

Willard Scott Helped Make My Jewish Penicillin Story Front Page News



Tom Madden, Founder & CEO, TransMedia Group

Everybody in PR this century has I'm sure a Willard Scott story. Mine, if you'll pardon the expression, is a doozy, which I'm remembering on the eve of the Jewish high holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur amid the gloomy weather report that the jovial rotund, retired NBC forecaster has died at 87, no not degrees, age!

The longtime comic weatherman on the "Today" show put entertainment and clownish laughter and his own brand of

shtick into his forecasts and one of them resulted in one of the biggest PR coups I ever had in my career as a grand slam publicist.

The client back in 1986 was chicken soup, actually **Ben's Best Kosher Deli** in Queens.

The Public Relations Journal called it a farcical mini-epic that pitted a small delicatessen, 100 grandmothers and Henny Youngman against the portly, bigger than life Willard Scott representing the makers of one of the country's best-selling cold remedies-Contact.

The way the Journal depicted it, the play went like this:

MADDEN'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT FOR CHICKEN SOUP (ALIAS JEWISH PENICILLIN) STARRING WEATHERMAN WILLARD SCOTT, COMEDIAN HENNY YOUNGMAN AND A POSSE OF JEWISH GRANDMOTHERS DIRECTED BY SPIN MADDEN.

(A Three-Act PR Play)

The first alternative medicine I ever promoted was chicken soup. Our PR campaign in 1986 was such a hit with New York media that the *Public Relations Journal* gave it a rave review.

According to my profession's esteemed trade journal, I had put together a PR program that came off like a well-crafted three-act play for which I wrote the script, pulled together an incredible cast and taken my seat in the director's chair.

I did this for **Ben's Best Kosher Deli** in Queens, New York, one of the clients of my PR firm, **TransMedia Group**. Ben's served the pastrami, corned beef, brisket and tongue that if you're from New York and you moved to Florida you dream about.

I had to hand it to my troupe. Everyone played their part superbly. Staging couldn't have been better at Ben's. It blew the lid off the soup pot. And Willard stole the show

charming all the Jewish grandmoms.

The play went something like this:

(AT RISE, The PR playwright (me) is at home watching television. On the screen, the comedian Steve Landsberg is comparing chicken soup to Contact cold capsules. Landsberg claims Contact is more effective than chicken soup for combating colds. Commercial ends.)

(Darkness.)

ACT 1, SCENE 1

(Ben's Best Kosher Deli on Queens Blvd. in Queens, NY. Yours truly and the owner, Jay Parker, are sitting at a table, bowls of our beloved but defamed chicken soup in front of us.)

ME: Listen I've got a terrific idea. It won't cost much and you'll get a million bucks worth of publicity out of it.

PARKER: (his feelings truly hurt): They really said that? How could they say that? How can a simple pill compete against a good bowl of chicken soup? Don't they know this is Jewish Penicillin?

(DARKNESS)

ACT 1, SCENE 2

(The set of *The Today Show* at **NBC** where I was once Vice President, Assistant to the President, then Fred Silverman. NBC weatherman **Willard Scott**, a national spokesman for *Contact*, is battling the flu. Scott sneezes and coughs as he tries to report the weather.

I had my wife and business partner Angela rush over to him a bowl of Ben's Best chicken soup. All over America, millions of TV viewers that morning watched Scott, the national spokesman for Contact, gratefully sip from the cup of soup

containing Ben's Best logo clearly visible on camera. Hit #1.

(Darkness)

ACT 2—THE PROTEST

(Ben's Best Kosher Deli. Present are myself, one of my PR account executives who used to do PR for Ringling Bros. Circus and Parker.)

Also present, invited by us, was Congressman Gary Ackerman, comedian Henny Youngman, a number of local grandmothers carrying placards protesting "Contact Unfair to Chicken Soup."

(Journalists scribble notes frantically, flashbulbs pop.)

REP. ACKERMAN: (reading from a proclamation): *Let it be known to all assembled that Ben's Best Kosher Deli . . . has courageously upheld the dignity, the honor and the medicinal value of chicken soup, in the face of unwarranted and slanderous attacks from the slick, the cynical and the manipulators of Madison Avenue.*

PARKER: *Chicken soup is the drug of choice of all these grandmothers . . . After all, there's no warning label, and we know what the side effects are over a 500-year period.*

(Journalists scribble notes frantically, flashbulbs pop.)

ACT 3—THE RECONCILIATION

Ben's Best Kosher Deli, Next Day: Present are me, the beaming congressman, cheering grandmothers and the same chorus of media. Press coverage so far included the front page of **The Wall Street Journal**, plus prominent coverage in **USA Today**, **The New York Daily News**, **Newsday**, just to name a few, the clippings all now adorning the walls of the world-famous deli.

Enter **Willard Scott** and representatives of **SmithKline**

Beckman and **BBD&O**, the advertising firm that created the Landsberg commercial. Members of the delegation carry signs that read: "Contact Loves Chicken Soup."

Willard kisses each grandmother and begins slurping soup.

A deliriously grateful Parker pulls me aside and says (I hoped kiddingly):

"Tom, what's TransMedia going to do for me next week."

THE END