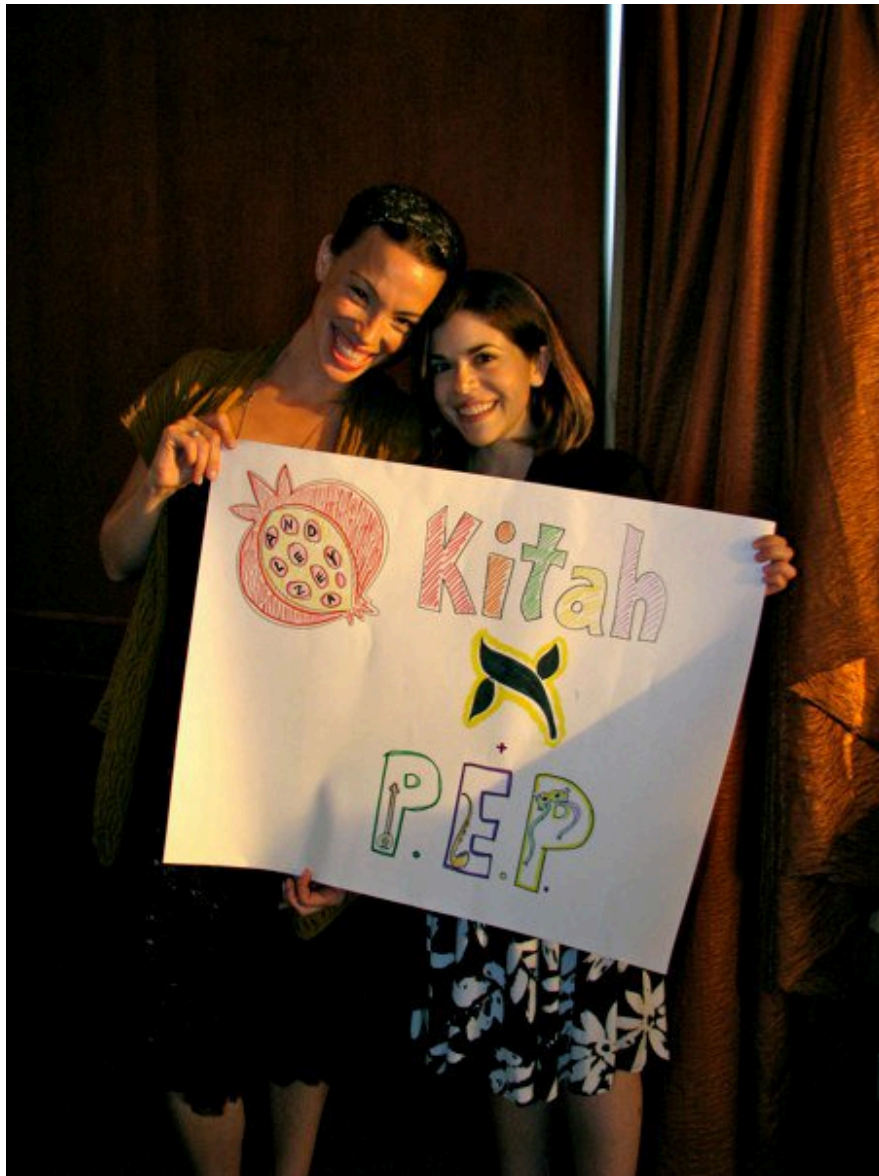


Orange Peel + Poppy Seed Cookies: The Love Continues

I invite you to know Ali Brand Stern, today's guest blogger for our Love Stories series, which, if you've been following the series, you are realizing has moved into September. Yep, forgot to account for the obligatory Rosh Hashanah posts so our Love Stories were interrupted. However, we are back and still in love.

I met Ali, whose love story is written below, and her husband at the same place I met the previous guest blogger, Stef. I met them all at the glory that is The Pardes Institute of Judaic Studies. I knew I wanted to be friends with Ali during the obligatory opening introductory 'get to know you' circle that opens every first year of school at Pardes. There were roughly 60 – 70 people in the room and everyone's not-so-secretly trying to prove just how smart they are when they introduce themselves. And then it's Ali's turn. Ali stands up in the Beit Midrash, introduces herself and proceeds to tell everyone she just got married and, rather than try to prove her brain power, which is pretty powerful, she continues, "So, sorry ladies and gents, but I'm taken", and then proceeded to sit right back down as if she didn't just tell a room full of rabbis, Torah scholars and the like that she's off the market. Yes. Please. Ali is one of the funniest and most genuine people in the world. When I was trying to wrestle with leaving my single life behind and marrying my husband, it was Ali whose wisdom and open-mind I sought out. She is someone whom I believe truly lives her life to the fullest and I admire her so much. Ladies and gents, here's Ali. xoxo, Whit



Ali and I representing our class at our friends' wedding.

Thirteen years. That's how long my husband and I have been partners. When I tell people our dating history, I follow it up by saying that I met my husband, Noam, when I was a fetus. That's not actually true, but it sometimes feels like it. I don't know many other thirtysomethings who have been with their better half for the better half of their life.

Talking about the beginning of our "love story" is like talking about the day I realized I had a left arm. I can't recall when, but I'm sure there was a day when I said to myself, "I have another arm? This is awesome! This will help me accomplish so many more things in my life!" That's sort of

how I feel about my husband. I can't really remember a time when he wasn't there.

I met Noam three weeks before my 17th birthday while we were attending a summer program at Brandeis University called Genesis, which was a glorified nerd camp for Jews. Are there summer camps for Jews that aren't also nerd camps? No, probably not.

Noam was the first Orthodox Jew I ever really met. He was sweet (still is), short (still is) and wore an over-sized, severely faded Pearl Jam t-shirt (which I later made him burn for fashion reasons. I have nothing against Pearl or her delicious jams.) Noam sat down across from me during the first Shabbat dinner at Genesis. My actual thought when I saw him was, "That one. I want that one." Although full disclosure, I thought the same thing when they brought out cake for dessert.

Having never attended Jew camp before, I didn't know any of the songs that everyone else started to sing at the end of the Shabbat meal. Actually, I could barely read Hebrew. I felt like an idiot. And there is nothing more painful than being a 16-year-old girl sitting across from a super cute little *yid* and feeling like an idiot. But because Noam is who he is, he quickly caught on that I was just silently mouthing the word "watermelon" over and over again, trying to look like I belonged. Noam got everyone to sing the only song I knew (which could very well have been *Dayenu*, complete with hand gestures. I don't remember.) Noam stuck by me the rest of the night. And that was it. That was the night I met my left arm.



Ali and Noam in Jerusalem, 2013

We fell for each other quickly, in a totally PG-summer camp sort of way. During one of our many night walks through the deserted college campus, Noam asked me if I was a fruit, what kind of fruit I would be. I told him I would probably be an orange because I have a layer that you need to get past in order to really know me (Leave me alone. I just finished reading Ralph Waldo Emerson that summer and had even underlined a few passages in a vintage fountain pen, so clearly, I was really, really deep.)

A few days later, on my 17th birthday, Noam gave me a gift. It was an orange, partially peeled. He told me that he hoped he had gotten past part of my “layer”, and was looking forward to getting to know more about me.

At the end of the summer, I went back to Boulder, CO and Noam went back home to Maryland. We said our goodbyes and left our relationship as “two people who cared a lot about each other, but lived super far away.” We didn’t want to label ourselves and what we had. Dan Savage would have been proud. I never thought I would hear from Noam again. I cried a lot. Had there been Facebook when I was 17, I’d like to believe that I

wouldn't have posted thousands of very meaningful and totally poignant song lyrics from all of the Lilith Fair albums. But I would have. Because I was that awesome.

Fast forward 8 years. Fast forward through hundreds of long distance phone calls and emails. Fast forward through my parents flying Noam out to be my high school prom date. Fast forward through that time when I was a freshman in college in Seattle and Noam was studying in Israel during the height of the Second Intifada, and he called to tell me that the café across the street just blew up, and it was terrible, but he was okay and he loved me. Fast forward through me not being able to tolerate the long distance anymore and finally transferring colleges to be with Noam at Brandeis.

Fast forward 8 years to the afternoon at Walden Pond when Noam got down on one knee and took out an orange, almost entirely peeled. Fast forward to when he told me that he wanted us to spend the rest of our lives getting to know each other better.



Newly engaged; peeled orange and all.

Two weeks after our wedding, we ran away together to Israel, where I met Whitney. Our year-long-honeymoon-adventure in Jerusalem turned into five years living in Israel. Living abroad was the greatest gift to our marriage. We dodged rockets and killed cockroaches. We walked towards each other religiously and spiritually and built ourselves a happy little home somewhere in the middle. We made each other laugh, and we drove each other completely insane in ways that only your partner can. We helped each other up when we fell down. In 2011 when I lost my dad to cancer, Noam stayed at my father's bedside reciting Psalms, serving as my father's spiritual guardian. Noam

is so much more than my left hand; he is my spare soul.

Noam and I celebrated our 5th wedding anniversary this July. On our wedding day, we stood in front of our family and friends and pledged to spend the rest of our lives helping each other peel back our layers. I think we're off to a good start.



Ali's Orange Peel and Poppy Seed Cookies.

Ali's Orange Peel and Poppy Seed Cookies:

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp orange zest
- 1 egg (room temperature)
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup butter/margarine
- 1 tbsp poppy seeds
- 1 1/4 cup flour
- 1/2 tsp baking soda

Directions

Blend butter and sugar. Add egg and orange zest. In a separate bowl, combine dry ingredients (except seeds). Slowly add dry ingredients to the butter/sugar/egg/zest mixture. Add poppy seeds. Bake at 360F for 10-12 minutes, or until golden brown.