

# When Family Members Disagree

By Judy Gruenfeld

Have you ever had a bucket of ice cold water thrown in your face? It's not a very pleasant experience. For many of us, the news that our child is not perfect, assaults us like the proverbial buckets of cold water.

What to do? Where to turn? How do I know that what they are telling me is accurate? After all, many anomalies have gone misdiagnosed. People have gone from doctor to doctor seeking relief from one ailment or another only to be told something different from each "competent physician."

Some will pay credence to your symptoms, send to you for tests, analyze the results and prescribe a particular treatment which, they say, will probably alleviate your symptoms. Others will tell you it's all in your head, psychosomatic, there's nothing wrong with you. Know about your life and stop being a hypochondriac. What you want to believe?

All these questions become more pronounced when one parent, usually the mother, but not always, agrees with the doctor who identifies the problem with her child and the other parent refuses to face the troubling fact; or, when the parents agree there is a problem but disagree as to what the problem is. It is equally troubling when grandparents refuse to believe that there is something wrong with the child. When I would talk to my mother on the phone, she would say of my Autistic son,

"He'll surprise you, yet. You'll see, he'll grow up to be a doctor."

My mother meant well. She was probably just trying to make her own child feel better. But it had the opposite effect on me. Not only did I have to contend with my son and his problems but I could not share my concerns with my mother, with whom I was

very close. As my son became older, my mother realized he was not going to be a doctor.

"I worry double" she would tell me.

"I worry about what will become of him and I worry about you, too. You are still my child. This is not what I wanted for you."

She was suffering, too. How could I have been so selfish and not realized this? I was so wrapped up in my day to day struggle that I failed to see how others were affected by my son's disability.

The facts are hard to face, at times, no question about it, but dissension will only make matters worse. We need to rally 'round each other and work together as a team in order to do what is right for our children. If you're not happy with one doctor's diagnosis, go to another, and then a third or fourth, if necessary.

Contact early intervention if your child is under three years of age or your school districts child study team if your child is three or older. Find out what services are available and take advantage of as many as you can.

Having a disabled child changes our whole perspective on life. We see things differently now, through distorted glasses. It is a daily struggle to bring things back into focus. We either rise to the occasion and become closer as a couple and as a family unit or we are torn asunder and the family unit becomes dysfunctional and falls apart. Either we all win or we all lose. It is important for family members to be open and honest with one another and each can play a role in the disabled child's life. As a matter of fact, the more involved each family member is, the closer the family will be.

If you need professional help to accept the reality of the situation, get it. Speak to other parents of disabled children. You are not alone. There are many organizations that offer the support we need in order to get through the day. Reach out. Someone will take your hand and guide you.

It is true that each of us must come to terms with this difficult situation in his own time and in his own way. We need to have patience with each other and allow each person to grieve in his own way. And there is a

grieving process involved. We grieve for the child he could have been, if only..... The most important thing is to be there for each other in a non-judgemental way. No one is to blame.

You may not have chosen this path but, I assure you, it will be one filled with meaning and purpose. Remember, we are not seeing the whole picture. So, pack up the van, throw the kids in the back and start your journey. The road may be bumpy but, I guarantee you, the ride won't be boring.

# My Brother's Keeper

By Judy Gruenfeld

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It was 3:30 in the afternoon. They were usually home by 3:30. I say "they" because this was the one year Ronnie attended the neighborhood public school that Kevin attended. We lived fairly close to the school so the boys walked. Needless to say, I was getting a little worried.

While I was debating whether or not to go to the school, my doorbell rang. It was Kevin's friend Adam. Adam was completely out of breath and could barely speak. He finally swallowed a few gulps of air.

"Mrs. Gruenfeld," he said, "there are some boys who are teasing Ronnie and won't let him come home. Kevin is trying to keep them from hurting him." Ronnie was ten and Kevin was six.

"You sit down and rest," I told Adam, and then I took off. Fortunately, I was able to run a lot faster than I can now.

As I approached the scene, I was totally amazed. There were three boys who were considerable bigger than Ronnie, blocking the path and not allowing my boys to pass.

Ronnie kept asking, "why won't you let me go home?" and Kevin was threatening to "beat them all up."

When the boys still wouldn't move, Kevin started kicking the biggest of the three. Luckily, they all started laughing and ran away when they saw me. I would deal with them at a later date. Meantime, I was concerned about my boys.

"Adam came to the house to get me. What happened?" I asked.

Kevin said, "those boys started teasing Ronnie and wouldn't let him pass" – there was a path in the woods that the kids took to and

from school. "I sent Adam to get you while I tried to protect Ronnie."

"You did a fine job," I said. "I'm very proud of you."

"Why wouldn't those boys let me go home?" asked Ronnie, "and why did they call me such terrible names?"

"What did they call you," I asked.

"Stupid, retard, and baby. Am I retarded?"

"Absolutely not," I said, "and you are a much nicer person than all three of those boys put together. I don't know why they wouldn't let you come home but they obviously aren't very happy boys and are probably criticized a lot at home. Do you know who they are?"

"No," said both boys. "What are you going to do?" asked Kevin.

"Don't you worry," I said. "I will think of something. This incident will not be ignored."

When we got back to the house, Adam was still waiting and breathing a lot easier.

"Adam, why don't you call your mother and ask her if it is okay if I take you for ice cream?"

A resounding "yay" changed the tenor of the day. I think the boys enjoyed that ice cream more than any, prior or since.

The next day I called the principal.

"Do you know which boys were involved?" he asked.

"No, I'm afraid I don't"

He apologized profusely and then said, "You know what," why don't we have an assembly regarding the matter? Would you be willing to speak?"

"I certainly would, I said."Just tell me when and I will clear it with the boys. I wouldn't want to embarrass them."

The assembly was scheduled for the following week. I spoke to the entire student body from kindergarten through sixth grade about having understanding for those who are different from us.

It appeared that I was well received and Ronnie had no further problems. As a

matter of fact, several children wanted to befriend him and he became somewhat of a celebrity in the school. He never brought friends home after school as Kevin did, but our little school, in our little corner of the world, now has a zero tolerance policy towards bullies.

Oh, and the Karate lessons didn't hurt, either.

# Mrs. Shteksheach Buys New Slippers

By Judy Gruenfeld

The sun was setting in early twentieth century Yememvelt. The men were coming home from work and shul and the women were getting supper ready. Of particular interest, on this particular day, was a kind, gentle man named Mr. Shteksheach.

Mr. Shteksheach loved his slippers. Whenever he wore them he felt as though he were floating on a cloud. Mr. Shteksheach worked in a factory and stood on his feet all day. By the time he came home his poor, aching feet were crying for the slippers.

When he walked in the door he called to his wife who told him supper was ready. He then went to the bureau, took out his slippers, dropped them on the floor and gently pushed them with his feet. The slippers stopped right in front of Mr. Shteksheach's bed in the exact same spot day after day, year after year. Mr. Shteksheach would then wash up, put on clean clothes and slide his feet into his beloved slippers.

"A *mechaya*," he would say. Feeling refreshed, he would then go to the kitchen where he and his wife would eat supper.

After supper, Mr. Shteksheach would sit in his favorite chair and read the newspaper.

One night there was a knock on the door. When Mr. Shteksheach opened the door he saw Mr. Fleishig who was out of breath and trying to talk.

"Take deep breaths and try to calm down. Then you can tell me what the problem is" said Mr. Shteksheach. When Mr. Fleishig finally calmed down and he was able to speak he said,

"You won't believe what just happened," he said. "Mr. Milchig just came to

my house. After fifty years of having nothing to do with me, he wants to be my friend."

"Something doesn't sound kosher to me, said Mr. Shteksheach.

"That's exactly what I said," replied Mr. Fleishig. "Now, he's a very nice man but we just don't mix. What should I do?"

"Well," said Mr. Shteksheach, "I would suggest you tell him just that. He has his place and you have your place. If you pass each other in the street you can say hello but you just cannot mix."

"You are a wise man," said Mr. Fleishig. "I will tell him just that."

Mr. Fleishig did what Mr. Shteksheach suggested. The arrangement worked out very well.

The next day when Mr. Shteksheach came home from work he called to his wife as he always did and then went to the bureau to get his slippers. When he opened the bureau door, Mr. Shteksheach almost had a heart attack. His beloved slippers were not there. Mr. Shteksheach gave a *gishray* (scream) and then passed out cold on the floor. When Mrs. Shteksheach heard the noise she came rushing over to her husband to find out what had happened. When she saw him passed out on the floor she also gave a *gishray*. She then got a washcloth, saturated it with cold water and began rubbing her husband's face and forehead with the cold cloth. Mr. Shteksheach regained consciousness in about two minutes. Very weakly he said,

"Where are my slippers?"

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Shteksheach, "Your slippers are very old. When I went to the market today I bought you a new pair.

"You don't understand," replied her husband. "My slippers are a part of me. They

mold to my feet. They know exactly where to go when I push them towards the bed when I come home from work. I don't want a new pair. Do you know how long it took me to train those slippers? I cannot bear to be without them."

"But, dear," said Mrs. Shteksheach, "you haven't even seen the new slippers. You might even like them."

"My dear wife," said Mr. Shteksheach, trying to remain calm. "Remember when Mr. Fleishig came over last night to discuss the problem he was having with Mr. Milchig?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Shteksheach, "but what does that have to do with us or your slippers?"

"Some things just don't mix, like Mr. Fleishig and Mr. Milchig. New slippers and I just don't mix. Please tell me that you haven't thrown out my old slippers."

"Well, no," she said. "I haven't had a chance yet."

"Oh, Baruch Hashem!" said Mr. Shteksheach. "Please give them to me."

Mrs. Shteksheach gave Mr. Shteksheach his old slippers back.

Mr. Shteksheach never mentioned the incident and Mrs. Shteksheach never again tried to buy her husband a new pair of slippers.

# Getting Paid Under the Table

By Judy Gruenfeld

Parents beware, lest you be accused of the capital offence of favoring one child over another!

Ronnie and Kevin were aged sixteen and twelve respectively. They had both just finished their homework when Ronnie went looking in the refrigerator for something to make himself for lunch the next day.

"Ma, what do you have for lunch for tomorrow?" asked Kevin.

Before I had a chance to answer, Ronnie said, "Don't you think Kevin is old enough to make his own lunch?"

Again, I tried to chime in, when Kevin said, "I think I'll buy lunch from now on."

Due to the large number of Jewish students in his school, there was a selection of cold kosher meals from which the children could choose. So, from then on, Kevin bought lunch. I tried to make it a point not to ask when he needed money because I felt he was old enough to be responsible for this. I figured, if he missed one lunch, he wouldn't forget to ask for money again.

Things went smoothly for a few months when, one day, to my surprise, I found a ten-dollar bill under my kitchen table. I assumed it was my husband's. Kevin, seeing it, said,

"Oh, I need lunch money," so I gave him the ten dollars.

Ronnie was still doing his homework and didn't say a thing.

The following week I had an IEP (Individual Education Plan) meeting for Ronnie at the school.

When I arrived and all the pleasantries were over, we sat down to business. Ronnie was, naturally, included in the meeting.

At age sixteen, a large part of Ronnie's IEP consisted of pre-vocational training. The students in the "high school" class were taken into the community and given an opportunity to work at various different jobs. After getting the academics out of the way, we focused on this area.

At the present time, Ronnie was working at a plant nursery two afternoons a week, and getting paid for it. My husband is into plants and Ronnie had grown up helping him in the garden so he really enjoyed his job. His boss was very pleased with him, also.

"Mrs. Gruenfeld," asked Ronnie's teacher, "are you aware that Ronnie gets paid for the work he does at the nursery?"

"Yes," I said.

"Do you know what he does with the money he earns," she asked.

"I told him he could buy whatever he wanted but he hasn't gotten anything yet so I'm assuming he's saving it.

"Well," said the teacher, "he earned ten dollars last week and when I asked him what he did with it, he said you gave it to his brother."

"Wait a minute," I said, "Ronnie, that ten dollar bill I found under the kitchen table was yours?"

"Yes," he said.

"Why didn't you say something? I would have given it to you."

"I don't know," he typically answered.

I turned towards the teacher. "When I found the money under the table, it never occurred to me that it could have been Ronnie's. His brother needed lunch money, so I gave it to him. You must think I am terrible."

"Not at all," said the teacher. "Ronnie has been coming to this school for years. I knew there was a good explanation."

So here you have it. With all good intentions of seeing that one child doesn't go

hungry, I was almost accused of stealing from the other. I always make it a point now to give the benefit of the doubt.



# An Overdose of Alphabet Soup for the Soul

By Judy Gruenfeld

Attention, parents of physically or developmentally challenged children! Welcome to the land of alphabet soup. Our first stop will be the Division of Developmental Disabilities, otherwise known as DDD. They used to be known as the Division of Mental Retardation DMR but we must be politically correct. We cannot offend anyone.

All disabilities are created equal. One is not more entitled than another. The road you are about to travel is very bumpy. At times you will want to stop the world and get off. But that is not an option. Though you didn't realize it at the time, the ticket you purchased was "one way". You can never return to your former life. I know the alphabet soup is hard to swallow. At times it gets stuck in your throat.

A hearty pat on the back (I'm doing a pretty good job) will usually dislodge what is stuck and allow you to swallow your portion and continue down the road (or up the hill). However, there is always more soup in the pot.

Now, you may be dealing with ADD or ADHD, Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, formerly known as MBD or Minimal Brain Dysfunction; ALS, or Asperger's Syndrome; AS, or Angelman's Syndrome (be careful not to confuse the two) DS, or Down's Syndrome; ED or Emotional Disturbance, PI, or Perceptual Impairment; NI, or Neurological Impairment; CP, or Cerebral Palsy; CS, or Childhood Schizophrenia (otherwise referred to as Autism).

Autism, at one time was classified as ED but is now a category unto itself and has its own label; or LD, a learning disability, specified or unspecified. Are you with me so far? If not, don't worry about it. The system

can function independent of any human intelligence and in my opinion, often does.

When you sign your child up at DDD you will be assigned a CM, or Case Manager. He or she will assist you in negotiating the system and obtaining any services for which you qualify. When your child reaches eighteen, he or she will also be signed up with DVR, or the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. This is in order to place your child in a job setting or a workshop upon graduation from school age at twenty-one. Currently, there are several programs available. There is 21+ or Twenty-One+, MCVR or the Monmouth County Vocational Rehabilitation Facility, WOC or the Work Opportunity Center, ARC-EC, or the Association for Retarded Citizens Employment Center, just to name a few.

Your son or daughter will also be eligible for SSI, or Supplemental Security Income based on his or her personal income. If it is determined that your child is able to pay his portion of the household expenses, he is categorized as self-supporting and will qualify to receive additional assistance. If your child cannot pay his portion of the household expenses, it is assumed that someone is helping to support him and he will not qualify for any additional funding. In other words, if he doesn't need more money, he can get it. If he does need more money, he can't get it. Make sense to you? Me, neither. Welcome to the system!

Eventually, you might want your child placed in a group home, or GH. The various agencies countrywide have group homes. Several years ago a bill was passed allocating money to build group homes across the state. There was, however, no money allocated to

run them. Make sense to you? Me, neither. Another "gotcha by The System! While in school, your child may receive OT, or Occupational Therapy; PT, or Physical Therapy; Or SLR, Speech and Language Remediation, according to needs identified by the CST, or Child Study Team at the annual IEP, Individual Education Plan.

Once your child graduates from school these same services may also be available to him or her depending on the DP, or Day

Program he or she attends. These needs will be determined by the IDT, or Inter-Disciplinary Team at the annual IHP, or Individual Habilitation Plan.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting kind of full. I've been eating alphabet soup for the past thirty years and it hasn't gotten any better. How about I get another spoon and we share what's left in the bowl? Who knows, maybe someday, someone may come up with a better recipe.

# False Hope / Perseverance

## The Fine Line In Between

By Judy Gruenfeld

As the mother of an Autistic son, who is now an adult, I have run the full gamut of emotions.

First, you get that uneasy feeling that something is not quite right. You can't put your finger on it, but you know this child is not like others his age. You dismiss the feeling, telling yourself that every child is different (and, indeed they are). But way down, deep inside of you, the truth is festering and gives you no peace.

Then you think, Einstein didn't speak until he was four; Beethoven's music teacher told him that as a composer, he was hopeless; Thomas Edison's mother was told by several of his teachers that he was too stupid to learn anything; Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor who told him he didn't have any good ideas; Enrico Caruso's music teacher told him he had no voice at all; Louis Pasteur was rated as mediocre in chemistry; Abraham Lincoln entered the Black Hawk War as a captain and came out as a private; Louisa May Alcott was told by her editor that she could never write anything with popular appeal; Leo Tolstoy flunked out of college; and Winston Churchill failed sixth grade.

"So" you figure, "My child is in good company. He must be a genius. Besides, he is only two years old. But the festering continues so you discuss it with your husband.

"What?" he says, as his male ego takes over. "There is absolutely nothing wrong with my son!"

"He's my son, too" you respond.  
"Please don't be so defensive. Maybe we should take him to a specialist."

"You're talking nonsense," your husband says as he stomps out of the room.

"Maybe he's right," you hope. So you put it out of your mind. But after a while the gnawing feeling in your gut re-surfaces. So, you call your mother.

"Mom" you say, "Something's not quite right with the baby."

"What's the matter?" she asks. "Is he sick?"

"No," you respond. "It's something else. I think something is wrong. He's not doing what other children his age are doing."

"Nonsense," says your mother. "His only problem is that he is too smart for his own good. You mark my words, he'll grow up to be a doctor. Besides, Einstein didn't speak until he was four;....."

So you hang up the phone but the gnawing feeling continues.

The next time you go to the pediatrician, you express your concerns.

"Frankly," says the doctor, "He would be fine if you didn't hover over him so much. I think you need some help." And then he hands you the name and phone number of a psychologist and suggests that you make an appointment to see him.

'You walk out of the pediatrician's office fighting back the tears. By the time you have the baby safely secured in his car seat, the floodgates open up. It's obvious that there's either something wrong with the baby or there's something wrong with you, or maybe even both of you!

You make an appointment with the psychologist and you pour your heart out to him.

"Well," says the psychologist, "you definitely have several unresolved issues to work on. Come twice a week for the next three months and we will assess the situation then."

Three months go by. You forgive your mother for not buying you the doll you wanted when you were five. You forgive your father for grounding you the time you stayed out too late. You even forgive them for caring about you so much that they insist you check in with them when you're on a date with someone for the first time.

Dad was always there with his car keys ready to pick up his only daughter at any time, and from any place. Mom was always awake when you got home, waiting to hear if you had a good time. Did they hover too much? Maybe. But with the help of the therapist, you are now able to forgive them for this, too.

In the meantime, baby has not shown any improvement. So you bring him to a child psychologist who says he is fine.

"I must be crazy!" you think. And by now there is a second child on the way. By this time you've been on an emotional roller coaster for so long you are dizzy beyond belief.

You don't know how you will manage to get through this pregnancy, but somehow, you do. And, of course, you are worried about this baby, too. But, Thank G\_d, he turns out to be healthy, well adjusted and smart as a whip. By now your first child is almost four and you've changed pediatricians. When you express your concerns to this doctor he suggests you take your son to a pediatric neurologist, which you do. He is now diagnosed with Minimal Brain Dysfunction, or MBD, now referred to as ADD or ADHD. Alphabet soup for dinner again! Your concerns have finally been validated but you don't know what to do. Since there is no Early Intervention, you enroll him in a reputable

nursery school. He does well that year and in kindergarten.

In first grade, he is put in a special education class. At this point, he is seen by the school psychiatrist who diagnoses him as Autistic.

The emotional roller coaster that ensues makes the earlier years seem like a long, dreary ride on a boring highway.

I'm reminded of the joke where this guy gets the blinker lights on his car fixed. He wants to know if they are working, so he tells his friend,

"I'm going to turn on the blinker. You stand in front of the car and tell me if it's working.

"Okay" says the friend and he steps in front of the car. The friend looks at the lights and says, "it's working.....it's not working.....it's working....it's not working."

In our endless quest for stones unturned, we tried a nutritional approach, which had no effect. We took my son to a family who had supposedly brought their own son out of his Autistic world. This, too, failed to "cure" my son. He attended several different schools, none of which met his needs, except for the last one. With every new approach my heart would soar in anticipation. With every failure I would become more depressed.

"Maybe this will do it," I hoped. "There are only so many years left until he is grown and then the dye is cast. There are times when I considered refusing a treatment because I just couldn't live through another disappointment. But this was not about me. This was about my son and regardless of my feelings, I owed him every opportunity to become "normal".

It wasn't until I went to a particular PTA meeting that I was able to put things into focus. This particular PTA meeting was for parents of gifted children. You see, my

younger son was in the gifted program all through school. All we wanted were "normal" children and ours were at both extremes of the spectrum.

The parents at this PTA meeting were somewhat distraught because their children were not typical. One mother even stood up and, in tears, asked how she could deal with a child who was quicker on the uptake and knew more than she did. Not one parent at the Special Needs PTA meetings was so negative.

"Excuse me," I interrupted, as I stood up. "But my older son is in Special Ed. and the parents there have a much more positive

outlook than I'm seeing here, tonight. We were blessed with gifted children. Indeed, they are very special gifts. Why can't we love them and accept them the way they are and do everything in our power to help them reach their full potential?" "They will certainly bring us a lot of joy."

It wasn't until I sat down that I realized what I had said. I had found the key that would unlock the barriers to my son's and my own achievements. I have learned to accept what I have today while striving for a better tomorrow. This works across the board and helps to keep me somewhat sane.

# No Sweat

By Judy Gruenfeld

It was the hottest Fourth of July I could remember in years. It was also the busiest. We had been living in our house for several of years and my in-laws had come down to visit for a few days. We were also expecting the cement truck to come and pour the cement for the patio my husband had designed. Several of our neighbors had agreed to assist my husband and spread out the cement with him, once it had been poured.

As the cement truck backed into our yard, the kids stood transfixed. I highly recommend this as entertainment for bored children. It is a lot of trouble and money, of course, but depending on how difficult your children may be acting at the time, it may very well be worth the investment. Anyway, it took a while for the cement to be poured but eventually, much to the chagrin of my children, that part of the job was done and the truck left.

Now came the hard part, which, frankly speaking, I found to be entertaining. My husband and our nice but not necessarily Mensa material or Phi Beta Kappa neighbors had the arduous task of spreading the cement, evenly and smoothly over the specified area, before it had a chance to harden. All were wearing old shoes specifically designed for the job at hand, or foot, if you'll pardon my pun. As they spread the cement, they were all slipping and sliding with the ease, if not the grace, of professional ice skaters.

As I mentioned previously, it was a very hot day. Very hot! The temperature was nearing triple digits and the men were practically drowning in the own perspiration. Now, my husband would not be satisfied with a simple rectangular shaped patio. He had

designed one with curves and angles, and openings for trees and flowers to be planted. The men had to be careful not to allow the cement to spill over into the curves or openings that had been designated for foliage. I could hear them all muttering under their breath, as the cement became the enemy that the "patio brigade" was determined to vanquish.

I was right there, inside, of course, serving cold drink after cold drink to the "sweaty six" as I began to call them. My in-laws were watching from their comfortable spot in our air-conditioned family room. Finally, my mother-in-law could stand it no longer. Her baby was out there, in the hot sun, "sweating bullets" as were the five other men. But, as they say, there is no love like a mother's love. She decided to brave the elements outside and bring her son a cold, wet washcloth for him to wipe away the perspiration and cool himself off.

And, may I remind you, there were five other men out there, literally drenched from head to toe, from the work and the heat, but my mother-in-law saw only one. Her precious baby boy was in danger of passing out from heat prostration and she was not about to allow that to happen.

"Here, sweetheart," she said as she stepped outside. "Cool yourself off with this."

She then handed my husband the washcloth. The other men looked at her in total disbelief as they stood there, equally drenched. But, Mama Gruenfeld only noticed her baby boy. As far as she was concerned, as long as her son was okay, nothing else mattered.

Fortunately, cement lasts virtually forever. Our neighbors have gotten a lot

smarter, and a lot older. I definitely think my  
husband would be on his own, should we

decide we needed a new patio.

# Learning to Trust Yourself

By Judy Gruenfeld

Becoming a parent for the first time is challenging under the best of circumstances. When we are handed our precious bundle of joy we are thrilled, but also apprehensive. We have been entrusted with the care of another human being who is totally dependent on us. Will we know how to care for our newborn? Will we be able to rise to the challenge? But, when you are told your little miracle has special needs, the task seems insurmountable.

We run from doctor to doctor hoping to hear more encouraging words from the next one we see. While we definitely need the advice and direction of doctors, teachers and therapists, we also need to learn to trust ourselves. There were several incidents with my son that shook me to the core of my very being.

The first incident occurred when my younger son was eight months old. Ronnie had been playing on the floor with color forms. Color forms, for those of you who are not familiar with them, are soft, plastic shapes and figures that come with a board. The child can make a design or scene on the board, creating his own picture. Ronnie was quietly playing with the color forms on the floor.

When he was done playing with them, he walked away, leaving the brightly colored pieces where they were. My baby crawled over to them and, naturally, put a piece in his mouth. When I went looking for him I found him sitting by the color forms. He was having difficulty swallowing. I grabbed both children and sped to the pediatrician.

I ran into the doctor's office screaming that my baby had been chewing on a color form and that he was swallowing funny. He was taken immediately into the exam room.

The doctor put him on the exam table, felt his stomach, and said,

"He's breathing okay. He'll pass it."

"But doctor," I implored, "aren't you going to look in his throat?"

"I will if you want me to, but I'm sure I won't find anything" he answered.

"Yes, I want you to," I told the doctor.

He turned his pen light on and looked in my baby's throat. The color form was lodged down deeply and had adhered itself to the back of his throat. The doctor then got a long instrument and pulled it out. The baby, Baruch Hashem, was fine. But I walked out of the pediatrician's office in considerably worse condition than when I walked in.

The next incident occurred shortly after the first one. I took him to a pediatric neurologist while my husband remained at home with our baby.

At one point during the examination, the doctor wanted him to go into another room with him and play ball. When Ronnie refused, the doctor was clearly annoyed and said,

"Most 4 year olds would come with me."

Dumbfounded, I replied, "If he were like most four year olds, we wouldn't be here."

So much for that doctor! For some reason he sent me a copy of his report in which he stated that my son's biggest problem was his mother. Here I was, trying so hard to be the best possible mother I could, under very difficult circumstances, and this "professional" was saying how totally inadequate I was.

And there are many times when you do feel inadequate. No matter how many "stone you turn" there is still a nagging voice in the back of your mind telling you, you haven't



done enough. You missed something. You failed your child!

The next incident occurred when Ronnie was eight. The child study team in our district suggested two schools that we might be interested in looking at for placement the following year.

At the first school, the director was so taken with my younger son, who was four at the time; he virtually ignored my special needs son. When I attempted to refocus his attention, I was asked,

"Do you feel you are the only one who knows what is best for your son?"

"No. Do you?" I asked in return.

Needless to say, we left. I later found out that this school uses "aversives" which means they can use physical force, pinching or the like, in order to get the students to comply with their wished. There is no way I would have allowed Ronnie to be placed in that environment.

We liked the other school very much. Ronnie went there until he aged out of the system at twenty-one. During his last year at the school, his teacher was given the Special Education Teacher of the Year Award. She is a gem, and now runs the school.

The last traumatic incident occurred when Ronnie was fifteen. He wanted to learn how to ski and enter the Special Olympics. The two special ed. teachers who were in charge gave him skis and lessons. At the appointed time, we put him on the bus with the other special olympians.

The Special Olympics was a two-day event, which meant that he would be gone over night. He had a wonderful time and came home with two silver medals.

I don't remember where I was at the time, but my husband went to pick Ronnie up when he returned. My husband told me that Ronnie had hurt his shoulder but he was fine now. He had no further details for me. Since Ronnie was already asleep, I had to wait until the next morning to find out what happened.

Ronnie told me that when he was done taking a shower he went to turn off the water but the faucet was different from ours. The water got hotter and in an attempt to get away from the hot water he fell in the shower.

"Did you tell the teacher?" I asked him.

"Yes," he answered.

"What did she say?" I then inquired.

"Well," he said, "I told her it hurts when I do this" and then he moved his shoulder up and down. "She told me not to do that."

Naturally, I called the teacher. I asked her only one question.

"What would you have told him if you said it hurt when he breathed?"

I believe that a competent professional, and there are many of them out there, will welcome parental input, will consider what parents have to say and will guide them towards making appropriate decisions for their child. We, as parents, must advocate for our children.

Throughout my son's childhood I prayed for a "miracle worker" to walk into our lives and "fix" him. It wasn't until he grew up that I realized my prayers had been answered a long time ago. He wasn't "broken."

By accepting our children as they are and loving them unconditionally we, as parents, can make miracles happen every day.

# When They Grow Up

By Judy Gruenfeld

The news is wonderful. You're expecting! Whether it's your first child, your fourth child, or your eighth child, you react to the news with equal joy and anticipation. What will this new little person be like? What kind of personality will he/she have? What color eyes will he/she have? And what color hair? But there is one thing you knew for sure. There is definitely another little genius on the way.

Baby finally makes his arrival in the world. You're overjoyed, He's perfect; ten fingers, ten toes, everything is working the way it is supposed to and he is the most beautiful baby you have ever seen; except, of course, for your others.

As baby grows, you are beset with an uneasy feeling. "The others were doing such and such by this age," you think. They didn't sleep as much (or as little) or, they didn't cry as much, they didn't take as long to feed, they would busy themselves with their toys and not fuss quite as much.

At some point in time, to your great dismay, your concerns are validated. Your child is diagnosed with developmental disabilities. You put him in the best program that is available, and, as with all your other children, you try to see that he is in an environment where he can maximize his full potential, although you are not quite sure what that potential is. You face many problems raising this child and deal with them as best as you can. Life is definitely more complicated. "One day at a time," you keep telling yourself. "Things will work out." "Yard by yard, life is hard, Inch by inch, it's a cinch" Whoever came up with that saying obviously never raised a child with developmental disabilities.

After long and arduous years, baby finally makes it to adulthood. He is twenty-one years old and he graduates from his special education school. Now what? Should he go into supported employment? Should he go to a day program? Should he work in a sheltered workshop? Exactly what is out there for him now? As with everything in life, each has its pros and cons. What about living arrangements? Should we keep him home? Should we try to find placement in a group home or supervised apartment? The answer to these questions more than likely will depend on where you live and just what services are available in your area.

Your case manager will attempt to reach desirable answers to these questions with you at the annual IHP meetings. That's right, Mom and Dad! Junior has graduated from school and you no longer have to attend IEP meetings' Now, you will attend annual Individual Habilitation Plan meetings and IHP reviews every six months. How many times has your mother told you, "No matter how old you get, you will still be my child?" Fortunately for your mother, she doesn't have a clue as to how true that statement is, especially for us, the parents of adult children with developmental disabilities.

Aside from the above-mentioned questions, which everyone faces, there are many other problems that arise, depending on your child's level of functioning and ability to understand the world around him. Life, needless to say, is very interesting.

My son has Autism and functions at a high level. He is smart enough to get himself into trouble but not out of it.

He reads, writes, spells accurately and is completely independent with his activities of

daily living (also known as - AKA - ADL's in our world of alphabet soup); so much so that at one point in time, he decided to shave every hair off of his body. What do you do in a case like this? Punish him? He's already bald!

Then there was the time I wasn't feeling well. I had another migraine and took some aspirin and decided to take a nap. I slept for quite a while.

The smell of something burning woke me up. At about five o'clock my son figured that he could not rely on me to prepare his supper and decided that he would cook supper for himself and his ailing mother.

He took a pot roast out of the freezer, defrosted it in the microwave oven, and then put it in the convection oven to cook. By the time I smelled the burning meat, there was nothing left to salvage. What was I supposed to do then?

He was trying to help me out, and besides, his supper was already burned! And he loves his food!

Though there is a comical side to these stories (when looked at in retrospect, of course), these are also potentially very serious situations. Fortunately, my son used an electric razor when he decided to become the hairless wonder. I shudder to think what might have happened if he had decided to use a scissor. And the pot roast? Needless to say, he could have burned the house down.

One day, several years ago, when my next door neighbors were away, their dog got out of the yard, My son had been warned several times to stay away from the dog because it had a tendency to bite. But he was worried about the dog getting lost so he attempted to pick him up and put him back in the yard. In the process, the dog bit him. He was afraid to tell me what had happened because he knew I would be angry with him for going near the dog. I happened to see the

bruise on his arm and asked him how it got there. He finally told me, at which point we went to the emergency room for a tetanus shot and an antibiotic. I was so grateful that the wound was not too serious, I didn't have the heart to scold him. Besides, my neighbor's pet almost made a meal out of my son's arm!

The next incident that comes to mind is one that occurred when we were visiting friends for Shabbos, Ronnie needed to use the bathroom. Our hosts had two bathrooms and both of them were occupied. So, being very resourceful, he went down to the basement to use the bathroom. The only problem was the basement was rented out to a young couple and their small son. The lady of the house, or basement, as it were, was also expecting her second child. Fortunately, they were all napping and had no idea that they had been visited by someone they didn't even know. The poor unsuspecting family could have been scared out of their wits. For some reason, there was no lock on the door leading to the basement apartment. Ronnie had been in several homes with basements, none of which were rented out to another family. No matter how many times we tried to explain the situation to him, he could not grasp the extent of the repercussions his actions might have caused. Should I have punished him for answering a call to nature? Would having an "accident" been a better solution? He hasn't done that since he was four!

Ronnie loves to walk. He has a wonderful sense of direction and for several years he would navigate the neighborhood. He never got lost. But as he got older, other issues precluded his walking too far from home. As he matured he became very friendly and outgoing, and very curious. He would interact with anyone, anywhere, and at any time, whether appropriate or not.

He particularly likes small children. Perhaps they are less threatening to him. And though he would never hurt anyone, we could not make him understand that someone who didn't know him would be wary of trusting him around his or her children. In this day and age, a grown man accosting a child is a very dangerous situation.

My son was escorted home twice by police officers because he was thought to be a threat while watching some children play. Fortunately, both police officers were very kind and understanding and realized that he posed no threat to anyone.

I bought Ronnie a Curious George T-shirt with a picture of Curious George, lying flat on his back next to a bottle of ether.

"See what happened to George because he was so curious?" I asked him. "You can get into a lot of trouble by being too curious."

My admonitions fell on deaf ears. He couldn't understand why anyone would consider him a threat. After all, he knew that he would never hurt anyone.

Now, for his own good, he must stay on our block. Does this "punishment" fit his crime?" I, for one, feel at times that my Autistic son has been sentenced to a life of solitary confinement when, ironically enough, he has now become very sociable. He still doesn't understand the implications of his behaviors and seeing him in so much pain breaks my heart.

My birthday was last month. Ronnie tried, unsuccessfully, to print out a birthday card for me on his computer. Instead, he handed me a piece of paper on which he had written:

"Dear Mom,

I'm sorry I couldn't think of anything better to give you, because I'm having trouble with the printer and I have no more money. Have a happy birthday, anyway, with lots of love.

Love, Ron"

That kind of makes up for a lot, don't you think?

# Of Rice and Spaghetti

By Judy Gruenfeld

When both boys were in school all day, I decided it was time for me to do something for myself. But, what did I want to do? We needed a little extra income so I decided to get a job. But, what could I do? I didn't want to leave the house before I had sent the kids off to school and I wanted to be home when they returned. That left the hours of 9:30AM to 2:20 PM.

Before the kids were born I worked as a secretary but I promised myself that I would never be anyone else's "girl" again. So, I got a job in a fast food restaurant chain, working from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. After one week of hauling out huge bags of garbage, mopping floors and scrubbing heating ducts, I quit.

"There's got to be a better way," I thought.

A friend of mine, who had returned to school, suggested I do the same. It sounded like a good idea but I had much trepidation. I felt very unsure of my ability to handle college courses, and had no clue as to what I should major in. My friend was going for Nursing. Although I thought I would like to be a nurse, I knew I didn't have the stomach for it. I seriously considered Special Education but decided that one full-time special ed. student was enough for me. I didn't want to major in business. I wanted to help people. After speaking with a counselor, I decided that Social Work would be the perfect solution, I could help people, even those with developmental disabilities, without the intense relationship of student and teacher. I was on my way.

I enrolled in the local community college and got an Associate's Degree in Social Science. I then transferred to a four year school and obtained a Bachelor's Degree in

Social Work. It turned out to be one of the best decisions I had made in my life. It took me many years to complete my education because I had to leave time for my boys, especially Ronnie. Various situations would arise and I had to be available for him.

The two most difficult courses for me were Physics and Statistics. I stayed after school for extra help and came home crying on more than one occasion.

"Why am I putting myself through this torture?" I would ask my husband.

"Hang in there," He would tell me. "You'll make it." How right he was. Not only did I make it, but I managed, somehow, to get an "A" in both courses. The teachers were very generous.

One day, I was sitting at the dining room table when Kevin, my younger son, who was in the gifted program at his high school came home.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm trying to figure out a problem in statistics," I answered.

He came over to me, looked at my paper, picked up my calculator, pushed a few keys and said, "Here's your answer." He came in very handy that semester.

It's funny, but people would tell me how much they admired me because in spite of the fact that I was raising a handicapped child, I managed to get through college. In spite of my insecurities regarding my ability to handle college courses, I persevered. I found myself looking forward to going to class and enjoyed every minute of school. I did not feel that I deserved any "credit," no pun intended. School was an outlet for me. It helped to keep me sane (although some would argue this point).

I graduated in December of 1991. It was time to look for a job. I now found myself being haunted by the same insecurities that plagued me when I first started school.

"You were worried when you went back to college and you did fine", reassured my husband. "You'll do equally as well at work". Now, almost twelve years later, he very proudly says, "I told you so!"

Ah, but time wise, working was not easy. My younger son was away at college and it took the entire four years for me to learn to cook for three instead of four. Although, nuking the leftovers was my favorite method of cooking.

I did, however, tell my husband and remaining son, who was attending an adult day program at the time, that I would appreciate it if they would be responsible for dinner on Tuesday and Thursday nights as I first was coming home at 6:00 on those days. They had no choice but to help. That is, if they wanted to eat.

The first Tuesday night my husband brought home ready-made meatballs, a jar of spaghetti sauce and a box of spaghetti.

As I walked through the door, I was greeted with,

"How do you make spaghetti?"

"The directions are right on the box," I told my husband.

"But I don't know which pot to use," he said. "Could you take it out for me, please?"

I looked at him, snickered, and took out a pot.

"I'm taking a shower," I told him as I pointed to the directions on the spaghetti box.

"It doesn't say how much water to use," he cried. "Please fill up the pot for me."

I complied.

"I'm taking a shower," I repeated.

"Wait a minute," he pleaded. "How high do I put the flame?"

I put the flame on "high" and told my husband,

"When the water boils, put the spaghetti in the pot. Stir it till it boils again. Then lower the flame a little, to a rolling boil. Stir the spaghetti every two minutes so it doesn't all stick together. It should be done in about eight minutes. Taste it to see if the consistency is good, pour the spaghetti into a strainer. Rinse it with cold water and return it to the pot. Then pour the sauce in and heat it on a low flame until the sauce is hot. If you have any problems, **check the directions on the box.** I'm taking a shower, now."

I turned and ran upstairs for fear that I would never make it to the shower.

Somehow, the spaghetti got cooked and we were actually able to eat it! Although, I must admit that it probably would have been a lot easier on me if I had just cooked it myself.

On Thursday night I came home and found a barbecued chicken sitting on the stove. Ronnie was also at the stove fluffing up a pot of rice.

"Oh, that looks great," I said. "Who made the rice?"

"I did," was his reply.

"That's terrific. Who showed you how to cook rice?"

"No one," replied my Autistic son.

"The directions were on the box!"

# Mrs. Baldt and Mrs. Yetzt

By Judy Gruenfeld

Mrs. Yetzt was the type of person who took care of things immediately, whether it was mending a hem, paying a bill, or doing one of her many acts of chesed.

Mrs. Baldt, on the other hand, was a procrastinator. She would wait till the last minute whenever anything needed to be done, from laundry, to grocery shopping, to straightening up the house.

So it was no surprise that at eight o'clock on any given Friday morning, Mrs. Yetzt was up and cooking and Mrs. Baldt was the last woman in Yemvelt to remain in bed.

On this particular Erev Shabbos morning Mrs. Baldt was sound asleep when her phone rang.

"Hello," she said groggily.

"Mrs. Baldt," said the chipper voice on the other end. "You're not up yet? It's ten o'clock. What are you waiting for?"

"I don't think my Shabbos order has been delivered yet. Besides, Shabbos comes in very late today. It's the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. Say, did you ever try standing an egg up on its tip? You can do that today and it will balance itself. I did that once when the kids were small and I took a picture of it but I haven't been able to do it since. Remind me to show you the picture one day."

"Mrs. Baldt," said Mrs. Yetzt, "There is really no time to talk about egg experiments now. You really have to get moving if you want to get done on time."

"I know," said Mrs. Baldt. "I'm getting up."

"Good," said Mrs. Yetzt, and hung up the phone.

Mrs. Yetzt always prepared extra for Shabbos; probably double the amount she needed for her family. She never knew when

one of her children would bring a friend home, or her husband, a colleague or a Yeshiva bachur or two. There was also extra for the Baldt family if necessary, although Mrs. Baldt somehow seemed to manage to get ready at the very last minute; no time to spare but ready, none the less.

Actually, today was not a very good day for Mrs. Baldt. She had had a migraine since Wednesday and just could not shake it. Her medication did no good, nor did the cold compresses she applied to her head. But, Shabbos would soon be here and she would have to start her preparations eventually.

Mrs. Baldt got out of bed and looked out her living room window. Her entire Shabbos order was on her porch. Slowly, she began to bring all the items into the kitchen. By the time she was done she was exhausted and her head was pounding.

She called her husband "Yaakov," she said. "Our order was just delivered but I am too sick to cook. My head is pounding and I am nauseous. This is one of the worst migraines I have had in a long time. I know I should have been cooking a little each day for Shabbos but I didn't expect to feel so bad."

"Don't worry, dear," said Mr. Baldt. "I will go to the butcher on my way home from work and pick up ready made food. It won't be as good as yours, but it will do for this week."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Baldt. "I am really lucky," she thought to herself. A lot of husbands wouldn't put up with someone who always waits for the last minute to do everything."

She then hung up the phone and went to sleep.

Mr. Baldt got to the store just as it was about to close, "Please," he said, "My wife is sick and I need food for Shabbos."

"We don't have much left," said the butcher, "but I can give you what we have."

A grateful Mr. Baldt took his packages, paid the butcher and went home. His wife was still in bed so he put the items into pots, put the blech on the stove and put the pots on the blech.

None of the married children were coming this week and the three boys who still remained at home had already showered and were ready to go to shul. They knew better than to disturb their mother, not that she would be angry, but they were concerned for her welfare.

When they returned, Mrs. Baldt was still in bed but she wasn't sleeping.

"How are you feeling?" said Rabbi Baldt.

"A little better," said Mrs. Baldt. I bentched licht, although the light really bothered my eyes, and I think I can join everyone at the Shabbos table."

"Wonderf'u1," said her husband. "You sit. The boys will serve."

The boys ran into the kitchen, happy to be able to assist their mother. Just as they did so, there was a knock at the door.

"I'll get it," said Rabbi Baldt. To his surprise three of his most promising students stood outside his house.

"Rebbe," one of them said, "we missed our bus home and we have nowhere to stay for Shabbos."

"Come in, come in, he said to the boys. Now you have a place."

As soon as he said those words, the rebbe remembered that there was not enough food for three additional young boys with hearty appetites.

Embarrassed, he looked at his wife, whose cheeks were starting to turn red. She stammered a little and said,

"Oy, I just remembered," said Mrs. Baldt,

"Mrs. Yetzt invited us all over for the Friday evening meal. With my head feeling so bad, I forgot all about the invitation. I'm sure there will be plenty for our three guests, too."

The eight of them went two doors down to the Yetzt family and were welcomed like royalty. Not only was there plenty of food, there was plenty of camaraderie and Yiddishkeit.

"I don't know how to thank you," Mrs. Baldt said to her hostess when they were ready to leave, but I can tell you one thing. From now on, I will not allow laziness to



# A Very Special Education

By Judy Gruenfeld

"Ma," called ten year old Kevin as he walked in the door. "I'm home."

"Hi, honey. How was your day?"

"Good. Can I have a friend come over after school tomorrow?"

"Whom did you have in mind?"

"Joel. He's also a walker but he lives in the other direction."

"How come you never mentioned him before?"

"He's a new kid. He just moved in. He's really nice and I'd like to be his friend."

"Do you have his phone number? I'd like to speak with his mother first."

Kevin handed me a piece of paper.

"Yeah, sure. Here it is."

I picked up the phone and dialed. A lady answered. "Hello."

"Hi, Mrs. Gross?"

"Yes."

"My name is Judy Gruenfeld. Our sons are in the same class at school and it seems they have become friends. Kevin would like Joel to come over after school tomorrow. Naturally, I wanted to speak to you first,"

"That's really nice of you. Everyone in the neighborhood has been so welcoming. Please, call me Lori."

"Okay, Lori. They can walk home together and Joel is welcome to stay for supper."

"If it is okay with you, I would like to pick the boys up from school and bring them to your house. This way we can meet."

"That sounds like a good idea, especially since it's supposed to rain tomorrow. You can stay for coffee, if you like."

"Actually, I have to be home for my daughter but I appreciate the invitation. Maybe another time."

"Okay, I'll see you tomorrow, then."

"Bye", Lori said, and we both hung up.

"Joel's mother sounds very nice," I

said.

"Why wouldn't she? Joel is nice."

"All right, Mr. Wisecracker, have your snack and go upstairs and do your homework."

"Okay. Thanks, Mom."

"You're welcome, honey."

"Ma," yelled Kevin as he walked in the door the following day. "Joel and his Mom are here."

"It's so nice to meet you both," I said as I approached the front door. Please come in."

"You, too," said Lori, "but I really have to run. I'm afraid Joel can't stay for supper, either. Maybe another time. I'll be back to pick him up at five-thirty, if that's okay with you."

"That's fine," I said.

"See you later then. Joel, behave yourself. Bye."

"Boys, you can have a snack and then go up and play."

Out came the milk and cookies.

"Ma, Joel is from Queens, the same place that we're from." Though Kevin was born in Freehold and knows he never lived in Queens, he still refers to the apartment we lived in before moving to New Jersey as "ours"; maybe because Ronnie lived in the apartment until he was fifteen months old. Who knows? Whatever the case, it's certainly not worth making an issue over it.

The boys were enjoying their cookies and milk when Ronnie came home. Kevin introduced him to Joel, as Joel had his eyes fixed on Ronnie's schoolbooks.

Though Ronnie was fourteen years old, his books were on a more elementary level than Kevin's and Joel's and Joel couldn't hide his stare or his confusion.

As I gave Ronnie his milk and cookies, I noticed Kevin discretely moving closer to Joel and whispering in his ear,

"He's in Special Ed. I'll explain what that is when we go up to my room."

*Judy Gruenfeld can be reached at  
judygru@optonline.net*

# Judy's Connection

By Judy Gruenfeld

*Judy can be contacted through email@judys\_connection@yahoo.com*

Dear Judy,

I have four children ranging in age from two to seven. My second son who is five was diagnosed with Autism and ADHD a year and a half ago.

We have been very fortunate in that we were able to find an excellent school for him to attend.

The school not only addresses his education and behavioral needs but the environment is one that teaches our values.

Though we certainly have issues we must face while raising our son with Autism, he is not my major concern at this time. His brother, who is eighteen months younger, seems to have gotten lost in the shuffle when we were taking our second son from doctor to doctor, seeking a diagnosis, and expecting our fourth child.

I have read where siblings of children with disabilities develop sensitivity towards other people, especially for their disabled sibling. This is the case with my older son but not with my third one.

Maybe he is too young and we are expecting too much of him but he is a very angry, oppositional child. He fights with his brothers and I once saw him hitting the baby (I am expecting again and I am very worried about him being near a newborn). My son with Autism is a very mild mannered and gentle.

I am constantly getting calls from his play group saying that he is acting out and fighting with his classmates. I don't know how much longer they will put up with his behavior before he is expelled, and I think it would be a mistake for him to be home all day and not learn social skills.

Also, I haven't got the time to constantly watch him.

My older son is very well adjusted and happy, Baruch Hashem, except when it comes to dealing with my third son.

I, myself, am almost at the breaking point. Please help me.

Signed,

*Overwhelmed*

*Mom*

Dear Overwhelmed Mom,

It is not unusual for typical children to feel that they are being neglected when one child takes up so much of their parents' time and attention. There are many "sibs groups" for siblings of children with disabilities where they can get together and discuss anything that is bothering them. This can be of great help to those siblings. Just knowing they are not alone and can form friendships with other children who are going through the same thing is a positive reinforcement.

That being said, I'm surprised you didn't mention anything about having your third son tested for any learning disabilities. I am also surprised that the school did not refer you to anyone for testing. Many times this runs in families and when one child exhibits signs of ADHD, there is the likelihood that other children will also display the same symptoms. This does not mean that your other son has Autism, but there is a possibility he may have ADHD and not be able to control his behaviors.

I would speak to the principal at his school and see if he has any suggestions. I would also suggest that you contact your Autistic son's school and express your

concerns to them. I'm sure they have the resources for any referrals you need.

I, personally, would suggest psychological and psychiatric evaluations. If there is a learning disability or a psychological problem involved, it will be identified and treated. You want to address this before it takes more of a toll on your family and more importantly, before your son starts exhibiting more of a lack of self-esteem and his behaviors

continue to escalate. This would compound any already existing learning disability drastically. I have seen it happen. The psychological problems resulting from a lack of appropriate intervention and, thus, a lack of self-esteem, can have consequences much more far reaching than the learning disability itself.

I wish you the best.

# When the Bough Doesn't Break

By Judy Gruenfeld

My life as I knew it, changed completely on May 30, 1969, when my son Ronnie was born. Though our lives, naturally, change once we have children, I was totally unprepared for the turn it took. He was, of course, the most beautiful baby I had ever seen.

By the time Ronnie was two, his golden hair framed two brilliant sapphires that glistened beneath a long forest of eyelashes. He knew the alphabet, could count to ten and knew about six colors.

Though he was wary of others, he was very affectionate with my husband, my parents and myself. Ronnie was a very happy toddler. He loved to play hide and seek and he quickly learned to swim in the above ground pool we had in our back yard. To this day, he makes barely a splash as he glides from one end of the pool to the other.

I remember one incident when I gave Ronnie a hamburger for lunch. I cut up the hamburger and served it to him. He removed one piece of meat at a time from his plate and put it on the table, counting as he went along. When the entire hamburger was on the table he would begin counting again and returned the pieces to his plate. It took a lot of coaxing to get him to eat everything.

While Ronnie's vocabulary was adequate, his sentences were short and choppy, and he definitely lacked communication skills. By the time he was three he exhibited what is called "echolalia". When someone said something to him instead of answering, he would repeat what he or she said. We were at a friend's house one afternoon when Ronnie picked up an ashtray. When my friend said, "Ronnie, put the ash tray down," instead of putting it down or even saying "no" he

repeated, "Ronnie, put the ash tray down" He spoke in a sing-song voice - which he still does - and had trouble recognizing faces.

Ronnie was also afraid to sit on riding toys; the kind you push with your feet. Now, with 20/20 hindsight I can attribute this to his perceptual impairment.

We went from doctor to psychologist, to speech therapist, to audiologist, to a pediatric neurologist, to the eye doctor. The only one who found a problem was the eye doctor who prescribed glasses for Ronnie. Nothing changed; not even his recognition of people, though he had proven to be quite nearsighted. The pediatrician said, and I quote, "The only thing wrong with Ronnie is you. You are much too overbearing and are stifling his growth." I grabbed Ronnie and ran out of his office crying. Needless to say, we found another pediatrician.

My husband and my mother refused to believe there was anything amiss. I had nowhere to turn. I felt alone, guilty and overwhelmed.

Though Ronnie did well in nursery school and in kindergarten, the gnawing in my stomach would not abate. Maybe it WAS me! I was totally at a loss and very desperate. At age six he started first grade. Though he learned to read easily, he still possessed no social skills. He had never passed the parallel play stage. Ronnie's teacher referred him to the school psychiatrist who diagnosed him with Autism.

Autism is a pervasive disorder characterized by impaired social interaction and communication skills, rocking back and forth, hand flapping, and head banging (which, fortunately, Ronnie did not do). While today, Autism is more commonly diagnosed -

according to experts at the National Institute of Neurological disorders and Stroke, three to six out of every one thousand children are born with Autism, with males four times as likely as females to be afflicted - back then, it was practically unheard of.

Truth be told, my husband and I had no idea what to do, where to go, or how to help our son. My parents lived two hours away, there was no early intervention at that time and the support system that is available today was non-existent then. It was also very difficult bringing him to family gatherings at times. Most people, family and friends included, didn't understand Autism, nor did they even try. Often, I was told that I was spoiling my son and it was this that was the root of the problem. Indeed, as Ronnie became increasingly immersed in his own world, mine felt more and more like it was falling apart.

I recall a time when we went to visit my husband's sister and her family one Sunday afternoon when Ronnie was about six. At that time my sister-in-law had a son who was three. My nephew had quite a collection of matchbox cars; there must have been at least fifty of them. The sewer happened to be in front of their house. (Remember the riding toys Ronnie would not ride on because of his faulty depth perception?) Well, he was beginning to grasp onto this concept and would test it out whenever he could. Unfortunately, he chose to see how far down the sewer went by throwing the matchbox cars into it.

My mother-in-law became very angry and started yelling at Ronnie and looking at me for not disciplining him. My father-in-law told my mother-in-law to stop yelling because "You know how he is. He can't help it."

I managed, somehow, to hold back my tears until we left, which wasn't soon enough for me. When we got in the car, the dam broke and I was hysterical crying. My husband

defended his parents, stating that they meant the best and I was over reacting. I have never felt so alone and unaccepted.

Eventually, after many years of hand-wringing, sleepless nights, and contentious meetings with doctors and supposed experts, my husband and I decided to put Ronnie in The Search Day School for Autistic Children. He was eleven years old. Under the guidance of the capable staff, Ronnie began to thrive. There was a very small teacher/pupil ratio and he got the attention he needed. There is no substitute for cooperation between school and home. Together, we helped Ronnie strive to reach his full potential.

Today, Ronnie is thirty-nine years old. He grew up to be one of the finest, most sensitive young men I know. He now attends a workshop with other individuals who have developmental disabilities. He is a hard worker and gets a great sense of accomplishment from his work. He bowls, swims, skis, reads, learns every week, uses a computer, plays the piano and is more at home in the kitchen than his father. He makes the best rice pilaf I have ever tasted, and he has his own indoor grill on which he can cook just about anything.

While Ronnie was growing, I was also growing. I had discovered Yiddishkeit and was grabbing onto it for dear life. I was raised in a totally secular home. As an adult, I decided that what might be right for my parents might not be right for me. I began learning with an insatiable appetite for Torah, which, I am delighted to say, continues to grow stronger. Suddenly, I had a different outlook when it came to my son. I wasn't being punished. I had been chosen – chosen to nurture a special neshama that Hashem had brought into this world.

When my attitude changed, my whole life changed. Instead of trying to stop the "bad" behaviors, I would encourage the

appropriate behaviors. Instead of looking at my son as a punishment, I began looking at him as a blessing and a test - a test that I could pass with flying colors. Why am I being tested? I don't know. But what I do know is that my life definitely has purpose and meaning. This is not to say that every day is

delightful and I'm not always in the mood to take a test.

Reaching out to other families who have a child with special needs has helped me. Just knowing I am not alone often gives me the courage to continue to move forward. And with Hashem's help, we will continue to grow every day, one day at a time.

## **I'll Be Your Best Friend** By Judy Gruenfeld

*Judy can be contacted through email@judys\_connection@yahoo.com*

When we are born, no one knows which road lies before us. We could be inundated with material goods or barely eke out a living. We could be what society deems good looking or we could have a face "only a mother could love".

We could be blessed with good health or be stricken with a dreadful disease. We could be ever so fortunate as to be born into an observant home. Or we could be "Exhibit A" and follow the secular American Dream, many of our parents did after shedding their European garb and customs, until we know better. We could also have many healthy, happy, normal children (*kin ayena hara*) or we could be blessed by one who is not as perfect as his contemporaries.

The gift of a disabled child comes in various wrappings, unraveling all our hopes and dreams as the paper is torn away. Suddenly, the future is not so clear.

What will happen to this child? How will the world treat him? What will happen when I am no longer here? He has siblings who love him, but they must lead their own lives.

But, if we take advantage of the many resources around us, life will be much more fulfilling for all those involved in our special child's life. For me, until recently, that resource was my parents. My father was the best father a girl could have had and is the best grandfather my son could have.

From day one they were inseparable. There is an expression that grandparents and grandchildren get along so well because they have a common enemy. I have my doubts on that one, but who's to say? Nonetheless, Grandpa and Ronnie are best friends of the highest order. As Ronnie once put it,

"Grandpa loves me best."

There wasn't a dry eye in the house, including Ronnie's.

When my mother asked him why he was crying, Ronnie said, "they are happy tears".

I don't think I could have expressed the idea of "happy tears" at the age of four.

Ronnie always liked lights. That is why Grandpa held him up to the light switches when he was a baby and Ronnie turned the lights on and off as he giggled with delight. They went for walks, they played ball, Grandpa read to Ronnie until Ronnie could read and then they took turns reading to each other. When my parents stayed over, Ronnie snuggled in bed with them, drowning in their kisses.

So, last spring, when my father was told he needed open-heart surgery for a clogged coronary artery and a calcified heart valve, Ronnie was devastated. Ronnie can certainly relate to hearts. He's got one of the best ones I've encountered.

I'll never forget one particular Friday afternoon, when he was five years old. Ronnie and I were walking down Clifton Avenue when an elderly lady in front of us tripped and fell to the ground. My little tzaddik tried to pick her up while asking,

"Are you all right?"

Yes, you read correctly. Ronnie. The little boy with the big label that said, "DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED" was trying to help an elderly lady get back on her feet.

The lady told me she had never seen such a small child show such compassion for another person. Ronnie is also perceptually impaired. This is a given with many



developmental disabilities but I often wonder just whose perception it is that is impaired. I believe that he often sees things more clearly than the rest of us.

Baruch Hashem, my father is doing fine. Ronnie has, of course, been to visit him often and I believe these visits were an integral part of my father's recovery.

Throughout the years my parents have had their health problems. They are quite elderly now and cannot do what they were able to do when Ronnie was a child. I, as their only child, need to help them on occasion but Ronnie and my father were, are, and will always be best friends.

# IT'S NOT EASY GETTING OLD

By Judy Gruenfeld

It's not easy getting old. Or so I've been told. Although I am definitely experiencing some of the symptoms first hand, my mother-in-law is ninety-four and has a full blown case of old age.

Things weren't going too badly until her recent stroke. The only lasting effect was memory loss. Now, that can be a good thing, say, if you owed her some money. But, generally speaking, things have become much more difficult. My sister-in-law is constantly running over to Mom's apartment, afraid that Mom will forget who she is or where she is. (Security in her senior building has found her roaming the halls in the middle of the night). Or that she might forget that she put something on the stove to cook and burn down the building.

It is very hard for my sister-in-law. One with Dementia needs as much if not more care and patience than a child does. Patience is not my sister-in-law's strong suit, although I must admit she is handling Mom very well. It's got to be a difficult thing, in general, to see the person who nurtured and raised you fade before your eyes. And so, Mom gets confused, and Sis loses her patience. And the screaming matches start: Sis thinks if she yells louder Mom will understand. Unfortunately, Mom doesn't even hear her a great deal of the time.

We were visiting one week-end and I decided to take a nap in the afternoon. The sound of a screeching voice penetrated my peaceful, dreamy world and woke me up. It was 6:00 in the evening. When I went downstairs to inquire what the commotion was about, my husband told me that his sister had

just put dinner on the table; chicken, pot roast, potato kugel, kasha, vegetables and salad. It sounded and looked good to me. I washed my hands and the sleep from my eyes and sat down to what I thought would be a pleasant dinner. Was I mistaken! As soon as I sat down my mother-in-law started complaining to me,

"What do you think" she said "We are being served dinner for breakfast"!

"Huh?" was my astute reply. (I was still a little groggy and not fully awake).

"The food" my mother-in-law said. "My daughter is serving dinner food for breakfast".

"Oh" I said, not knowing what had transpired before I emerged from my comfortable, quiet cocoon just moments earlier.

"It's six o'clock in the evening" said my sister-in-law, a few decibels louder than before. Now I was awake! ]

"Would you like me to make you something else?" I offered.

"No" she replied glancing somewhat contemptuously at my sister-in-law. I'll eat what I was served".

Finally, things calmed down and everyone started eating peacefully. Then the phone rang and I totally lost it.

"Who's calling so early in the morning?" I asked.

We all had a good laugh which we needed, especially my sister-in-law. Hopefully she let off enough steam to be able to face the next crisis which is probably just around the corner.

## A Tribute to Mike

By Judy Gruenfeld

Mike woke up on Wednesday morning as he did every morning prior. He got dressed and left for his job at the hospital.

Mike was a nurse. He cared for each and every patient as if he or she were a member of his family. His infectious grin put a smile on everyone's face, co-worker and patient alike. The children regarded him as a surrogate father during their hospital stay; the adults as an adoring son or grandson.

There was nothing Mike wouldn't do for his patients. Just having him around lifted their spirits and made them feel better. His wonderful wife, Rose, deserves partial credit for Mike's attitude towards life. She adored her husband, as he did her, and together, they

brought joy and love to all those whose lives they touched.

But this past Wednesday morning was different. Mike never returned home from work. He collapsed on the hospital floor and, thus, became a patient as everyone rushed to him and tried to assess the situation. Mike died at age thirty, in the very place he helped to save so many lives.

Mike's mother-in-law is one of my dearest friends and I, who put pen to paper, can find no words to comfort those who so desperately need comforting.

May Mike take his rightful place in the World of Truth and may G-d give strength and comfort to all those to whom he was so dear and left behind.

# If You Love Your Children...

By Judy Gruenfeld

If you love your children, raise your hand. I'll bet there isn't a hand that didn't go up. Figuratively speaking, that is. Though we all want what is best for our children, none of us can claim to have the wisdom of King Solomon. So, why are some divorced parents splitting their children in half? Life is not a chess game and our children are not pawns. Nor are they footballs to be passed back and forth in order for one parent to "score a goal" over the other.

I recall an incident when my children were small. They were playing in the sandbox, which was actually comprised of four wooden slats that were connected together to form a square of dirt where they could dig. As you know, children love dirt. So do worms.

My sons dug up a worm that must have been at least six inches long and began arguing about who could rightfully lay claim to their prized finding. My little King Solomon came upon the perfect solution. He took a shovel, split the worm in half, gave half to his brother and kept the other half for himself. Both boys were delighted. Each had a decent size worm and they went about their business of playing.

The only problem arose when it was time for them to come in for supper and I refused to allow the worm(s) inside my house. After all, that was my "turf."

Another incident occurred several years later when my younger son's middle school band had a concert. My husband had just gotten a new job and with it a brand new company car. As he didn't come home until 8:00 the evening and the concert began at 7:30, I herded the kids into my old station wagon (pre-SUV days) and headed for the school.

My husband came home, wolfed down his dinner and met us at the school after the performance had begun. (Needless to say, no one can play the trumpet like my son, with the possible exception of Louis Armstrong). We all enjoyed the performance and started piling out of the auditorium after helping ourselves to some refreshments.

When we got out to the parking lot, my husband queried,

"Who wants to ride home with me and who wants to ride home with Mom?"

Both boys chose to ride home with their father but would not go with him until they explained under no uncertain terms that they were choosing between cars, not between parents! Fortunately, our home was, and still is, intact. And yet it was very important to the children to express the fact that they could not be expected to choose one parent over the other.

Why do our children feel it is up to them to act as adults, settle arguments and keep peace in the family? What burdens are we placing on them? This role reversal is taking its toll on poor, innocent children whose parents are playing ping-pong and using their children as the ball.

Divorce is not a pleasant thing even in the best-case scenario. If you can't see your way clear to get counseling and stay together for the children and do your best to provide a safe, secure environment for them, at least try to be civil to one another. Whether or not you decide to stay married and remain in the same home, you are all in the same boat, like it or not. And it's sink or swim. Either you all win or you all lose. And the stakes are high. A child's security is a horrendous price to pay in

order to feed your ego. As the old saying goes, "even if you're right, you're wrong."

Unfortunately, I have seen bright, sensitive children become lost and frightened because parents lose sight of what is truly important.

And the road back is infinitely harder than staying on the right path to begin with. Sometimes a marriage can't be saved. But

regardless of your difficulties with your spouse, I urge you to consider the effects your behavior has on your children. There is nothing more important to us than they are. We must be sure we are sending them that message whether by word or deed. Perhaps we, too, will get a newer and clearer perspective.

# In Tribute to Mom

By Judy Gruenfeld

We visited my mother-in-law a few months ago after she suffered a stroke. She had just turned ninety-five and had to celebrate her birthday after moving into a nursing home. As we each took turns wishing her a happy birthday, her words of years ago echoed in my ears.

"G-d forbid," she would say. "I should never have to be in a nursing home."

Still somewhat disoriented, she asked, "Do you like my new apartment?"

"It's very nice," I told her.

"Yah, it's okay," she said. "In this apartment I get all my meals. Not just supper. The food is not as good as in the other place and I have my main meal for lunch. Supper is terrible. I think they're trying to starve me. I keep losing weight."

The food is the same, as she went from independent living to nursing care in the same complex. The private duty nurse we hired for her said she eats everything.

"She complains," the nurse would tell us. "But she eats it."

"Come closer;" Mom said to each of us. "I want to see you better." "You look wonderful," she told each of us as she raised the only arm she could move to give us each a hug. Her recent stroke and subsequent mini-strokes left her right side virtually useless. She was unable to walk independently and required assistance to transfer from bed to wheelchair, to bathroom, etc. When she did move, it was at a snail's pace so she was kept in diapers to avoid any accidents. She was changed frequently and didn't seem to mind the fact that she was wearing diapers, which to me, felt like a double blow to her dignity. She also had an alarm on her wheelchair. If she attempted to

get up by herself, the alarm would go off and someone would come to her aid.

When I first met my mother-in-law she was in her fifties, as I am now. I was twenty. She ran circles around me then. To see her so debilitated was incomprehensible. We have become very close over the years and we genuinely love each other, but it wasn't always that way. I got a somewhat less than warm welcome into the family as a bride of twenty-one and our relationship was strained for many years. My in-laws were European and, thank G-d, they made it to these United States before the gates surrounding Europe were locked and bolted.

My husband and I were married for about twenty-five years when suddenly, from across the breakfast table, my mother-in-law proclaimed, "I love you. You have no idea how much I love you. I'm always talking to my friends about you and telling them how much I love you. I'm only sorry I never told you sooner. I don't know why I didn't. Maybe I was afraid if I opened myself up to you, you would have made fun of my English."

How truly courageous of her to risk ridicule (as she perceived the situation) in order to make things right between us.

I got up from my chair and went over to her. We both started crying and hugging, and melted into each other's arms. From then on we openly felt and showed affection for one another.

Seeing Mom in a nursing home, in diapers, often disoriented, belied the strength and courage she required in order to leave her home and start life anew halfway across the world. But time marches on, and Mom was no longer the vital young woman she once was.

Shortly after our visit, I received a phone call from my sister-in-law, who had received a phone call from the nursing home. It seems my mother-in-law attempted to get out of bed during the night and fell to the floor. Thank G-d, she was fine. Nothing was bruised or broken.

"I need to use the bathroom," she told the night nurse as she was assisted back into bed.

"I'll change your diaper," the nurse told her.

Diaper changed, Mom safe and sound in bed, the nurse went back to her station.

When my sister-in-law went to visit her later that day, my mother-in-law said,

"Come closer. I have to tell you a secret."

"What's the matter, Mom?" inquired Sis. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine," Mom said. "Don't tell anyone, but I fell out of bed on purpose last night"

"What?!" asked my sister-in-law. "Why would you do such a thing?" "Because I

had to use the bathroom," Mom replied. "And they come faster if they think you fell out of bed. You have to learn how to get what you want around here."

When repeating the incident to me, my sister-in-law asked, "Is she funny, or what?"

"Yeah, she's funny." I admitted. But, somehow, I didn't feel like laughing.

A few weeks ago my mother-in-law had another stroke, which left her totally dependent, disoriented and unable to communicate. She could not get out of bed and had to be fed either by someone else if she could swallow or intravenously, if she could not swallow.

Last week Mom returned her pure soul to her Creator, dignity and kavod fully restored.

Throughout all the difficulties she encountered in life, her emunah and bitachon in Hashem never wavered. May she be zochar to have her children and grandchildren continue to serve the A-mighty in the manner befitting this true Bas Yisrael and Aishes Chayil.

# The Name on the Paper

By Judy Gruenfeld

As Pesach approaches, unlike Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when we are expected to ask forgiveness for any transgressions from Hashem and our fellow Jews, we are led from the humility of bondage in Mitzrayim to freedom and nationhood in our own land.

Throughout history countless stories have been told that have depicted personal journeys from captivity and persecution to liberation, and have shown examples of the indomitable Jewish spirit.

The following is a fictionalized account of one such struggle. The facts contained therein, however, are unfortunately, all too true.

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Miriam Esther Grossberger was the daughter of Holocaust survivors. Her parents had come to the United States after the war, broken and alone, and penniless. Both of their families had perished in the inferno in Europe. Only her father and mother remained alive from each family. There were no more grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers or cousins. And no more friends. There was nothing left in Europe for either of them but bad memories and heartache. Each decided to leave the ghosts behind in the ruins that were once their home-towns and start life anew in America.

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David Grossberger, Miriam Esther's father, was from a prominent family in Berlin. They were wealthy merchants who catered to the needs of the upper echelon of Germany's aristocracy.

They had become totally secular and assimilated and were caught up in German society and the privileges their position

accorded them. There was virtually no more connection to their religion, with the exception of Bris Milah and a family gathering on the first night of Pesach. There were no prayer books, and no rituals. The only thing that made this night different from all other nights was the fact that they had matzah on the table next to the bread. No one knew why he or she even bothered with these two rituals but, nevertheless, they continued, even though they were just empty expressions of a tradition long abandoned.

Only David's mother held tight to the traditions of her ancestors, But since her husband had become enmeshed in German society and referred to himself as a "proud German citizen," while denying or minimizing any affiliation with his Jewishness, his mother could do nothing to counteract the influence on their only son.

David's family had many friends in high places and was sure their political and social connections would keep the family safe from the atrocities that were beginning to occur all around them. They were not alone in their thinking. Many well-placed Jews felt they would be safe and exempt from the ubiquitous butchering taking place in their native countries. But they were dreadfully wrong.

When push came to shove, a Jew was a Jew in the Germany of the 1930's and 1940's. Though many were lured into a false sense of security, reality eventually caught up with them. There was no escaping the brutality in which they were about to be engulfed. The myth would prove to be just that, a myth, as they were eventually swallowed up in the abyss that was the Third Reich. Much to the



family's horror, one blustery, winter morning, that will forever remain embedded in David's mind, he, along with his entire family, was rounded up and deported to Auschwitz. Their heartless captors met their cries regarding their connections with people in high places with laughter and derision. All but David perished.

While sorting out some of the ill-fated inmates clothing, which was his job in the concentration camp, David found his proud father's shoes and his dear mother's dress.

"Mama," he cried, "What has your G-d wrought on us? How did your religion help you? It's all a sham! I want no part of it!"

When other inmates were able to take out a hidden prayer book and pray from it in secrecy, David turned his head and his heart away. When other inmates refused to eat on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, David shook his head, called them "fools" and ate his moldy bread and watery soup.

"You need all the strength you can get," David admonished his fellow inmates. "Don't be foolish. Eat."

"Nu," said a rabbi in David's barracks, "With what little we are given to eat, it will be much easier for us to fast. Our stomachs are already used to being empty. One day without moldy bread and watery soup won't make much of a difference."

"But, how can you still believe in and hold on to all these traditions after all we are being put through? How can G-d allow such a thing to happen? I cannot believe in a G-d who would allow such inhumane treatment to occur."

"David," said the rabbi. "Tell me something. Your disbelief, your assimilation into German society, your denying who you are and identifying with non-Jews, has this served you in good stead? Has this helped to keep you safe from harm during these treacherous times? Whether you like it or not,

you are a Jew. You will always be a Jew. And if you ever forget that, an anti-Semite will invariably come along and remind you. The Nazis make no distinction between you and me, between the observant and the non-observant. But I do have an advantage over you. Your Germans, your friends in high places, have all turned their backs on you. Now, you may say that my G-d has turned his back on me, has abandoned me. But I know different. Those of us who believe are given the strength to go on. We won't give up on G-d or on ourselves. And He won't give up on us, either."

David listened to the words of the rabbi, a distinguished and esteemed gentleman, who was a renowned Torah scholar, walking around in tattered, striped prison garb, his bones almost protruding through his thin, translucent skin. The guards spat on this holy man when they passed by him. They laughed heartily at him and his piousness and tried to bait him, saying,

"You filthy Jew! Where is your G-d now?"

The rabbi well knew the answer to this question but he refused to engage in any sort of discourse with these sub-human creatures. His body was imprisoned, this was true, but no one, not even these reincarnates of Amalek himself, could lay claim to his soul.

David was confused. How could the rabbi still have such strong convictions in the midst of all this horror? But he seemed to draw every ounce of his strength from his belief. David did not know what to think anymore. He did not know what to believe anymore. He just wished this nightmare would end. If he survived he might even be willing to give G-d a second chance, but he wasn't sure. He wasn't sure of anything anymore.

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Anna Liebowitz, Miriam Esther's mother, was from a small town in Poland. Unlike David, she came from very modest beginnings. Her family was not poor but neither were they rich. Her father was a tailor and was very good at his craft. He made suits and dresses for the religious and the not so religious, for Jew and Gentile alike. Everyone trusted him. He was an honest man who charged fair prices. He had much more work than he could handle, but people were willing to wait for their clothing. He would take his time with each garment and would not allow anything to leave his shop until he was satisfied that he had done the best job possible.

When the war began moving closer to their hometown, the Liebowitz family considered emigrating from Poland, but where would they go? There was no one to sponsor them and they did not have enough money for themselves and their four children to leave the country, much less start a new life elsewhere. They would have to make do as best as they could and remain where they were. With G-d's help, they would be alright. They would survive, one day at a time.

Once Hitler (may his name be blotted out) invaded Poland though, the Liebowitz family found themselves caught up in the maelstrom. One Friday night, after Mrs. Leibowitz had lit her Shabbos candles, and the family was about to sit down to their meal, there was a loud and furious knock at their front door. Someone was screaming to open the door and let him in. The family members looked at each other, petrified. Mr. Leibowitz went to open the door just as one of the SS was about to kick it in.

"You have one hour to pack some things!" The guard ordered. "We will be back for you then! If anyone is missing, the rest of you will be shot!" He clicked his heels, exited the house, and continued down the street, rounding up all the other Jewish families in the neighborhood.

"What should we pack?" Mrs. Liebowitz asked her husband, the reality of the situation not quite registering.

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asked her husband, the reality of the situation not quite registering. "And for how long? Where are they taking us? Will it be cold? Will it be hot?"

"My dear wife," said Mr. Liebowitz. "Do not worry. Everything will be fine. Just put a few things in a suitcase, a change of clothes, a little something to eat, maybe. G-d will be with us. You will see. It will be all right.

Mrs. Liebowitz did as her husband suggested. She packed a change of clothing for each of the children and for herself and her husband. She made them each a sandwich and put them in the suitcase, too. She wrapped a pearl necklace and a gold bracelet in a handkerchief and put them under the clothes. Then the family sat and prayed while waiting for the SS to return. The guard who was posted outside their door did not bother them until their time was up.

An hour later, as promised, they could hear shouting in the street.

"Jews, outside! Every one of you! We will search your homes before we leave and whoever is found inside will be shot on the spot!"

The Liebowitz family did as they were told. Mother, father and four children hurried outside, not knowing where they were going or if they would ever see their home or each other again. They were herded into a truck, leaving behind forever the life they had known. It was a good life, and things would never be the same.

They were driven to the train station where they were herded into cattle cars. They rode for days until they reached Auschwitz.

Once there, the men and boys were separated from the women and girls. They

were then told to go to the left or to the right. Anna was the eldest. She and her parents were pushed to the right while her younger siblings were pushed to the left. When Anna's mother and father tried to grab their three small children, they, too, were pushed to the left. Anna never saw any of them again. But her faith in G-d never wavered. It was this that got her through the war.

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When David and Anna were liberated from Auschwitz, they were barely alive. They were both hospitalized for several months until they were strong enough to go to a Displaced Persons Camp. It was there that they met. Neither spoke the other's language, but somehow they were able to connect and communicate on a deeper level. They felt each other's pain and identified with each other's losses.

While in the camp they learned English from the soldiers who were in charge. They were both hungry for the family they had lost and found in each other a sense of oneness born out of their desperation and need to belong, somewhere, and to someone. Whether they would have chosen each other under more normal circumstances, it is hard to say. But these circumstances were far from normal and they both yearned to be whole again.

They decided to marry and immigrate to America. Both Anna and David wanted to build their family again but Anna wasn't sure she could have children because of all the inhumane experimentation done on her. David told her it didn't matter. One way or another, they would have a family, they would be a family. They would start all over again. They would put down roots in America and build as many branches as they could.

They were married shortly thereafter and moved to America six months later. David opened up a grocery store and Anna was by his side every day, helping him make a go at it. Business was good but Anna kept having miscarriage after miscarriage. David never told his wife of his increasing pain after each miscarriage but tried to sooth her each time and help her through each loss.

When Anna finished the first tri-mester of another pregnancy she told David she was expecting. She had never gotten this fart before. They were both elated and afraid to be too happy at the same time. But, when six months later, Anna gave birth to a healthy baby girl, they were both beside themselves with joy.

With tears in his eyes, David said, "Anna, I know we both lost our entire families during the war, and I don't know if I have the right to ask this of you but, if it is all right with you, I would like to name the baby after my mother."

Anna could not refuse him. This or anything. He was a good and loving husband and had told her a lot about his beloved mother who was a fine, righteous person. And, although David was still not sure how he felt about G-d, he went along with his wife, and observed Jewish law, as his mother also would have wished. Anna owed him this.

"Miriam Esther Grossberger, it is," said Anna, and they cried in each other's arms; tears of unparalleled joy mixed with tears of heart wrenching pain.

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They were not able to have any more children but Miriam Esther was all that a parent could hope for. She was pretty, smart, obedient and devoted to her parents. They were the only family she had. And while her friends had aunts, uncles and cousins, Miriam Esther was given enough love by her parents

to make up for the lack. She did not feel as if she were missing a thing. Sure, some of her friends had extended families but Miriam Esther wouldn't trade her parents for all the extended family in the world.

Occasionally she would ask her parents questions about the family she never knew. They would tell her all about her wonderful grandparents, aunts and uncles. As she got older, they told her, in an age appropriate way, a little about some of their war experiences, they wanted her to be aware of the Holocaust but did not want to cause their precious daughter any undue fright.

When Miriam Esther was a senior in high school, her history teacher planned a trip to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. She had been there once before on a class trip when she was in elementary school. She would have liked to go with her parents but they did not have the wherewithal to live through the experience again even if they could walk away from it at any time. Miriam Esther understood this and did not press the issue.

The following Monday morning the students boarded the bus and headed for Washington. When they arrived at the museum, five hours later, they were all glad to get out of the bus and stretch their legs. They purchased their tickets and headed into the museum. As her ticket was being handed to her, Miriam Esther's mind wandered back to one of the stories her father had told her.

"Papers!" said the SS officer: as he saw her father, then a young boy, running down the street, and made him stop. Her father stood, frozen in the spot, and proffered the papers in question, as he was told to do.

"Where are you going?" asked the stern SS officer.

"Just to the pharmacy," her father said. "My mother is ill and I must get her medicine"

"Very well," said the SS officer. "But be quick about it!"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy as he ran off in the direction of the pharmacy and ran home just as quickly, once he had procured the medicine.

As the students entered the museum, each was given a replica or a passport of someone who was killed in the war. A short biography of each individual was written inside the "passport."

"More papers," thought Miriam Esther as she opened the one she was given. She took one look inside, gasped for air and fell to the floor as she fainted.

"Help! Help! We need help here," the teacher shouted as paramedics came rushing to the scene.

Fortunately, she was revived quickly.

"Are you all right? What happened?" the teacher asked, relieved to see that her student was coming around.

She could not speak. She silently held up the "passport" she was given upon entering the museum for her teacher to see. The name, printed in bold letters on top of the page, was "Miriam Esther Grossberger".

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I would like to wish everyone a zeesin Pesach. May we all celebrate next year in Yerushalayim!

# Who Says It's Just a Number?

By Judy Gruenfeld

Ever since our foremother Sarah Imenu was told, at a very advanced age, that she, with her husband, Avraham Avinu, was going to bear a child for the first time, women, and men to some degree, have been trying to fool mother nature and head father time off at the pass.

Ponce de Leon claimed to have found the "Fountain of Youth" in Florida in the early sixteenth century. The culture around us today is becoming more and more youth oriented and less and less respectful of the wisdom that comes with age.

Now, I, myself, am crossing that invisible line (though maybe not so invisible on my face) into mature adulthood. Whether I like it or not, it is a fact. And, all things considered, it's better than the alternative. But, it's difficult to admit we are not what we once were or that we cannot do all that we once did. After all, we basically feel the same, inside. Our personalities and our reactions to stimuli, for the most part, remain unchanged.

So, it goes without saying, the person I see when I look in the mirror is not me.

"What is my mother doing in my medicine cabinet?" I think every time I put on my make up.

I can remember a time, long ago, longer than I'd care to admit, when I put on make up in an attempt to look older. What a fool I was in my youth! It never occurred to me the day would come when I would be using a cream to moisturize my skin and a concealer to cover up any wrinkles. I have a magnet on my refrigerator that says, "wrinkled was not one of the things I wanted to be when I grew up."

Also, when I go to get my coat on a cold day and happen to glance at the full-

length mirror on the inside of the door, I think, "What is my grandmother doing in my closet?"

When I was about fifteen years old my grandmother warned me never to waste one precious moment.

"Time flies," she would use the trite expression over and over again.

"One day you will find yourself as old as I am now."

I loved my grandmother more than words can express but I surely thought senility was setting in. There I was, fifteen years old, and on top of the world. All I had to do was snap my finger and anything I wanted would fall at my feet. Me, grow old! Never in a million years! Or even forty or fifty!

But, here I am, almost at the age my wise grandmother was when she gave me that priceless piece of advice. Personally; I find denial a wonderful place. Whenever I'm feeling old, I go there. My favorite coffee mug says, "I feel terrific since I've gone into denial."

I am fortunate, though. My grandmother had smooth, silky skin. My mother inherited it from my grandmother. And I inherited it from my mother. I certainly don't look sixteen, but I have been told several times and by several different people that I don't look my age.

One such incident occurred several years ago when I returned to work. I was schmoozing with a co-worker when the subject of age was brought up. Not by me, of course. The woman I was talking with was in her mid-thirties. I was ten to twelve years older than her. When I told her my age, she didn't believe me. She insisted on seeing my driver's license. I proffered said document and still she could

not believe I was as old as I claimed. She absolutely made my day.

When I arrived home that evening, I burst in the door and called out to my husband.

"You won't believe this," I told him. "One of my younger co-workers thought I was her age."

"Oh," responded my husband. "And how old is she?"

"Thirty-five," I answered.

"Not bad," he said enthusiastically. "I think you look good for your age, too."

I thanked him, managed to get past my swelled head, and prepared dinner.

After dinner my mother called to find out how my first day on the new job went.

"You'll never guess what happened at work," I exclaimed gleefully.

"What happened?" she, of course, inquired.

"One of my co-workers, who is thirty-four years old, thought I was her age."

"Terrific," replied my mother. "That would make me younger, too."

"Absolutely," I reassured her. We then hung up the phone. The conversation was over. Nothing more needed to be said.

Later that evening some friends came by for a visit.

"How's the new job?" asked my girlfriend.

"Oh, great," I answered. "One of my coworkers told me she thought I looked her age. She is much younger than I am."

"How old is she?" my girlfriend naturally asked.

"Oh, I don't know," I continued. "Maybe thirty-three or so."

I told everyone I bumped into about my wonderful new job, and especially about my perspicacious co-worker. I was floating on a cloud, feeling once again that the world was mine to conquer. And then my son, who was eighteen at the time, overheard me telling the story once too often and burst my bubble as only one's children can.

"Mom," he said. "Every time you tell that story, the woman gets another year younger."

"So, who's counting?" I asked my son, the math wiz.

Right then and there, I made a decision. If it's just a number, from now on I'm going to choose a number with which I am more comfortable. I'm not going in order any more. When my birthday rolls around, I will decide which one to celebrate. Next year, I think it will be my Sweet Sixteenth.

# The Doctor's Doctor

By Judy Gruenfeld

I have a friend who is a psychologist. Though I am a social worker, unlike my psychologist friend, I never wanted to do counseling for a living. One day I received a phone call from her. She was totally beside herself. When I inquired as to what the problem was, she started complaining about her mother.

"She doesn't understand me. She never did and she never will," my friend lamented. "I try to carry on a civil conversation with her but it always comes to blows. She stomps on my feelings and never listens when I speak. I want to have a close relationship with her but she just won't let it happen. She has never validated my opinions, thinks her way is the only way and refuses to allow me to be my own person. I'm in my forties now, and I think it's time she treated me like an adult and yet I need motherly understanding from her." By the time my friend was done with her diatribe, she was in tears.

Ever the sensitive, understanding person that I am, I responded, "I have a joke for you. There were these three elderly, Jewish ladies playing Scrabble. The first lady said, "I have such a wonderful daughter. She bought me a car." "That's nothing," replied the second lady. "My daughter bought me a house. "I've got you both beat", said the third lady. "My daughter goes to a psychiatrist three times a week, for an hour each time, and all she does is talk about is me."

I heard my friend laughing on the other end of the line.

"Well, at least I've got you laughing," I told her.

"Seriously, though," she said. "What am I going to do? This is really bothering me."

"It's time you got passed this. Move on," I responded. "Your mother is an old lady now. If you didn't get what you needed from her when you were a child, what makes you think you are going to get it from her now? Just love her the way she is, difficult though that may be, knowing she tried her best. We are all products of our upbringing. Your mother obviously didn't get what she needed from her mother. She can't give you something she never got herself. You can get that understanding from someone else, namely, me. In addition to all the jokes."

"Thanks," she said. "It's not the same but I guess I should be grateful I have a friend like you."

"That's better," I replied. "I'll send you my bill."

"I'll be sure to remit your fee as soon as I receive it." We both laughed and hung up.

A couple of days later, I received another phone call from my psychologist friend.

"I had a patient in my office today who complained about her mother the same way I complained about mine the other day," she informed me.

"And what did you tell your patient?" I inquired.

"Well," she said, "I gave her the same advice you gave me."

"Wait a minute," I said. "How many more years of schooling than I had, did you? Now, I'm definitely sending you a bill!"

"The check is in the mail," she reassured me.



# Becky's Grandma

By Judy Gruenfeld

Becky's long, dark brown curls bounced up and down like springs as she skipped down the street towards home. Although she was nine years old, she had never gotten a haircut. Mom's hair was thin, straight and mousy brown and when her daughter's hair started growing in thick and dark she promised herself she would never cut her daughter's brunette locks. Becky had hair like her father and she looked like her beloved grandmother.

As Becky approached her house, she noticed a lot of cars parked out front.

"That's funny," she thought. "Mom didn't say we were having company, and it's the middle of the week."

When she opened the front door, Becky saw several relatives milling around in the living room, talking quietly. Her parents, aunts and uncles were sitting at the dining room table. Her mother and father were crying. So were two of her aunts, Becky got scared and ran over to her mother.

"Mom, what happened?" she asked.

"Becky," said Mom, trying to control her voice. "Sit down. I have something to tell you."

Becky's scared expression froze. "What is it?"

"It's Grandma," Mom said softly. "She had a heart attack, sweetheart. I'm afraid she passed away this morning."

Becky dropped her books and ran up to her room. "No!" she screamed. She threw herself down on her bed as her sobs took control of her body, heaving her up and down on the soft mattress while the sea foam green comforter yielded as waves of emotion overcame her.

There was a knock on the door but Becky did not hear it. Slowly, the door opened and Dad walked into her room. He sat down on Becky's desk chair.

Becky's tear stained face looked up at her father. "What are we going to do?"

Although he had just lost his mother, Becky's father tried to control his sobs. "I don't know," he said. "Right now, we'll all just have to be here for one another."

"What did you love best about Grandma?" Becky asked through her tears.

"She was always there for me," said Becky's father. "I could always count on her. There was nothing she wouldn't do for me, or anybody else in her family. How about you?" asked Dad.

"Remember, for my third birthday, Grandma bought me a tricycle?" Dad smiled. "Indeed, I do," he said. "I put it together."

"I never knew that," Becky replied. "You know what, Dad?" "Grandma used to let me ride the tricycle in her house. I used to ride it in the kitchen and the living room all the time."

Dad smiled, again. "I never knew that," he said.

Now Becky smiled. "I know," she said. "Grandma said not to tell you because you and Mom wouldn't want me riding my tricycle in our house."

"Your Grandma was very smart."

"I know," Becky said. "Nobody else's Grandma would let them ride a tricycle in the house. Grandma also used to let me roller skate in her house, too."

Becky's father's smile began wrestling with his tears. "She used to let me roller skate in the house, also but she told me not to tell your grandfather. He was afraid the skates

would ruin the wooden floor. But, every time I was done skating Grandma would polish the floor and when my father came home he always complimented my mother on how beautiful she kept the floor. Your grandma and I would smile at each other and then grandma would send me, and my sister and brother, off to bed and give grandpa his dinner. He didn't like us children around when he ate his dinner. He wanted it quiet. I promised myself that when I had children we would all have supper together.

Becky smiled at her father. "I'm glad you did, Daddy. You know what else? When I slept at Grandma's on Motzei Shabbos, she let me stay up as long as I wanted. I would fall asleep on her lap and she would carry me to bed. She had the softest, warmest blanket in the world."

"In the summer, when we sat down to read together on the porch, Grandma would give me some big, red grapes but before she gave them to me she would open them up and take the seeds out."

"She did that for me, too," said Becky's Dad. "At times like those, I felt as if my heart would burst with love. I was too young at the time to realize that Grandma felt the same way, too."

"On Sunday morning," Becky continued, "Grandma would make me a pancake egg. She beat the egg and then put it in a frying pan. When the bottom side was cooked, Grandma slid the egg onto a plate and flipped it over into the frying pan. When the second side was cooked, Grandma slid the egg back onto the plate and gave it to me. The egg

always came out perfect! It was completely cooked, no runny parts, and all nice and yellow. There was not one brown spot on it! Then Grandma would cut me a nice, thick slice of fresh bread and put cream cheese on it."

Becky started crying again. "No one can make an egg like Grandma."

"You're right about that," said Dad. "What else did you have for breakfast?"

"Well," Becky dried her tears. "We had warm prune juice. Grandma poured some in a pot, warmed it up, and then poured some in a glass for her and for me. The juice came exactly to the top of each glass. Every time. And not a drop spilled over."

Dad started to laugh.

"Dad," asked Becky, "Do you think when I grow up I'll be able to do that?"

"I'm sure you will, honey."

"Grandma also gave me cold milk but she drank hot water. Do you know why Grandma drank hot water?"

"No, Becky, I don't," Dad answered. "I guess we'll never know."

"Dad," Becky said, "I guess Mom will have to buy my clothes at the store from now on. I loved to watch Grandma sew my dresses on her machine. Sometimes she let me move the pedal up and down for her. But then I got too big to fit under the machine."

Becky's most prized possession is her grandmother's old sewing machine. It doesn't work any more but Becky has it in her sewing room next to the new machine she will use to sew clothes for her own grandchildren, *B'Ezras Hashem*.

# Go Now... Pay Later

By Judy Gruenfeld

I desperately needed a vacation. You know how it is. What with the demands of work, home, family and ageing parents, I felt as if I were going in a million different directions. And I was.

I tried to tidy up the house one day. As soon as I got done with the second room, the first room was in its natural, chaotic state. And I don't have small children!

"Can't I have one room in this house clean for one day in a row?" I bawled at my husband and son.

"I didn't do it, my son said. "These are all Dad's papers."

"I know they are," I said.

"You seem a little uptight" my husband said. "Why don't you go to a spa for a couple of days." I gave him a look.

"I don't want to go to a spa," I said. "But, you know what? I think I'll stay in my friend's guest room for a few days. I have an open invitation to use it at any time and you can learn to pick up after yourself. And that goes for your clothes and your papers."

"What?" he said, "You want to go on vacation in Lakewood? You're joking, right?"

"No, I'm not joking and it's not a vacation. I'll have a secluded little spot where I can think and maybe even get some writing done. I can't organize my thoughts in this mess much less get anything down on paper"

"What about us," my husband said. "We'll starve to death."

"I doubt that," I said. "There are plenty of frozen dinners in the house, there's take out, and Ronnie can do some cooking."

Much to my husband's chagrin, I packed my bag and was off. The ride took fifteen minutes; certainly enough time to get back home in case of an emergency.

I arrived before Shabbos and was planning on staying through the next Shabbos.

I was greeted as warmly as ever as my hostess shooed her children away from me.

Leave Judy alone. She came here to rest, not to deal with all of you."

I settled into the room, albeit with the help of my little friends, and went downstairs to bentsh light.

"Oh, it smells delicious in here," I said after we sang Lecha Dodi. "But I wish you had let me make something."

"Never mind," my friend said. "You're here to rest."

She was very convincing and very fast. She and the children had everything on the table in record time.

Needless to say, it was a wonderful Shabbos. But the next few days felt a little strange without my husband and son. I also felt a little guilty as my meals were prepared and served to me every night and my girlfriend would not allow me to help her clean up.

By Wednesday I decided it was time to go home. I missed my family and decided I would sacrifice a little mess in order to be home. When I walked in the door it was very quiet. I braced myself and went into the kitchen. The dishwasher was full of dirty dishes, thanks to my son and both sinks were full of dirty dishes, thanks to my husband. I turned on the dishwasher and washed out the dishes in both sinks. Then I realized the house looked different. I did not see the trail of dirty clothes on the floor. I ran upstairs to check the hampers. Much to my surprise, they were both empty. Now, I don't know about the men in your house, but it would literally take a miracle for either my husband or my son to operate a washing machine or a dryer. But, the

empty hampers spoke for themselves. I ran back downstairs to the laundry room. Nothing in the washer. Nothing in the dryer. Did they also fold their clothes and put them away? I couldn't believe my luck. Nah, this was too good to be true. And you know what they say about something that seems too good to be true. I tried to get my husband on his cell phone. It was busy. I would have to wait for them to come home.

Both my husband and my son arrived home at the same time and both were glad to see me, though I'm not sure what motivated their feelings.

"I have a question for both of you, I said. "Why did you leave so many dirty dishes, which by the way I wasn't thrilled to see, but no dirty clothes?"

"Well, we had to eat," my husband said nonchalantly.

"You mean you were able to operate the washing machine but not the dishwasher?" I asked.

"No," said my husband. "We don't know how to use the washing machine."

"Well, what happened to all your dirty clothes?" I asked.

My husband and son looked at each other and then my husband looked me square in the eye and said, "We wanted to keep things simple so we just wore the same clothes. We figured you'd have less wash to do when you got home."

Now, I ask you, "Have you ever encountered a more considerate pair?"

"Did you take showers?" I asked.

"Of course we took showers. Every night. We are very clean, you know."

"Don't tell me you put the same clothes on after you showered."

"They weren't dirty. We were very careful. I told you we were very clean."

I need another vacation but I wonder if it's worth the price.

# Mirror, Mirror On the Wall

By Judy Gruenfeld

One lone tear started trickling down Chava's face.

"You must have heard wrong. Or else, you forgot after all this time," she said.

"No, I didn't hear wrong and I remember it word for word, even though the incident took place so many years ago, because it was so bizarre."

"Tell me again," Chava said, not really sure she wanted to hear it a second time.

"It was twenty years ago. We were all at I your house for Chanukah"

Then she stopped.

"I promised I would never tell you about it. I don't know why I broke that promise. The last thing I want to do is hurt you."

Chava and her friend Tzippy were sitting on deck enjoying the warm summer sun I and started a "therapy session" as girlfriends do, talking from the heart, and sharing their innermost feelings.

"Please," Chava said. "I need to hear it again, to digest it, to sort it all out in my head. Actually, even through my pain, I am putting some puzzle pieces together in my mind. So many things happened that made no sense, but with your piece of information, they're all beginning to, in a sick, twisted sort of way."

"Very well," Tzippy continued. "As I said, we were all at your house for Chanukah. I was talking with your mother. Our dear friend, Basya, was still alive and, of course, was there, too. Out of the blue, your mother asked me, 'Who do you think is prettier?'"

I understand your first thought was to ask if your mother was comparing you with Basya. But, no. She was asking me if I thought she (your mother) or you were prettier."

By the time Tzippy had repeated the incident for the second time, the lone tear had been joined by an endless flow as Chava was sobbing in her friend's arms.

"What would provoke something as sick as that?" she said, incredulous, when she had calmed down enough to speak. How can a woman be in competition with her own child? I'm a mother, too. Nothing like that would ever occur to me."

"It's her own insecurities," Tzippy said. "It has nothing to do with you."

"At this point in my life, I can figure that out, but it still hurts. How could she do that? She's my mother. I needed her to build my self-esteem. But instead, she was using me to build hers. No wonder I had no self-confidence. She's been manipulating my emotions all my life and I, fool that I am, thought there was something wrong with me!"

It will take me a long time to come to terms with this pain. But I think, in the long run, I will be better off for knowing about this incident. I will build my own foundation and go on from there. I do feel sorry for her, though. Imagine feeling so threatened that in order to feel good about yourself, you have to sacrifice your own child's sense of self-worth and sense of well-being?"

Chava wiped away her tears and thanked Tzippy for being there for her.

Tzippy calls Chava every day to apologize for letting the story "slip out when she wasn't paying attention".

Chava is still trying to come to terms with her pain.

As she says, "I have trouble looking my mother in the eye. But I think I feel more sorry for her. They say the truth hurts. They also say it sets you free."

And in a strange way Chava finally did to be.  
feel free. Free to be all that Hashem meant her

# Let My Peephole Grow

By Judy Gruenfeld

As Pesach approaches we are all busy cleaning our homes from top to bottom, ridding it of all chometz. But equally; if not more important, it is a time to remove the "chometz" from our hearts and from our souls.

Mitzrayim can take many shapes and forms. Being enslaved does not necessarily mean there is someone literally standing over us with a whip, forcing us to do back breaking labor. Indeed, when our bodies are free and our hearts and our souls live in a land that is "killing us with kindness" the threat to our existence is incalculable.

When my grandparents came to this country from Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century they were, for the most part, frum Yidden. They did not know any other way. But, they wanted to be "Americans" so most of the old country ways were shed in pursuit of the "American Dream". Little by little old customs and practices were substituted for new ones. My grandfathers worked on Shabbos. My grandmothers maintained kosher kitchens only until my aunts, uncles and parents became teenagers. At that point, the influences from their Gentile and even Jewish peers could not be ignored. My grandmothers relented and for the first time in the history of either family treife food was brought into the house.

By the time I was about eight years old, only two customs remained. On Shabbos morning my cousins and I would put on our "Shabbos clothes" and go to shul with a friend whose father always went for Shachris, Mincha and Maariv.

My maternal grandfather worked only half a day on Saturday and the whole family would get together for the afternoon meal. On a nice day we would walk. On a nasty day we

would drive. The radio was on the opera station and the conversation usually revolved around politics and the arts.

I don't know if any of the members of my family were aware of the Shechinah but I have always felt the presence of G-d within my being. Trouble was, in those days a child's opinion was not allowed to differ from that of her parents.

My parents preached Agnosticism and for a child, the parents must be right. That is the basis for the child's entire security. So, I pushed my feelings down into the deep recesses of my subconscious where I wouldn't feel as though I were "leaning on a crutch for weak minded people" as articulated by my parents. And, it wasn't their fault. They didn't know any better, either. They, themselves, weren't taught differently. I saw the world through the narrow purview that was presented to me.

I attended a Workmen's Circle School for a short while where I learned Yiddish and some customs but no religion. It did not fill the hole in my soul, which was aching for Hashem.

Fortunately, I married a nice Jewish boy and though we did not raise our children to be frum, they are proud to be Jewish.

But my discontent and my search for meaning in my life continued. I looked into eastern religions, Transcendental Meditation, holistic healing, a vegetarian diet, EST, and a host of other "isms" that didn't amount to anything. It never occurred to me to look into my own religion as, by then, I had fooled myself into believing I had adopted my parents' point of view and thought it to be shallow and meaningless. Fortunately, I didn't

look for meaning in anything that would be harmful to my physical well-being.

I became very depressed and discouraged, when an incident occurred that opened my eyes and allowed me to pursue my own beliefs.

We were at my parents' house for dinner one Sunday evening about fifteen years ago. When I selected a piece of roast beef that was a little pink, my mother said,

"You don't know what's good," as she has told me all my life when my opinion differed from hers. Mom likes her roast beef very well done, which is fine for her, but not for me.

The proverbial light bulb lit up. I realized that I had spent my entire life trying to please my mother, whose approval I

desperately needed. And it wasn't working. Here I was, in my mid-forties and I still wasn't getting it right. She was wonderful and supportive with most things but she, too, has faults, and those faults interfered with her parenting on occasion. Also, as adult children, we have to forgive our parents for being human and not the super heroes they seem to be when we are small.

The rest, as they say, is history. I could no longer quell my yearnings for Yiddishkeit. I began learning with a fervor that I didn't even know I possessed. I have a purpose. My scope widens every day. And, all those "isms" I looked into; they all have their origins in the Torah.

I wish you and yours a Zeesin Pesach.



## **Judy's Connection**

**By Judy Gruenfeld**

**Judy can be contacted through  
email@judys\_connection@yahoo.com**

Dear Judy,

Thank you very much for opening up this forum. I have been reading your column for quite a while but I never thought I would be writing to you. I recently had a baby with Down's syndrome.

This is my first baby and I feel very overwhelmed. My husband learns all day and I was planning to return to work when my baby turned 6 weeks old but now I'm not sure what to do.

It seems that no one in my family or my husband's family is willing to accept the fact that my son has special needs. Even my husband, who was as anxious for our baby to arrive as I was, is now unable to "bond" with him. He spends more time learning, which of course, is not a bad thing, but I need him to help me with the house and the baby.

My in-laws, who are very good grandparents to their other grandchildren have not come to see the baby and me since his bris. My parents can't stop crying and wonder what they did to deserve a handicapped grandchild. Can you please give me some guidance?

*Overwhelmed Mom*

Dear Overwhelmed,

First of all, mazel tov on the birth of your new baby. He has a special neshama and so do you. It was a shdiduch made by Hashem in Heaven. He chose you both. Never lose sight of this. You will have much nachas from this baby. At times, though it may seem bittersweet, there will be periods of unparalleled joy.

Fortunately, there are many resources available today that were not available when my son was born thirty-eight years ago. You can contact Early Intervention, the child study

team in the town you live and I'm sure your pediatrician can direct you as to other resources where you can get services for your son.

If there is no possibility for you to stay at home with your baby, there are also some neighborhood playgroups that cater to babies and pre-schoolers with special needs. I would also suggest you contact other mothers of children with Down's syndrome, start a support group or go for counseling. Admitting that you need help and getting that help is not a sign of weakness but one of strength. All these measures will help you and your son.

As far as your husband is concerned, I think he just needs a little time. As wonderful as fathers are, they are not mothers. The male ego seems to get in the way of many realizations. As the baby grows and starts responding to his father, I am sure he will come around and as long as the two of you work together it will lessen the burden on you. Also, don't be ashamed to admit that there are times when it is a burden.

There will be many times when you say, "Why me"? This is only natural. While Hashem never gives us a test we cannot pass, we may not always be in the mood to take a test. I can tell you from my own personal experience though, that while I certainly would not outwardly have chosen to have a child with a disability, my son has opened up a very special world to me, one that I, otherwise, would not have been privileged to enter.

I have also met some of my dearest friends through him. I often say that Ronnie chose my friends for me and, indeed, it is the person who will take the time to connect with

him and understand him that I find to have the most sterling of midos.

As far as the baby's grandparents are concerned, they are hurting, too. You and your husband are their children. Not only are they disappointed for themselves, they are also worried about the two of you, as you are about your son. Everyone reacts differently. It is important that you do no sever

communications with them. Try to include them in the baby's life as much as possible but do not push. I believe that in time they, too, will come around.

Most important, as I stated before, you are not alone. The road ahead may be a little bumpier than you bargained for but it will be a wonderful journey.

# Of Love and Legacies

By Judy Gruenfeld

A teacher of mine once said that life is a process of continually letting go. Whether we move from one job to another or one home to another we are inevitably giving up that which we know and that with which we are comfortable and familiar and venturing into the unknown.

While jobs and homes are important to us, they certainly cannot compare to people and the relationships we build with them. When we come into this world, we become part of a family and a circle of friends. When we leave this world we leave behind our family and friends but, for the most part, these groups are comprised of completely different people. When we are born we have parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. When we die we usually have a spouse (unless our spouse has predeceased us), children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. One by one, we must let go of someone we love. The hole in our heart is filled by someone else to love until we have come full circle and it is our time to depart for the World of Truth.

I was very fortunate in that I had all four of my grandparents until I was seventeen years old. I will never forget the call that motzei Shabbos. A neighbor of my grandparents called my mother and told her that her father was very sick and she should come to her parents. My parents and I quickly got in the car and made the trip from Queens to Brooklyn in record time. During the entire trip my mother cried.

"I bet Papa is already gone," she said.

My father tried to soothe her by telling her that was not so and that everything would be all right. But, my mother would not be

comforted, and with good reason. Somehow, she knew!

We arrived at my grandparents' house forty minutes later only to discover that my grandfather had, indeed, passed away. Neither my grandmother nor my mother could be comforted. I was in a state of shock. I had never experienced death before and, seeing the doctor there and my grandfather lying on the bed with a sheet covering his entire body, including his face, left me absolutely numb. It was not until representatives from the funeral parlor came to take him away that reality set in. Then, I, too, began to cry uncontrollably. My grandmother, mother and I sat on the bed and held on to each other as we continued to weep.

My mother stayed with my grandmother that night and my father and I went home. When I woke up the next morning I was genuinely surprised to see that the sun had actually risen. I was seventeen years old, as I said, not a little kid and yet, the world was a totally different place for me now. Someone I loved very deeply was no longer part of it.

Since then I have lost many other loved ones, both family and friends. It never gets easier. The pain tears at my heart until it feels as if there are only empty fragments left in my chest. I have crossed paths with many exceptional people and even through the pain, even through eyes that are blurred with tears, I can clearly see how fortunate I was to have known every person I have ever lost.

One such person was Chana Dowek. Any attempt to list all her attributes here would be futile as the list would be unending. She was everything to her husband, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces,

nephews, and to me, whom she considered a friend. To be considered a friend by Chana is among the greatest compliments with which I will ever be endowed.

Chana passed away last month. She had been sick for two years though no one ever knew; no one that is, except of course for her husband, her children, and for some reason, me. Until the very end she went to

work every day, was meticulous in her appearance and was always there to offer hope and inspiration for anyone who needed it.

Dearest Chana, may your memory be a blessing to all who knew you and loved you and will certainly miss you. May you reside in Shamayim with the Holy of Holies until Moshiach comes and we are all reunited for eternity.

## **Judy's Connection**

### **By Judy Gruenfeld**

*Judy can be contacted through  
email@judys\_connection@yahoo.com*

Dear Judy,

I have been reading your column for a while and find myself laughing at times and crying at other times when you write about your son with Autism.

I have a brother who is about the same age as your son who also has Autism. We are a large family. I am the oldest and my brother is the youngest. There are eighteen years between us. My parents are getting up there in years and need help, too. Although my brother doesn't present any behavior problems and can care for his personal needs, he still needs to be monitored 24/7.

He is on a list for a group home but the list is so long that he can only get "emergency placement" if G-d forbids, my parents are no longer here.

*Kin ayin hara*, we are six other siblings, each raising our own families. We want to do what is right by our brother and parents but we don't want our children to feel neglected. Can you help us?

*Big Sis*

Dear Big Sis, it sounds like you have a wonderful family. Your children and nieces and nephews will benefit greatly by seeing how you care for their grandparents and uncle. You are wonderful role models for them.

There are a lot of factors that come into play here. That your brother can care for

himself and is no threat to anyone would be my biggest concern.

I would suggest that you have a family meeting, including all the grandchildren who are old enough to participate. Some of them may even want to have little "jobs" they could do that would make them feel as if they were helping and, indeed, they would be. Make a list of all the needs your parents and brother have. Also discuss your schedules, proximity to Mom and Dad's house and when each family member would be available for "duty". Keep it flexible as things do come up and you may have to switch times with another sibling. One can also transport nieces and nephews to any after school activities with one's sons and daughters to free up a sibling if that is feasible.

You may also want to consider having your brother live with each sibling for two months out of the year as long as he is comfortable with that. You want him to feel like he has a home and is not being shifted from pillar to post because no one wants him. You also don't want your children to feel put out.

It's not easy, I know but you seem to be a wonderful family who has everyone's best interests at heart and your priorities in order. I wish you well.

# Believe Me, You're Not Alone

By Judy Gruenfeld

Sometimes life is very disappointing. Nothing seems to go your way. The shidduch you really wanted for your eldest daughter isn't met with equal feelings. The job you thought was perfect for you doesn't come through. Your child doesn't get into the school he or she so desperately wanted to attend.

You look around you and it seems that everyone else's lives are perfect. Their houses are always in order; their children are always clean and well behaved. They never answer back. Your friends' clothes are wrinkle-free and don't have any baby food on them. And, they are always cheerful and meet life's challenges with equanimity. Nothing seems to faze them.

"Why can't I be like that?" you think.

"Everything seems to get to me. Why can't I organize my life?"

The laundry is piled up. There isn't a spot on the floor that doesn't have a toy or a textbook on it. The baby is crying for no reason (that you can think of), no one has done his or her homework yet, supper is far from being put on the table and your husband is late...again.

But, believe it or not, those very neighbors may secretly be wishing they could be like you. After all, when you finally do get out of the house, you are very put together.

You think back to the time when you and your bashert were joined under the chuppah as husband and wife. You were very happy. Just the thought of your chossan brought a smile to your face. Your entire future was before of you and your head was filled with the dreams it held.

What has changed? In a word..."life". When we are young, we think we are invincible, no harm can befall us. And when

we are young, and things don't go our way, we don't always have the coping skills to deal with the problems. Ah, but life itself, the source of those problems, will teach us these skills.

Now would be a good time to take off the rose colored glasses in favor of clear ones. We are not the only ones who suffer pain and disappointment. Any number of examples can be taken from the Torah. And, disappointments don't go away as we grow older.

But, our "perfect" friends and neighbors also have their problems, which we don't know about.

Just as we don't go complaining to them, they don't come complaining to us. I am not suggesting that we should feel good because someone else is suffering. That would be contrary to everything we are taught and believe

The saying "I felt bad about having no shoes until I met a man with no feet" never worked for me. One can't get so caught up in one's own problems that he can't see suffering in his fellow man.

However, we can keep things in their proper perspective. Another shidduch will come along. Another job will come along, and an offer for another school will also come along. Eventually, even supper will be on the table.

"Hmm, but then there will be dirty dishes to tend to and clothes with supper stains on them to wash."

It's a never-ending cycle. But, I'll deal with that another time.

I find the answer to the problem of "life" is life, itself. As long as you are living life, there will be problems, sometimes small ones, sometimes big ones. Our challenge is to

meet them head on and do what Hashem expects of us.

The more we are tested, the more opportunity we have to do His will. I know, at times, it is hard to see through our

disappointment, and it is difficult to know what Hashem expects of us. But, if we keep in mind that we are never alone, each step forward will be a step in the right direction.

## **Jewish Trivia – Not So Trivial** By Judy Gruenfeld

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I am always amazed when I hear of the accomplishments of our fellow Jews. Not only because we have done such great things but because of the magnitude in which we have contributed to the world. Following are more facts that I have been able to accumulate. I think you will find them as interesting and inspiring as I have.

The Roosevelts were Jewish Dutch, arriving in New York City in 1682. Claes Rosenvelt changed his name to Nicholas Roosevelt. Sarah Delano, FDR's mother was descended from Sephardic Jews.

Joseph Stalin was originally Sjugashvili (translating into "son of a Jew", this one really threw me). His three wives were also Jewish.

Dwight Eisenhower's father was a Swedish Jew and was so identified in the West Point Yearbook of 1915.

Lilian Friedman married Cruz Rivera. They named their baby Geraldo Miguel Rivera (funny, it doesn't sound Jewish, does it?) Since, according to Jewish law, anyone born to a Jewish mother is Jewish, Geraldo Rivera is Jewish.

Fiorello LaGuardia's mother's name was Jacobson. His father was not Jewish. LaGuardia spoke several languages – including Hebrew and Yiddish – fluently.

Winston Churchill's mother's name was Jenny Jerome.

Famous actor Cary Grant's mother, Elsie, was Jewish. His father, Elias Leach, was not. Grant's original name was Archibald Alexander Leach. (Robin Leach is his first cousin).

Peter Sellers' (also an actor) mother, Margaret Marks, was Jewish. His father, Bill

Sellers, was Protestant. Peter's real name is Richard Henry Sellers.

David Bowie's (a singer in present day U.S.A.) mother is Jewish, his father is not. One of Bowie's album covers discusses his Jewish ancestry. His real name is David Stenton Haywood Jones.

Robert DeNiro's mother is Jewish. His father is not. Robert DeNiro has been an actor in this country for several decades.

Shari Belafonte's mother is Jewish. Her father, Harry, has a Jewish grandfather. She and her famous father sing and act.

Olivia Newton John's (an Australian singer) Jewish grandfather was a Nobel Prize winning physicist.

Harrison Ford's mother is Russian Jewish. His father is Irish Catholic. Harrison Ford is an actor in the U.S.A. today.

The first theater to be used solely for its showing of motion pictures was built by a Jew named Adolph Zukor.

The first full-length sound picture, *The Jazz Singer* was produced by Samuel L. Goldwyn (a Jew) and Louis B. Mayer (also a Jew). The movie is about the son of a cantor who wants to be a jazz singer instead of following in his father's footsteps.

Dr. Abraham Waksman coined the term antibiotics.

A Polish Jew (Casimir Funk) who pioneered a new field of medical research gave us a word now common in our language – vitamins.

A Jewish surgeon performed the first successful operation for appendicitis by the name of Dr. Simon Baruch.

Dr. Abraham Jacobi, also a Jew, is hailed as America's father of Pediatrics.



Until a Jewish Doctor (Dr. Siccary) showed differently, Americans believed the tomato was poisonous.

Jewish Levi “Levi’s” Strauss, inventor of jeans, is the largest clothing retailer in the world.

A Jew by the name of Emile Berliner is the man who developed the modern day phonograph. While Edison was working out a type of phonograph that used a cylinder as a record, Berliner invented a machine that would play a disc. This machine he patented was called the gramophone, and the famous RCA trademark is a picture of a dog listening to “his master’s voice” on Berliner’s device. The gramophone was superior to Edison’s machine. Emile Berliner made possible the modern record industry. His company was eventually absorbed by the Victor Talking Machine Company, now known as RCA.

Louis B. Mayer (MGM) created the idea for the Oscar.

European Jews are the founding fathers of all the Hollywood Studios.

Three of the greatest and most influential thinkers dominating the twentieth century were Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx.

Dr. Jonas Salk, a Jew, is the creator of the first Polio vaccine.

Two Jews, Hayam Solomon and Isaac Moses, are responsible for creating the modern banking institutions.

Jews also created the first department stores of the nineteenth century: The Altmans, Gimbels, Kaufmann, Lazaruses, Magnins, Mays, Strausses became leaders of major department stores. Julius Rosenwald revolutionized the way Americans purchased goods by improving Sears Roebuck’s mail order merchandising. Hart, Schaffner, Marx, Kuppenheimer and Levi Strauss became household names in men’s clothing. – And

let’s not forget EJ Korvets – Eight Jewish Korean (war) Veterans.

Marc Chagall, born Segal, in Russia, is one of the great twentieth century painters.

The fortune of English Jewish financiers such as Isaac Goldsmid, Nathan Rothschild, David Salomons, and Moses Montefiore, fortunes helped England become an empire.

In 1918, in Detroit, Max Goldberg opened the “first” commercial parking lot.

In 1910 Louis Blaustein and his son opened the “first” gas station, eventually founding Amoco Oil. They are one of the richest families in the world.

Dr. Albert Sabin developed the first oral polio vaccine.

Steven Spielberg is the most successful filmmaker since the advent of film.

A Jewish poet’s (Emma Lazarus) famous poem, “give me your tired, your poor. Your huddled masses,” appears as the inscription on the Statue of Liberty.

Harry Houdini (Weiss) is the father of magic/illusion.

Dr. Sigmund Freud is the father of psychiatry.

George and Ira Gershwin and Irving Berlin are three of the most prolific composers of the twentieth century.

Isadore and Nathan Straus – “Abraham and Strass” eventually became sole owners of Macy’s, the world’s largest department store, in 1896.

Dr. Paul “magic bullet” Ehrlich won the Nobel Prize in 1908 for curing syphilis.

Armand Hammer, physician and businessman originated the largest trade between the U.S. and Russia. You can think of him when you purchase “Arm & Hammer” baking soda.

Louis Santanel, a Jew, was the financier who provided the funds for Columbus's voyage to America.

Sherry Lansing, also a Jew, of Paramount Pictures, became the first woman president of a major Hollywood studio.

Jews were the brains behind the Confederacy. Major Adolph Proskauer led the unit at Gettysburg. Judah P. Benjamin held

four cabinet positions: Attorney General from February 25 to September 17, 1861; Secretary of War from September 17 to March 18, 1862; Secretary of State from March 18, 1862, until the end of the war and was referred to as "the brains of the confederacy."

Rabbi Max Michelbacher was a confident and spiritual adviser to General Robert E. Lee.

# A Good Bye

By Judy Gruenfeld

*Judy can be contacted through email@judys\_connection@yahoo.com*

Though Hannah was exhausted from the commotion of the past few days, she could not fall asleep. It was already midnight and she had to be up by five. Her same-day-surgery was scheduled for seven-thirty and she needed to be at the hospital by six o'clock the following morning. Her knee had been bothering her since she had fallen two weeks earlier and she finally decided to go to the doctor. The doctor explained that if she did not have surgery, the knee would not heal properly.

"Why am I being so immature?" she scolded herself. "The orthopedist said he was confident the surgery would go well. I don't have any more babies to care for. The older children will get the younger ones off to school in the morning and the younger children will be going to the next – door neighbor after school. My husband said not to worry about supper; he would pick it up from the take out place on his way home from work."

Dan, Hannah's husband, had an important meeting that morning and could not take her for the procedure so her parents had volunteered to provide her with transportation. Everything was in place. Hannah turned on her other side.

"I guess it's normal to have some trepidation about any upcoming procedure," she thought, with little comfort.

The clock said 12:10. She turned on a light and got a book from the shelf but found herself staring at the page, one word blending into the next. Hannah put the book down and turned off the light. It was 12:15.

Not being able to find a place for herself, she got out of bed.

"It's no use. I might as well fold the laundry." By 12:45 it was all folded and Hannah stifled a yawn. She decided to go back to bed.

The next thing she knew, the alarm was ringing. "I guess a few hours of sleep are better than none at all."

Hannah got up, got dressed, and waited for her parents to arrive. As anticipated, they arrived a few minutes early and the three of them headed for the hospital.

When they reached the hospital, Hannah was taken to the Same-Day-Surgery-Unit, and her parents were directed to the waiting room. Hannah's mother pointed to the Bikur Cholim table in the corner.

"Can you get me a cup of coffee?" she asked her husband. "I think we both could use something to calm our nerves."

Hannah's father got up to get the coffee. "Sounds like a good idea."

Ruth took the hot drink from her husband. "What else did you bring?"

"Danish."

"What kind do they have?"

"Cheese and cinnamon."

"I'll take a cheese Danish."

Sam handed his wife the cheese Danish and bit into the cinnamon one he took for himself. "How long did they say the procedure would take?"

"About an hour," Ruth said. "Then she'll be in recovery for another hour. We can see her when they bring her back to her room."

Husband and wife looked at each other, wishing the time away. Sam began reading the newspaper he brought and Ruth began doing the crossword puzzle.

"Sam, I'll take another cup of coffee," Ruth said.

Sam obligingly did as he was beckoned, and filled his own cup again.

An hour later the doctor came out to tell Hannah's parents the surgery had gone well and they would be able to see her when she returned to her room. Another hour passed. This time a nurse came out to tell the Fines that they could see Hannah, who had just been wheeled back to her room. Naturally, Mom and Dad were happy to see their eldest child with the procedure behind her.

"How are you feeling?" Dad asked. Mom brushed the hair away from Hannah's face and kissed her forehead. "My poor baby. Are you in much pain?"

"I can't really tell yet. The pain medication still hasn't worn off. But they expect to have me up and about very shortly."

Though a little groggy, she went on. "I will get instructions on how to use the crutches and then I will be able to go home. I just have to keep my foot up for the rest of the day and as long as I can handle it, I can start using the crutches tomorrow."

Mom and Dad looked at each other and then at Hannah. "That's wonderful," said Mom. "I know you don't like to be tied down and since it is your left knee, I'll bet you will be able to drive, also."

"I certainly hope so," said Hannah.

About half an hour later the physical therapist came in and showed Hannah how to maneuver with the crutches. She got the hang of it pretty quickly. Then the doctor came in with specific instructions for Hannah to follow.

"I want you to stay off your feet today," he said. "If you are feeling stronger tomorrow, you may walk around the house a bit with the crutches. Add a few minutes each day until you feel comfortable going out. If you have any questions or if you are in a lot of pain, please call my office. Otherwise, call and make an appointment for a week from today. Any questions?"

"No. That sounds pretty straight forward."

"Good," said the doctor. "Hopefully, I won't see you till next week, then. The nurse will come in with your discharge papers." He nodded at Hannah's parents and left the room.

After signing herself out, Hannah was driven home by her parents. As they pulled up to the curb in front of Hannah's house, her mother was filing a nail she had broken. Her father helped her out of the car and then got back into the driver's seat.

"We're going to the mall," said Ruth. "They're having really good sales now. You take care of yourself. If I see anything I think you will like I will buy it for you."

Hannah wasn't sure she'd heard right. She thought she was still under the effects of the anesthesia. "What did you say, Mom?"

"I said we are going to the mall. If I see anything I think you will like, I will buy it. You know I always think of you."

"Uh, y-yes, Mom. Thank you. I-I know you do."

"Hannah watched in disbelief as the car disappeared. "Oh, Mama," she thought. "Don't you know it's you I want and not the things you buy me?"

# The Jewel

By Judy Gruenfeld

*Judy can be contacted through email@judys\_connection@yahoo.com*

I couldn't believe it! I finally had it on my finger - my paternal grandmother's engagement ring! My precious gem of a grandmother, who was my world; my grandmother, who was everything you think of when you think of a grandmother; the legacy had finally passed on to me.

When Grandpa died, Grandma gave her engagement ring to my mother, her daughter-in-law, who never had one of her own. Mom changed the setting to suit her taste, and the changing times, and proudly wore it, while joking that she was engaged to her mother-in-law. She definitely could have done a lot worse.

Eventually, my grandmother passed away. By then I was married and had my own engagement ring. Before she passed away, whenever I would proudly show off my engagement ring, Grandma would remind me that my chossan was my diamond, never mind the ring.

Many years passed and I still missed my grandmother and wondered if I would ever get a chance to wear her ring. As we all know, time does not stand still, and my parents, thank G-d, who are in their late eighties and early nineties, are doing very well. So, one year when my mother asked me what I wanted for my birthday, I took advantage of the opportunity and said, "Grandma's ring."

To my surprise, my mother said, "You know what? It's time."

"Are you serious?" I couldn't believe my ears.

"If I didn't mean it, I wouldn't have said it. Do you want it with the setting it's in or do you want to pick out another setting?"

"I think I would like to pick out another ring setting," I said, "and I don't want to a pendant because I have Tante Malka's diamond in a pendant.

"Okay," said Mom. "Pick me up whenever you want and we'll go to the jeweler."

The rest, as they say, is history but not quite all of it.

I wore the ring for a few years and felt as if I were being kept safe in my grandmother's warm embrace.

Then, the unthinkable happened! I lost the ring! I turned the house upside down, inside out, looked in every corner of every drawer but still the ring remained hidden from me. My heart was broken. The fact that it was a nice size diamond was not even a consideration. It could have been a chip. All I knew was that when I went to change rings, it was not there.

I called my mother, in a panic. "Mom, I lost grandma's ring," I cried. "I knew it would happen eventually if I kept switching Grandma's engagement ring with mine but I thought it would look silly to have an engagement ring on each hand. I've looked everywhere and it is nowhere to be found."

"Getting hysterical is not going to help the situation," Mom said. "Where do you usually put the rings when you change them?"

"In my dresser drawer. That's the first place I looked but it's not there"

"Calm down," she said. Did you forget to put it back on when you took it off to wash nagel vasser anywhere?"

"No, because if that were the case, I would have no ring on my finger and one in the drawer, and I am wearing mine."

"Listen to me," she said. "I know how much the ring means to you, but try not to get too despondent. I'd be willing to bet it will turn up one day when you least expect it."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, I really do."

Fast-forward about a year. It was a beautiful spring day and we were going to friends whom we hadn't seen in ages for Shabbos. I took my sea foam green suit out of the closet and got dressed. The last thing I put on was my jacket, naturally, and my hands automatically went into their pockets.

"I found it!" I started screaming.

My husband ran into the bedroom.

"What's the matter?"

"My grandmother's ring. I found it in my jacket pocket. I don't remember the last time I wore this suit. I don't know how it got there." I cried again but this time they were happy tears.

"Mazel tov," he said. "I knew it would turn up one day. You don't just lose something like that."

It took a while for me to calm down and then we were on our way. We had a wonderful time. I don't think anything could have happened that would have bothered me.

A few months later my uncle passed away, my father's younger brother. My father

had now outlived both his younger siblings. My uncle was a wonderful man and it was a great loss for all of us.

On the way home from the funeral, I had an idea. I turned to my husband.

"Tell me what you think," I said.

"Since my cousin sandy never got married, she never got an engagement ring. I was thinking of giving her my grandmother's diamond. After all, she was her grandmother, too this way I want to be switching ranks and she will treasure it as much as I do.

"I think that's a wonderful idea," he said.

After shiva was over, I called my cousin into a quiet room. "Sandy," I said, "I once lost Grandma's ring and I don't want to take the chance that it will happen again. I want you to have it."

"Are you sure?" she said.

"Absolutely sure," I said as I handed her the ring.

We both started crying and hugging each other.

"You can do whatever you want with the stone," I said.

"I think I will put it into a pendant like you did with Tante Malka's diamond," Sandy said. "Now I will not only have Grandma with me all the time, but my father, too."

# Off the Cutting Edge

By Judy Gruenfeld

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"Grandma, Grandma," I yelled as I entered my grandparents' apartment after running up two flights of steps.

"What is it?" My grandmother said, a little concerned for my welfare.

"I met a new girl. She just moved in across the street. Her name is Stephanie and she wants to be my friend."

I was spending the day with my maternal grandparents, who lived four blocks away from my parents and me, while my parents were attending a wedding.

"Would you like to invite her upstairs?" asked my grandmother.

"Not now," I said. "We're going to play Hop Scotch first. Stephanie is going to use a small rock to throw into the boxes but I don't like using rocks. They roll too much."

I turned to my grandfather. "Grandpa, can you make something for me to throw using a tin can lid like you did before?"

"What did you do, Abe?" my grandmother said. "She could cut herself very badly."

"Don't worry, Becky," my grandfather said. "I made something for Judy that she used to throw into the Hop Scotch boxes, and our precious ainakel did not get even a tiny scratch. I will make another one just like it."

My grandfather opened the pantry cabinet. "Pick out a can and I will make your "Potsy piece."

I perused the cans in the pantry. I needed a large one so my grandfather would have enough tin to craft what I needed. Finally, I found a large can of baked beans. "This will do," I said, as I pulled it out. I had no idea what my grandparents were going to

do with all those beans but neither one of them batted an eye.

Grandma took the lid off the can and gave it to Grandpa. (My grandfather worked as a tool and dye maker in Newark and had some of his handcrafted tools with wooden handles at home).

Then grandpa got to work. His hands could see exactly what he was doing. Grandpa was in full control. He didn't flinch. He just gave me a kiss on the top of my head and continued to bang the tin with his hammer. He folded the edge over once and flattened it out. Then he folded the edge over again and flattened it out again. Then he folded it in half and in half again, each time banging in along the edges, just to be sure there was no way anything sharp could escape and harm his precious granddaughter.

When he was done, he handed me the smooth piece of tin. I caressed it in my fingers and felt the love that had gone into it.

I threw my arms around him. "Thank you, Grandpa."

"You're welcome, Shayna maidel. I will make one from the other side of the can for your friend if she wants one.

I ran out the door and down the stairs. "Thank you, Grandpa."

When I got downstairs, Stephanie asked me what took me so long and what I had in my hand.

I proudly proffered my treasure. "My grandfather made it for me. I use this instead of a stone so that it won't roll. He bends the edges in so I won't get cut. Would you like one? My grandfather said he would make you

one from the other end of the can."

"Yeah," said Stephanie.

"Come upstairs. I'll be yours is almost done."

Stephanie followed me into the apartment and sure enough, her Petsy piece was almost done. A few more carefully placed slams with the hammer and Grandpa handed it to her.

"Thank you," she said. "I think I am going to like it here."

"Well," I said, "I don't live here, I'm just visiting my grandparents. I live four blocks away and you'll be going to a different school but we come every Shabbos so I can see you then."

Stephanie and I did become pretty good friends but, as they say, "the only thing constant is change" and I haven't seen her



# A Left Handed Complement

By Judy Gruenfeld

I held them both out in front of me and stared as I opened and closed them and turned them palm up and palm down, in unison. My hands. Perfectly formed and in perfect proportion to my six year old frame. So, what was wrong with me, I wondered? According to my two aunts, being left handed was as good as being “handicapped”. I was ashamed, embarrassed, and felt as if I should never have been born.

“It’s a right handed world,” one of my aunts kept hounding. “You should practice using your right hand. I don’t know what your mother was trying to prove by allowing you to continue using your left. She should have slapped it.”

“As far as your being an only child,” said my other aunt, “It’s just not fair to you. You should be able to fight with someone in your own home and not just come here and fight with your cousins.”

“Cousin,” was more accurate. David and I never did get along but Sharon and I always did.

Looking back, I realize that my aunt resented the time I took away from her kids playing together. I was always at my grandmother’s, who lived next door to my cousins David and Sharon, who would come over when they knew I was there. My other aunt’s children were born later on and were too young to be my playmates.

Invariably, I would run off to “my room” at Grandma’s house and cry until Grandma came in to soothe me. I often heard her yelling at my aunts, but to no avail. I never told my parents because I did not want them to be ashamed of me, though they never gave me any indication of having such feelings.

As I grew older, I decided to do some research and see just how many accomplished people were left handed. The results were astonishing and made me realize the problem was not mine, but my aunts’.

The following is only a very small sample of left-handed people I found listed, and many of them are Jewish:

U.S. Presidents: James Garfield, Herbert Hoover, Harry Truman, Gerald Ford, Ronald Regan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton.

High Achievers: Benjamin Franklin, Prince Charles of England, Ted Koppel, John F. Kennedy, Jr., General Norman Schwarzkopf, Oprah Winfrey, Caroline Kennedy, Ruth Bader Ginsberg

Politicians: Sen. Bill Bradley, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Writers: Lewis Carroll, Mark Twain.

Singers: Judy Garland, Paul McCartney.

Artists: Michelangelo, Albrecht Durer.

Comedians: George Burns, Sid Caesar, Jerry Seinfeld.

Actors: Charlie Chaplin, Cary Grant, Danny Kaye.

Athletes: Mark Spitz, Bruce Jenner, Dorothy Hamill, Gayle Sayers, Whitey Ford, Ty Cobb, Sandy Koufax, Don Mattingly, Stan Musiel, Casey Stengel.

But the scars remain to this day. I find myself watching people’s hands. As they write. As they eat. As they cook. And I wonder if anyone has commented to them about their left handedness. Sometimes, I’ll ask and surprisingly, to me, the answer is never in the affirmative.

The other day I went over to my husband and asked him.

“Why do you suppose my aunts tormented me the way they did? I was just a child. They were adults. They should have known better. And, isn’t it ironic that one aunt has a grandchild who is an only child and one

has a grandchild who is left handed? I guess it's okay now.”

He looked at me and smiled. “I don’t have an answer for you,” he said. “Just keep writing.”

# Mrs. Salz and Mrs. Pfeffer

By Judy Gruenfeld

Mrs. Salz and Mrs. Pfeffer were long time residents of *Yenemvelt*. Each had moved there right after they had gotten married. They were civil towards each other, but they really didn't get along.

If Mrs. Salz said something was white, Mrs. Pfeffer would say it was black. If Mrs. Salz said it was daytime, Mrs. Pfeffer would say it was night.

The situation was even more unfortunate because Mrs. Salz's daughter had just married Mrs. Pfeffer's son. Whenever the families got together, the *machatunum* would argue.

One Erev Shabbos, both sets of parents decided to surprise the young couple and bring their child's favorite food for the evening meal.

The newlyweds were a little apprehensive about having both sets of parents over at the same time, but they figured it would happen eventually and everyone would be on their best behavior. After all, it was Shabbos.

Mr. and Mrs. Salz arrived first. Mrs. Salz began to set the table with a beautiful white linen table cloth she had bought just for the occasion. It was their first Shabbos meal at the home of Dena and Moshe. When Mr. and Mrs. Pfeffer arrived and saw the sparkling white tablecloth, Mrs. Pfeffer took out the new black satin napkins she had bought and put one at each place setting. The *kallah* (bride) put out the dishes and silverware and the *chossan* (groom) put a glass at each place setting.

"Dinner will be ready as soon as you men return from shul," said Dena.

"We'd better go now," said Moshe. "I'm sure we will all have a lovely Shabbos meal when we return."

After the men left, Mrs. Salz and Mrs. Pfeffer looked at each other.

"What did you bring?" asked Mrs. Pfeffer.

"Why, I brought my daughter's favorite food, my chicken soup," answered Mrs. Salz.

"You didn't!" exclaimed Mrs. Pfeffer. "I also brought chicken soup. My Moshe prefers my chicken soup to anyone else's. As a matter of fact, I gave Dena the recipe."

Mrs. Salz felt betrayed by her daughter and resolved to talk to her in private the first chance she received.

Dena became a little nervous and wondered if it were really such a good idea to have invited both sets of parents for the same Shabbos meal. But, it was too late, now. Everyone would just have to make the best of it.

All three ladies *bentched licht* and sang *Lecha Dodi*. By the time they had finished, the men had returned from shul.

"Good Shabbos," the men said as they took off their coats.

"Good Shabbos," said the ladies.

The gefilte fish was already on the table. They sang *Shalom Aleichem* and *Eshes Chayil*. Both Mr. Salz and Mr. Pfeffer made Kiddush, and soon everyone went to wash. Both made the *HaMotzi* and all partook of the delicious challah.

After the gefilte fish plates were collected, Dena put out salads. She had made broccoli salad, cucumber salad, and tossed salad. Everyone enjoyed all three.

So far, so good," thought Dena, as she collected the salad plates.

“Moshe,” can you help me in the kitchen, please?” Dena asked.

Moshe, seeing the worried look on his wife’s face, followed her into the kitchen.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“I don’t know what to do about the soup,” she said. “I know you prefer your mother’s soup, but it has so much pepper in it, that when I tasted it, I began to sneeze. And frankly, my mother’s soup is much too salty. They almost got into an argument about it while you were gone.”

“I have an idea,” said Moshe. “Why don’t we mix them together? We’ll serve it and see what they say.”

“That’s an excellent idea,” said Dena, as she ladled out the soup. Moshe brought each person his or her portion. When everyone was served, the young couple took their places at the table.

“The soup is delicious,” said Mrs. Salz. “I knew you would serve mine.”

“Wait a minute,” said Mrs. Pfeffer. “This is my soup.” And they started arguing right then and there.

“That’s enough,” said Moshe. “With all due respect to our parents, we do not want any arguing here, especially on Shabbos.”

“As a matter of fact,” added Dena, “you’re both right. Moshe and I mixed all the soup together. We are one family now and we will have one chicken soup. This way, we get the best of both.”

Mrs. Salz and Mrs. Pfeffer looked at each other with remorse.

“Can you ever forgive me?” said Mrs. Salz.

“Of course,” said Mrs. Pfeffer, “if you can find it in your heart to forgive me. We’ve both been acting very foolishly and it took our children to show us how wrong we were.”

Both ladies became very devoted to one another and to their families, which is a very good thing, because the following year they were blessed with their first *ainakle* (grandchild). By the time they had become the best of friends and there was no competition between the two new bubbies (grandmothers).

# A Great Miracle Happened Here

By Judy Gruenfeld

“Is everyone all packed?” my husband yelled.

“Not quite,” I said.

“Almost,” Ronnie said.

We were going to spend Shabbos Chanukah with family. I wasn't really looking forward to the trip because this particular side of the family didn't have much patience for my son.

Don't get me wrong. They were nice to him but that certain something was missing, and Ronnie, above all else, felt it. I didn't want to compromise my son's self-esteem because of someone else's insensitivity but one must do what one must do. Not that he was mistreated. He wasn't. But no one took the time to really get to know and appreciate him.

“Their loss,” I've been told. Maybe, but I still had to get through the weekend.

Finally, we were all packed and ready to go. The trip was about three hours. My younger son would be meeting us there.

We arrived to our usual warm welcome and brought our luggage up to our respective rooms.

“It smelled delicious in the house. The pot roast and potato latkes were in the oven, the table was set, and there were numerous salads on the table along with the gefilte fish, challoos and wine.

My relative's cell phone rang.

“Oh my goodness! Is he okay? What happened? I see. Okay. Good. Please hurry. It's almost Shabbos.”

My host's eight-month-old grandson had fallen and bumped into his head but, aside from the bump, he was fine. They arrived fifteen minutes later.

“What happened to Mendel?” asked Ronnie, as he took the baby from my niece and showered him with kisses.

He's fine,” said Michal. “He just bumped his head.”

“Fellows, I think it's time we light the menorahs so we have time to get to shul for Maarav,” said our host.

All the men lit their menorahs, the women bentched light, and then the men took off for shul.

“Come,” said my hostess, “let's all sit down. We have half an hour to catch up on all that's going on before we get busy.”

I, for one, watched the flames flickering on the candles and thought of all the “coincidences” that had brought me back to Yiddishkeit.

The glow inside me was as bright as the one coming from the candles.

By the time the men returned home, we were all hungry. Our host made Kiddush, we washed, and then sat down to a most delicious meal.

“I made a few extra portions,” said my hostess, glancing in Ronnie's direction. “I know we have some big eaters here.”

“Not me,” said Ronnie, staring back at the eyes that were staring at him.

“Who else, then?” said the mouth beneath the eyes.

“I don't know,” said Ronnie. “Let's just eat.”

“I think that's an excellent idea,” I said, and we began passing our plates around the table.

The pot roast was soft and juicy, the latkes were crispy, the salads were crunchy, and the applesauce was smooth and cool. Jewish soul food at its finest.

In the middle of dinner, it became obvious that Mendel had something stuck in his throat. He was still breathing but he was not swallowing properly. Everyone began to panic; everyone that is, except Ronnie.

He grabbed the baby, pulled him out of his high chair, turned him upside down, and gave him a hefty pat on the back. A piece of pot roast flew out of his mouth. By then, we were all shaking and Mendel was crying.

When things calmed down, I asked Ronnie, "Where did you learn how to do that?"

"When I worked in the restaurant they taught me to do that, and the Heimlich maneuver, in case anyone started choking."

My hostess went over to Ronnie, "You're my hero," she said. "You saved Mendel's life."

"Oh," he said, in a typical Ronnie response. "I'm glad I did."

I guess you could say we experienced two miracles that night. Though one was a long time in coming, it was well worth the wait. Baruch Hashem, we are all breathing easier now.

# What a Country!

By Judy Gruenfeld

A friend of mine emailed this to me and I would like to share it with all of you. If it weren't so outrageous, it would be funny. The truth is certainly stranger than fiction. Please read it carefully. Believe me, you can't make this stuff up.

It's time again for the yearly 'Stella Awards'!

For those unfamiliar with these awards, they are named after 81-year-old Stella Liebeck who spilled hot coffee on herself and successfully sued the McDonald's in New Mexico where she purchased the coffee. You remember, she took the lid off the coffee and put it between her knees while she was driving. Who would ever think one could get burned doing that, right?

That's right; these are awards for the most outlandish lawsuits and verdicts in the U.S. You know, the kinds of cases that make you scratch your head. So keep your head scratcher handy.

Here are the Stellas for the past year:

## 7TH PLACE:

Kathleen Robertson of Austin, Texas was awarded \$80,000 by a jury of her peers after breaking her ankle tripping over a toddler who was running inside a furniture store. The store owners were understandably surprised by the verdict, considering the running toddler was her own son.

## 6TH PLACE:

Carl Truman, 19, of Los Angeles, California won \$74,000 plus medical expenses when his neighbor ran over his hand with a Honda Accord. Truman apparently didn't notice there was someone at the wheel of the car when he was trying to steal his neighbor's hubcaps.

Go ahead, grab your head scratcher

## 5TH PLACE:

Terrence Dickson, of Bristol, Pennsylvania, was leaving a house he had just burglarized by way of the garage. Unfortunately for Dickson, the automatic garage door opener malfunctioned and he could not get the garage door to open. Worse, he couldn't re-enter the house because the door connecting the garage to the house locked when Dickson pulled it shut. Forced to sit for eight, count 'em, EIGHT days on a case of Pepsi and a large bag of dry dog food, he sued the homeowner claiming undue mental anguish. Amazingly, the jury said the homeowner must pay Dickson \$500,000 for his anguish.

We should all have this kind of anguish.

Keep scratching. There are more...

Jerry Williams, of Little Rock, Arkansas, garnered 4th Place in the Stella's when he was awarded \$14,500 plus medical expenses after being bitten on his rear by his next door neighbor's beagle - even though the beagle was on a chain in its owner's fenced yard. Williams did not get as much as he asked for because the jury believed the beagle might have been provoked at the time of the butt bite because Williams had climbed over the fence into the yard and repeatedly shot the dog with a pellet gun.

Grrrrrr... scratch, scratch.

## 3RD PLACE:

Third place goes to Amber Carson of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, because a jury ordered a Philadelphia restaurant to pay her \$113,500 after she slipped on a spilled soft drink and broke her tailbone. The reason the soft drink was on the floor: Ms. Carson had thrown it at her boyfriend 30 seconds earlier

during an argument. Whatever happened to people being responsible for their own actions?

Scratch, scratch, scratch. Hang in there, only two more Stellas to go.

2ND PLACE:

Second place goes to Kara Walton, of Claymont, Delaware, who sued the owner of a nightclub in a nearby city because she fell from the bathroom window to the floor, knocking out her two front teeth. Even though Ms. Walton was trying to sneak through the ladies room window to avoid paying the \$3.50 cover charge, the jury said the night club had to pay her \$12,000... oh, yeah, plus dental expenses.

Go figure.

1ST PLACE : ...May we have a fanfare played on 50 kazoos, please.

This year's runaway First place Stella Award winner is Mrs. Merv Grazinski, of

Oklahoma City, OK, who purchased a new 32-foot Winnebago motor home.

On her first trip home from an OU football game, having driven onto the freeway, she set the cruise control at 70 mph and calmly left the driver's seat to go to the back of the Winnebago to make herself a sandwich. Not surprisingly, the motor home left the freeway, crashed and overturned. Also not surprisingly, Mrs. Grazinski sued Winnebago for not putting in the owner's manual that she couldn't actually leave the driver's seat while the cruise control was set. The Oklahoma jury awarded her (are you sitting down?) \$1,750,000 PLUS a new motor home. Winnebago actually changed their manuals as a result of this suit, just in case Mrs. Grazinski has any relatives who might also buy a motor home.

You can't fix stupid...and now it's profitable!



# My Most Important Life Lesson Was Learned in Kindergarten

By Judy Gruenfeld

It was a beautiful September morning. In Brooklyn, in the 1950's, Labor Day clearly marked the end of summer. The temperature registered at seventy degrees and there was no humidity in the air. We had just come home from our bungalow colony in the Catskills, as I would be starting my career as a student the following week. I was excited – and a little nervous – about going to Kindergarten, as I had never been to pre-school.

My grandmother, who sewed all my clothes, made me a special dress for the first day of school. It was navy blue taffeta with white lace ruffles on the collar and sleeves. My long, round, brown curls bounced behind me as I walked. Finally, Mama let me wear my new navy blue Buster Brown school shoes. They were a little stiff.

“I told you I should have worn my shoes before today,” I said “They would be much more comfortable.”

“And much more scuffed,” said Mama. “You’ll have plenty of time to wear them in – and out.”

“Mama,” I said as we walked the four blocks to the elementary school, “Do you think anyone will like me? Do you think I’ll make friends?”

“Of course you will,” said Mama. “You already have plenty of friends on the block.”

“But, that’s different. All the families on the block are friends.”

“You’ll be fine,” Mama said. “Just be your sweet self. I’m sure you will make many friends.”

When we reached the school, Mama found my class and I got on line.

We kissed. “Bye, Mama. I’ll see you later.”

I think she had tears in her eyes, but I didn’t. I was feeling very grown-up.

When Kindergarten let out at twelve o'clock, Mama was waiting for me. I ran to her and we hugged.

“So, how was your first day at school?” she asked.

“It was wonderful. I made a lot of friends, just like you said. And we started learning our ABC’s and 123’s. The teacher is so nice. We had a snack and we had free play. We could play with whatever we wanted and today we had to pick a partner to play with.”

“Who did you pick?” Mama asked.

“Well, somebody picked me,” I said.

“Who is she?” asked Mama.

“Her name is Debbie, but I’m not sure I like her. She’s nice enough, but she’s kind of funny.”

“What do you mean ‘funny’?”

“Well, she doesn’t seem to understand everything. She’s the only one in the class who didn’t learn the ABC’s and 123’s, she couldn’t cut out the dresses for the paper dolls with the scissors, and she doesn’t know what to do with some of the toys.”

“It sounds to me like she could use a friend.” Mama said.

“I know,” I said, “but I want to play with the other kids. They were having much more fun.”

“You can do that,” Mama said. “Just be sure to include Debbie so she won’t feel left out. I’ll speak to your teacher and ask her if she can allow more than two of you to play together. Just this morning you were worried

about making friends, remember? I'm sure Debbie must have felt the same way."

"I guess."

The next day, Debbie got on line right behind me.

She turned to a lady. "Mama, this is Judy," she said.

"Hello, Judy," said the lady. I am Mrs. Schneider, Debbie's mother. Debbie couldn't stop talking about you all day yesterday. Thank you for being so nice to her."

"You're welcome."

Mrs. Schneider then turned to my mother and introduced herself.

"You have a lovely daughter," she said. "I was so concerned about Debbie making friends. She's a little slow and many of the children on our block tease her and don't have the patience to play with her, but from what I understand, our daughters were partners yesterday, and Debbie had a wonderful experience."

"I'm so glad to hear that," my mother said. "Judy was also concerned about making friends. I'm sure they will both have a very good year."

The teacher came out and said, "Everyone choose a different partner today. I want all of you to get to know each other."

I chose Phyllis, a tall girl with straight dark hair and deep brown eyes. She wore a beautiful purple dress that I just had to get my grandmother to make for me.

"Do you want to come to my house and play after school?" Phyllis asked towards the end of the day.

"I have to ask my mother, but I would love to," I said,

When twelve o'clock rolled around and our mothers came to pick us up, we exchanged phone numbers and set a play date for the next day.

While walking home I asked my mother, "Why did Debbie's mother say she was slow? She doesn't seem slower than anyone else. And why do the kids tease her? I didn't have such a great time playing with her but I know it's not nice to tease other people."

"It's hard to explain," Mama said. "Debbie's mother didn't mean slow physically. She meant slow mentally. That means she is not quite as smart as most of the other kids. It takes her a little longer to learn most things, but she is still one of Hashem's children and should be treated with respect. She has feelings like everyone else, and she does not deserve to have those feelings hurt. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think so. I'll be her friend, but I want other friends, too."

"That's fine. I'm sure you will have a very good time at Phyllis' house tomorrow."

Phyllis was an only child like myself. We had a great time together and before I knew it, my father was knocking on the Abrams' door, ready to take me home for supper.

"See you in school tomorrow," we both yelled as I left with my father.

"Did you have a nice time?" my father asked.

"Really nice," I said. "Can I invite Phyllis to our house?"

"I don't see why not. You can set up another play date when you see her in school tomorrow," Dad said.

As soon as I got to school the next day, I looked for Phyllis. When I found her, we began chatting. Debbie came over to us. It was obvious that she wanted to be part of the conversation but she was hesitant.

"She lives on my block," Phyllis whispered in my ear.

"So what," I said. "It's not polite to tell secrets. Why are you whispering?"

Debbie's eyes filled with tears. They started rolling down her cheeks and she ran away.

"Let her go," said Phyllis. "Nobody really likes her, anyway. She's a retard."

"What's a retard?" I asked.

Phyllis touched her forehead with her index finger. "She's pretty stupid."

"Oh, you mean 'slow'? That's what my mom told me yesterday."

"Yeah, I guess," said Phyllis. "I won't play with her but if you want to, go ahead. I'll find someone else to play with, and she turned and walked away."

I was heartbroken. I really liked Phyllis and I wanted to be her friend. I started crying and Debbie came over to me with a tissue.

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Fast forward fifty-some-odd years. Debbie and I are still in contact with each other though she does not live nearby. She has managed to hold down a job all her life. She has never married or had children, but she was the one I could turn to for understanding and encouragement when I was looking for answers concerning my son. Our mothers have also remained friends throughout the years.

Whatever happened to Phyllis? I have no idea, but I have gotten to this point in my life without all the Phyllises in my world, and I will happily continue to do so.

# Mrs. Freilichkeit's Tea Party

By Judy Gruenfeld

It was a beautiful day in Yenemvelt. Mrs. Freilichkeit decided to have a tea party to celebrate the arrival of summer. She thought it would be nice to invite some of the neighbors over on this glorious afternoon. She was a very sociable person and enjoyed being with people. Once she decided on the menu she started calling the neighbors to see if they could come.

The first neighbor she called was Mrs. Oygen. "Mrs. Oygen," said Mrs. Freilichkeit, "would you like to come to my house for a tea party later this afternoon?"

"I don't think so," said Mrs. Oygen. "I have conjunctivitis and I wouldn't want to infect anyone."

Mrs. Freilichkeit said she hoped she felt better and hung up the phone.

Next Mrs. Freilichkeit called Mrs. Emmes.

"I'm having a party at my house tomorrow. Would you like to come?"

"To tell you the truth," Mrs. Emmes said, "I would love to come, but I have a previous engagement and won't be able to make it."

Mrs. Freilichkeit called Mrs. Toiva and asked if she would do her a favor and come to her house for a party later that day. Mrs. Toiva said it would be her pleasure.

Mrs. Freilichkeit then called Mrs. Hais.

"Mrs. Hais," she said, "would you like to come to my house later this afternoon. I'm having a party."

"Will you have your air conditioning on?" asked Mrs. Hais.

"Certainly, if it is hot outside."

"Then I will be there, said Mrs. Hais.

Mrs. Freilichkeit started to call Mrs. Gantzagadilla but decided not to. Mrs.

Gantzagadilla was very hard to please and was always trying to change things. This wasn't good enough and that wasn't good enough. The coffee was too cold. The ice cream was too warm. The cake wasn't moist enough. No, she would be better off without her.

She also decided not to call Mrs. Kvetch for the same reasons.

Mrs. Shpait told Mrs. Freilichkeit that she would love to come but she could not possibly be there at the appointed time.

"That's fine," said Mrs. Freilichkeit. Come whenever you can.

Next on the list was Mrs. Arbeitnit who was delighted to receive the call from Mrs. Freilichkeit.

"Oh, I'd love to come," she said. "Since I retired I have plenty of time to visit with neighbors."

Checking her list, Mrs. Freilichkeit saw Mrs. Balaboosta's name and called her. Mrs. Balaboosta said she would love to come, as did Mrs. Kockleffel. Both said they would be happy to attend but insisted that they bring something. Mrs. Oysgapitst (who was always looking for an excuse to dress up in her finest clothes) also said she would be delighted to attend. On and on down the list she went, until she had called all the neighbors.

Mrs. Krankeit, who had originally said "no" because she had a very bad cold, called Mrs. Freilichkeit back as the day progressed and said she was feeling much better and decided that an afternoon with the neighbors was just what the doctor ordered.

When Mrs. Apfel heard that Mrs. Freilichkeit was serving her famous strudel, she said she wouldn't miss the party for anything.

Mrs. Essengut had just eaten when her phone rang, but fortunately, she still had room left for apple strudel.

Mrs. Freilichkeit then called Mrs. Lushen (Tsing). Mrs. Lushen (Tsing) said she would love to come, and kept talking and talking, so by the time Mrs. Freilichkeit got off the phone with Mrs. Lushen (Tsing), it was too late to call anyone else. She should have called Mrs. Rednisht first. Oh, well, there was nothing she could do about it now. She had to get ready for her guests.

Soon, Mrs. Freilichkeit's doorbell began ringing. Mrs. Essengut was the first to arrive.

"Please come in," said Mrs. Freilichkeit. She was about to close the door when she heard a squeaky little voice say,

"Excuse me, but may I come in, too?" It was Mrs. Klein.

"Of course you may," said the hostess. "I'm so sorry. I didn't see you standing there behind Mrs. Essengut."

Mrs. Mentsch arrived with some cookies she had baked. She never went to anyone's house without bringing something.

As they sat down to tea, there was a knock on the door. When Mrs. Freilichkeit opened the door, she saw Mrs. Balaydigt, who was crying.

"Why wasn't I invited to the party?" she asked.

"Oh my," said Mrs. Freilichkeit, "I'm so sorry. It was just an oversight on my part. Please come in and join the rest of us."

Mrs. Balaydigt wiped away her tears and joined the others.

By three-thirty, everyone had arrived except for two guests, Mrs. Farblunjit and Mrs. Shpait. Soon there was a knock on the door.

"I was never good with directions," Mrs. Farblunjit told her hostess. "I went around the wrong corner."

"It's a good thing I didn't come early," said Mrs. Shpait, "or I never would have seen Mrs. Farblunjit's car."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Freilichkeit, "the main thing is that you are both here now. Please come in and join us."

The ladies were having a lovely tea party until Mrs. Narishkeit said, "I don't like this strudel."

Mrs. Yenta told Mrs. Narishkeit that it was impolite to say such things to one's hostess. Mrs. Narishkeit apologized to Mrs. Freilichkeit although she really didn't understand why what she had said was so wrong.

At about five o'clock, Mrs. Klein said, "I think it's time we all left."

Everyone thanks Mrs. Freilichkeit for her hospitality and although they, themselves, were no hungry, they all went home to prepare supper for their husbands.

# What Goes Around Comes Around

By Judy Gruenfeld

Did you ever watch a determined two-year-old try to get dressed by herself, refusing to let anyone help her? I had the pleasure, and the frustration, of doing so just last week.

I was at my girlfriend Beth's house. She was babysitting for her granddaughter and would be having her as an overnight guest.

We were sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee while Amy was playing very nicely in "her room" at Grandma's house, when we noticed the time. It was five o'clock. I had already prepared supper for my family so I was in no hurry to go home. Since Amy's grandmother is a dear friend of mine and I, as of yet, have no grandchildren of my own, I wanted to enjoy the child a little longer, so I decided to stay a while.

"Amy, come have supper," my girlfriend called.

"Amy ran into the kitchen with a big smile on her face. "What's for supper, Gamma?" she said.

"Come. Let me put you in your highchair and I will show you," my friend said.

"No! Me (short for Amy) do it," said Amy, and then very adeptly proceeded to climb into her highchair while my girlfriend and I stayed on either side of it. No problem! Amy was seated before we had a chance to get nervous. My girlfriend put the tray on and served Amy her supper.

"Mmmmm," said Amy. "Yummy chicken." When she finished what was on her plate she said, "me want more."

"Her you go sweetheart," said my girlfriend, as she put more chicken on Amy's plate. "I have some carrots for you, too."

Amy smiled, knowing she was as cute as a button and could probably get away with anything. "Me like carrots."

"They're very good for you, too," Beth said. "Bunnies like carrots and horsies like carrots."

"It's amazing how you fit right back into the loop after being out of it for so long," I said.

"Wait, you'll see. When your time comes, you'll be a natural; kind of like riding a bicycle. You never forget.

"I'm afraid that when my time comes, I'll be crawling around on the floor with my grandchildren. There will be a box of Depends next to the box of Pampers, a Geri chair next to the highchair, a large and a small walker standing side by side, a plate of pureed food next to the baby food jars, and two toothless grins."

"Don't give up hope," Beth said. "We never know what Hashem has in store for us."

"This is true," I said. "In the meantime, I will enjoy yours."

"Any time," said Beth.

As soon as we finished what we were saying, we noticed there was no one in the high chair.

"Amy, where did you go?" said Beth.

"Me in the baffoom, Gamma," said Amy.

Not one to waste time, after finishing her supper, Amy was getting ready for her nightly bath. Her cloths were off and she was trying to climb into the tub.

"Amy, mamala, you must never get into the bathtub if there is no grown-up with you," said Beth. "You could get hurt."

"Me no get hurt. Me thwim," said Amy.

“Not without a grown-up, you don’t,” replied Beth.

Acrobat that she is, Amy climbed into the bathtub as easily as she climbed into the highchair. Beth regulated the temperature of the water and let Amy play for a while. She then washed her and pulled the plug out of the drain. Amy watched, fascinated, as the water drained from the tub. Beth watched Amy with as much fascination.

Okay, maialah,” said Beth, after the water was gone. “It’s time to get into pajamas.

Amy insisted on climbing out of the tub by herself, which she did with a little help from us, as her wet lets were sticking to the tub and making the task a little difficult. Beth then wrapped her in a towel. I have never seen nor smelled anything so sweet. She looked like a budding flower with her face peeking out of the thick, green towel.

“Let’s get you into pajamas,” said Beth.

“Me do it,” said Amy, and she refused any help, though her damp skin made it difficult for her to get her arms and legs into their appropriate places. Meantime, Beth and I, knowing we would not make any headway, went back into the kitchen and had another cup of coffee.

About ten minutes later, Amy came out, wearing her pajamas. There was only one small problem – if you consider it a problem – they were inside out and backwards.

Beth turned to me. “She’ll never let me fix them.

“Not to worry,” I said. “If you throw them in the wash, as is, when Amy takes them off, the next time she puts them on, they will be right side out and front wards.”

# Schools' Out

By Judy Gruenfeld

The following information and statistics were emailed to me by a very good friend. I think you will find them as interesting as I did. **Education Is The Thing By Dr. Farrukh Saleem** (The writer is an Islamabad-based freelance columnist)

"There are only 14 million Jews in the world; seven million in the Americas, five million in Asia, two million in Europe and 100,000 in Africa.

For every single Jew in the world there are 100 Muslims. Yet, Jews are more than a hundred times more powerful than all the Muslims put together. Ever wondered why?

Albert Einstein, the most influential scientist of all time and TIME magazine's 'Person of the Century', was a Jew.

Sigmund Freud - id, ego, super-ego -- the father of psychoanalysis was a Jew.

So were Karl Marx, Paul Samuelson and Milton Friedman.

Here are a few other Jews whose intellectual output has enriched the whole humanity:

Benjamin Rubin gave humanity the vaccinating needle.

Jonas Salk developed the first polio vaccine.

Alert Sabin developed the improved live polio vaccine.

Gertrude Elion gave us a leukemia fighting drug.

Baruch Blumberg developed the vaccination for Hepatitis B.

Elie Metchnikoff won a Nobel Prize in infectious diseases.

Bernard Katz won a Nobel Prize in neuromuscular transmission.

Andrew Schally won a Nobel in endocrinology (disorders of the endocrine system; diabetes, hyperthyroidism).

Aaron Beck founded Cognitive Therapy (psychotherapy to treat mental disorders, depression and phobias).

Gregory Pincus developed the first oral contraceptive pill.

George Wald won a Nobel for furthering our understanding of the human eye.

Stanley Cohen won a Nobel in embryology (study of embryos and their development).

Willem Kolff came up with the kidney dialysis machine.

Over the past 105 Years, 14 million Jews have won 15-dozen Nobel Prizes, while only three Nobel Prizes have been won by 1.4 billion Muslims (other than Peace Prizes).

Stanley Mezor invented the first microprocessing chip.

Leo Szilard developed the first nuclear chain reactor.

Peter Schultz, optical fibre cable; Charles Adler, traffic lights; Benno Strauss, stainless steel; Isador Kisee, sound movies; Emile Berliner, telephone microphone and Charles Ginsburg, videotape recorder.

Famous financiers in the business world who belong to Jewish faith include Ralph Lauren (Polo), Levis Strauss (Levi's Jeans), Howard Schultz (Starbuck's), Sergey Brin (Google), Michael Dell (Dell Computers), Larry Ellison (Oracle), Donna Karan (DKNY), Irv Robbins (Baskin & Robbins) and Bill Rosenberg (Dunkin Donuts).

Richard Levin, President of Yale University, is a Jew.



In the media, famous Jews Wolf Blitzer (CNN), Barbara Walters (ABC News), Eugene Meyer (Washington Post), Henry Grunwald (editor-in-chief Time), Katherine Graham (Publisher of The Washington Post), Joseph Lelyyeld (Executive editor, The New York Times), and Max Frankel (New York Time).

Can you name the most beneficent philanthropist in the history of the world?

The name is George Soros, a Jew, who has so far donated a colossal \$4 billion most of which has gone as aid to scientists and universities around the world. Second to George Soros is Walter Annenberg, another Jew, who has built a hundred libraries by donating an estimated \$2 billion.

At the Olympics, Mark Spitz set a record of sorts by winning seven gold medals.

Lenny Krayzelburg is a three-time Olympic gold medalist. Spitz, Krayzelburg and Boris Becker are all Jewish.

Did you know that Harrison Ford, George Burns, Tony Curtis, Charles Bronson, Sandra Bullock, Billy Crystal, Woody Allen, Paul Newman, Peter Sellers, Dustin Hoffman, Michael Douglas, Ben Kingsley, Kirk Douglas, Goldie Hawn, Cary Grant, William Shatner, Jerry Lewis and Peter Falk are all Jewish. (Note: One of the Greatest Hollywood producers in the 1950s was Cecil B. DeMill, a Jew)

As a matter of fact, Hollywood itself was founded by a Jew. Among directors and producers, Steven Spielberg, Mel Brooks, Oliver Stone, Aaron Spelling (Beverly Hills 90210), Neil Simon (The Odd Couple), Andrew Vaina (Rambo 1/213), Michael Man (Starsky and Hutch), Milos Forman (One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest), Douglas Fairbanks (The thief of Baghdad) and Ivan Reitman (Ghostbusters) are all Jewish.

(Note: One of the greatest Producers was Cecil DeMill).

William James Sidis, with an IQ of 250-300, is the brightest human who ever existed.

Guess what faith did he belong to?

There are an estimated 1,476,233,470 Muslims on the face of the planet: one billion in Asia, 400 million in Africa, 44 million in Europe and six million in the Americas.

Every fifth human being is a Muslim; for every single Hindu there are two Muslims, for every Buddhist there are two Muslims and for every Jew there are one hundred Muslims.

There are 57 member-countries of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and all of them put together have around 500 universities; one university for every three million Muslims. The United States has 5,758 universities and India has 8,407.

In 2004, Shanghai Jiao Tong University compiled an 'Academic Ranking of World Universities', and, intriguingly, not one university from Muslim-majority states was in the top-500. As per data collected by the UNDP, literacy in the Christian world stands at nearly 90 per cent and 15 Christian-majority states have a literacy rate of 100 per cent.

A Muslim-majority state, as a sharp contrast, has an average literacy rate of around 40 per cent and there is no Muslim-majority state with a literacy rate of 100 per cent.

Some 98 per cent of the 'literate' in the Christian world had completed primary school, while less than 50 per cent of the 'literate' in the Muslim world did the same.

Around 40 per cent of the 'literate' in the Christian world attended university while no more than two per cent of the 'literate' in the Muslim world did the same.

Muslim majority countries have 230 scientists per one million Muslims. The US has 4,000 scientists for million and Japan has

5,000 per million. In the entire Arab world, the total number of full-time researchers is 35,000 and there are only 50 technicians per one million Arabs (in the Christian world there are up to 1,000 technicians per one million). Furthermore, the Muslim world spends 0.2 per cent of its GDP on research and development, while the Christian world spends around five per cent of its GDP.

Daily newspapers per 1000 people number of book titles per million are two indicators of whether knowledge is being diffused in a society. In Pakistan, there are 23 daily newspapers per 1,000 Pakistanis while the same ratio in Singapore is 360.

In the UK, the number of book titles per million stands at 2,000 while the same in Egypt is 20.

Exports of high technology products as a percentage of total exports are an important indicator of knowledge application. Pakistan's exports of high technology products as a percentage of total exports stands at one per

cent. The same for Saudi Arabia is 0.3 per cent; Kuwait, Morocco, and Algeria are all at 0.3% while Singapore is at 58 per cent.

Interestingly, the combined annual GDP of 57 OIC-countries is under \$2 trillion.

America, just by herself, produces goods and services worth \$12 trillion; China \$8 trillion, Japan \$3.8 trillion and Germany \$2.4 trillion (purchasing power parity basis).

Oil rich Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Qatar collectively produced goods and services (mostly oil) worth \$500 billion; Spain alone produces goods and services worth over \$1trillion, Catholic Poland: \$489 billion and Buddhist Thailand \$545 billion (Muslim GDP as a percentage of world GDP has fast declining).

So why are Muslims so powerless?

Answer: Lack of education.

Quality education to be exact.

Uncontaminated education to be precise.

'Nuff said!

# Mrs. Machayah and Mrs. Kvetch

By Judy Gruenfeld

Another day had just dawned in modern day Yenemvelt. The thin, white, hazy cloud covering the sun made it look like a fried egg cooked "over lightly".

Mrs. Machayah stretched, said, "Modeh Ani", and got out of bed.

She looked at the sky and thought, "I know that cloud will move away from the sun and it will be a beautiful day."

She was definitely a glass-half-full kind of person.

On the other side of town, Mrs. Kvetch was also waking up. She also stretched, said "Modeh Ani" and got out of bed, but that is where the similarity ended. When Mrs. Kvetch looked out the window she couldn't help but bristle.

"Oy," she said. "If only that cloud would move away from the sun, I would be able to enjoy the day. Mrs. Kvetch always seemed to forget that Hashem created the clouds, too. She was definitely a glass-half-empty kind of person.

In spite of their very different outlooks on life, Mrs. Machayah and Mrs. Kvetch were very good friends. Mrs. Machayah felt it incumbent upon her to teach her friend to appreciate all things in life, including rainy days, whether literal or figurative. She felt that Mrs. Kvetch became too depressed when things were not going her way and she did not take the time to realize that all things happen for the good and that things could improve at any moment.

Mrs. Kvetch, however, felt it her duty to get her friend to see things more realistically. She felt nothing good could come out of perceiving things through rose-colored-glasses. Mrs. Kvetch felt her friend tended to

avoid all things unpleasant and not face the truth,

Mrs. Machayah made herself a cup of steaming hot coffee, added one teaspoon of sugar and a little milk and made the appropriate bracha. "Ah, how sweet," she thought as she took her first sip. Before she realized it, the coffee was gone and the phone was ringing. Mrs. Machayah pushed the button on the cordless phone that was just within her reach.

"Hello."

"No wonder you're home," said Mrs. Kvetch to her friend. "How are you doing on this gloomy day?"

"I'm fine, thank you. The sun is about to peek through the clouds any moment now and I just finished my coffee. Why don't you come over for breakfast and we can decide if we want to do anything today. I don't feel like sitting around the house. Maybe we can go to the park. How are you doing today?"

"To be honest with you, not very well. I feel a migraine coming on and my whole body aches from Arthritis. On top of that, I broke a tooth and I have to go the dentist."

"Why don't you get out of the house?" said Mrs. Machayah. "I'm sure that will make you feel much better."

I doubt it, but I don't think this will be a park day, anyway. Why don't we go to the mall? My nephew is getting married next month and I need to find a dress to wear. That is, if I feel well enough to go to the wedding."

"That's fine with me," said Mrs. Machayah. "Why don't you come over and we'll be on our way?"

"Okay," said Mrs. Kvetch but I'll just grab something to eat at home and I'll be right over."

Mrs. Kvetch didn't like her friend's cooking, even if it was only breakfast, but she certainly did not want to insult her.

Soon the two were off to the mall. Mrs. Kvetch tried on dress after dress but none seemed to satisfy her. She thought the color of the first one clashed with her eyes. The second one had too many ruffles. The neck was too tight on the third one and she couldn't breathe. The neck was too loose on the fourth one and Mrs. Kvetch felt it was not *tzniusdik* (modest). By the time she tried on the fifth one, Mrs. Kvetch began to feel she wouldn't find the right dress at all.

"Oh, why do I have to go to this *Chasunah*, anyway?" she moaned. "It's a three hour schlep and if I find a dress, then I will have to go looking for shoes, too."

"Let's try another store," said Mrs. Machayah. "We haven't exhausted all our efforts yet. I know just the right place."

"Okay," said Mrs. Kvetch, allowing herself to be led to another dress shop.

"Let me see if I can pick something out for you," said Mrs. Machayah.

"You can try," said Mrs. Kvetch as she thought to herself, "She has such awful taste. She will never find something I like."

Mrs. Machayah picked a dress off the rack and handed it to her friend. She had to admit it was a nice dress. The color seemed perfect as did the neckline and there were no

ruffles. It was elegant without being ostentatious.

Mrs. Kvetch went into the fitting room while Mrs. Machayah waited right outside. A few minutes later Mrs. Kvetch came out wearing the dress and a smile on her face.

"I like it," she said. "What do you think?"

"I think you look beautiful," said Mrs. Machayah.

"Good," said Mrs. Kvetch. "I'll take it, and I already have a pair of shoes at home that will go very nicely with it."

Mrs. Kvetch went back into the dressing room to change her clothes again. Mrs. Machayah was waiting for her when she came out.

"I'd say we've had a pretty nice day, so far," she said.

The ladies went out to lunch and then started heading home. As they approached the mall exit, they saw that it had started to rain.

"I knew the clay would be nasty," said Mrs. Kvetch.

"How can you say that?" said Mrs. Machayah. "You got a beautiful new dress and saved money because you don't need to buy new shoes. Now we will each have to buy an umbrella, so it's a good day for umbrella manufacturers, also."

As the ladies got back into the secure feeling of the dry car, Mrs. Machayah turned to Mrs. Kvetch. "You know, my friend, reality is how you perceive it. Try to remember that the next time you see half a glass of water."

# One Woman's Curls...

By Judy Gruenfeld

For the past six weeks, the sun had shone like a fireball in the sky, its intense rays attacking the parched earth with ceaseless flames.

This morning, however, it was so dark outside, there was no evidence that the sun had even risen. The clouds hung low and appeared ready to burst and spread their liquid treasure over the thirsty soil.

Aliza stared out the window. She looked at her lawn, which she and her husband had not been permitted to water for the last three weeks. There was not a blade of green grass left.

The reservoirs were down to twenty percent. Everyone had been *davening* (praying) for rain. Maybe today was the day *Hashem* (G-d) would choose to allow the clouds to open up and overflow with its precious long awaited for contents.

The ringing phone startled Aliza. It was her mother, who lived on the other side of town.

"I know it's going to rain today. My arthritis is really acting up," she said.

"I'm sorry to hear you're not feeling well, Mom," said Aliza, "but we do need the rain. I can even feel my hair curling up under my snood."

"And mine is just hanging there like limp noodles."

Both women laughed. Aliza's mom had stick straight hair and was so delighted that Aliza's hair was thick and curly like her father's. Aliza could never get her mother to understand curly hair had its problems, too. No matter how many times the subject of hair came up, Aliza's mom could not imagine what Aliza had to complain about.

Aliza felt a pang in her chest as she had ever since she was a child. Mom was terrific but it did hurt when, especially Mom, did not validate her feelings. However, Aliza chose not to say anything, as she had never gotten anywhere with the conversation before, and didn't see why this time would be any different.

While talking to her mother, Aliza continued looking out the window. The clouds sailed across the sky in unison, refusing to let go of each other, and getting darker and more threatening as they passed. Suddenly, a flash of lightning and a crack of thunder intruded in on the conversation between mother and daughter.

"Mom, I've got to get all the children's toys inside. I think today is the day for which we've all been waiting. I'll talk to you later."

"Bye, dear," said Aliza's mother, "I'll see you at the Bar Mitzvah tonight."

Both ladies hung up their respective phones.

Aliza got the toys in the house just in time. As soon as she closed the front door, the clouds opened up and drenched the parched lawns, which soaked up the rain as fast as it was falling.

"Thank goodness for shaitels," thought Aliza. She had just had hers done for the Bar Mitzvah that night. No matter what the weather, it looked perfect.

Across town, Aliza's mother was thinking the same thing. Her own hair wouldn't stand a chance in this weather, no matter what she attempted to do with it.

Fortunately, the Bar Mitzvah was in town, so no one would have to drive far in the inclement weather. It was called for seven

o'clock but the bulk of the people would not be arriving until about eight.

Aliza had a terrible day, For some reason, her *shaitel* (wig) just would not comply with her wishes and it was too late for her to do anything about it. It didn't look bad but the lady that styled it for her had made it curly instead of straight.

"Why didn't I look inside the box before I brought it home?" she chided herself.

Well, it was too late now. She would have to attend the affair as is.

When Aliza arrived at the Bar Mitzvah, her mother, who was already there, came over to her. "I love the way you had your shaitel done, it reminds me of your own hair."

Aliza burst out crying. She didn't know where the tears came from. She was an adult. Why would she react in this manner?

"What's the matter, dear?" said her mother.

The feelings came from deep down within her. "You know, Mom. Ever since I was a child, you did not validate my feelings. I hated my hair. I know you hated your hair, too, but that didn't make my feelings any less real. I know you loved my hair and made the most beautiful long curls with it but it would have meant a great deal to me if, when I got older, you would have acknowledged my feelings, too."

"I'm so sorry," said Mom. "You're right. I loved your hair. I just couldn't understand why you wouldn't. Please forgive me."

"All is forgiven," said Aliza, and they hugged as only a mother and daughter can.