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Parents are loopy over Loopsy! Adorable Mittens Fluff 'N'...

NYC Local • Business • Opinion

Page Six



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Sports



It's Collins
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Teams • High Schools • Scores

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Humorist Fran Lebowitz still isn't writing

By MICHAEL GILTZ

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There are a lot of people who've never heard of Fran Lebowitz — for good reason. No matter how much you laughed when she first published her bestselling essay collections, "Metropolitan Life" and "Social Studies," you can't help but notice she has been absent from the "New Books" section of Barnes & Noble for nearly 30 years. Martin Scorsese has decided to capture this endangered New York icon in her favorite booth at the Waverly Inn, giving lectures and on-stage in conversation with her friend, Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison. It all adds up to a new documentary, "Public Speaking." Even if she doesn't like to write, Lebowitz loves to gab, which she did with the Post.



Fran Lebowitz prowls the city.

Q: If a young person asked you where they should live, where would you send them?

A: I don't know. One of the reasons that New York is less interesting than it used to be is because everything is so homogenized. I always like to blame a lot of what happens in New York on Bloomberg because I want to blame everything on Bloomberg.

Q: Did you blame Giuliani when he was in charge?

A: I did. This is the trajectory of my relationship to mayors. I used to say, "We could never ever have a mayor that is worse than Ed Koch." Okay? Then I used to think, "We could never have a mayor worse than Giuliani." And then we have Bloomberg. We certainly could never have a mayor longer than Bloomberg.

Q: Do you go to the theater?

A: I don't like the theater. I know, I'm a horrible person for saying that. Though in fact, I'm going tonight to see "The Pee-wee Herman Show" because Paul

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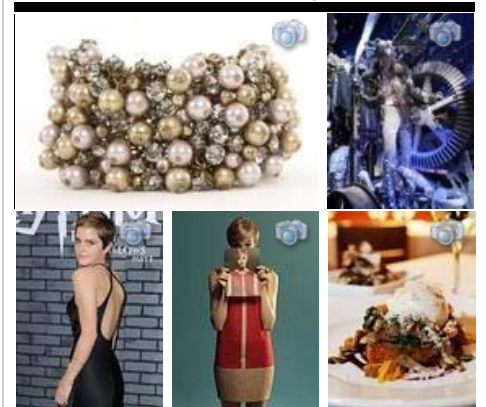
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Reubens is a friend of mine.

Q. How do you reach out to a friend who's been arrested?

A: During that escapade of Paul's, I spoke to him on the phone a couple of times. I gave him some advice and he

didn't take it. I told him, "Come back. Don't run away." He didn't kill anyone. I did say to him getting arrested for jerking off in a porn theater is like getting arrested for eating in a restaurant. That's what they're for!

Q. Did you enjoy driving through the streets of New York while the Bernard Hermann score from "Taxi Driver" was playing in the background?

A: That shooting was the most scared I've ever been in my life. We did that on a Saturday night right through Times Square where there are billions of people and billions of buses and cars and rickshaws and bicycles. And horses! And I could not see. I could not see the entire time I was driving. At the end of that night, I could hardly breathe. I kept saying, "I can't see." No one cared. And they wrecked my car — plugging things into the cigarette lighter, pulling panels out, taping things to the steering wheel. Afterward, I said, "You know, Marty, they just trashed my car." He looked at me and said, "Fran, don't you know never to allow people to make a movie in your car or your house?"

Q: Do you regret publishing your second book? Because if you publish only one book it has a certain Harper Lee status to it. Of course if you do three books you have a body of work. But two is an awkward number.

A: It is. But I still do not intend it to be the final number. I do have two halves of two different books done. And I did say recently to [Alfred A. Knopf editor-in-chief] Sonny Mehta, who is still my publisher, "You know what, Sonny, I have two unfinished books. If you put them together, I have a book. Why don't we publish the book, the first half of "Exterior Signs Of Wealth," which is a novel? Then you turn it the other way around and you have "Progress," which is non-fiction. People might think it's some sort of post-modern trick. But in fact it'll be a book.

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