

Hey Frankie, Shalom

By

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As soon as mom walked out the door this morning, I untucked my white shirt. There was no way I was gonna keep it tucked in all day. Do they really think I'd go to a Jewish school. At least she let me wear my green army boots.

It's the last period of the day and I sit next to this girl wearing a wild multi-colored coat. Half reggae and half hippie. Underneath she wears a black blouse with white buttons, black jeans with a white spot on the knee, and black shoes. Her hair hangs down over the blouse but gets lost in the million colors of the coat. The table is brown with a fake wood design on top. Dad says that they don't use real wood in anything anymore. All the other table's have two or three kids at them. Why'd they put me at the table with only one kid? Why's she sitting alone anyway?

My chair is cushy and rotates just like dad's office chair. In my school, we have those hard seats with the little mini-desks attached. They're always full of graffiti and swear words.

Why are all the kids sitting down already? The teacher's not even here yet. He's over there paling it up with the other teachers. We never even see the

teachers at my school except during class. They don't show up until the bell rings. Then they start blabbing and don't stop blabbing until the next bell. I bet this teacher blabs too. Teachers are expert blabbers.

Here he comes. He doesn't look that old. He's got a striped skater shirt but he's probably just a skater-poser because his blue jeans aren't ripped or anything. Why's he spinning that sound tube thing around? It sounds like an airplane starting. The girl in front with the blond pony tail and braces gets this big smile on her face as if the sound tube is the coolest thing ever.

Those two girls must be sisters. Hmmm, I wonder if they get a discount on tuition.

I gotta admit, the sound tube thing is pretty cool.

The teacher makes us go over to the lounge area and we sit in a circle on the black couches. I sit in a black chair all by myself. There's no way I'm gonna sit next to somebody if they don't make me. Hey this chair is pretty cushy too. The girl with the wild multi-colored coat takes it off and throws

over the couch. She sits between two other girls all dressed in black. I guess black is some sort of Jewish thing.

The teacher says something about propositions and some guy named Euclid. He holds up this little blue paperback and all the kids have their own copy and they're all marked up with highlighters. Green and blue and yellow and orange. Nobody uses highlighters in my school.

Then he says something about sexy triangles. The girls in black giggle and roll their eyes. Sexy triangles? He asks everybody to take out their essays. My brother said that if I go to his high school, I won't have to write an essay until Junior year.

"I'd like to ask" the teacher says "was math discovered or invented?" At first just the boy in the blue t-shirt and the khaki pants with the long curly hair hanging down raises his hand. The principal told me that long curly hair is definitely a Jewish thing. Something about the corners of a farm. The principal's not Jewish and she said that it's okay that I'm not. This morning mom called her Mrs. King but then Mrs King said that I could call her Trish. "Okay, Trish" I said. "How long do I have to stay here?" She

kind of laughed and said “Frankie, we’d just love it if you spent the morning with us. Is that cool?” Adults that say cool definitely aren’t cool.

The boy with the long curly hair reads from his essay and everybody listens. One girl writes a note on the back of her hand. A lot of the kids still have their own hands up, only half way though. They’re kind of quiet, like they don’t want to interrupt. He’s got one of those little Jewish hats. It fell off when he was making his big point. He kissed it when he picked it up. But then he forgot what he was saying and then he just called on one of the sisters.

The teacher takes notes while the sister talks. At first, I couldn’t really see her because the teacher was in the way. But then he leaned back and kind of smiled at me but not real big to make me feel like a dork or anything. Are they twins?

The girl didn’t call on her sister even though they’re sitting right next to each other. She called on the girl with the note on the back of her hand. That girl laughs a lot and talks a lot and the other kids raise their hands high. But she doesn’t call on anyone. She’s got a lot to say and sometimes makes

jokes when she talks and they all laugh. But she laughs more than any of them. The note on the back of her hand says 'Science quiz, Monday.' She points her figure in the air and says, "Therefore, philosophically speaking, I say geometry was invented by Euclid."

Is this the math class or the humanities class?

The big kid with the baseball cap says something that takes a long time because he makes an analogy between the election and geometry. Trish said they use a lot of analogies here and I'd probably like it for that reason. Why are they spending so much time on this? Math was obviously invented.

One of the girls in black has her essay upside down on her lap. She takes notes even though the teacher didn't make them. 'PJA High School' their grey sweatshirts say but it must not be a uniform because the sisters aren't wearing them. One's got a red jacket and the other a green. I bet they share. The guy in the gold shirt has his sweatshirt around his waist.

Why do they have so many teachers with only eleven kids? I guess Jews need more teachers.

There's a stain on that boy's sweatshirt. He wipes his glasses on it but the stain looks like it's from ketchup or something. His pencil is extra large. Must of have had it super-sized at McDonalds. But probably not because he said he's a vegetarian. That's why he didn't come out to lunch with us.

We went to Garbanzos and Baskin Robbins. It was alright but it was kind of weird going out with a bunch kids I don't even know. They were all upbeat and bragging about the school. The teachers probably make them say all that good stuff. I had falafel and got some taboulli on the edge of my shirt and had to tuck it back into my pants. I don't think the other kids noticed because none of them teased me about it. Some of the taboulli spilled on my green army boots but I just kicked it off onto the floor.

The kid with the stained sweatshirt hasn't said anything yet but Trish said that the teachers don't force anybody to talk if they don't want to. She said the teachers find a way to teach everybody.

Hey, they've got a kitchen down here. That's cool. Mom wants to get a stainless steel refrigerator too but dad said that it's kind of expensive.

I guess some parts of math must have been discovered because nobody could invent it that stuff out of thin air.



The skater-poser teacher gets up and walks over by the stainless steel refrigerator. He talks to that short girl teacher that we had for Jewish class this morning. She kept making the kids back up whatever they said with real quotes from the Ball Four Declaration. I don't know why they called it the Ball Four declaration. I guess the British and the Jews played a lot of baseball together. The kids complained a little about using real quotes but I thought it was good idea because everybody in my school just says whatever they want. I hate that. Why bother reading a book if you're not even gonna think about it?

The kid in the gold shirt talks about math controlling the universe and the girls in black roll their eyes. Then one of them says, "I think that's true."

My seventh grade teacher said that planets move in ellipses so I guess there is some math in nature. Maybe math was discovered.

I'm the only one that notices that the teacher isn't in the room anymore because they keep calling on each other like everything's normal. Then the

girl with the note on the back of her hand gets them all riled up again. If it wasn't for her this whole thing might be boring.

My arms kind of hurt from the rock-climbing class. It's not like a pain like you go to the doctor for but more like they're all bloated up. Like sausages. But I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say sausages in a Jewish school so I just say that they're bloated.

I climbed with that girl with the funny accent. She sounds kind of normal most of the time but then says some stuff kind of weird. Like she said "do you want to climb a-gain instead of climb again." She was super nice though. They all told me I did a good job climbing even though I could only make it half way up and they could make it all the way to the top. The girl with the note on her hand said "Frankie, you should come here next year, we're gonna go on a rock-climbing trip."

The teacher comes in and sits back down. He raises his hand and has to wait forever for one of the kids to call on him. They're so into talking about geometry being invented or discovered that the teacher must feel like a dork sitting there in his skater-poser shirt with his hand raised.

The girl with the funny accent finally calls on the teacher. “Okay,” he says “where are we on the question?” The big guy with the baseball cap kind of summarizes what everybody said and then says, “So, I guess, we really haven’t come to a conclusion yet.” He says yet like they plan to stay there all day. That’s okay with me because in my school, everybody’s always in a rush. If you don’t keep up they make you feel stupid and I’m not stupid I just like to think more about every single topic.

Trish comes in and does one of those out loud whispers. “Frankie” She calls me over like I’m in trouble but I don’t think I am because she smiles and her top teeth show. And, even though I try to walk out without making a scene, the girl with the note on her hand says “Bye Frankie,” and then the girl with the multi-colored coat says “Come back again” and then the other girls in black, and the guy with the gold shirt, and the girl with the funny accent, and the twins, all say “See ya” and “Take Care” and “Thanks for coming” and the boy with the long curly hair and the big kid with the baseball cap both say “Come back anytime.” Then, the boy who hasn’t said anything at all says, “Hey Frankie, shalom.”

The papers in Trish's office are all stacked in those manilla folders and its kind of a mess but she seems to find everything okay. My chair's squishy and I have to push myself up so I'm not all slumped over like a dork. My green army boots are too hot and maybe I should have worn shoes like mom said. Trish sits right in front of me and smiles even when she talks. Frankie," she says. "Your mom called while you were at lunch. She's gonna pick you up in half an hour when school's over." I sit up tall and dig my watch out of my front pocket. Three o'clock. It's over already? Boy that went fast.

Trish asks me how I liked my visit and tells me all about the application process. I don't really listen to that part because my parents do all the papers and everything. I just do my part which is the homework and the studying hard and not writing graffiti and thinking things all the way through.

The door is closed but not locked and the math teacher skater-poser guy comes in. It's kind of crowded in here. But they pretend it's not because they're both just chattin it up like we've got loads of room. Like we're in Pioneer Square or something.

Then, Trish tells Mark, “Frankie had a great day. He really liked the discussion in Robin’s class.” I fold my hands like a dork because they’re talking about me and what else am I supposed to do. “And he’s read some Gilgamesh before so he understood the personal identity lesson in Bill’s class. Frankie said he really likes to explore identity and integrity.”

Then she says, “Frankie, tell Mark what you said about the rock-climbing class.”

I hold my sausage arms out and say, “I thought it was awesome but my arms feel like saus..., I mean, my arms feel kind of bloated.”

Trish laughs and rolls the wheel of her chair over one of the manilla folders.

“Frankie,” she says. “On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your visit?”

“If it weren’t for my arms,” I say, “I’d give it a ten. But I guess, right now, I’d give it just a nine.”

She laughs again and the wheel puts a big dent in the manilla folder.

Then Mark asks, “Frankie, Do you know what the best thing about PJA is?”

“Hmmm,” I rub my arms. “Let me think a second.” Rub them again. “It must be the Jewish studies.”

Then Mark, the skater-poser, math teacher guy says “Well, that’s certainly important. But the best thing is.” He puts both his hands out for a two-handed shake. “The best thing is that if you come here you’ll have a whole new group of people that love you.”