

## Repeat the Enchanting

Jennifer Lang October 15, 2020

*The cube of 5 is 125, expressed as a sum of two squares in two different ways:  $125 = 10^2 + 5^2 = 11^2 + 2^2$ .*

Our family of 5 makes an odd-numbered cube: father, mother, son, daughter, daughter; or man, woman, boy, girl, girl; or Philippe, Jennifer, Benjamin, Daniella, Simone.

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*125 is called a Friedman number in base 10 since  $125 = 51 + 2$ ; integers named after Erich Friedman, a Florida-based mathematics professor.*

My maiden name is Friedman. Only place I use it is on my Facebook personal page—first, maiden, married name—so people from my past can find me. It's my parents' joint name, one my kids will use if asked the routine mother's-maiden-name question for credit card applications or driver's license forms in America. In Israel, where we live, a mother's maiden name has no significance even though Judaism is based on matrilineal descent.

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*125, as in CA-125, is a frequently used biomarker that may be elevated in the blood of patients with specific types of cancers. Discovered in the early 80s, the cancer antigen is present in greater concentration in ovarian cancer cells than in other cells.*

During a routine ultrasound, the Hebrew-tongued obstetrician stopped circling my abdomen and said, “*Yesh lach cista,*” pointing to the small lumpy image of an ovarian cyst on his grainy screen. Throughout my first pregnancy, he measured and recorded it. My grandmother had ovarian cysts, my mother breast cysts. Me, third generation Levee lady, I inherited both. Now, a quarter-century later, my gynecologist refers me for an ultrasound of my ovaries on an annual basis. Now, I sprout two small spots, one on each ovary. I summon yoga breath when the doctor

sends me for a CA-125 blood test to make sure what looks benign is benign, what's in the body can stay in the body.

CA, the official abbreviation for California, is where I was born and raised, where I spent my first 18 years and another six as a young mom, where I romanticize, sometimes fantasize, about returning and planting roots after too many major moves—California, Chicago, Paris, Chicago, Paris, Israel, Paris, California, New York, Israel, New York, Israel—over the past three decades.

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*125: area code for Vikbolandet, Sweden, 96 miles south of Stockholm.*

I sometimes leave Israel to escape the restrictions of religious Jewish holidays (no movies playing on Rosh Hashanah, no cars driving on Yom Kippur, no public transportation running from Friday to Saturday sundown). Three Aprils ago, during the weeklong Passover, my daughter and I spent five days in Stockholm, where, bundled in coats-gloves-scarves, we performed on a mock stage at the ABBA Museum, visited the first IKEA, and gasped at the 17<sup>th</sup>-century high-tech wooden warship Vasa, capsized and recovered after 333 years on the sea bed, awed its timber, hull, and carvings had remained intact.

*Intact (adjective): not altered, broken, or impaired; remaining uninjured, sound, or whole; untouched; unblemished: not changed or diminished; not influenced or swayed: complete or whole.*

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*According to Jewish Gematria—the system for assigning numerical value to Hebrew letters and words—the number 125 equals “make a choice”.*

When I settled in this desert land at age 46 with three teenagers, I confronted a choice: accept with an open heart or rage with anger and resentment. After couples' counseling to try and make my third attempt living here successful, I apply all the yoga teachings I've learned about the constancy of change and the ability to choose. I often pinch myself as a reminder to make a conscious decision to see the good. To say yes to all the possibilities.

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*125th Street station serves Metro-North's Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven Lines in New York.*

During our nine nonconsecutive years in Westchester, I occasionally rode the train into the city. When it stopped at 125<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, I eyed the hustle and bustle below, recognized the iconic Apollo Theater with its red-and-white vertical sign, and wondered if it meant anything to an outsider. For years, I've passed cultural/historical landmarks in Tel Aviv unknowingly, like

David Ben Gurion’s house, a nondescript two-story structure where the fledgling country’s first Prime Minister once lived that I stumbled upon one oven-hot summer day. No matter how much I adapt and adopt, I am and always will be *other*.

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*In yoga, the number 108 refers to spiritual completion, which explains why malas are composed of 108 beads, why pranayama breath control techniques are occasionally done in 108 cycles, and why sun salutations are often performed in nine rounds of 12 postures or 108 times.*

*In Sanskrit, the ancient language of yoga, 125 is symbolic because punah means repetition and ucharana means enchanting; combined they form punahacharana. If you do 10 rounds of the maha mrtyunjaya mantra a day, it takes 125 days to complete a punahcharana.*

Whenever I finish 108 sun salutations, I feel empowered, energized, enthralled. Maybe one day I’ll take on a *punahcharana* practice too simply to say I’ve mastered this complex mantra whose English translation—repeat the enchanting—mesmerizes me.

My New York dermatologist snapped 125 naked photos of me and bestowed them upon me as a farewell gift before I moved to the Middle East, warning me to stay out of the sun. Six years later, my Israeli dermatologist biopsied an asymmetrically-shaped mark on my right shin and checked it against the photos before calling me. “*Jennifer, ze melanoma.*” Regardless of how well I eat, how much yoga I practice, how much sunscreen I apply, I cannot control every outcome.

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Some days, it feels like I’ve somersaulted through time, lost my compass, and ended wrong-side up. The health scares, the stay-or-go questions flatten me like a deadweight anchor. Then there are other days, broken down into numbered moments, when, with my feet rooted into the sturdy, tiled, Israeli floor, I feel as strong, sound, and unshakable as the Swede’s salvaged ship.

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