

July 31

I got them. I actually got tickets to Barbra Streisand's farewell concert in Los Angeles. I call my friend Jeff to share the good news. "How much did they cost?" he asks. "Oh, \$375," I mumble. "Each?" he gasps. "Where are you sitting, in her lap?" Jealous bitch.

Aug. 8—B minus 44 days

Tickets have arrived safely. I was a little worried some unscrupulous queen working for the U.S. Postal Service might steal them. The only problem now is where to store my precious cargo. What if the house burns down? Maybe I ought to get a safety deposit box. "Aw, c'mon," my brother says. "You wouldn't get a safety deposit box for a pair of airline tickets, and they cost the same." "But this is BARBRA!" I scream. Honestly, I pity these poor straight people—they can't possibly understand the mysteries of Judy, Liza and Barbra. Together they constitute the Gay Holy Trinity: Mother, Daughter and Holy Nose. And now, of course, we have our own Madonna, too.

Aug. 15—B minus 37 days

Dreamed that I eloped with Jason Gould to Vermont for a private, but elegant, civil ceremony. At our reception, Mother Streisand cries, "Welcome to the family," then bursts into "Happy Days Are Here Again." Close family friend Shirley MacLaine tells me it's my karma to be related to Barbra. I agree.

Sept. 7—B minus 14 days

Booked flight today. My partner, Floyd, and I are flying down the day before, because if our flight is in any way delayed I'll end up on the 6 o'clock news, one of those out-of-control people detained for assaulting a flight attendant.

I'm embarrassed to admit we're actually taking three days off work just to go to a concert. I try to make light of it with a customer in our sign shop, saying: "Can you believe she scheduled the performances for a Wednesday and Thursday night? What, she couldn't perform on a weekend?" "Maybe she has plans," my customer says, dead serious. "Maybe she does," I say.

Sept. 15—B minus 6 days

I go to borrow our friend Ed's superpowerful binoculars. They weigh about as much as a brick and come in a carrying case the size of my mailbox, but I don't mind. I just wish the case matched my shoes.

Sept. 18—B minus 3 days

According to the Weather Channel, the temperature in L.A. is 110 degrees. Despite the heat, I've decided I'm going to wear my new black polyester shirt with the real fake leopard trim. If I get overheated I might just burst into flames, but at least I'll die happy.

Sept. 20—B minus 1 day

I tell everyone I see that we're going to the Streisand concert—the baggage handler, the pilot,

The way she is

A Streisand diary

BY MARC ACITO

the rental car guy. I worry that I'm being indiscreet. Suppose some unscrupulous queen overhears me and mugs us? Stupid, stupid, stupid.

Sept. 21—B-Day!

I'm just a little nervous about getting stuck in traffic, so Floyd and I arrive two hours early. We pay \$20 for parking and go in. I chat with various people before the show. "Are you a fan?" I ask one woman. "Oh, yes," she gushes, "I even lost a job once because of her." "Really, why?" I ask. "Oh, I kind of stalked her," she says. People...people who love Barbra are the scariest people in the world.

We buy a bottle of water for \$3.25. "Geez, are they gonna charge for the air we breathe, too?" Floyd asks. "Behave or I'll buy a \$35 T-shirt," I reply. But we both covet the shopping bag with the monogrammed "B" on it.

Barbra looks fabulous in a sequined pantsuit revealing a butt you could bounce a dime off of. The show is a retrospective of her life, but in some ways it feels like a retrospective of my own. Like so many other gay boys and Jewish girls, the soundtrack for my life comes courtesy of Barbra. When I fell in love with my best friend at 16, I played "My Man" over and

over again, Barbra's voice expressing what I couldn't myself. Eighteen years later, I still listen to "Don't Rain on My Parade" almost daily to get me going in the morning. Barbra introduces this journey into our shared past by singing "The Way We Were," and I start to cry and flap my hands in front of my face in that inexplicable way junior high girls do. Geez, the kids on the school bus were right, I think—I am a big fag.

Sipping tea from a china cup, Barbra apologizes for sounding hoarse (like we noticed), explaining she normally doesn't perform 40 songs two nights in a row. This is what I love about her. She could get out there and fart to the tune of "Evergreen" and we'd scream for more, but after all these years, Barbra still can't help but reveal her vulnerabilities. I can't even imagine the pressure of having to sound as good as Barbra Streisand, even if you are Barbra Streisand. It's her glorious triumph over these insecurities, time and again, that inspires such zealous devotion in her fans. She's nearly 60 years old, and she can still sing the paint off the walls.




Barbra greets the various celebrities up front in the \$2,500 seats—Elizabeth Taylor, Jack Nicholson, Dustin Hoffman. When she acknowledges Debra Messing from *Will & Grace*, Messing, apparently so thrilled that Barbra knows who she is, leaps from her seat and jumps up and down, waving her arms wildly in the air. It's a lovely moment and one the rest of the 12,000 of us can understand. To identify with a person your whole life from afar and then to have that person recognize you—what bliss.

Me, I've planned out for years what I would say to Barbra if I met her. I'm at a gala to raise money for the hand dryers in the bathrooms of the Clinton Library when my good friend Rosie O'Donnell introduces us. I take Barbra's perfectly manicured hand in mine, look her straight in the eye and say, "I'm sorry, dear, what did you say your name was?" Barbra, of course, is charmed at my refreshing take on what must be a tiresome ritual after nearly 40 years of fame.

Back in reality, Barbra slips her shoes off and tells us although she'll continue to record and

make movies, these concerts in L.A. in New York really are her goodbye to live performing. "I've been working since I was 11," she says. "I want to relax a little." And referring to the dieting necessary to look so glam, she says, "I love food—I want to eat!" She looks at Elizabeth Taylor in the front row for support. "You understand, don't you, Elizabeth?" Oh, Barbra, if only you knew how I dieted to look good for this concert, too.

Sept. 23

Ran into our friend Gary getting onto the same flight to Portland. "Did you enjoy the concert?" he asks. "They're still drying the seat he sat in," Floyd says. Gary tells us he spent \$465 on a last-minute plane ticket to L.A. because Madonna was making a personal appearance at the Virgin (how appropriate) Megastore and he's always wanted to meet her and get her autograph. Geez, I think, what the hell kind of obsessed nutcase does such a thing? 

MARC ACITO is the creator of the comic strip "The Boys Next Door."

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