

Jerry's Brood

An idea for a new sitcom

By Phillip W. Weiss

Alternate title: Why Did I Ever Get Married?

Alternate title: Jerry's Brood or Why Did I Ever Get Married?

Alternative Title: Say Hello to the Birnbaums

The main characters are a family of five:

Jerome "Jerry" Birnbaum – male, age 66 – the father

Ethel "Ettie" Farbstein – female, age 34 – the mother

Richard "Dickie" Birnbaum – boy, age 9 – the son, aka Champ

Michelle "Mickie" Birnbaum – girl, age 6 – the older daughter, aka Sweet Cakes

Victoria "Vickie" Birnbaum – girl, age 4 – the younger daughter, aka Dumpling

The sitcom is set in the year 1964. The Birnbaum's live in a large upscale three bedroom apartment on the Eastside of Manhattan. Jerry and Ettie have been married for ten years. This Jerry's second marriage (his first wife died in 1953). Jerry and Ettie are secular Jews. That is, they are Jewish but are not observant. Nevertheless, in conformance with social convention, they attend synagogue on major holidays. Jerry knows Yiddish but never speaks it at home.

Character breakdowns:

JERRY: Jerry owns a garment factory in Manhattan. He employs thirty-seven workers. Jerry is a workaholic. He devotes little time to his children and his sole preoccupation is with his business. Jerry is gruff but loveable. Although ruthless at work, at home he is a pushover, a trait that his children fully exploit. Jerry has little formal education; he is primarily self-taught. Jerry was born in 1898 "somewhere in central Europe." He came to the United States when he was one and half years of age and grew up in lower Manhattan. Jerry completed the 7th grade. He was never a sports fan but admires Honus Wagner and Lou Gehrig because they were Jewish (neither in fact were Jewish.) Jerry refuses to believe that they were not Jewish. Jerry served in the Army during World War One;

during the war he was stationed at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn where he was assigned to the commissary. Jerry is very proud of his military service. Although Jerry makes an excellent living and is able to afford an upscale apartment, he is frugal with his money, frowns on ostentatious displays of wealth and constantly complains about how money is “so tight.” In short, Jerry is a penny pincher. Jerry knows Yiddish but never speaks it at home. Jerry is the sole breadwinner; however, too tired to manage the household finances, and trusting completely in Ettie, he gives all his earnings to Ettie who has placed Jerry on an allowance. When excited or angry, Jerry will often exclaim: “Go blow your nose!” or “Tell it to the mayor!” Other “Jerryisms”:

Go take a hike!

Stick it in your sock!

Go pet a bear!

Go twiddle your fork!

Don't forget your brain!

I'm not the pope!

Four strikes and you're out!

That's better than a two-point touchdown!

I'd rather be in Yakima!

Sit on a bun!

You're dumber than my thumb!

Don't make me sing!

Go paint your car!

You're jumpier than a mouse!

Are you a mouse or a moose?

Jerry owns a 1953 DeSoto Powermaster. He wants to buy a new car but is emotionally attached to his DeSoto which he considers to be a family heirloom but everyone else considers a hunk of junk on wheels.

ETTIE: Ettie was employed as a receptionist and model at Jerry's business, which is where they met. While single, Ettie was slim, attractive and sexy, qualities that Jerry noticed and liked. She is also an excellent cook. When frustrated or angry, she eats. Since being married Ettie has gained 75 pounds and is becoming rotund. However, Ettie still considers herself graceful and beautiful. She complains that the children behave like "hooligans" and demands that Jerry, as the father, do something to bring the children under control. Ettie constantly scolds the children, but is ignored and often laughed at. Ettie was born and raised in Newark, NJ. She graduated from high school and then attended the Hoboken Academy for Secretarial and Administrative Sciences for six months, earning a certificate which, for Ettie, is equivalent to a college degree. Whenever the subject of college comes up, Ettie is quick to point out that she went to college too. At home, Ettie constantly wears a worn house dress and an apron. Although Jewish, Ettie is neither observant nor is she particularly conscious of her ethnicity. She does not know Hebrew; the only Yiddish words she knows are "Oy vey iz mir" which she exclaims whenever she is angry or frustrated, "kvetch" or other grammatical variations of the word when she is annoyed, and "mazel tov" when she is happy. Ettie enjoys playing cards with her girlfriends Bertha Zimmer and Louise Rothblatt. Her favorite card games are casino and pinochle. She plays cards with her friends once a week but never in her apartment because she does not want the children seeing their mother "gambling." Ettie manages the day-to-day household finances but leaves the "big-ticket" decisions up to Jerry.

DICKIE: He is nine years old and the oldest of the three children. He attends public school and is in the 4th grade. Although very smart, he finds school boring and is a low-achiever. His primary interest is sports. He is an avid sports fan. His favorite teams are the New York Yankees and the New York Football Giants. He idolizes Mickey Mantle and Y. A. Tittle. He knows the starting line-ups of both teams by heart. Dickie is a good-natured boy with lots of friends, He routinely disobeys his parents and is constantly getting into minor trouble. Jerry's nickname for Dickie is Champ.

MICKIE: She is the second oldest child and the older daughter. She is in first grade and is already a prima donna. She is already flirtatious with boys. She enjoys playing with dolls and fantasizing that she is an actress and starlet. She is cute-looking and craves attention. Jerry nickname for Mickie is Sweet-cakes.

VICKIE: She is the youngest child and the younger sister. Vickie attends pre-school in the morning. Unlike her brother and sister, she is much more reserved and tends to stay more to herself. She is the target of pranks both at pre-school and at home. When upset, Vickie screams. Jerry's nickname for Vickie is Dumpling.

Other Characters:

TONY: Tony is a two-year old cocker spaniel. The question of who is to walk Tony is a constant source of friction in the family. Everyone expects Jerry to walk the dog. Jerry always claims he is too tired and does his best to finagle his way out of that task. Invariably, despite all his protesting, Jerry always winds up walking Tony.

ARNOLD “ARNIE” GREENBAUM: He is a 68 year old single man, and Jerry’s next-door neighbor, friend and confidante. Arnie has never been married. He was born in New York City, served overseas with the army during World War One and is a retired haberdasher. Arnie completed one year of college. Whenever Jerry is dealing with a crisis, he invariably talks with Arnie. Arnie is whimsical, thoughtful and supportive of Jerry. However, whenever Jerry starts bragging about his military service, Arnie reminds Jerry that the fight at the post-exchange he had with Corporal Irving Schwartzbaum, who later became Jerry’s chief competitor in the garment district, was not combat, and that Schwartzbaum was not a German spy.

MABEL BIRNBAUM: Mabel is Jerry’s older sister. Mabel is 69 years old, a spinster with whom Jerry was living prior to his marriage. Mabel blames Ettie for her having to leave the household (even though Jerry told her she could stay) and considers Ettie a shameless gold digger, even after ten years of marriage and three children.

MURIEL FARBSTEIN: Ettie’s mother. Muriel, who is six years younger than Jerry still believes that Jerry is a lecherous pervert who “ruined” her virtuous daughter (even though prior to meeting Jerry, Ettie had a series of boyfriends including one, Frankie Siciliani, who took her to the Catskill Mountains for a “relaxation” weekend). Muriel adores Guy Lombardo, Laurence Welk and Arthur Godfrey. She lives in Brooklyn and is terrified of the subway.

FRANKIE SICILIANI: A longshoreman, army veteran and an ex-boyfriend of Ettie’s. Frankie calls Ettie to find out if she is “available.”

MILTON BIRNBAUM and PAULA ABRAMOWITZ: Jerry’s grown children from his first marriage. Milton is an accountant; Paula is a public school teacher. Both are snobs; they refuse to visit Jerry in order to avoid having to deal with Ettie who they consider to be a tasteless low-class frump and boor. Instead, they maintain communication with Jerry via phone. Ettie refers to Milton and Paula as “the brats” or “the other children.”

BERTHA ZIMMER and LOUISE ROTHBLATT: Ettie’s friends from the old neighborhood. Like Ettie, they too are married and have children. Ettie meets them once a week to play cards. Bertha is not Jewish but is married to Jewish man, Al, who is a postal letter carrier. Louise is married to Merle who owns a kosher deli in Brooklyn.