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TOP STORIES

New Einstein Play Reveals His Simple Complexities

by: Julia Gorin | Thursday Aug 1 2013



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"Who was the real Einstein?" the creators of the original new Off-Broadway play "Einstein" ask rhetorically. "The man who cruelly mistreated his first wife, or the one who worked day and night to bring over refugees from Hitler's Germany?"



Sheilagh Weymouth, a real-life chiropractor, plays Einstein's second wife, and his Mom, in new play.

For those of us who have dealt with complicated men, the answer is easily "Both." Between all the geniuses who can't seem to keep it in their pants, and the do-gooders who just can't do good by those who love them, the seeming contradiction is more a cliché.

The best minds quite often come with personalities that are intolerable on an intimate level, and so I felt for this first wife of Einstein, whom I hadn't even known about, as I hadn't about any subsequent wives. Imagine my surprise when I learned that Einstein's second (and final) wife was being played by my holistic chiropractor.

Generally, just saying the name Sheilagh Weymouth would often alleviate my aching back, but now my blood pressure was up as I wondered whether my (still gorgeous) 60-year-old chiropractor had actually done what I'd been promising myself to do for over a decade: gone back to acting.

Sure enough, there was her increasingly crowded IMDB page. What the hell was my chiropractor doing with an IMDB page?! Add to this that in these early stages of her return to the stage, the Irish lass was playing Jewish.

I emailed her immediately to straighten all this out. I mean, two years ago she was patenting gum rejuvenator, and now she's in the movies? She emailed back that she was playing Einstein's mother and the second Mrs. Einstein. I wrote back, "Playing two Mrs. Einsteins? I always knew you secretly wanted to be Jewish!"

I thought I was kidding, so imagine my additional surprise when she replied, "Wanting to be Jewish was never a secret. At age 10, I

Do some religious men view secular women as playthings?



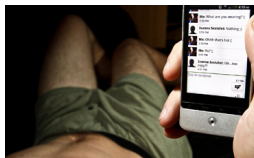
by Miss Aleph

Living in Israel has been quite the education in becoming a more outspoken, true-to-myself person.

It's also, sadly, shown me how badly Jews can treat one another.

Coming from America, ... [more](#)

Table for One: Watch out for the Weiners



by Heather Robinson

The ongoing controversy about **Anthony Weiner's** lewd sexting raises political questions about whether the man is fit to govern. But as a single woman living in New York, there's something ... [more](#)

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prayed to Jesus to make me Jewish."

Well, I simply had to interview her about the play.

Blueprint: What's different about the perspective or insight that this play offers about Einstein?

SW: This covers the last 50 years of his life, starting with him as a man already. What's most important is Einstein the man--his science, but also about his family and his beliefs as a human being and his personal affairs. His humanity and humanness, not just that $e=mc^2$.

So he was a womanizer?

According to the play, and you must understand the play does not marry itself to fact 100%--artistic license is taken but based on fact--he purportedly was a serial womanizer with very little ability to have a relationship. There is some discussion that he had a greater commitment to humanity than he did to individual humans. He was who he was and he was very clear about his commitments, and he made no apologies. Which is part of the heartbreak of the man. His science was of course big and rather singular, and from his science sprang many different major discoveries and understandings of the physical world.

Was there anything in his relationship with his mother that influenced his future relationships with women?

That's not really discussed in the play. While his mother is referred to and there's a very short scene with her, I as an actress am trying to bring some parallels between his mother and his relationship with his second wife.

As he is depicted in the play, he's rather insensitive. There is a scene with his first wife where there is a shocking cruelty. Not physical, but a setting of boundaries: 'This is how it's going to work. I'm the man, I'm the husband, you will bring me my meals, you will otherwise not talk to me.'

In his relationship with Elsa, his second wife, there was never any cruelty, but there was almost a lack of understanding by him as to why Elsa might be upset about the affairs. You don't understand from Albert's reaction whether he is just shutting down, whether he has nothing to say, or if he feels it's none of her business--or if he doesn't understand why it's a big upset. And the play quickly moves into a different scene. I think it was constructed that way on purpose.

My relationship as his second wife is more of a loving business relationship. She is his caretaker in every aspect of the word and almost like a business manager. She's not highlighted in the play, but I hope I can bring out that she was extremely important in his life, or he probably would have stayed in a scientific cave most of his life. He was not particularly at ease in social situations and almost always had [someone act as a filter] between him and the public.

Albert is quoted as saying that "Elsa is my woman comrade." There was not a fiery passion between the two of them, but an enormous pride and admiration. Elsa was incredibly proud of her role in Einstein's life--his contribution to science, his being an admirer of Gandhi, a proponent of the League of Nations, an anti-war activist. Her life was supporting him from the moment she met him at 36 ("met" in a romantic sense). Whereas his first wife, Mileva, was needy and volatile, Elsa is depicted as very steady and honorable.

Does playing the role of mother and wife give you any insights into the reputed romantic feelings that Jewish mothers have for their sons?

(Laughs.) I will say that there was a rehearsal rather early on of a scene between Elsa and Albert, and Albert (Richard Kent Green) accidentally referred to Elsa as "Mama." I stopped the scene right there, saying, "Calling Oedipus, Anyone?"

Elsa was actually Albert's first cousin--their mothers were sisters and their fathers were first cousins--not uncommon in those days. Einstein didn't have any children with Elsa (he had three with Mileva). She was 43 when they married and three or four years older

than he--as was Mileva--which was kind of a big deal in those days. Maybe there's something motherly in that.

How prominently does Einstein's Jewishness figure into the story, or is it just a background framework?

There's quite a lot of talk about Jewishness because of course he renounced his German citizenship to come to the U.S. There's a scene where Hitler is speaking about what his plans are with the

Jews and it's quite a chilling scene. But his Jewishness is talked about, and his relationship with god is talked about, which can be a dichotomy for a scientist. He was extremely secular but still had a relationship with god.

Tell us about your Jew-envy in early life.

When I was about 10 years old, I was out playing and somehow became friendly with a little girl named Rachel. She said after a while, "Let's get something to eat." I asked, "Where would you get something to eat?" She said, "Come on in. My mom always has something to eat." In my house you didn't invite someone in unless you first asked permission.

She pulled me into the house. I'll never forget the scene. There was an unshaven man sitting at the table in a white T-shirt that had stains on it. You would never see this in my house, which was on the suffocating side. Rachel said, "Mom, this is Sheila," and the mother, who was cooking, grabbed my behind and said, "You are too skinny! Sit down and eat."

I had been told my whole life that I was too big. I sat down, and suddenly this music came from the rec room in the basement. It was Lesley Gore's "It's My Party," and Rachel starts howling: "Howie is not allowed to play my records!"

"Howie, stop playing that!" her mother yelled. There was all this screaming crossways. No one ever raised their voice in my house. I was thrilled; I'd taken the first deep breath of my life. What stopped the fighting was the man, who was the father and never spoke, banged his fist on the table and everyone shut up and the music stopped. Howie came upstairs and apologized to his sister. After the food, we went downstairs and sang to Lesley Gore.

When I got home, I told my mother, "I met the most wonderful people of my whole life." She said, "What are you talking about?" I told her about the whole scene and said, "They're just very different." And she said, "Do you know why they're different?"

"Why?"

"Because they're Jewish."

That night I got down on my knees as I always did, and I said to Jesus: "You're the only Jewish I know. Would you please make me Jewish?" I was going right to the source; this was the big Jew as far as I knew, and who else but a Jew could make me Jewish? I subsequently went to a high school that had a lot of Jewish girls and it reignited my adoration of Jewish people. Screaming and hollering, hugging and kissing.

Freedom of expression and acceptance of who everyone was in the family--that was not evident in my family and extended family. While we were raised Roman Catholic, we were more Wasps than Roman Catholics and we were all Irish, and there's a certain reservedness about the Irish until you get to the drinking. I just felt like I was alive and normal when I was with Jews.

I've got the pug Irish face and yet I get cast as Jew. It was only when I started going to rehearsals that I understood the Jewishness of the play. When Albert says he'd rather be a scientist than go into business with his father, my reaction was "Oy!" and so there was a re-write to put that in. But personally, I really understand when Albert says 'I cannot go into business with you. I would rather be a scientist and star.' I cut back to part-time as a doctor because my heart is with my acting. And everyone knows the chances of making a good living

as an actress, as compared to a doctor.

What prompted your mid-life career switch, or switchback?

About five years ago I spent a week in the Catskills with a shaman. In fact, a self-described Jew from Chicago, who found himself at one point in his life in Mexico learning how to be indoctrinated as a shaman in the Huichol tradition. I had a shamanic healing every day, and after each healing, I would ask, "So what happened?" But he would not talk to me. A week later I became overwhelmed with vertigo, which I never had before. I could not move my head without retching. I knew after a few hours that this was not necessarily a physical situation, that this was a spiritual opportunity for me to be still and get something very important.

After I was in bed without a sip of water or bite of food for two days, I started to cry. And didn't stop. When I finally came up for a breath I realized I was mourning the loss of my acting. I had not acted for 19 years. When I decided to become a doctor I felt like I was putting my playthings away and I was going to do something very adult now. What life had to show me was that it was a good thing I did, and I still do it. But my real work is acting--that's when I feel the best of myself. That's when I feel like I'm home--when I'm on stage or on a film set. But it was a secret that I kept from myself for 20 years. I never thought I would go back to it.

After two years of deep introspection, I realized I had to come back to acting. And that I had a responsibility to my patients and myself financially to not close the door to my doctoring. When I made that decision to come back to acting, doors opened to me that had never been opened to me before. Within weeks, I was signed to a good agent. Within months I was cast with very reputable people in a play. I've been very fortunate: in not quite three years, I have done 14 films and this is my tenth theatrical project... Here I was, a doctor who used to be an actor--the acting not even on my radar anymore--suddenly taking eight hours a week of a second-year Meisner course while doctoring full-time. I'm now part-time, but the work I do since my return to acting is better and richer--there's more of me present, as I'm a more realized, happier person.

"Einstein," a play by Jay Prasad, opens on August 11th at 3pm, at Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. (between 9th and 10th Aves). Previews begin August 2nd at 8pm. Press performances are August 5 and 8-11.

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