

What's A Yenta?

NPR - 2012

DAVID GREENE, HOST:



And now, a correction. Yesterday, we brought you a story from our Planet Money team about a man whose job is to help Spanish banks merge with one another. He told NPR's Chana Joffe-Walt that he brings together the heads of various banks, and sits them down.

ANGEL BORGES: ...to see whether there is - um, we call here in Spain, chemistry.

CHANA JOFFE-WALT, BYLINE: Angel, do you know the word yenta?

BORGES: Yenta?

JOFFE-WALT: Yenta - it's somebody who arranges marriages.

BORGES: Yes, yeah, something like that.

GREENE: That was from yesterday. Today, Chana has asked for a chance to follow up.

JOFFE-WALT: My mom listens to all my stories, and she often calls to share her thoughts.

CHANA JOFFE-WALT'S MOM: Hey, Chana?

JOFFE-WALT: I have never opted to share any of my mother's feedback on the air before. But I think this time, she is deserving of a larger audience.

CHANA'S MOM: The one thing that I noticed immediately was the use of the word yenta, because yenta doesn't actually mean a matchmaker.

It means like, an old woman; an old, gossipy woman. A shadchan is a matchmaker. So give me a call. OK? Love you sweetie, bye.

JOFFE-WALT: I was wrong; my mother is right. A yenta is not a matchmaker - although I did think maybe my mom was the only one who noticed it. Wrong again. To the many, many of you who have also corrected my mistake, I am sorry. The correct term for a Jewish matchmaker...

JUDITH GOTTESMAN: A shadchanit is a matchmaker.

JOFFE-WALT: And that, by the way, from a woman who actually is one. Judith Gottesman helps love-seeking Jews in California find their soul mates.

Do people ever call you a yenta?

GOTTESMAN: Yes. Just the other day, I met somebody who - when I said, I'm a matchmaker; he said oh, you're a yenta. And I said, actually, no, I'm not a yenta. To me, a yenta has a negative connotation. It's the character in "Fiddler on the Roof." And she was kind of thought of as sort of a nosy, busybody type - not necessarily the best skilled at matchmaking.

JOFFE-WALT: Judith is a professional - although she does say she can behave a bit - just a little bit - like the yenta in "Fiddler on the Roof," if she thinks she's got a fantastic match.

GOTTESMAN: So I definitely will call them, or email them; remind them, it's really important; I have a very strong sense these people should meet. And I've never been wrong. I mean, every single person I had that feeling about, got married. Every person who's married through me, married the very first person I set them up with.

JOFFE-WALT: The happy couple can then say they were set up by a matchmaker, dating coach, shadchanit - anything but a yenta. Sorry.

And now, a name that suggests I really should know what a yenta is - Chana Joffe-Walt, NPR News.

Copyright © 2012 NPR. All rights reserved. Visit our website terms of use and permissions pages at www.npr.org for further information.

NPR transcripts are created on a rush deadline by an NPR contractor. This text may not be in its final form and may be updated or revised in the future. Accuracy and availability may vary. The authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio record.