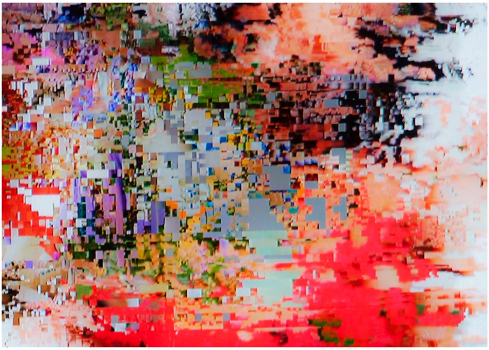
**Join the conversation.**
Subscribe for unrestricted access.
SUBSCRIBE

Lilith
INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST



"IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD," BY SHERRY KARVER, SHERRYKARVER.COM, INSTA @SHERRYKARVER

# Fiction: Joie to the World

LINDA LENHOFF

### Lilith Annual Fiction Contest Second Prize

NOVEMBER 1, 2023

**I know** no one wants to hear about another person's dreams (and often not even their hopes), so let me tell you a story instead, and since the line between fiction and nonfiction have blurred so much (and basically who even cares anymore unless there is some kind of life-changing pandemic coming or a missile aimed at your head), let's just go with this is what happened. Let's go with that it happened to me.

Ashley at work said that her friend Joey (it's really spelled Joie but even Joie refers to herself as Joey, like the dumb guy on Friends, so I don't know what to think about her, not that we've met)—so this friend Joey has had really bad shingles. I think that may be the only kind of shingles there is, but I don't know much about them. We're all in our early thirties at work and don't have much experience with shingles but recognize that apparently, it/they hurt really badly. So this Joey has shingles and has been working from home a lot, and Ashley wants to send her some Girl Scout cookies Ashley's daughter is selling. Ashley says I live really close to Joey and could I possibly drop them at her house?

Well, last year wasn't my greatest year and my mom left me out of her will, which has a lot more to do with my mom than it does me (all my friends agree so there's that), but I really, really, have been thrown by this whole thing. Part of my reaction, then, is to try to be a far better person than my mother (be the kind of person who would never leave a daughter out of a will no matter what she's done/said/rebelled against whathaveyou—I mean it's not like I ever ended up in jail and have only been drunk that one time when I was 22 at the party all my friends were at and still remember. But it was one time, and I'm convinced our twenties really don't count. Or shouldn't)

Also the whole thing feels not Jewish at all to me, not right, and each and every family

PREV NEXT

SHARE THIS

THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN

Fall 2023

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

All Her Things
FALL 2023

What Can Polyamory Teach Us About Judaism?
FALL 2023

friendship

Giving Friendship Its Due
FALL 2023

The Rainbow "-Ship"
FALL 2023

member is/was/has always been Jewish. LA Jews, my ophthalmologist calls it. Something about nearsightedness. And my mom was the most nearsighted, after all.

**What all this means** is that I'm trying to do more acts of kindness, as they're called in the bestsellers (which clearly Mom never read but enough about her). I'm trying to be nicer. I'm trying to be the one who offers to run errands, go to the post office, carry whatever's heaviest, carefully pick up the creepy bug/spider/crawly thing and escort it from the room so it's alive to crawl another day.

This is the me I want to be and I do not like spiders, but I can change. I can, and I have, and as my therapist says, that's big.

So I'd love to take the cookies to this Joey and I mean it. It's something little I can do to kind of build my portfolio of positive goodness that I can use to bolster myself for the harder times. I do good things. I can be a good person. A mitzvah, as ophthalmologist Bob would say. I do not want to be the one everyone hates even after she's dead. No siree.

Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

"Oh, you'll love Joey," Ashley says. Ashley is a really reliable graphic designer with an excellent eye for proofreading. I feel like we've become great pals in just four or maybe six months. It's one of those "Any friend of Ashley's might just as well be a friend of mine's," or whatever the exact saying is. We didn't grow
up with a lot of sayings in our hous

There's no one but Phoebe waiting
kitty kibble bag with her front paw
mean she likes petting, but only up
from each of us. She's basically nic

Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

Ashley says Joey lives like three blc
an apartment on Alfred Street whe
even in the best editorial job I can
know what that means), a house is

I carry two boxes of Thin Mints, a S
Lemon Drop, though this is more the name for candy I think. I'm not sure why one box is
gluten-free and the others aren't, v
delivery girl at this point and Ashle
sharp pains attack your body, thou

Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

Joey's place is a separate unit, sligh
home at all, but this makes me feel
points. Which I'm going to need be
woman who leaves a nasty will. Bu

The boxes of cookies emit no smell
supposed to say Thin Mints across
don't judge a cookie by its cover ki
in chamomile tea for just two quic
mush blast from the past. In a really good way.

Joey's little, cozy, almost hobbit-lik
look behind you (carefully because
city mostly unblocked by the horro
classic if not still breathtaking viev
Alfred Street; I don't care how mar
the nearest restaurant, and wouldn

Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

Ashley's friend Joey opens the doo
giant rash across her face or anythi
shingles have attacked. I didn't rea
into the room that is so nice, just, s
They're probably the LED environ

"You've saved me," she says. Joey has one of those haircuts that's just below the jawline
so it swings when she speaks, light

"You must want a cup of tea!" she

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

"That's very nice," I say. "You don't

"Please," she says lightly. She is no
kind of fuzzy that I touch, even tho
bad for it, but Joey doesn't say any
after she's put the cookies down.

"That's fuzzy," she says. I nod. "No
judgmental of the plant family," sh
she admits it. I have a plant I call F

She begins pouring hot water into a teapot she's adding two chamomile teabags to.
That's right, not two cups with tho
important. I smile. Someone's mak
teabags in tea-stained mugs. It is d

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

But then I see something. Just poki
that looks like it's been handed do
There's something brown.

I bring my hand to my mouth and i

"Zena!" Joey shrieks with an enorm
kitten, brown tabby, as anyone whc
had to cover my mouth with my ha
grand prize on a game show, like I'm the luckiest girl in the world. I know I said my
Phoebe wasn't the friendliest cat in town but don't kid yourself, I'm nutty for cats

"You have a kitten!" I shriek like ar
kitty and I are all a tangle. Plus I ca
some sort of organic sugar and the

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

"Just wait!" Joey with the perfect h
makings appear on the table and m
would mean it's going to burn your

Joey rubs her fingers together—whi
another cat.. This cat has white hai
some kind of mystical tarot symbol
could be a meme, easy.

"This is Snuggles," Molly says.

"Of course it is!" I say. Snuggles ru
of Thin Mints and what can I say, I

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

"So you work at that place with Asl
chamomile tea. I tear myself away
entirely around my leg and comes
Thin Mint dipped in chamomile. I l

"A lot of people refer to it just as T
L.A., too. For a long time it was jus
government secrets hidden (and le

"Yeah, I've been there for ten years
expression. Editing isn't a really good or bad thing. Somebody has to do it, and I get
benefits and a good salary and vaca
a gym bag, and it could be so much

"Wordsmith," she suggests.

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

“Um, editsmith,” I say. Writer alwa once had. “You?” I ask her, shortha

“I am officially a third-grade teach Joey says in a way that’s beginning all that long. I notice I’m sort of sm

“Oh my god!” I say, I think not for t

A third cat, very short-hair, black, almost square in body shape, and a look on his or her face that says, Yeah, I know. I’m so cool. Don’t fuck with me

Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

“Max,” says Joey. Max literally shru have. He walks over to her and swi

“You know chocolate is bad for cat pppfffttt, like please, that old line climbs my back as I melt another c giggling and silly and have become moments. It’s the twinkle lights, ri

“I should tell you,” Joey says, rollin more.” I think for a minute she me pack of Girl Scout cookies, and this think I’ve had more than three, and on top of it, they’re thin).

Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

But no, it’s a fourth cat. An orange the table. If cats could talk humans care say, Oh, hey. Or maybe, Get lo soy milk or leaving tracks of baby c

I give him a solid look. “Hey,” I say

“That’s Hamlet,” Joey says. “I went

“Didn’t we all,” I say. “I wanted to be able to remember it when she w called her Kitty.” I begin to whispe green eyes,” I said.

OK I am not really beginning to cry. But then I’ll tell you, chocolate affects me in super weird ways. Little Jewels. She belo

Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

Then Joey shudders for a minute a time. Even Hamlet turns his head.

“Are you okay?” I say.

“It gets your nerves,” she says. “Sh and make unexpected ‘Yeeeaah, I’ expressions.”

“There’s a guy in the mailroom tha don’t mention it, to be polite.”

“I go back to work soon. I’ll have to tone it down among the third-graders, though really, you should hear some of the elaborate weird sounds that come out of their mouths.” She rubs her arm, but otherwise she se

Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

**Joey and I talk**, and her hair swing dinner because we are heavily coo

“This cornbread is from a mix,” Jo extraordinary people who, you kno

I am wowed. I always forget to buy

that enter my home in need of swe
needling of a young cat's touch. Ph
what we have like.

We eat five bean soup and cornbrea
old episodes of *t* on the babyboome
shoulder pad or two. It gets late. W
just to see and both end up spitting
lack of gluten, they're also sugar-fr

"Ashley meant it as a nice gesture,
practically gargle with tea to get th
triangle flicks the lemon cookie aw

"To be found someday under the cl

I haven't been drinking alcohol. Or
weeknight to pass the time till '80s
there's no way to explain this. I don't think it's even a sugar high, or the kind of utter
peacefulness you get from spendin
with small animals who then curl u
and pretend Southern accents walk

I say goodnight to Joey and her cre
both laugh till we cough. I linger pu

It is weird and I am happy and sad
whom I will be extra tender with to
wear the sweats with the holes in t
like me at all.

And I know it, although I can't real
love with a person, place, and thing (that cornbread, I mean it), and with four more cats. I
sit in my car for a few minutes and
can even believe this, wondering w
happening to me, but knowing full
did worked better than I'd ever ima

*Linda Lenhoff's latest novel, Your Ac*
*Writers Project in 2025; her earlier n*
*the '67 Beetle.*

---

TAGS: CARE, CATS, COOKIES, DAUGH
WOMEN, KINDNESS, LILITH, LILITH N
MOTHERHOOD, SHINGLES, WILL

ALSO ON **LILITH**

Remembering Lori Zabar

a year ago • 1 comment
Nora Ephron called Zabar's, "The most rambunctious and …

2 years ag
A Yiddish-
expressio
rich wisdo

**Lilith Comment Policy**

Comments are reviewed by a moderator
appreciate your patience with this proces

**0 Comments**

**Login ▾**

MAYBE NEXT TIME

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

## Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN

Name

Share

# Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

# Need More Lilith?

Sign up now for a weekly batch of Jewish feminist essays, news, events--and incredible stories and poems from 40 years of Lilith.

Enter your email address

I WANT MORE! HERE'S MY EMAIL.

MAYBE NEXT TIME

Subscribe Privacy Do No