wasn't time to get you up to speed for the service. You're always in rehearsal.

IZZY

You certainly did do this really quickly. I thought it took months to plan a wedding. I was thinking it would be in the spring and then I wouldn't audition for a show if it was. Or the summer. Summer weddings are beautiful. You seem to be in such a rush? Is there a reason for it?

LINA

I am NOT "in the family way" if that's what you are implying. How can you even ask? Who are you these days? There's still time to respond.

IZZY

I'm sorry. I can't. Can we ... meet later and celebrate?

LINA

It's a wedding! Not a birthday celebration. You celebrate your wedding at your wedding!

IZZY

Where are you registered?

LINA

January 1973

Dear Izzy,

Thank-you for the china place setting.

Lina and Michael

(The lights fade to black. Time passes.)

Scene 5 – All Grown Up

(IZZY has the box of LINA'S letters and is going through them. We hear LINA'S voice as she reads. LINA could be anywhere – at her desk, standing, above IZZY.. But the focus the light is on IZZY.)

LINA'S VOICE

“You know what we need? We need to dance again. Dance away the world for an hour.”

“I am thankful you are not Barbara Hershey, but Izzy.”

“Please don't become someone else. Be Izzy. I like Izzy.”

“Izzy is crazy-imaginative. I'd rather be friends with Izzy than Patty Duke.”

“We're crazy-busy, aren't we? Happy New Year. Let's never forget how we were when we were little.”

(IZZY thinks for a moment and writes. LINA is silently soaking it all in.)

IZZY

Hanukkah, 1977

Dear Lina,

It's a milestone year. We will be twenty-five. A quarter of a century. I've been thinking about milestones and how I really screwed up. A role in a play is not a milestone. Milestones are births, deaths, marriages and for you a Bat Mitzvah. A role in a play is a shiny brass ring and I chased shiny brass rings for a long time.

Could have? Would have? Should have? All of that. I didn't even try to see if I could get the afternoon off from the play. I never asked. I had – a false sense of my own importance. Maybe the director would have figured out a way that I could get to your wedding – maybe not. But I'll never know because I didn't try. I'm trying now. Does friendship have an expiration date? I know it's been five years and a lot happens in that time. I also know that in the span of a life time, five years is just a small portion of this “grown up” life - if we're lucky and get to live a long one.

It's Hanukkah. I think about you every Hanukkah, and on your birthday.... I wish you a year filled with light. How is Michael? Do you have babies? (I bet you have at least one.) Do you play them Brahms Lullaby? See? I remember. Everything. I used to think you were in a hurry to grow up. Now I wonder if I was afraid to grow up.

I moved to Madison, Wisconsin. Yes, this die-hard New Yorker escaped from New York. I don't miss the “Smile Baby” calls from the doorways or the constant echoes of “Smoke, smoke, coke, coke.” An opportunity presented itself just when I desperately wanted to get out and I took it. Madison is a great university town with bookstores, eclectic coffee shops and a big beautiful lake

IZZY (cont'd)

that glows during sunsets. It was a good move at the right time. As they say in theatre, timing is everything. My address is below. I miss you.

Love,

Izzy

P.S. My family is doing well. My parents moved to Minnesota for work and my sister is married and lives in Denver. We now are a multi-state family. How are your parents and Ari?

(LINA reads the letter. She pulls out a sheet of paper and starts to write.)

Dear Izzy,

What a lovely surprise to hear from you. We are doing well. And you are correct. I do have babies. Two darling little girls. Julianna is three and Elise is still a bouncing baby....

(LINA stops. Maybe she tears up the letter. Maybe she just puts it away. Where do you begin? She puts the letter away. Maybe she hears the call of a baby and exits. Maybe IZZY checks her mail to see if she has a letter from LINA. Maybe they are both lost in thought.)

(Time passes. You could have the characters change something to show they are thirty. Or not. It is Christmas, 1982. LINA is writing the letter and reading it. IZZY never gets it.)

LINA

Christmas 1982

Dear Izzy,

I really did mean to answer your letter earlier. Yes, I have babies. They are now eight and five. And we're hitting another milestone – age thirty. Remember when we were young and told “don't trust anyone over thirty?” Can we trust ourselves?

Ari was asking (actually nagging) me to finish a letter to you. He is a believer in connections and thinks fences can and should be mended. You'd really like grown-up Ari. He put away his chemistry set (but I bet he still has it - he saves everything.) He's turned out to be my best friend. Who knew?

I can't put everything into one letter. I don't want to hand you a forty-two page letter as you once threatened to do with me. So for now, there are the milestones:

- Michael and I moved into a house. (Address is below.) Michael's business is doing well.
- Julianna and Elise light up my life. Julianna is in third grade and very dramatic. I think some of your DNA got passed to her. Elise is my builder and I live in a house full of legos.
- Speaking of Ari, he got married last year. And his wife is amazing.
- My parents are doing great – still working.
- Speaking of working... The kids grow fast and I think a return to school is in my future.

To be continued in the New Year.

Yours until the chocolate chips (I remember, too)

Lina

(We see LINA put the letter in an envelope and stamp it. LINA turns around. She picks up her purse and turns back facing the audience. LINA turns back and pulls the mail out of her purse. She sees the letter she sent IZZY.)

“Return to sender. Address unknown.”

Oh, Izzy, where are you?

(There is a shift in character. We fast forward to two middle-aged women. Maybe they put their hair up. Maybe they now wear a suit jacket or a blazer – or make a more creative choice than I am making!)

(IZZY opens up her computer.)

LINA

December 25, 2000

Surprise and Merry Christmas, Izzy! You’re right. Friendship doesn’t have an expiration date. I have thought about you often through the years. I am still growing up. How about you?

Chocolate chips?

Lina

IZZY

Lina?

LINA

You’re online!

IZZY

I’m always online. I’m currently trying to scan Christmas photos to share with my New York family. It’s not working. And now I can stop and do a happy-dance. *How are you?* How did you find me?

LINA

Ari! I was bemoaning the fact that we never “finished our friendship” and Ari reminded me of the miracle of the internet. He looked you up and there you were – directing and teaching theatre. You have an actual website. In Minnesota. Not Wisconsin. You never returned to New York?

IZZY

Nope. And I never will. *(A moment.)* Is this awkward?

LINA

A bit.

IZZY

Is it really you? Lina-whose-hair-I-burned-and-you-had-to-get-a-shaggy-dog-haircut...

LINA
Says the girl with poodle hair who wore pajama tops to school!

IZZY
George!

LINA
No way! Paul McCartney forever!

IZZY
Dancing like an ostrich!

LINA
While doing munchkin voices!

(And maybe with some laughter, they've reconnected.)

IZZY
Where do we begin?

LINA
Milestones! We're pushing fifty.

IZZY
Sheesh, Lina. Don't wish your life away! We'll only be forty-nine next year.

LINA
Close enough.

IZZY
"But my dear. We're still here."

LINA
What?

IZZY
A line from a musical.

LINA
I should have known.

IZZY
So milestones. I'm married with children. Your turn.

LINA

I want to know more about “married with children.”

IZZY

It’s all good. Your turn.

LINA

You’re in theatre but not an actress.

IZZY

That’s my milestone. Not yours. But so not an actress. A teaching artist. And guess what my focus is on?

LINA

I deal in facts and not guesses.

IZZY

You’re no fun. I create plays with the students that focus on social justice. You rubbed off on me. Your turn.

LINA

I’m a lawyer.

IZZY

What?

LINA

You heard me. The kids grew up and I had to do something. I wanted to be a mother and a wife but never just a housewife.

IZZY

More, please.

LINA

We’ll be on all night and I have an early morning. Let’s take it slow/

IZZY

/ gobbling everything up. MORE!

LINA

You’re still Izzy. I like to go slow and think about stuff.

IZZY

And you’re still Lina. Thank goodness! Real life question: How’re your parents and Ari?

LINA

My parents finally retired. Still in the same house. Ari's married with children and standing over me with a huge grin on his face. Now, he's waving to you.

IZZY

Hi, Ari!

LINA

He says "hi." Now he can go away. Family?

IZZY

My Dad's retiring this year. He's looking at living in Florida. Minnesota is a bit chilly for them. My mother went to Weight Watchers and got skinny and is finally happy. She had no idea that all those diet pills she took forever was making her crazy. My sister is happy as a clam in the mountains near Denver. *I can't believe we're talking!* Madame Lawyer!

LINA

Mrs. Social Justice!

IZZY

Can we ... is it possible...

LINA

I don't know...

IZZY

But?

LINA

It's looking good.

IZZY

I know!

LINA

I have to go. I didn't think this would be – so easy. I have early mornings.

IZZY

Lawyer stuff.

LINA

Contracts. Long contracts. I'm good at them. Probably from reading someone's long letters.

IZZY

I don't want to let you go.

LINA

I want to hear everything. But in real time. I have a few days off after the New Year. We'll talk soon. I'll send my phone number.

IZZY

It's been ... so ... great? Wonderful? Fantastic? To hear from you. Thank-you. And thank Ari.

LINA

He's still grinning. We'll catch up more ... privately. Without my brother-the-chaperone. Send me your address. I have something to send to you in the spring. It's a surprise. Night night. I hope your kids have a "Puddle-duck" to sleep with...

IZZY

You remember!

LINA

All. I remember all.

*(They close the computer. It was a good exchange. They're happy.
Lights change. IZZY opens a thick envelope.)*

IZZY

To Mrs. Isobel Ross-Johnston and Mark Johnston
Mr. Michael Goldblum and Ms. Lina Zenes-Goldblum
Request the honor of your presence and your family to the marriage of their children
Julianna and David
On Sunday, September 16, 2001

(Izzy has a moment of emotion. SHE writes on the "reply card.")

IZZY

Dear Lina, Thank-you for believing in second chances. My family of four will all be there with bells on.

(IZZY and LINA are on the computer.)

LINA

I got your reply card and I am thrilled that our families will meet each other.

IZZY

I must buy all new clothes. And dye my hair. *(Beat.)* I need to tell you something.

LINA

Everything okay?

IZZY

I got chubby.

LINA

Sheesh, Izzy – we’re pushing fifty. We all got chubby! There’s a Krispy Kreme down the block from my office. You know I’m a frequent visitor. Just don’t go on the cottonball diet.

IZZY

The cottonball diet is looking mighty tempting.

LINA

Don’t even think/

IZZY

/so much has happened since our days together.

LINA

No kidding! This could be fun.

IZZY

Confession: My children won’t do munchkin voices.

LINA

Confession: Julianna has mastered the witch laugh. She does it all the time. And she is an adult.

IZZY

I want more... everything/

LINA

We’ll talk about everything when you’re here. In person as it should be.

IZZY

Everything? As in *everything*?

LINA

Is that code for, “You still want to know how my parents survived?”

IZZY

I like endings to stories.

LINA

It’s actually a beautiful story. You’ll like it. Best told when you are six inches from the person you are speaking to. I have to shut down now. There’s an early meeting tomorrow. Cantor Fitzgerald thrives on early meetings. See you in ten days. When the chocolate chips.

IZZY

Until Niagara Falls.

(LINA exits. Small break. A change. Maybe some music.)

EPILOGUE

(IZZY is reading a newspaper. Or from the computer. September 12, 2001)

IZZY

Snippets of papers from Cantor-Fitzgerald littered the streets below. The plane hit at 8:48 a.m. just below the Cantor Fitzgerald Headquarters at World Trade Center One. All 658 employees perished.

(IZZY is writing a letter. September 15, 2001)

IZZY

September 12, 2001

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Zenes:

Dear Ari:

IZZY (cont'd)

I just heard *(crosses out)*. I want to express my sincere *(crosses out)*... Words cannot express *(crosses out)*.

(IZZY opens a box and takes out notes and letters.)

LINA'S VOICE

(IZZY hears LINA'S voice as she scans old letters and notes. Maybe LINA is above her.)

"Hello, Isobel-the-new-girl. Will you be my friend? We can sit together at lunch."

LINA'S VOICE (cont'd)

"I'm here and I intend to make my time here count. I am going to be the best daughter, friend, sister, wife, mother that I can be."

(THEY face each other.)

IZZY

I'd want to save you. Does that count?

LINA

It counts.

IZZY

I will always be yours. Until Niagara Falls ... and the chocolate chips.

END OF PLAY