

Better Late Than Never
by Abe Mittleman

In 1972 I while I was still what I would consider myself a newbie in the taxi business I had another day job. Driving the taxi was only a hobby that I did on the weekends to earn a little extra cash. I was living in the Midwood section of Brooklyn and each weekday morning I would get up early and take the subway from the Avenue H station on E16th and Ave H to my job in Manhattan. Having been part of The Viet Nam era and recently discharged from the US Army, to which I was unwillingly drafted, my attitude toward government was not too positive at that time.

So, one weekday morning I was sitting at the platform of the open air train station on Avenue H waiting for the "D" train when a young woman approached me and introduced her self. She had been making the rounds to all that were waiting at this location. She said she was Elizabeth Holtzman and that she was running for Congress. My reply to her was something in the order of "I could care less" or words implying that. After that, I went on to my job while Elizabeth Holtzman was well on her way to be elected to Congress and serve there for the next eight years.

I never forgot that day and often when I heard of her work, that I was very much in favor of, and the influence that she had in her position I would remember our brief encounter and think to myself that I was a jerk and very foolish to have acted the way I did. I would tell myself that I should never again be the way I was. Subconsciously, I wanted to reach out to her and apologize. But, in reality I figured that would never happen. So, I just took it as a good lesson learned.

So, now we will fast forward to the year 2001, twenty nine years later. I was working the night shift one Thursday night. It was around 11PM, I was in Manhattan and I was getting tired. Even though it had not been a very profitable night for me I was thinking of calling it quits.

Suddenly then, I got hailed for a fare to LaGuardia. This was good luck since I needed to drop the taxi off in Flushing. But, I still wanted to make a little more money. So, I told myself that if the airport was slow, I'd call it a night and if it was busy I'd take one more fare. It was busy. After dropping off my passenger, someone jumped in and I went back to Manhattan, W 86th street. While unloading a suitcase from the trunk after arriving on W 86th street, a woman approached me and asked me "Are You Free?". To which I replied " No. I'm a slave. But I'm available". We both laughed. She then asked if could take her to Brooklyn. I told

“Get in The Taxi, I grew up in Brooklyn”. We instantly started to converse. My statement had led to a pleasant conversation that would last the entire ride.

I drove onto the West Side Highway on my way to go to Canal street so we could go over the Manhattan bridge on our way to Boerum Hill. As I was driving and conversing with this woman I had a good look at her in my rear view mirror. I thought, am I just imagining this or do I have Elizabeth Holtzman in my taxi engaged in conversation with me. I wasn't sure and I was shy to ask.

We traveled further. I thought maybe she would tell me. I asked her what she did for a living. But, her reply was “I'm a lawyer. No, that didn't do the trick. As we passed the Intrepid Battleship Museum she made mention of seeing tanks on the deck. This was visible from the roadway. I told her that I drove a tank while in the Army. That's when she told me that she visited North Viet Nam. That made me even more suspicious of who she was. I remembered Elizabeth Holtzman went there while in Congress. So, I asked her why. She replied she had business to do there. I didn't pry.

The ride continued and so did the conversation. I can't remember all we talked about. But, I knew I couldn't let this ride end without finding out if she was who I thought she was. So, after crossing the Manhattan bridge I knew I had to ask her. I said “Listen, are you Elizabeth Holtzman?” she replied “Yes” . So, I said to her “I owe you an apology” . She asked "Why?" So, I told her of the time we met while she was running for Congress and how rude I was and how when I heard of exploits I would think of how wrong I was to have acted in that manner. I think she was surprised to hear this But, her reaction wasn't to memorable because I don't remember.

Soon after, the ride ended, she paid, the tip was average and we said good night to each other. But, I felt really good. What a coincidence! After all these years I got to apologize. Who would have thought this could happen?