



9 ◀ no replies but acknowledges that this is not so surprising: he was a non-Jew with no relevant expertise (or even a college degree) who wanted to start a Jewish library — in Lithuania. Eventually persistence paid off and *The Forward* sent a reporter to interview him.

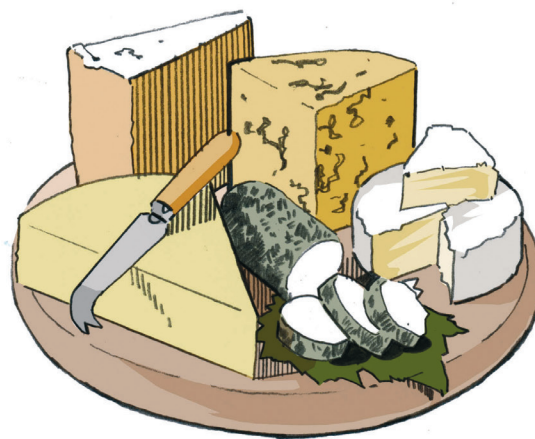
News of the library spread and books began coming in. Yad Vashem has donated. The Yiddish Library in Amherst is preparing to send 1000 books. Cornell University, Jodi Picoult, and Leonard Nimoy (aka Spock, from the original *Star Trek*) have all sent books Brent's way. Sir Martin Gilbert has promised an autographed copy of each of the 79 books he has written or edited. Brent proudly calls Gilbert a friend.

Lithuania has a Jewish population of approximately three thousand; whatever Jewish culture there is tends to be produced by and for non-Jews. The yearly Klezmer festival features mostly non-Jewish musicians. *A Fiddler on the Roof* production, the largest musical in Lithuania's history, is in the works and there is not a single Jew in the cast or crew.

The Vilnius Jewish Library's 'Jewish' criterion is a loose one: any book/film/music created by Jews, featuring Jews, about Jews, has or alludes to a Jewish theme, or in some way just seems Jewish is a candidate. "If it's not blatantly antisemitic, the library probably has a place for it," Brent said. (He has yet to turn down a donation.) The film catalogue runs from *Two Days in Paris* (starring Adam Goldberg) to *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* (with Seth Rogen). All the *Star Wars* movies are in (Harrison Ford's maternal grandparents were Jewish immigrants). Brent sees a natural order to this. "Of course we'll have *Schindler's List*," he said. "And last time I checked, Steven Spielberg is Jewish. So why not *Jaws*? Why not *Jurassic Park*? People will say, '*Jurassic Park* scared the hell out of me — maybe these Jews aren't so bad!'"

Brent clearly likes Jews. And it was a Jew — albeit a dead one — who was his matchmaker of sorts. Two years ago, Brent ordered a documentary about Al Jolson from a small, student-run company in Kiel, Germany. Brent was immediately intrigued by the director's photo and it proceeded from there: next month, that director and Brent are getting married. He shrugs off the mazel tovs. "It's the only payment I've ever received from the library," he said. "So thank you, Al Jolson!"

— Menachem Kaiser



Food

The Big Cheese

New York ¶ The wild, top-hat-and-jeans-clad compère jumped onto the stage to announce the 20 semi-finalists of the second annual New York Cheesemonger Invitational. The crowd roared approval at those über-mongers who could detect age, nationality, name and bloom. For this, the third of four rounds, each contestant was to cut two ¼ pound chunks of cheese and wrap each in cheese paper in under a minute. To mad applause, the first woman cheesemonger took to the stage. The clock began to tick. She estimated and sliced cheese amounts, posed triumphantly for the audience when her scale read 0.27lbs and began to wrap vigorously.

Billed as a *Fight Club* meets *Dancing with the Stars* showdown between 40 international cheesemongers and a buffet of local cheeses, the event was sold out weeks in advance. Despite the flash flood and subway re-routing, the semi-refrigerated warehouse in Long Island City drew 700 glasses-toting, ironic t-shirt wearing, thirty-something hipsters, who stood nibbling golden nuggets off paper plates, nonchalantly bobbing their heads to Detroit techno. At the entrance were stands with 'Raw Milk Rockstar' t-shirts, home-grown sodas, and Raclette 'smores' — towers of Graham crackers topped with ginger chocolate chunks and drenched in tangy swiss. Past the central giant stage where the competitive cheesing took place were three tables, each a mini Mount Sinai of fromage. On one, a pot of bubbling cheese was being spooned like champagne. And on the other two, plates of goudas, chèvres, blues and rinds. Not to mention, baskets of crackers, pastes, crudites; a *minyán* of accoutrements.

The wrapping round eliminated all except ten finalist cheesemongers, who were put to the ultimate 'Plate the Slate' test, where they had 15 minutes to match a cheese with two other ingredients. The winner was Steve Jones, owner of The Cheese Bar in Portland, Oregon, who was crowned the Big Cheese for his pairing of Austrian semi-soft with bacon caramel popcorn.

