

BARBARA

One assignment I got while I was finding my way in Southern California, a lost young poet from Brooklyn, was to meet with Barbara Streisand in Santa Monica. My agent at William Morris, a rude fellow named Marty Caan, either said she wanted to meet me about something, or I was to pitch something to her, I really don't remember. I do remember that there was a line of trees, a dirt road, and a nice house, very quiet. I was greeted very politely and shown into a parlor room, or an office, tastefully and luxuriously arranged, making me feel like some kind of lower class interloper, when Barbara was shown into the room to meet me. I was immediately struck by how much herself she was, there were no airs, no affectations, she seemed genuinely glad to see me, and the whole event lacked the tension that usually rides along with these Hollywood business meetings.

She was smaller than I imagined – about my size – and stunningly beautiful. Her beauty was Inner. That's the only way I can say it, but so beautiful that she practically glowed with an inner life. I was thrown by her presence. She wasn't beautiful like the Rita Hayworth type – up front sexy and alluring, and whom I'd never met, but Barbara was beautiful like an Angel might be beautiful, quiet and observant and soft-spoken. I could hardly talk. The chief attribute I would assign to her, in retrospect, and which accounted largely for her quiet Beauty, was her kindness. She was extraordinarily kind. And as I tried to pull myself together while she spoke softly to me about whatever the subject was, and coffee was served, I realized – or maybe it's only now that I realize – that her kindness was an ancient manifestation of her tradition, an expression of thousands of years of refined kindness, an aristocratic Jewishness so secure in its essence that there was

no anxiety or insecurity attached to it – it was the essence of Jewish learning and Jewish intelligence, of an attitude of tolerance and hospitality toward the Stranger that was thousands of years old.

Though I didn't get the gig, needless to say, that show-biz experience with Barbara Streisand was the purest and finest that I can remember -- a reminder of what that particularly refined Jewish kindness meant in my own tradition, as a fellow Jew, and for which I find myself grateful to this day.

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