

American Jewish Times columns by Judy Gruenfeld

Note that the email address shown in many of these articles is no longer valid.

I was unable to find the dates of these except for the following:

- * "Home Is Where The Guilt Is" – May 26, 2006
- * "The Gift That Keeps On Giving" has a Wakefern grocery ad with effective sale prices for Sun Jan 29 - Sat Feb 4, so the article would be during this time or slightly before.
- * "All For The Cause" – May 12, 2006
- * "Intro. To Cleaning 101" has a ShopRite coupon that can be used Sun Feb 20 - Sat Feb 26, 2005, so the article would be during this time or slightly before.
- * "Standing Still and Moving Backwards" – January 7, 2005, page 8
- * All for the Cause, based on the ages given of the individuals, would have been written spring or summer, 2006

-Kevin E. Gruenfeld

Am I A Fireman Yet?

By Judy Gruenfeld

Judy can be contacted through email@judys_connection@yahoo.com

I am grateful to my cousin Rachel for telling me the following story. It touched me so deeply that I wanted to share it with you.

In Denver, Colorado, a twenty-six year old mother stared down at her six year old son, who was dying of terminal Leukemia.

Although her heart was filled with sadness, she also had a strong feeling of determination. Like any parent, she wanted her son to grow up and fulfill all his dreams.

Now that was no longer possible. The leukemia would see to that. But, she still wanted her son's dreams to come true.

She took her son's hand and asked, "Danny, did you ever think about what you wanted to be once you grew up? Did you ever dream and wish what you could do with your life?"

"Mommy, I always wanted to be a fireman when I grew up."

Mom smiled back and said,

"Let's see if we can make your wish come true."

Later that day she went to her local fire department in Denver, Colorado where she met Fireman Bob who had a heart as big as Denver.

She explained her son's final wish and asked if it might be possible to give her six year old a ride around the block on a fire engine.

Fireman Bob said, "Look, we can do better than that. If you'll have your son ready at seven o'clock on Wednesday morning, we'll make him an honorary fireman for the whole day. He can come down to the fire station with us, go out on all the fire calls, the whole nine yards! And, if you'll give us his sizes, we'll get a real fire uniform for him with a real fire hat –

not a toy one – with the emblem of the Denver Fire Department on it, a yellow sticker like we wear, and rubber boots. They're all manufactured right here in Denver, so we can get them fast.

Three days later Fireman Bob picked up Danny, dressed him in his uniform and escorted him from his hospital bed to the waiting hook and ladder truck.

Danny got to sit on the back of the truck and help steer it back to the fire station. He was absolutely delighted.

There were three fire calls in Denver that day and Danny got to go out on all three calls.

He rode in the different fire engines, paramedic's van, and even in the fire chief's car. He was also videotaped for the local news program.

Having his dream come true, with all the love and attention that was lavished upon him touched Danny so deeply that he lived three months longer than thought possible.

One night all of his vital signs began to drop dramatically and the head nurse, who believed in the hospice concept - that no one should die alone - began to call the family members to the hospital. Then she remembered the day Danny had spent as a fireman, so she called the fire chief and asked if it would be possible to send a fireman in uniform to the hospital to be with Danny as he made his final transition.

The chief replied,

"We can do better than that. We'll be there in five minutes. Will you please do me a favor? When you hear the sirens screaming and see the lights flashing, will you announce over the PA system that there is no fire? It's

the department coming to see one of its finest members one more time. And will you open the window to his room?

About five minutes later a hook and ladder truck arrived at the hospital and extended its ladder up to Danny's third floor window. Sixteen fire fighters climbed up the ladder into Danny's room.

With his mother's permission, they hugged him and held him and told him how much they loved him.

With his dying breath, Danny looked up at the fire chief and said,

"Chief, am I really a fireman now?"

"Danny, you are, and Hashem is holding your hand.

With those words, Danny smiled and said "I know, he's been holding my hand all day, and the angels have been singing.

He closed his eyes one last time.

Nothing Up My Sleeve

By Judy Gruenfeld

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We were sitting around the dinner table when my uncle asked two-year-old Kevin if he went to school.

"No, I'm too small," my little genius said.

That was a year ago! And this was Monday morning! I would have some time for myself this afternoon. Seven-year-old Ronnie was in school full time and three-year-old Kevin went to nursery school on Monday and Tuesday afternoons for three hours. Though I only had two children, they seemed like a handful to me at the time, especially since we were still trying to negotiate a course for Ronnie's education.

Ronnie had already left for school and Kevin was eating his breakfast and chatting away.

My mind wandered to the previous week. "Mrs. Gruenfeld," his teacher had said after only two weeks of school, "Kevin is the most verbal child in the class."

"You should hear him at home," I said. "It's a wonder he doesn't give himself a headache."

"He's a good boy," she said. "He's always a gentleman and is very kind to the other students. They all want to be his friend. But, he does want to socialize a bit more than he should when he is supposed to be paying attention to the lesson."

"Thank you," I said, "I'm not surprised. Be sure to keep an eye out. I wouldn't put anything past him."

"Like what?" asked the teacher.

"I can't think of anything specific right now, but he's very bright and very resourceful. I never know what to expect."

"I'll keep that in mind," she said.

Kevin loved school. He couldn't wait to start. I don't know if it was because he had an older brother in school or because he was so independent, but he never cried when I left him, not even on the first day.

Several months into the school year he had become even more comfortable in his environment. He had several play dates every week at other children's homes except for one particular day when it was snowing. All the mothers felt at the time, it would be best to take their little darlings straight home and avoid driving in bad weather.

When we entered our home, Kevin took off his jacket, hung it on one of the hooks my husband had put on the wall for the boys, and quietly began ascending the stairs to his room.

"Don't you want a snack?" I asked.

"No," said Kevin. "I'm not hungry."

"What is the matter with your arms? Why are they so stiff? Did you hurt yourself?"

Kevin continued ascending the stairs.

"No, I'm fine."

"Come here," I said. "I want to have a look."

"Later," he said. "I want to go up and play now."

"Now," I said. "Turn around and come back downstairs. You can play in a little while. Let me see your arms."

Kevin's bottom lip began to quiver. Reluctantly, he slowly pulled a long, colorful block out of each sleeve.

I tried to look serious but had a really tough time holding back my laughter. Is this the beginning of a life of crime? Is this how Al Capone got started?

"Why are you hiding these blocks in your sleeves?" I asked.

The lip continued to quiver. He was having a little trouble talking. "I'm not hiding them. The teacher said I could take them home and play with them. I will bring them back tomorrow."

"If the teacher gave you permission to take them home, why are they in your shirt sleeves?"

"I didn't want them to get cold."

I took him by the hand, trying harder to suppress my laughter, and we sat down on the couch. "I want the truth. You know I can speak to your teacher."

The tears started flowing. "I love these blocks. I just wanted to play with them. I'll bring them back tomorrow. I promise."

"Taking something without permission is stealing. When grown-ups steal, they go to jail. This is a very serious matter."

Kevin's crying escalated. "I'm sorry," he managed to say. "I won't do it again. I don't want to go to jail."

I took him in my arms: "You're a child. You won't go to jail. But I do want you to return the blocks to your teacher tomorrow afternoon and tell her what you did."

"I can't. I'm afraid," he sobbed.

"There is nothing to be afraid of. I will go with you and you can apologize to her. I'm sure she will let you borrow them any time you like as long as you ask permission."

"Okay," Kevin said.

I called the teacher that night and explained what had happened. She, too, found it very amusing. The next day she reinforced what I had said and thus; Baruch Hashem, the potential for a life of crime was averted.

Open Your Heart and Let Me In

By Judy Gruenfeld

The day seemed to go on forever. It was midnight before I was able to get my golden haired child to bed. The years of struggling to raise a son with Autism were taking their toll. I went downstairs and absentmindedly put on a special CD my friend had loaned me, as tears started streaming down my face. I felt beaten that day. Beaten by life and beaten by all the obstacles that were placed before me.

After crying for several minutes and relieving some of the stress, I decided to have a cup of herbal tea. When I sat down with my tea I remembered the CD as I heard thunderous applause coming from my CD player. Without realizing it, I had put on one of the Irish Tenor's CDs that had been recorded live at Madison Square Garden. The particular fellow who was about to sing had had many challenges to conquer.

I imagined his presence permeating every inch of space in the huge auditorium. The crowd was completely taken with him, not just by his voice but by his total being. The applause stopped as he began singing. Nothing could be heard but the pure notes rising from deep within him. As he continued, I imagined the audience becoming one with him as he unabashedly bared his soul; the gentle yet strong heart and soul of a man who has known suffering. The pure, honest heart and soul of someone who has fought hard and triumphed over the challenges placed before him, one agonizing step after another.

I could picture his gait being imperfect but belying all the struggles he had overcome in order to climb the steps onto the stage in Madison Square Garden, where he was now performing.

The song wound down and ended. The last few notes shared the spotlight with the tears he fought to conceal. Though he made no attempt to hide his emotions, he wanted every word of his song to be heard by those who had come to adore and admire him.

When he was done, the crowd erupted. He thanked them and continued. Note after note. Song after song. He sang of love. He sang of hope.

He sang of life and of his struggle to live. He sang of his setbacks and he sang of his triumphs. But what was most moving to me was when he sang of his parents and all they had been through with him. Each step he took was done on his own but not alone. They did not prevent him from falling down but they were there to help him get up when he did.

I felt as if I were in the audience, as if he were singing to me. He understood my struggles. He understood my pain. He understood what it took to persevere. And he understood the courage one must have in order to keep going in spite of one's fears.

A very strong-willed person, he would never take "no" for an answer. He would never entertain the thought that he could not do something he wanted to do. And thus, he accomplished what many thought to be impossible.

He takes life by the horns and lives it his way defining for himself what his life is to mean. And he does it not only for himself but also for all those who are told, "No, you can't."

He says, "Yes, you can." And he means it sincerely.

I don't know if he is aware of the magic he wove that night, but by the time his performance was over, I felt as if I had the

strength to face another day. One day at a time. One step at a time. We would make it, too.

On the Offensive

By Judy Gruenfeld

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I was absolutely exhausted. For some reason, I couldn't keep my eyes open that afternoon so I decided to lie down for a while. There was plenty of time before Ronnie was due home. I woke up with a start at four o'clock. He's usually home by three-thirty.

"Ronnie, are you here?" I called out. No answer.

I got up and searched the house. Ronnie was nowhere to be found, nor was his lunch box on top of the refrigerator, where he usually puts it when he comes home.

I called the workshop. No answer. I called his case manager at home. No answer. I called the van driver. After four rings, she picked up.

"Oh, my," she said, when I explained the problem. "I took a personal day today. There is a substitute driver. He must have gotten lost. I'll call the boss and see what I can find out."

"Thank you," I said, and then I called my husband.

"Ronnie isn't home yet. There's a substitute driver and I'll bet they're good and lost."

"Relax," he said. "I'll be home in five minutes. I'm sure Ronnie won't be much longer."

"Do you think I should go looking for them?"

"Where would you look?"

"Good point. But at least I'd feel as if I were doing something. I hope they didn't get into an accident."

"If they got into an accident the boss would have told the driver when she called."

"I haven't heard back from her yet. I don't know what to do with myself."

I was glad my husband was coming home soon but I still felt so helpless. All sorts of images started going through my mind and the more I thought, the worse the images got.

"I'm sure she'll call back soon," he said.

I began to imagine what parents are put through when their children go missing. It was unthinkable. After all the years of loving, caring and nurturing your child, to have him swept away by a deranged individual was not within the framework of my consciousness. Still, he was three-quarters of an hour late by now.

The phone rang. I picked it up immediately.

"Mrs. Gruenfeld?"

"Yes."

"This is the driver from the workshop. I just spoke to the boss, who spoke to the substitute driver. Apparently they got lost. There are only two individuals left on the bus and Ron is one of them. He should be home shortly. I apologize for the distress this has caused you."

"Thank you so much for letting me know. I just wish someone had called to tell me what was going on."

"I understand," said the driver. "But, they never seem to tell us anything, either. Unfortunately, we are often as much in the dark as you are."

"Not very comforting," I said.

"I'm sure it isn't," she said. "You might want to take it up with his case manager at the workshop."

"I think I will do just that," I said.

"Thank you, again. Bye."

"Bye."

I was relieved but I would not be, happy until I saw Ronnie walk through the door. I called my husband and told him what the driver had said.

"See, what did I tell you? They just got a little lost."

"A little! He's almost an hour late!"

"You might want to look out the window," my husband said. "I'm pulling up in front of the house and there is a big, beige van right behind me."

I hung up the phone. Window! Nothing! I ran out the door!

By the time I got outside, Ronnie was walking up the driveway and the van was heading down the street.

My husband and I both gave Ronnie a bear hug.

"What happened?" I asked. "Why are you so late?"

"Well," said Ronnie. "The regular driver was absent today and we had a substitute. He took a wrong turn and then he got very lost."

"I bet you know the van route by heart now. Do you know where he made the wrong turn?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you tell him? You could have saved everyone a lot of time and trouble."

"Well," said Ronnie, "I didn't want to offend him."

Judy's Connection

By Judy Gruenfeld

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Dear Judy,

I have a twenty-one-year-old son with developmental disabilities who will be graduating from school this June. The school he attends is private and has a very good transition program.

They are teaching him various different skills and taking him out into the community to assess his ability at various jobs. Each student works at a job for two to three months (with the cooperation of the wonderful businesses that are willing to employ them) and then an assessment of the student's performance is done at a team meeting, which includes the student.

The student is also asked if he or she likes the work he/she has been doing and to compare it to previous jobs. The students are also getting paid for their work.

My problem is this. We are a frum family and my son is being exposed to various populations to which he would not otherwise be exposed. Most of the people are nice but I, naturally, would prefer that my son remain in a more protected environment. Also, there have been times when some of the employees and customers are less than understanding regarding my son.

I am sorry to say this, but this is especially true of high school students who, at times, call my son uncomplimentary names and make fun of the pace at which he works. My son is aware enough to understand what is going on and there are times he comes home from school very depressed. At one point, he said he had no right to live and was going to commit suicide. When I asked him why he would say such a thing, he said that a boy at work had told him this.

I had a long talk with my son and told him how precious he was to Hashem and to us and that Hashem had created him just the way he was supposed to be, and that the boy who insulted him needed to be taught a few things. I then called the manager who said he would take care of everything, which he did. My son never saw that boy again.

I know there are also workshops for those with developmental disabilities. I would feel more comfortable with my son being in one of these workshops, especially if it were a frum workshop, but I want him to reach his full potential. Can you help me?

Signed,

Cautious Mom

Dear Cautious Mom,

Believe me, I can understand where you are coming from. I believe all parents who have children with developmental disabilities go through the same thing. We want our children to blossom but we also want them to be safe and to feel good about themselves. The fact that you are frum brings extra concerns into the picture. I am sure there are several frum establishments who would consider hiring your son and I would like to think there would be extra sensitivity in such an environment.

A workshop would also be a good choice. There are several different levels of jobs in workshops and your son would be put in a group of his peers who can perform on the same level. As of now, I don't know of any frum workshops, but I can tell you that my son, who has had similar experiences in the "work world" and is now working in a workshop, is very happy there.

I would suggest you contact The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) -

sorry for the serving of alphabet soup – if you have not already done so, and tell them that your son will be graduating from school this June. You can explore the various employment options with them and, of course, with your son's school.

There are also other considerations regarding having your son independently employed besides the ones previously mentioned. The biggest one is transportation. While workshops usually provide their own transportation, a private business will not. You will have to arrange for your son to be transported to and from work. If you are at home and are in a position to provide this transportation yourself, you may want to do that.

If there is nobody to transport him, you will have to hire a cab. Some cab companies are more reliable than others. Some come on time and some don't. Sometimes the cab never shows. In my son's case, he would get very nervous if the cab were late as he is a very conscientious worker and does not want to arrive late. He is less upset if the workshop van is late because he knows they will understand that if he is late for work it is not his fault.

When my son was independently employed, I had to quit my job and take a job

nearby so I could come home and take my son to work if his cab didn't show up. Fortunately, my employer was very understanding and had no problem with my doing this.

You will also have to pay for the cab out of your son's salary. This is referred to as an ERWE, or Employment Related Work Expense. Someone at DVR or DDD (Division of Developmental Disabilities) will be able to help you out with this.

It is easy to get overwhelmed when one considers the future of one's child. The good thing is, there is time for you and your son to decide which path would be best. Also, if one situation doesn't work out, there is always another path to try. Many people change jobs until they feel they have found the right one, and then another one comes along which is even better. This applies to all of us, whether we have disabilities or not.

Transition is a difficult process for anyone. Explore all the options and get as much information as you can. This way you will always have a back-up plan. Remain in contact with the DVR counselor and the DDD case manager who will provide assistance when needed.

I wish you and your son the best of luck.

My Graines

By Judy Gruenfeld

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Those who know me well know about my head. They also know about my back. I have chronic sinusitis, I am allergic to just about everything in the atmosphere, and I am constantly coming down with sinus infections. All that on top of my migraines. I also have a degenerative disc in my lower back, which, on a bad day, can rival any headache. I am not giving you all this information because I want you to feel sorry for me. I am merely setting the stage for the rest of my story.

I was complaining to a friend, once, which I usually don't like to do. No one wants to hear complaints all the time. "I think I need to amputate from the neck, up," I told her.

She grinned. "And which part would you keep?"

I started laughing uncontrollably. "That has got to be the best question anyone has ever asked me," I said. "And I don't have a clue as to what to answer you. Actually, on second thought, I would probably get rid of my head, which only serves to keep my ears apart. I don't know why that is necessary. They never fight."

Anyway, I've had headaches, off and on, for the past thirty some odd years. Sometimes they are brought on by sinusitis, sometimes by allergies, sometimes by a change in the weather; and sometimes by life. My head dances to the beat of its own drum. Literally. When my head hurts, it feels as if it weighs a thousand pounds and I can't hold it up. I must lie down. I usually take two aspirin or two non-aspirin pain relievers and go to sleep. I am good for nothing else. I usually sleep passed dinner or go back to bed shortly, thereafter. Either way, by the time nine o'clock rolls around, I've more than likely called it a day. If my friends call me after nine o'clock it

is usually to leave a message for me with my husband. They are shocked beyond belief if I answer the phone.

"How can she possibly manage to think and to do her writing?" you're probably wondering by now. That's easy. My mouth, which operates completely independent of my head, is where all the words come from. This is a fortunate thing. If not for my mouth, I would not be able to get any words on the paper, much less in the paper. It was then that I suddenly came to a realization. In answer to my friend's question, I would probably have to keep my head, pain and all, if given a choice, as my mouth, obviously, is attached to it.

I recently reconnected with my cousin Joan. We hadn't spoken for over twenty years. She vaguely remembers my headaches but they have increased tenfold since we were in touch. As it turns out, my cousin writes, also. We have been emailing each other back and forth and talking on the phone, critiquing each other's creations. It was wonderful speaking to her again. As she said, "it is as if we haven't skipped a beat" to which I replied, "that is because it is a heartbeat."

She called me yesterday afternoon regarding a chapter in a book she had written and an article I had written (though not submitted, yet). I was asleep. She woke me up. (Can you imagine?) She tried to have a conversation with me. She really did. All I could do was grunt.

"I'll call you later," she said.

"Ugh," I replied and hung up the phone.

I had a really bad headache. I slept right through dinner this time. The phone rang again at eleven o'clock in the evening. I think. I picked it up.

"Are you feeling any better?" the voice on the other end inquired.

"Huh?" I said.

"Your head. Does it feel any better?"

"Uh," I responded.

"Do you want to go over the chapter and the article we discussed earlier?" my cousin asked.

"Uh, uh," barely escaped from my mouth. "I'll call you tomorrow," I said as I hung up the phone. Needless to say, I forgot.

The following Sunday the whole family got together when my cousin Rachel came for a visit. Joan was there as well. Though Rachel is several years my junior, when she grew up, we became best friends. We are constantly in contact with each other even though she lives across the country. Rachel also gets migraines and her son gets a lot of sinus infections. Amazing gene pool!

"How's your head?" Rachel inquired when she came in the door. She knows the reputation I have about "early to bed" (which is similar to hers) and how a headache knocks

me out, as she also has first hand experience with this.

"Fair to midlin," I answered. "Have you heard, Joan is also writing? We've been emailing each other back and forth and talking on the phone quite a bit. It's been great reconnecting with her and we've really been able to help each other with our writing. But, I must tell you, and please don't repeat it to Joan - she woke me up several times when she called and I could hardly speak to her."

"Noooooooooo!" came Rachel's sarcastic response, as Joan entered the room.

"Hi, Joan," we both said in unison.

"Hi," answered Joan. "How's everybody been?" She then turned to Rachel and said,

"Judy and I have been a really good resource for each other with regard to our writing. As a matter of fact, I tried to talk to her at eleven last night but all I got were grunts."

Rachel glanced in my direction. "Do you have any aspirin?" she said. "I think I'm getting a headache."

Amazing Our Eretz Yisrael

By Judy Gruenfeld

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We all know about the holiness of our Eretz Yisrael but there are some facts I have gathered that I think you would be interested in knowing. We are like no other nation, not only because Hashem gave us the Torah, but there are also innumerable "mundane" reasons for us to be proud of who we are and what we represent. When our enemies talk about destroying us, aside from the holiness of the land and the Jewish people, the following, in practical terms, is what they would be forfeiting.

The Middle East has been growing palms for centuries. The average tree is about eighteen to twenty feet tall and yields about thirty-eight of dates a year. Israeli date trees are now yielding four hundred pounds a year and are short enough to be harvested from the ground or a short ladder.

Israel, the 100th smallest country, with less than 1/1000th of the world's population, can lay claim to the following:

The cell phone was developed in Israel by Israelis working in the Israeli branch of Motorola, which has its largest development center in Israel.

Most of the Windows NT and XP operating systems were developed by Microsoft-Israel. The Pentium MMX Chip technology was designed in Israel at Intel. Both the Pentium-4 microprocessor and the Centrino processor were entirely designed, developed and produced in Israel. The Pentium microprocessor in your computer was most likely made in Israel.

Four young Israelis developed voice mail technology for the AOL Instant Messenger ICQ in 1996.

Israel has the fourth largest air force in the world (after the U.S., Russia, and China). In addition to a large variety of other aircraft, Israel's air force has an aerial arsenal of over 250 F-16's. This is the largest fleet of F-16 aircraft outside of the U.S.

Israel's \$100 billion economy is larger than all of its immediate neighbors combined.

Israel has the highest percentage in the world of home computers per capita.

According to industry officials, Israel designed the airline industry's most impenetrable flight security. U.S. officials now look (finally) to Israel for advice on how to handle airborne security threats.

Israel has the highest ratio of university degrees to the population in the world. Israel produces more scientific papers per capita than any other nation by a large margin - 109 per 10,000 people as well as one of the highest per capita rates of patents filed. In proportion to its population, Israel has the largest number of startup companies in the world. In absolute terms, Israel has the largest number of startup companies than any other country in the world, except the U.S. which has 3,500 companies, mostly in hi-tech. With more than 3,000 high-tech companies and startups, Israel has the highest concentration of hi-tech companies in the world - apart from the Silicon Valley, U.S.

Israel is ranked #2 in the world for venture capital funds right behind the U.S. Outside the United States and Canada, Israel has the largest number of NASDAQ listed companies.

Israel has the highest average living standards in the Middle East. The per capita income in 2000 was over \$17,500 exceeding that of the UK.

On a per capita basis, Israel has the largest number of biotech startups.

24% of Israel's workforce holds university degrees, ranking third in the industrialized world, after the United States and Holland and 12% hold advanced degrees.

Israel is the only liberal democracy in the Middle East.

In 1984 and 1991, Israel airlifted a total of 22,000 Ethiopian Jews (Operation Solomon) at risk in Ethiopia, to safety in Israel.

When Gold Meir was elected Prime Minister of Israel in 1969, she became the world's second elected female leader in modern times.

When the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, Kenya was bombed in 1968, Israeli rescue teams were on the scene within a day -and saved three victims from the rubble.

When that terrible earthquake affected badly all-old buildings in Istanbul, Israeli rescue teams were there to help. The same for Armenia.

Relative to its population, Israel is the largest immigrant-absorbing nation on earth. Immigrants come in search of democracy, religious freedom and economic opportunity; hundreds of thousands from the former Soviet Union.

Israel was the first nation in the world to adopt the Kimberly process, an international standard that certifies diamonds as "conflict free".

Israel is the only country in the world that entered the 21st century with a net gain in its number of trees, made more remarkable because this was achieved in an area considered mainly desert.

Israel has more museums per capita than any other country.

In the field of medicine, Israel scientists developed the first fully

computerized, no-radiation, diagnostic instrumentation for breast cancer.

An Israeli company developed a computerized system-for ensuring proper administration of medications), thus removing human error from medical treatment. Every year in U.S. hospitals 7,000 patients die from treatment mistakes.

Israel's Given Imaging developed the first ingestible video camera, so small it fits inside a pill. It is used to view the small intestine from the inside for cancer and digestive disorders.

Researchers in Israel developed a new device that directly helps the heart pump blood; an innovation with the potential to save lives among those with heart failure. The new device is synchronized with the camera and helps doctors diagnose the heart's mechanical operations through a sophisticated system on sensors.

Israel leads the world in the number of scientists and technicians in the workforce, with 145 per 10,000 as opposed to 85 in the U.S., over 70 in Japan, and less than 60 in Germany. With over 25% of its workforce employed in technical professions, Israel places first in this category as well.

A new acne treatment developed in Israel, the Clear Light device, produces a high-intensity, ultraviolet-light-free, narrow-band blue light that causes acne bacteria to self-destruct - all without damaging the surrounding tissues.

An Israeli company was the first to develop and install a large-scale solar-powered and fully functional electricity generation plant in southern California's Mojave Desert. It is also developing a biological non-harmful way to clean ocean pollution and to combat agricultural harmful plagues.

Its economy is continuously under strain to spend more per capita on its own protection than any other country on earth.

And the French ambassador in England said,

"Israel is nothing else than a (blank) little non-important country in the Middle East, looking for trouble with its neighbors."

Shame on you, Mr. Ambassador!

The Cat's Out of the Bag

By Judy Gruenfeld

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Did you ever wonder where the idiomatic expressions that we use so frequently and take for granted come from? These expressions could not be substituted with traditional language without losing something in the translation, kind of like translating Yiddish into English. They "hit the nail on the head" every time. I don't know where that one came from but I was fortunate to have collected several others from various sources, which I would like to share with you.

In George Washington's days, there were no cameras. (I'm sure you knew this). One's image was either sculpted or painted. Some paintings of Washington showed him standing behind a desk with one arm behind his back while others showed both legs and both arms. Prices charged by painters were not based on how many people were to be painted but by how many limbs were to be painted. Arms and legs are "limbs," (another fact I'm sure you knew); therefore, painting them would cost the buyer more. Hence, the expression, "Okay, but it will cost an arm and a leg."

As incredible as it sounds; men and women took baths only twice a year, May and October! Women kept their hair covered while men shaved their heads (non- Jews, of course) - because of lice and bugs - and wore wigs. Wealthy men could afford good wigs made from wool. They couldn't wash the wigs because they would shrink, so to clean them they would carve out a loaf of bread, put the wig in the shell, and bake it for thirty minutes. The heat would make the wig big and fluffy, hence the term "big wig". Today, we often use the term "here comes the big wig" because someone appears to be or is powerful and wealthy.

In the late 1700's, many houses consisted of a large room with only one chair. Commonly, a long wide board folded down from the wall and was used for dining. The "head of the household" always sat in the chair while everyone else ate sitting on the floor. Occasionally, a guest who was usually a man, would be invited to sit in this chair during a meal. To sit in the chair meant you were important and in charge. They called the one sitting in the chair the "chair man" or the "chair man of the board".

Personal hygiene left much room for improvement years ago. As a result, many women and men had developed acne scars by adulthood. The women would spread bee's wax over their facial skin to smooth out their complexions. When they were speaking to each other, if a woman began to stare at another woman's face, she was told, "mind your own bee's wax". Should a woman smile, the wax would crack, hence the term, "crack a smile". In addition, when they sat too close to the fire, the wax would melt; therefore, the expression "losing face".

Ladies wore corsets, which would lace up in the front. A proper and dignified woman, as in "straight laced" wore a tightly tied lace.

Common entertainment included playing cards. However, there was a tax levied when purchasing playing cards, but only applicable to the Ace of Spades. To avoid paying the tax, people would purchase 51 cards instead. Yet, since most games required 52 cards, people were thought to be stupid or not too bright because they were "not playing with a full deck."

Early politicians required feedback from the public to determine what the people considered important. Since there were no

telephones, televisions, radios, or computers, the politicians sent their assistants to local pubs' and bars. They were told to "go sip some ale" and listen to the people's conversations and political concerns. Many assistants were dispatched at different times. "You go sip here" and 'you go sip there". The two words, go and sip, were eventually combined when referring to the local opinion and thus, we have the term "gossip".

At local taverns, pubs, and bars, people drank pint and quart-sized containers. A bar maid's job was to keep an eye on the customers and keep the drinks coming. She had to pay close attention and remember who was drinking in "pints" and who was drinking the "quarts". Hence, the term, "mind your P's and Q's".

Well, that's all she wrote. I've got to hop to it. My husband will be home in a flash and will most certainly want to chow down.

Dusting for Prints

By Judy Gruenfeld

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Becky was the epitome of what it meant to be a balabusta, and it took a lot of work for someone to be a balabusta back in the 1920's and 1930's. Even though she had five lively children to pick up after, her house was always spotless. You could show up at her door at eight o'clock in the morning or eight o'clock in the evening and the same immaculate scene would greet you. That is not to say that her children were not allowed to be children. They were. Though Becky was a very loving mother she taught her children to put their clothes and their toys away when they were finished with them. When they did, she hugged and kissed them and praised them for their sterling middos. As a result, all the children were eager to please their mother. The worst punishment that could be meted out was for Becky to tell one of her children that she was disappointed in him or her. Becky didn't yell and Becky didn't spank but she was a strict disciplinarian. She would just look at a disobedient child and say "es pahst nisht" - this is beneath you - and the child would burst into tears.

Their father, a soft spoken, loving man, would be there to enfold the child in his arms and offer comfort.

"You're spoiling the children," Becky would say. "How are they supposed to know they did something wrong?"

"They know when they do something wrong," her husband would reply. "They also need to know that we still love them. A hug never hurt anyone."

Thus, Becky would concede to her husband though she remained strict when it came to disciplining the children.

Of particular irritation to Becky were fingerprints - fingerprints on the icebox, fingerprints on the windows, fingerprints on the mirrors, and fingerprints on the walls.

"Why must you touch everything?" she would say to the children. The icebox has a handle; you don't need to touch the windows to look out of them or the mirrors to look into them; and there is certainly no reason to touch the walls. She did not upbraid the children for these minor infractions but would hand them a rag and some cleaner and have them "destroy the evidence" so to speak.

Many years passed and Becky became a grandmother. The children and grandchildren (too numerous to count) would alternate coming to their parents and grandparents for Shabbos. The first thing the grandchildren learned was not to get their fingerprints on anything. Although they were less likely to do so than their parents since they were obviously there for much shorter periods of time, the admonition remained

Becky was particularly close to her eldest granddaughter who was named after her mother. It is amazing but Mindy had the same personality and temperament as did Becky's mother, Becky had worshiped her mother and now, her little Mindy could do no wrong. That is, except for leaving unwanted fingerprints along the floor length mirror in the foyer. But Becky had mellowed a bit. She never said anything. She just quietly cleaned the mirror after her guests left.

Some years later, Becky's wonderful husband passed away and Becky was left alone and declining in her last years. All the children and grandchildren visited often while arrangements were being made for Becky to move in with her eldest daughter.

Mindy had gotten married and had a beautiful baby boy. She named him Aaron after her beloved grandfather.

One sunny Tuesday morning in the spring Mindy called Becky.

"Bubby," she said, "I would like to come over with Aaron and visit you."

"Of course," said Becky. "You don't need an invitation to come over."

"I'll bring lunch with me," said Mindy. "I'll see you in about an hour."

Nothing gave Becky more pleasure than seeing her great-grandchildren. She

laughed as baby Aaron crawled around the floor and grabbed hold of a chair and hoisted himself up into a standing position. He had just turned one and it was apparent that he would be walking any day now.

Mindy had to leave after lunch. "I'll see you after you move in to Mom's next week."

Becky kissed them both. "Good-bye my darling ainaklach."

Her furniture had been sold. Her clothes had been packed, and she was ready to move. When her daughter and son-in-law came to pick her up Becky walked over to the mirror in the foyer.

"We must take this with us. It has baby Aaron's fingerprints on it and I don't want them disturbed."

Put Your Two Bits In

By Judy Gruenfeld

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I could almost hear the rooster crowing as he took the box of corn flakes out of the pantry. He then pushed a chair over to the cabinet, climbed on it, and retrieved a cereal bowl. Next came a spoon, and then the milk. He carefully poured the cereal into the bowl, followed by the milk. Most of it made it into the bowl. He was very independent. As soon as he was able to do something for himself, he would not allow anyone else to do it for him. He would be leaving for nursery school in half an hour and, after dressing himself, he took his breakfast, as was his normal morning routine.

"Mommy," he said, "look at the pictures of the animals on the cereal box."

"I can see the rooster," I said. "That's some handsome comb he has."

"What?"

"On top of his head. That red thing is called a comb."

Kevin was not impressed. "No. I mean on the back of the box. There are pictures of kittens and puppies. They are so cute. It says here you can buy the posters for twenty-five cents, and you get one of each."

My little genius was reading, telling time and counting change by age four. It took all my cunning to stay one step ahead of him while raising him but, somehow, thank G-d, I managed to do so. All my husband and I wanted were normal, healthy children and we ended up with one on each end of the spectrum.

I turned the cereal box around. "Let me have a look at these adorable little critters." I had to admit, they were cute. Naturally, they would be marketed to children on a cereal box. But, at twenty-five cents for two posters, I considered them a real bargain.

Kevin began crunching as he spoke. "Mommy, can I get these posters?"

Pleeeeeeeeeeease! I can hang them up in my room. I love them, Mommy. Pleeeeeeeeeeease! "

"Don't talk with your mouth full. You have so much stuff in your room already. I don't know where you would hang such large posters."

Naturally, he ignored my admonition.

"I can hang them right by my bed so I can see them when I go to sleep at night and when I wake up in the morning."

"What about the *Shema* and the *Torah Tzivoh Lahnu Moshe* poster that's already your bed? There won't be enough room for the kittens and the puppies, too."

Kevin's bottom lip began to quiver and a few drops of milk spilled out of his mouth. He caught them with his sleeve.

"You know what," I said. "Why don't we wait until the cereal box is empty, and in the meantime, we will see how we can work things out?"

He wiped his tears on his sleeve. "I guess that's okay." (For those of you who don't already know, wiping milk and tears is the primary purpose of sleeves).

The cereal was finished in record time; one week to be exact, but it seemed like a really long week to me. Kevin cut the form off the box and filled it out in order to send away for the long awaited posters. He was beside himself with delight.

"Okay," I said, "now go up to your room and get me a quarter and we will put this in the mail."

Kevin looked at me, incredulous. "You mean I have to spend my own money on the posters?"

I nodded.

"You have a lot of money, certainly enough to pay for the posters. You can't expect Daddy and me to buy you whatever

you want whenever you want something."

I expected Kevin to cry, but he didn't. He thought for a moment. "You know what," said, "I

think I'll cut the pictures off the cereal box and use those. I guess I don't really need such big posters anyway."

Judy's Connection

By Judy Gruenfeld

Judy can be contacted through email@judys_connection@yahoo.com

Dear Judy,

I have an eighteen-year-old son with developmental disabilities. He is high functioning and aware of his limitations and realizes that he can't do many of the things that his peers can do. This frustrates him terribly. When our nieces, nephews and friends' children learned how to drive, my son also wanted to drive. When all the kids were going off to seminary, yeshiva, or college, my son was very distraught that he, too, could not take this next, normal step in life.

I have basically been very lucky. None of my children were ever really jealous of one another. Each took pride in their siblings' accomplishments, including my disabled son. As my son was growing up, we tried to focus on his accomplishments and praise him for what he was able to do. But, these two above issues have my family at a total loss.

Do you have any suggestions?

Troubled Mom

Dear Troubled Mom,

When my son was about the same age as yours, we faced the very same problems and then some. It seemed that everyone around us was learning how to drive and getting his or her driver's license. While I would not trust my son with a driver's license, I didn't see any reason why he could not learn to operate the vehicle. My husband took my son to the local high school parking lot and taught him how to drive the car. Our one stipulation was that he not insist on getting a driver's license. Because of his ADHD and OCD, we felt he would be too nervous to drive around other moving vehicles. He was so anxious to drive that he agreed to our terms. For the past twenty years my husband has periodically taken him to the

high school parking lot and allowed him to drive. He is still satisfied with the arrangement.

The biggest problem that arose was when my younger son graduated from college. My parents bought him a car as a graduation present. I was the one who had to tell my son that his younger brother was getting the one thing that he desired most in this world.

Ronnie crumbled right before my very eyes. I have never felt such pain for someone else in my entire life. But, Grandma and Grandpa came to the rescue and told Ronnie they would take him to the store and buy him anything he wanted, as long as it was not something he could harm himself with.

Ronnie chose a small "dorm refrigerator" for his room, an electric keyboard (he plays the piano), and an indoor grill. They took him shopping just as they took Kevin shopping for his car (and they got away cheap, at that). We all made a big fuss over him and that night he cooked us dinner on his new grill.

My husband didn't think the frig or the grill were very practical things to get but as far as I was concerned, they were worth every penny, even if I had had to pay for the items myself. It restored my son's self-esteem and gave him a lot of confidence (he's a pretty good cook).

I don't know if any of these suggestions will be helpful to you but I believe you should talk to your husband, son, and any siblings who want to be part of the decision process. You may want to try what we did, or you could find other solutions, depending on your son's interests. Ask him what he would like to do. Make suggestions yourself, and discuss the feasibility of each. Does he have a bicycle?

Perhaps he would be happy riding around the neighborhood - if you think this is possible. If there is a store that is near you, perhaps he could make a small purchase. This would certainly make him feel independent. If necessary, you may want to practice counting change with him so that he will be able to do this when he makes his purchase.

Of course, your son's safety must come first but I am sure there are many activities, whether organized or unorganized, in which he can participate. It's just a matter of finding the right one, or possibly, two that will hold his interest and make him feel good about himself.

Good luck to you,

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 fellowman.

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.

Judy's Connection

By Judy Gruenfeld

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Dear Judy,

I have a son with developmental disabilities who is approaching Bar Mitzvah age. He can read Hebrew and davens with my husband but I don't think he understands the impact of the words he is reciting.

Naturally, we celebrated his older brothers' Bar Mitzvahs and he was able to participate in the celebrations. He knows he is turning thirteen and asks us about his own Bar Mitzvah. I am not sure what to do.

Should we have him called to the Torah? Should we make a party for him? He has no friends but our family, of course, would come to the simcha. Can you please advise me as to what we should do?

Undecided Mom

Dear Undecided Mom,

Having a child with a developmental disability, who is approaching Bar Mitzvah age, is definitely a happy but uncertain time. You want to do what is best for your son, as in all other situations.

I have gone to many different types of Bar Mitzvahs where the bachur had a disability. If he can read from the Torah, I see no reason why he should not do so, unless there is some sort of problem that would preclude him from handling the Torah.

I would suggest that you and your husband speak to a rav who knows you and your son and see what he suggests. Not knowing your son, it is difficult for me to advise you as to what to do, but I can list a few options and describe some of the Bar Mitzvahs I have attended. I will start with my son.

When he was eleven years old, we hired a tutor for him. My son learned the alef-beis and was reading within a few months. Within the next two years he became very proficient at reading and was able to daven a little by himself.

As my son had trouble sitting for too long, we decided to have his Bar Mitzvah on a Monday instead of Shabbos, because the service was shorter. He read from the Torah with the help of our wonderful rabbi and also did his Haftarah portion.

Afterwards, we had a haimeshe buffet at the shul. We decided not to make a separate party because we wanted to keep it toned down.

My son had been to other Bar Mitzvahs so he knew about the attention heaped upon the Bar Mitzvah boy. He was very proud of himself and his accomplishments and he was delighted that everyone had gathered there just for him.

My son has no friends either but there were plenty of cousins and friends' children in attendance. He shone that day and I have never regretted for one minute, that we did what we did.

I went to one Bar Mitzvah where the boy was very high functioning and was able to have a typical Bar Mitzvah with some slight modifications in what he had to say during the davening. There was a regular party at night and the honored guest was so delighted with himself that he sang practically every song with the singer that had been hired.

Another Bar Mitzvah I attended was for a boy who was significantly lower functioning. It was decided not to have him called to the Torah for various reasons but

there was a lovely, balabatish party on the night of his birthday. Everyone gathered around him and praised him for the pure soul that he is, and danced in his honor. This young man knew this was his Bar Mitzvah. Nothing can convince me otherwise. Though he does

not speak, he went around, greeting all his guests, hugging them as only he can hug.

So, you see, there is not only one way to celebrate a Bar Mitzvah. I'm sure yours will be lovely. I wish you, your son, and your family mazal tov. May we meet only at simchas.

Wait Conscious

By Judy Gruenfeld

Judy can be contacted through email@judys_connection@yahoo.com

How many rooms can you remember waiting in? The doctor. The dentist. The pediatrician. The list is as endless as is the time you seem to wait. I realize that these professionals' time is worth money but what about my time?

As I sit here, waiting for the doctor to call my son, the zillions of things I should be doing go through my mind. It's Friday morning and my time, of course, is very limited. I certainly would not have chosen this time to bring my son to the doctor but he is running a fever and complaining of a sore throat. If I don't get him in today, I'll have to wait until Monday and I, of course, don't want to wait that long.

The longer I wait, the more nervous I become. Fortunately, all my shopping is done. Needless to say, I spent lots of time waiting on line at the various different stores, but I haven't started cooking yet. Maybe we'll get a last minute invitation for Shabbos. The odds of that are not very good. Besides, if it turns out that Ronnie is contagious, we can't bring him anywhere. So, I sit and wait - and wait. I may have to get ready made food, which will not go over too well with my husband but that might be my only option. I'm sure he will agree that it's better than going hungry.

My son does not wait very well, either. He paces. I guess it's the ADHD. He won't even sit down, so I sit and watch him pace. This makes me even more edgy. So far we've been waiting for half an hour. The appointment was for ten o'clock. It is now ten-thirty. I think they called someone ahead of us, so I go over to the receptionist,

"Excuse me, but I think I was here before the person you just called in."

"He's here for an allergy shot which the nurse administers. Please have a seat. We'll be with you shortly."

Was that a little snicker I detected in the corner of her mouth? She's here all day, anyway. She doesn't care how long I have to wait. Makes no difference to her.

I sit back down. Ronnie is still pacing and has already made about six trips to the bathroom. That's the OCD part.

I'm beginning to gag on the alphabet soup again when I hear "Ronald Gruenfeld."

"He's in the bathroom," I call out.

"I'll have to take the next patient," the nurse says.

"Please don't do that. He'll be right out. It's hard for him to wait so he's pacing in and out of the bathroom."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Gruenfeld, but we can't keep the doctor waiting, now can we?"

"I guess not," I say, when I really want to scream, "What about me? I'm waiting!"

As soon as the other patient goes into the examination room Ronnie joins me back in the waiting room. "You stay right here. You missed your turn and it's not going to happen again."

Ten minutes later Ronnie starts heading for the bathroom again. I grab his arm.

"No you don't. The only place you're going is into the examination room. You're not losing your place to another patient.

"I'll be right back," he says.

"No, you won't!"

"Yes, I will."

"Ronald Gruenfeld!"

"This way Ron," I say as I guide him towards the exam room, following the nurse

who takes his blood pressure and temperature, and asks him a few questions.

"Doctor will be right in to see you," she says.

"Sure, and I'll only experience some slight discomfort," I think.

About five minutes later the doctor comes in. "What seems to be the problem?"

"My throat hurts and I have a fever," Ronnie says.

"I'll have the nurse take a throat culture and I'll give you a prescription for an

antibiotic. We'll call you when we get the results of the throat culture but start taking the medicine today, Any questions?"

"No."

"Take care, then. Bye."

"Thank you, doctor."

Well, that took all of about three minutes but I did get to write this article while in the waiting room. I wonder how long I'll have to wait at the pharmacy for the medication.

Judy's Connection

By Judy Gruenfeld

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Dear Judy,

It has taken me a long time to build up the courage to write to you. I realize that ignoring the problem won't make it go away but I feel so overwhelmed that I don't know where to turn or what to do. I have three daughters, two of whom are on the Autism Spectrum.

My younger daughter is moderately Autistic and displays typical Autistic symptoms such as self-stimming - waving her hands in front of her face, for example, spinning objects, echolalia (repeating what is said to her instead of answering), no meaningful communication, acting as if she were deaf, and several developmental delays.

My older daughter has Asperger's Syndrome. She developed normally with regard to all the "milestones". She answers when spoken to, and is doing well in the area of academics, but has trouble interacting with other children, is socially immature, does not make eye contact and appears to be spaced out most of the time. My younger daughter is three and my older daughter is six.

We went from doctor to doctor with my older daughter until we were finally given a correct diagnosis which was much more difficult because she did not exhibit most of the classic Autistic symptoms. Most of the doctors we went to said we were overreacting because of our younger daughter but a mother knows when something is not quite right.

Intervention with my younger daughter seems to be more clear-cut whereas, with my older daughter, no one seems to have really been able to chart a course for her education. She is very bright and learns most things well but is socially far below her contemporaries.

She has no friends and .prefers to play music most of the time. My husband and I feel that social skills are as important as intellectual skills and would like to know what we can do help her develop socially. Also, if you could explain the basic difference between Autism and Asperger's Syndrome we would greatly appreciate it.

Mom of Three

Dear Mom of Three,

What is called "The Autism Spectrum" is comprised of many symptoms and criteria ranging from the very mild to the very severe. I have joined a site on the web called "Another Point of View on Autism" and have started writing articles for them. It is an excellent site, which I suggest you visit. It is not a frum or even a Jewish site but it is comprised of parents and professionals who are bound and determined to provide anyone in need with any information they require, from allergen free recipes to agencies that can offer help, at no cost to the consumer. They can be reached at <http://apovonautism.org>. They have a blurb on Autism and one on Asperger's Syndrome, which follow.

Childhood Autism

"Dr. Leo Kanner first introduced the term "early infantile autism" in his paper, 'Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact' in 1943. In 1956 he published a paper co-written with Dr. Leon Eisenberg entitled 'Early Infantile Autism'.

Leo Kanner, an Austrian born psychiatrist and physician, was the first person in the United States to be called a 'pediatric psychiatrist, and he is the first person

accredited to have published in the field of what is now called the 'autism spectrum'."

Asperger's Syndrome

"What is now called 'Asperger's Syndrome' was first described in a paper published in 1944 by Austrian pediatrician, Dr. Hans Asperger.

In his paper, Dr. Asperger described four boys that he had been studying as having 'autistic psychopathology', though he believed their prognosis to be much better than the condition, 'childhood autism', as described in 1943 by Dr. Leo Kanner.

Despite Dr. Asperger's description in the first half of the twentieth century, it wasn't until his works, many of which were destroyed by fighting in WWII, were translated and explained in 1981 by researcher Lorna Wing, that the world at large started to become aware of the existence of the syndrome.

Asperger's Syndrome first appeared in the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 4th Edition."

You may want to look up both conditions in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual)-IV, but it is not written for the lay-person unless you have some

familiarity with the conditions you may find yourself more confused.

I would suggest you discuss both children at length with your pediatrician and child study team's at your children's schools. They may suggest a psychological and/or a psychiatric evaluation. This will determine how each child views her world and what interventions are necessary. There is help out there. There is no need to feel alone.

What is most important is that you keep an open mind and remember that, just as with the general population, each one of your daughters is an individual. While you want each one to reach her full potential and behave in a socially acceptable manner, it is still important that each maintain her own individuality.

It is also important that your 'typical' daughter does not feel that her sisters are getting all your attention at her expense. Set aside some mother-daughter time and father-daughter time for her. Ask her how things are going in school and help her with her homework. See to it that she keeps up with her friends, perhaps going home with some after school where the environment is free from additional stress.

Good luck to all of you.

Hashem's Lace

By Judy Gruenfeld

The forecast was for snow. Not unexpected in February, even if unwelcome by most. I woke up at seven o'clock in the morning, to the sound of my alarm clock, in anticipation of the impending Invasion.

When I turned off the alarm I heard nothing. Nothing but an eerie cacophony of noiselessness. The quiet before the storm, as they say. Everything was still. It was almost as if I had lost my ability to hear. I saw the quiet. I felt the silence. I embraced the moment with the same ambivalent feelings as I would a small child, before bringing it in to the doctor's office for a routine inoculation. Even though I was protecting my baby from harm, and the end result would be beautiful, the unpleasantness of the ritual made me shudder as the scene flashed before me.

The sky was bulging with pure white. In a short while it would burst, and the flakes contained therein would fall to earth and whisper their presence to all who would have no choice but to listen. Unlike the rain that stomps its way to the ground, the snow would come tiptoeing in, falling gracefully, until it landed on the earth's surface, changing everything into a soft, yet crisp, and pristine picture. At times a blizzard would assault the land and grip it with its icy tentacles. But, one was not imminent. Only the promise of a milky white, cotton guest dropping gently in on its forewarned host.

Each one is unique. No two are alike. Billions and billions of snowflakes and not one

is a duplicate of another, impossible for the human mind to comprehend. Hashem's miracles are far too numerous to count. This is but one incredible example of His infinite creativity.

I watched as the clear air became speckled with tiny white freckles. The freckles grew larger and greater in number. As promised, there was no blizzard, just a quiet, white blanket floating down from Heaven, each thread intertwining with the others, weaving a tapestry that covered the beds of grass, blacktop and cement.

Soon, everything was white. The sky, the air, and the ground appeared to be one pure, unspoiled entity, indistinguishable from one another.

After several hours, it stopped snowing. The cottony blanket above complemented the silky blanket below. And, in between the blankets, was Hashem's lace. The snow glistened like sequins on every bare tree branch in intricate, delicately woven patterns as unique as each tree branch on which they rested.

Only the Master Creator could create a design so unique and so perfect in every way. I looked in awe at Hashem's picture, each snowflake having fallen into place on its assigned branch. My eyes and my heart began to overflow when I gazed upon the scene He drew. G-d's in His Heaven, as Pippa well knew.

To Live or Diet

By Judy Gruenfeld

I've heard it all before. I've said it myself countless times. I've got to lose weight. I'm going on a diet. The prospect isn't pleasant. I can hear my stomach growling already. The mere thought of it conjures up visions of a plate with three lonely peas sitting on it. Into how many pieces can you cut each pea in order to make the meal last longer?

The word itself - D - I - E - T - is enough to make the not so faint of heart tremble, Eliminate the "T" and you get a good picture of how the prospect of a diet makes me feel.

However, now that I have decided to go on a diet, I face an additional problem. Which one do I choose? Do I go with the low carb, high protein diet; the glycemic index diet, which espouses eating the right carbs; that is, whole grains and plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, which is also the Mediterranean diet (I wouldn't mind going there)?

Do I count calories and if so, what is my limit? Do I concern myself with the types of fat I consume? Years ago we were told not to eat butter; that margarine was better. Now we are told that the trans fats in margarine are no good and we are better off with butter, that is, unless we consume a margarine that contains no trans fats.

Then there's the South Beach Diet. I have nothing against the diet itself, but I hate the beach so the thought of following that plan makes me feel as if I am all full of sand. This one is definitely not for me. Then there's a new one called the Low Density Diet. With this diet you can eat more food as long as what you eat contains a lot of water; fruits and vegetables, for example. Doesn't seem much different from most of the other diets.

We are totally at the mercy of the food industry. What is good today proves to be not so good tomorrow. What is one to believe? And who would have ever thought that chocolate would be touted as a health food? I've been saying this all my life but no one would believe me. Some times you just have to go with your own instincts!

So far, Baruch Hashem, I've been getting good reports from the doctor. My blood pressure is good, my heart rate is good, and my cholesterol level is good. The thing is, I'd like to keep it that way and the older I get, the more my weight enters into the picture as a determining factor regarding these numbers. So I am faced with the following situation: the older I get, the more I have to watch what I eat and the more I watch what I eat, the older I'll get. That is, if I'm willing to play by the American Medical Association's rules. And, as I already said, these rules keep changing

And, what about these numbers? What do they really mean? What is high for one person could be perfectly acceptable for another. Having a Jewish mother and two Jewish grandmothers, I was raised with a healthy caution regarding doctors. I am by no means advocating that you do not seek medical attention when necessary or schedule well check-ups and get preventive tests but I remember the following joke my grandmother used to tell:

A woman is walking down the street and sees a friend of hers walk out of a pharmacy and throw a bag in the garbage.

She approaches her friend and says, "What did you just throw out?"

"A prescription from the doctor," says the friend. "If you knew you weren't going to

take the medicine, why did you go to the doctor in the first place?" the woman asks.

"The doctor's got to make a living," the friend says.

"Okay," says the woman, "but if you knew you weren't going to take the medicine; why did you bring the prescription to the pharmacy"?

"The pharmacist has to make a living, also," says the friend.

"But once you went to the trouble of going to the doctor and filling the prescription," says the woman, "why did you throw the prescription in the garbage?"

"I want to live, also," says the friend.

So, here I sit at my computer with some cottage cheese, fruit and a cup of decaf coffee. I'll report in every once in a while and let you know how I'm doing.

L'Chaim!

A Tale of Two Pockets

By Judy Gruenfeld

Basya and Yaakov were having a terrible argument. Sheva Brochos were over and the chossan and kallah were getting ready to settle into their new routine and their new roles. Each had been raised in a loving, affluent home where nothing was denied them. And though our chossan and kallah were lovely, young people, they were, admittedly, a little spoiled.

Though she would be returning to her teaching job and he to his kollel, their lives would be totally different now. In addition to the wife's income from teaching, both sets of parents had agreed to financially assist the young couple.

In the home in which Basya grew up, the wife was in charge of all financial matters. Every week her father would give her mother his paycheck. She ran the home like a fine tuned piano. Basya used her teaching salary to buy any extras she wanted and put the rest in the bank.

In Yaakov's home, however, his mother gave his father her paycheck, as it was the husband who was in charge of all money matters, although he would give his wife whatever she asked for.

Naturally, our young couple each thought he or she would be in charge of their finances. Yaakov expected his wife to give him her pay check. He had already worked out a budget and was ready to implement it. A certain amount would go towards rent, food, etc. What their parents gave them would fill in the gaps. If there were anything left over, they would put it in the bank.

Basya had no problem with her husband managing the money their parents gave them but she assumed, as always, that her salary would be hers to do with as she pleased.

Unfortunately, this was not discussed prior to the chassana, as Yaakov assumed that his wife's salary would go towards their support until it was necessary for him to get a job.

"I don't understand why you are being so stubborn," Basya said. "We will have enough money for all our necessities and if I see something I like, I want to be able to buy it."

"That's not the point," said Yaakov. "We are adults now and we are a couple. We need to take responsibility for our lives and that includes managing our money. It's not a matter of being able to buy whatever you want but knowing when it is the right time to buy something or if it is the right item to buy. That's not to say you can't buy something on a whim once in a while but we need to set some priorities. You can't buy everything you want just because you want it."

"I still don't see what the big deal is. It's not as if we won't have enough money to pay our bills,"

"Look Basya, it's late and we're both tired. I'm going to bed. We can discuss this in the morning when we are both a little more clear headed."

When Basya heard the bedroom door close, she took the opportunity to call her mother and complain about her husband's unwillingness to allow her to have her own personal "knippel."

"What's the matter," said Basya's mother when she heard her daughter crying on the other end of the phone.

Basya took a moment to compose herself.

"Yaakov and I just had our first argument. Oh, Mommy, he's being so unfair. He doesn't understand why I want to keep my

salary for myself. I work very hard for my money, and I would like to keep in "my own pocket" so to speak," she explained. "The rest of the money can go in "Yaakov's pocket" to be used for our expenses.

Basya's mother was very wise. "My darling daughter," she said, "You are married now. You think there are two separate pockets,

and indeed, there may be, but aren't both pockets in the same pair of pants?"

Basya calmed down and allowed her mother's words to sink in.

"I guess you're right, Mommy."

Basya dried her tears and hung up the phone. She would apologize to Yaakov in the morning.

The Food Machine

By Judy Gruenfeld

Forgive a mother for bragging but my son is beautiful, both inside and out. His eyes are the color of sapphires and when he was a child his hair was the color of spun gold. Although his hair has darkened somewhat since he grew up, he is a very handsome young man. And still just as beautiful inside; always concerned about everyone's health and always being careful not to hurt anyone's feelings.

As I have mentioned in previous articles, Ronnie has Autism and is high functioning. As he matured, many of the Autistic behaviorisms lessened and even disappeared. That's the good news. The not so good news is that these behaviorisms were replaced with many obsessive, compulsive behaviors.

My husband and I became very concerned. Ronnie began shaving four and five times a day and would not allow anything to remain in the kitchen sink (this I could live with).

He would even come downstairs in the middle of the night to check and would wash anything that had been left behind. He also became angry when one of us would not wash something out as soon as we used it. Never violent, thank G-d, Ronnie would say,

"Why are you doing this? I think you just want to upset me".

We tried reassuring him that that was definitely not the case and the kitchen police would not come after us if an item remained in the sink overnight. Indeed, I considered myself very fortunate with regard to my husband and younger son, if the dish or utensil in question even made it to the sink!

But our biggest concern was his compulsive eating. Ronnie had always been thin (though his weight did fluctuate a bit) but

now he continued to gain weight, well past what was acceptable and healthy. By this time he was thirty years old and we decided to seek the advice of a psychiatrist. Thus far, he had never been on any behavior altering medication but, perhaps, the time had come to take this next step. Ronnie was uncomfortable in his own skin. He was torturing himself. Something had to be done.

I called a well-known organization, which services the developmentally disabled population (for whom I had once worked) and explained the situation to the nurse in charge of health services. The nurse stated that people with Autism often develop Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder (OCD) at or about age thirty. Ever trying to maintain my sense of humor I replied,

"Well, he's right on target with this milestone," I laughed through my tears.

We met with the psychiatrist who put him on medication for OCD and ADD (yet another bowl of alphabet soup). After a while Ronnie was more relaxed and not quite as compulsive with items remaining in the kitchen sink. He also decreased the amount of times he shaved every day. But, despite the fact that both medications usually suppress one's appetite, Ronnie's appetite continued to increase and he continued to gain weight.

"He couldn't be that hungry," we thought.

We tried to limit his portions and we would continue to get arguments from him when we would tell him he ate enough.

We no longer buy any kind of nosh unless we are having guests and buy only one dessert item for Shabbos, carefully limiting the size of his portion.

Ronnie began sneaking food during the night at which point my husband suggested we put an alarm on the refrigerator. Again, we laughed through our tears.

"He's bored," a friend of mine said. "We need to find something for him to do".

"We," she said, not "you".

I am very grateful for the support of this very special lady. But he already has his household chores to do when he comes home from his workshop and he spends hours at a time on his computer (which we monitor closely) and playing the piano.

There is heart disease in the family. The handwriting is on the wall but Ronnie refuses to "read and heed" the signs. I even wrote a poem that I hoped would scare him into controlling his appetite.

My parents cried when they read it and my sister-in-law scolded me but, sometimes,

our fear and pain cause us to react in ways we normally wouldn't in order to cope with problems. Believe me, it was out of love and concern and total frustration that I wrote it as I am afraid my precious Ronnie will be digging his grave, one spoonful at a time:

A copy of the poem remains at Ronnie's place setting, to no avail. I don't know what strategy to employ next. But I certainly will keep trying. I will not give up on my son. I am davening more now and I pray that Hashem will guide me, as He has always done in the past, to help my son make the right choices and to give me the strength to go on. In the meantime, we're taking one meal at a time.

You'll have to excuse me for now. I think I hear someone moving about in the kitchen.

Laughing Over Spilled Milk

By Judy Gruenfeld

I woke up at eight o'clock in the morning on the first day of Chol HaMoed Pesach. Every muscle in my body was screaming,

"Stay in bed, I ache beyond belief."

But I had no choice, I had to get up. The cleaning lady was coming and I wanted to be dressed before she arrived. She was bringing her seven year old son, who was home from school with her, and I thought I should be somewhat put together.

I slowly got up, massaging each muscle as it moved, made the beds, got dressed, and then went downstairs and made myself a cup of coffee. As I sat down to drink my coffee, still rubbing my back, I thought,

"Why is this morning different from all other mornings?"

The answer did not require the wise son to figure out. It was simple. My house was quiet! My company had left the previous evening and, except for my husband who was upstairs working in his office, I was alone. I love Pesach and having my family over. The richness of this experience, since I incorporate what I have learned into the Seders, is unlike any other. And, my extended family is now more than happy to participate. But, I'm not as young as I used to be and I appreciated the quiet house and my ability to sit in one spot longer than two minutes.

The coffee was delicious. I hadn't had an opportunity to have any the previous two nights and was now able to smell the aroma and taste its richness.

My cleaning lady usually arrives about eight-thirty but eight-thirty arrived and she did not. I assumed she was sleeping in since she didn't have to send her son to school. Finally,

at nine o'clock she doorbell rang and in she walked, followed by her first-grade son.

As it turned out, this was the perfect day to have her come. After two Seders and all that company, the house needed more than a little tidying up. While my cleaning lady, who I will call "Maria" got to work as soon as she noticed the conditions in my usually fairly picked-up house, and I offered her son "Tommy" breakfast, an offer he found difficult to refuse. He liked the kosher for Pesach "cheerios" and asked for a glass of orange juice, which I gave him.

While Maria was busy cleaning upstairs, Tommy was busy eating downstairs.

"This is delicious," he said. "I like it a lot."

He's really a sweet kid.

"I'm glad to hear that," I told him.

While drinking my coffee, I noticed from over the rim of my cup that his orange juice was dangerously close to the edge of the table.

"Please drink you're your juice before it spills," I said to Tommy. He obligingly did as I asked. Then he finished the cereal. Unfortunately there was still some milk left in the bowl when Tommy's elbow knocked it off the table. It and its contents splattered all over the kitchen floor.

"I'm sorry," Tommy said. "It was an accident."

"I know. Don't worry about it," I said, trying to suppress a laugh as I remembered how many times I had cleaned spilled milk from the kitchen floor when my children were small and at the irony of having someone else in my house who was cleaning up the mess.

"Your mother will clean it up."

Judy's Connection

By Judy Gruenfeld

Judy can be contacted through email@
judys_connection@yahoo.com

Dear Judy,

I have a two and a half year old niece whom I am very worried about. She is my sister's first child and my sister and her husband do not seem to be concerned with what I consider to be developmental delays.

I have a daughter the same age (not my first child) who is much further ahead in just about every area. Whenever I try to bring this up with my sister she gets very defensive and tells me that all I am trying to do is favorably compare my daughter to hers. This is most definitely not the case.

I love my niece with all my heart and want to see her get whatever services she may need in order to give her every advantage in life.

At this point I don't know if her delays are serious or not, easily corrected or not, but I think she should be evaluated by a child psychologist to see where her performance range lies on the spectrum and what, if any, intervention is necessary. My sister says her pediatrician does not seem to be worried so why should I?

When they come over, my daughter wants to play with her cousin but my niece is more content to play by herself and virtually ignores my daughter. My sister stays home with my niece and says that she is just used to playing by herself while my daughter has older siblings to play with and teach her.

My daughter starts crying and says, "Mommy, she won't play with me" and then the whole scene repeats itself. By the time they leave, everyone is almost always crying.

My mother tells me to stop discussing this with my sister because all I am doing is upsetting her and my brother-in-law and that, in time, they will realize my niece is falling

behind. I believe that the longer they wait, the more time my niece will lose and the harder it will be for her to catch up and to be mainstreamed with her peers. Can you please advise me as to what I should do?

Concerned Aunt

Dear Concerned Aunt,

First of all, I would like to commend you for taking the time to write to me. Many extended family members, are busy with their own lives and would not take the time to bother. Your niece is lucky to have you.

First time parents, as you know are a breed all their own. I am sure you remember when you had your first child. No one was more beautiful or smarter.

Though children should, not be compared to each other as every person is different, there are certain milestones that, when not met, should set off red flags. Of course it is easier to be aware of the red flags when you have some experience raising children under your belt.

I am sure deep down inside your sister and her husband are concerned about your niece. They are just afraid and do not know where to turn.

If I were you, I would let it rest for a while. Make your sister feel comfortable coming to your home. When not threatened, a person is more likely to open up. I would also encourage her to enroll your niece in a playgroup in the fall. This way your niece will have exposure to other children and will be able to develop her social skills.

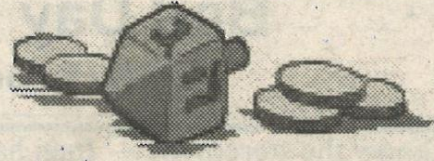
Also, if the teacher suspects any developmental delays she will bring it up with your sister. Sometimes it is easier to open up to a "professional" where there is only a

professional relationship and no history of any competition.

Good luck and be well.

The Chanuka Gift

By Judy Gruenfeld



**Judy can be contacted through
email@ judys_connection@yahoo.com**

The weather was reasonably mild for December. The forecast was for some snow flurries but it rained-instead, much to my delight. We were due at a friend's house for a Chanukah party and I am loath to drive in the snow.

So many memories came floating back in my head. When I was a child I got Chanukah gelt (money), not presents. However, in my husband's family, presents were exchanged for eight nights, and he insisted we do that with our children when they were young. But, they are not young any more and now gelt would suffice. But, we did wrap presents for our friends' grandchildren, lots and lots of presents.

"Let's get going," I said. "We want to get there before all the latkes are eaten, to say nothing of the donuts."

"Relax," said my husband. "Did you ever notice a shortage of food in the Rosen house?"

"Mom's right," Ronnie chimed in. "There's also lots of kids there."

"Don't worry," my husband said. "There will be enough food even for you. And, by the way, don't stuff yourself."

"Well, maybe just a little," Ronnie said. "After all, it is a holiday."

"How are we going to get you to lose weight if you keep stuffing yourself?" my husband asked.

"Well, I lost seven pounds," Ronnie said.

"And how many did you gain back?"

"Only three."

"That's not good," I said. If you want to be healthy you have to lose twenty pounds.

"I won't stuff myself too much," Ronnie repeated.

"I give up," my husband and I said in unison. So much for the obsessive/compulsive behavior that manifests itself in adults who were Autistic as children:

Half an hour later, presents in hand, we arrived at the Rosen's. After greeting everyone, our noses led us to the kitchen. The smell of potato pancakes and donuts put us in a holiday mood and made our stomachs grumble. Mrs. Rosen had put food on the dining room table from one end to the other. Her pot roast is the best in town, as are her chickens, kugels, kishkas, and every kind of dessert you can imagine.

I must admit, my husband and I had a problem not stuffing ourselves. How could we ask that of our son?

We watched the children play dreidel and Ronnie joined them for a while. Then he began wandered through the house, as he usually does. We kept an eye on him at all times to make sure he did not get into something he shouldn't. He's pretty smart, my son; smart enough to get himself into trouble but not out of it.

By the time the children were finished playing dreidel and the adults were finished with their dessert, it was time to give out the presents.

Our host gave Ronnie a box that was wrapped with love and had a beautiful bow fastened on it as he wished him a happy Chanukah. Not one to stand on ceremony, Ronnie ripped the paper off. Inside was a box

of his favorite candy. But, something happened at that moment He did not rip the box open to get a piece of candy. Instead, my son with Autism, which is associated with cold and uncaring emotions, stared at the box. There were tears forming in his eyes.

"Mom," he said. "We have such wonderful friends."

We all had tears in our eyes by then. Words from the heart do indeed enter the heart, especially when the heart is accompanied by a pure neshama.

Recycling is Nothing New

By Judy Gruenfeld

My family didn't have much money when I was growing up. Like all the other families on the block, we tried to make do as best we could. Things were different then, back in the 1950's. Very few people owned cars and some didn't even have a telephone. In our building there were only one and two bedroom apartments. Sometimes three or four children shared a bedroom.

I was an only child. When it was time for me to go to sleep, I would go into my mother's bed. Before my parents went to sleep, my father would carry me to the Castro convertible sofa in the living room. This lasted until I was seven and we moved into a larger apartment and I got my own room.

I can remember wanting an orange crate scooter more than anything else in the world. Most of my friends already had one. And one night I was promised that the following day I would be going shopping with my grandfather to get one. Or rather, to get the parts so Grandpa could make one for me. I could hardly sleep that night. When I finally did fall asleep, I dreamed of scooters in all different colors; red ones, blue ones, green ones and purple ones. Ah, the young child's imagination! When I close my eyes, I can picture it to this day.

As soon as the sun shone through the bedroom window I was awake. I brushed my teeth, got dressed, davened as best as I could by myself, and had a bowl of cereal for breakfast. I was very quiet so that I would not disturb my mother. My father had already left for shul. When I saw my grandfather come home, I ran across the street to him. As we walked towards his apartment building, he asked,

"Did you have breakfast?"

"Yes," I said. "I had cereal."

"Well, come upstairs with me and have a cup of hot cocoa while I have my toast and tea." It was nice and warm in Grandpa's apartment, and, oh, so cold outside.

Grandfather and granddaughter finished their drinks, bundled up, and set out to get a scooter.

We went down Main Street where all the stores were. First, we found an empty crate that would be perfect for the body of the scooter. Grandpa noticed a discarded board that would do fine for the foot-rest.

"I'm cold," I said. Can we find a fire so I can warm up?"

Back then, there were big metal barrels along the sidewalks that burned wood and coals so the outdoor store owners could keep warm. The shopkeepers also cooked chestnuts and sweet potatoes for those who wished to indulge in some of nature's treats.

We walked past a few stores and then came to a man who was selling fruits and vegetables. He had a nice fire going in his barrel because he had gotten up very early that morning to open his store. As Grandpa and I warmed our hands over the – fire Grandpa started talking to the store owner who was a friend of his.

"What brings you two out so early, Mr. B.?" asked the shopkeeper.

"We're looking for parts so I can build my granddaughter a scooter," replied Grandpa.

"Have you found any wheels yet?" asked the man, "because if not, I have just the right thing for you. My grandson just got a new pair of roller skates. I am using one old skate for wheels for the scooter I am building for him and you are welcome to the other one.

I have it right here in my store. I'll get it for you."

When the man came back with the skate I was practically jumping for joy.

"That's perfect," I said. "Let's take it."

"Yes," said Grandpa, "that will do very nicely. Thank you, my friend."

All that was left to find were two pieces of wood to use as handlebars. As we continued walking down the street, we noticed a broken crate in another sidewalk store.

"Do you mind if we take a couple of pieces of wood from this crate?" asked Grandpa.

"My grandfather is building me a scooter," I boasted.

"Of course you can have the wood," said the shopkeeper and good luck with your scooter."

Grandpa and I thanked the man and were on our way.

"Well, maidalah," said Grandpa, "we have everything we need. I think it is time to go back home."

"But Grandpa," I said worriedly, "we need paint."

"You let me worry about the paint," answered Grandpa.

When Grandpa and I returned, my mother and my grandmother were beside themselves with worry.

"Where have you been?" they both shouted at the same time.

"We went shopping for parts for a scooter that Grandpa is going to build for me," I said.

"You must never go anywhere without telling me," my mother admonished. "We were

very worried." Grandma would deal with Grandpa later.

We then went into the basement of Grandpa's building. Since Grandpa owned the building, he had set aside a spot to use as a "workshop". Together, grandfather and granddaughter began building the scooter, which was done by the time I had to go to bed.

"What about the paint?" I asked again.

"You let me worry about the paint," Grandpa reassured. Needless to say, I could hardly sleep that night.

The next morning I went to school but I could hardly concentrate on my schoolwork. All I could think about was the scooter and wonder what color Grandpa was going to paint it.

I rushed home from school at the end of the day and ran straight for Grandpa's workshop. Grandpa had just finished painting the scooter. My eyes opened wide as did my mouth when I saw my brightly colored new scooter. It was the most beautiful scooter I had seen in my entire seven years on the planet. My grandfather had painted it teal blue and my grandmother, who was a most gifted seamstress, had beautiful multicolored appliques with which she had decorated it. I was breathless.

As I watch the children of today zipping down the streets on their motorized scooters, I can't help but wonder at how the new technology of today has replaced many of the inter-personal relationships of years ago.

Technology is not about to slow down but maybe we ought to. The more we scoot around in the fast lane, the less we are apt to see.

Where's the Snooze Button

By Judy Gruenfeld

It doesn't happen very often but I absolutely hate it when it does. I'm sure you have experienced it too and don't feel any better about it than I do. What is "IT"? "IT" is Insomnia! If your clock were an old-fashioned wind up alarm clock, you'd hear it ticking away the hours. But it's not. It's a modern, state of the art digital clock so you watch as one minute changes to the next. You keep your eyes closed for what feels like an eternity hoping you will doze off, but still, they pop open at will. You glance at the clock again. Ten minutes have passed. You check again to make sure you set the alarm. After all, you must wake up on time for work in the morning. How will you make it through the day if you don't get to sleep?

"Aha!" you think. You will pretend you are asleep. Surely you will be able to fool yourself and lull yourself into dreamland. You close your eyes again. Your breathing is even and you can hear everyone else in the house also taking slow, steady breaths as they all slumber. You stay in that position for a long time. A really long time. Your eyes open. "I must have been asleep," you tell yourself. "I couldn't have had my eyes closed for so long if I weren't asleep." You look at the clock. Half an hour has lapsed. The ruse hasn't worked. You know you weren't asleep. You begin to get agitated. After all, you must function tomorrow.

What other strategies could you use? Maybe a cup of hot chocolate will soothe you and put you in a dreamy state. It's really warm and comfy under the covers, though. But, it's no use. You might as well get up and try another ploy. So, downstairs to the kitchen you go. It's really cold, even with your terry bathrobe on but the thermostat is set for the

night. Your husband is the one who programs it and you don't know how to raise the temperature. "Oh well," you think. "The hot chocolate will warm me up." You fill a mug with water and put it in the microwave for three minutes. Three precious minutes that you should be sleeping. When the water is hot, you mix in your cocoa, get a book and sit down at the kitchen table.

The cocoa is too hot so you start to read your book. You get really into your book and before you know it, a half hour has gone by, you are almost finished with your cocoa and you are still wide awake. So much for that idea! How about some warm milk? I don't think so. I don't know about you but I won't even drink cold milk. As far as I'm concerned it's fine for calves. I could never tolerate the stuff.

Isn't there something in bananas and turkey that is supposed to help you fall asleep? Tryptophan, I think. No matter, you don't have either bananas or turkey in the house.

What about counting sheep? Anything in Tehillim about that? It might not be a bad idea to recite a few chapters anyway. Maybe it will calm you down, although you don't even know what is bothering you, if there is anything bothering you in the first place.

You glance up at the clock again. Another hour has passed and you are no closer to your goal. You might as well go back to bed. As you lay, down, the clock stares you in the face. You know it is mocking you. You would love to smash it with a hammer but, fortunately, you have more sense than to break something that you would have to replace, and right away, at that.

You turn it around so you can't see the time. Yup! That'll do it! To make doubly sure

you won't see the time, you tum on your other side. You lie there for a while longer. You can't stand the suspense so you tum back to your other side and tum the clock around again. Another half hour has gone by. Time sure does fly when you have to get up early in the morning.

And what about daylight savings time? Whose idea was that, anyway? Of course I don't mind it in the fall when we gain an hour. But now I need every minute I can get. And this has to be the week we move the clocks ahead! When I was a kid, we moved the clocks ahead on the last Sunday in April. Then it was

changed to the first Sunday in April. Now, it has just been changed to the second Sunday in March. Timing, as they say, is everything.

By now, it's almost six o'clock. You can't believe you have been up all night. You might as well get a head start on the day. You, shower, dress, and prepare breakfast for your husband and children.

As soon as everyone has left the house, you start to yawn. Suddenly, you can't keep your eyes open. You dial your work number and call out sick. You'll just take a little nap. After all, you don't want to be up all night.

Pick-Up or Delivery

By Judy Gruenfeld

We've all been faced with the same situation time and time again. Whether we're dealing with a doctor, a repairman, the trash collector or the township, we end up playing the waiting game. The bureaucrats have us dangling from a string and there is precious little we can do about it. We make our calls to any one of the aforementioned businesses and wait patiently for call backs.

My personal favorite is the phone company. There are two scenarios that can be played out.

One is if the problem is from the box outside the house, up to the house and the other is if the problem is inside the house.

(This was not a problem when Ma Bell took care of all her phones. Back in those days all you had to do was call the phone company and, since she owned the phone, a repairman was dispatched to fix the problem at no cost to you). If the problem is outside, no one has to be home for the problem to be fixed.

If the problem is inside the house, obviously someone has to be home. But, it's not always possible to tell where the problem is until someone arrives at the scene.

If the problem is outside, there is no charge to the customer. If the problem is inside, there is a fee, that is, unless you were wise enough to purchase a contract with your long distance company. If you change long distance companies, obviously the contract is null and void.

I also don't like waiting for furniture. The phone will ring in the morning and the sales representative will be on the other end.

"Mrs. Gruenfeld," he will say, "We will be delivering your new recliner chair today, some time between 9:00AM and 7:00 PM."

"Can you narrow that down a bit for me?" I ask.

"I'm afraid I can't, ma'am. I'm not sure how the day will run but I can call you when I'm on my way to your house."

"What good will that do me?" I still can't make any plans for the day."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but that's the best I can do."

So, you thank him and you wait. He may remember to call you and he may not, all you know is that you are probably going to be last on his list and will probably be stuck in the house all day.

We put the old recliner chair on the curb on Monday and called the township and asked that the chair be picked up. The woman I spoke to said someone would come some time later that week. By Thursday, the chair was still in front of my house.

I put a sign on the chair that said, "free chair, in good condition".

Tuesday it was still there so I changed the sign.

It now read "chair, good condition, \$25".

By the next day it was gone. I suppose I should have called the township and told the powers that be not to bother to come and get the chair but the *yatzer hara* (evil inclination) got the better of me.

And, to be honest with you, I didn't feel too bad about it, either, especially since no one ever came.

What gets my dander up the most, though, is when the garbage isn't collected. We have to pay for private collection in our town. When we moved down here in 1970 the fee was \$10.50 every three months. Now, it is up to \$85 every three months and the service has

gotten worse. We are limited to two trashcans twice a week. I once put out an old rolled up carpet. The trash collector refused to take it.

"We only pick up household garbage," he said.

"This came from my house," I said to the man.

"We only pick up household garbage," he repeated.

One of us wasn't quite getting it so I decided to call someone in the office.

"I have a problem," I said to the man when he answered the phone.

"I put out some rolled out old carpet to be picked up and was told that you won't take it."

"We only pick up household garbage," the man on the phone said.

"I don't understand," I said. "The carpet came from my house."

"We only pick up household garbage," the man repeated.

"Never mind," I said and hung up the phone, totally frazzled.

I don't know what is considered to be "household garbage" but I desperately need to find another company to pick up my trash.

On top of everything else, the company has gotten very unreliable. We used to not get our garbage collected on Tuesdays and Fridays. Now we don't get it collected on Mondays and Thursdays.

There is one thing I can count on though. I'll pay for it somehow in the end.

Last Train Out of Odessa

By Judy Gruenfeld

The following is based on the life of my paternal grandfather. The major incidents that occurred are true. The minor details had to be left to the imagination as that information is not available.

Fruma Raizel, awoke at five o'clock in the morning as she always did. The children were still sleeping. She would have to wake the boys up soon. Her daughter could sleep a little longer. Life was very hard for a widow in late nineteenth century Odessa. The year was 1895 and Fruma Raizel had been widowed for four years now. Herschel, her eldest, was nine, Getzel, seven, and Leah, her youngest, had just turned five.

Herschel and Getzel did not have the luxury of learning in Cheder. They worked in a factory from sun-up to sundown. Leah went with her mother to the sewing factory where she learned, at a very young age, to sew buttons on the garments her mother made. Their mother, as her name suggested, was a pious woman, and had a *melamed* (teacher) come to the house in the evening and teach her boys what it meant to be a Jew. Leah learned from her mother, all that a Jewish woman needed to know to run a proper Jewish home.

It might have been easier for Fruma Raizel if she had returned to the section of the city where she was born but her parents were no longer alive and she had no siblings. And even though a Jew would help his fellow Jew, like any other big city, everyone was busy with his or her own life.

The first thing Fruma Raizel did when she got up in the morning was put wood in the stove. This would warm her tiny apartment and provide a cooking surface for the gruel the

children would eat for breakfast before they went out into the frigid winter air.

Herschel, Getzel, its five-thirty. You have to get up for work now, Fruma Raizel shook their bed.

Herschel rolled over and Getzel sat up. He washed nagel vasser and went over to the stove to warm himself as he got dressed. Once Getzel was dressed, he pulled his older brother out of bed. Herschel, too, washed nagel vasser and then he got dressed.

"Mama, it's so cold. I don't want to go outside," complained Herschel.

"Eat your breakfast. You will be late for work", his mother said.

"If you want to eat, you have to work. I know it's hard without Papa here but you must be strong and set a good example for Getzel and Leah. You don't hear Getzel complaining, do you?"

"Mama," said Getzel, "I like to work. I'm almost as fast as some of the men in the factory. And besides, you keep saying that G-d will help us but I think He forgot about us."

Getzel's cheek stung as his mother's hand smacked it hard.

"Don't ever let me hear you talk against G-d again. Do you hear me? G-d would never forget about us. Just because He doesn't give you what you want when you want it, doesn't mean that we are not His beloved children. He is always with us and He always will be."

"Yes, Mama, "Getzel fought back the tears.

"Now, both of you finish your breakfast and go to work. You know Mr. Goldstein doesn't like it when you come late and we'll be in serious trouble if you get fired."

"Yes, Mama, "both boys said in unison.

They finished their breakfast, put on their worn winter coats, and headed for the factory. It was six o'clock.

Fruma Raizel then woke Leah up, washed *nagel vasser* with her, got her dressed, and gave her breakfast.

"Finish your breakfast, child. We must be at work soon. Your brothers have already left."

"Yes, Mama," said Leah, knowing better than to complain.

It was now six-twenty. Mother and daughter had a ten-minute walk before they had to be at work at six-thirty.

The days were long and hard for the small Barabash family. Oh, how Getzel wished they were related to the other Barabash family in Odessa. They were bankers and very well off. But, not even a kopek came their way.

When Fruma Raizel left work at six o'clock in the evening she would stop at the store and buy some bread, potatoes, and beets. With it she made borsht for her hungry children. Sometimes she was able to buy a piece of herring. If Yossi, the fish man had any tails left over he would sell them to her really cheap. He knew better than to offer them to her for free. Her pride would not allow her to accept them. Fruma Raizel would fry them up with onions, to the delight of her children.

By the time the lamp ran out of oil they were all very tired and went to bed. These children didn't have to be told to go to sleep. Sometimes Leah fell asleep at the table. Her mother would pick her up and gently put her to bed. Fruma Raizel fought back the tears welling up in her eyes. She could not allow her children to see any weakness in her. They all had to be strong or they would not survive.

Once in bed, she would allow herself to cry, just enough to relieve the tension, but not enough to feel sorry for herself. She longed for the security a husband would bring but for

some reason she never remarried. And her parents did not raise a beggar. She and her children would be fine, thank you. Just fine.

The Enlightenment that was sweeping all over Europe finally came to Odessa. The year was 1905. Getzel was seventeen and very involved in the Jewish Labor Bund.

He believed that G-d had forsaken him, left his family to subsist on meager rations of food and tattered clothing. He would take matters into his own hands.

"Hey, Getzel," he heard a voice whisper behind him as he was leaving the factory. It was his friend and co-worker, Yaakov. "We are meeting tonight at the cafe. We can't wait much longer. No more pogroms, no more czars. We will overthrow that Jew-hater. We are no longer willing to live under his dictatorial rule. Soon, the Romanoffs will be gone and we will be free. Seven o'clock."

"I'll be there."

Seven o'clock found several young revolutionaries sitting around a table at the cafe, each sipping a glass of hot tea, with a sugar cube between his teeth.

"We're on for tomorrow night," said Yaakov. "I just met with leaders of the other groups. Is everyone with me?"

Yaakov was the leader of their little group in Odessa. He was big and muscular, compared to Getzel's average frame. But, Getzel had the brains and Yaakov would not do anything before consulting with Getzel.

All let out a "yea" and clinked their glasses. It was October already and winter was on its way: Soon they would be out from under the czar's rule. They would be free men, No more living in squalor. They would be paid a decent wage for their work, have enough food to eat, and warm coats to fight off the frigid winter weather. The czar's money and possessions would be divided up among the

people. It would go a long way. All Getzel really wanted was to buy his mother and sister a new dress. He couldn't remember a time when his mother hadn't pieced together left over material to make new clothes for them. She had sacrificed a lot, gone 'without a lot, and made her children strong and independent.

"Look, Mama," he would say, "I bought you a new dress." He imagined the smile on her pretty face. He couldn't remember the last time he saw his mother smile.

The time for action had come. He was scared. They were all scared, but they had no choice. Every time there was another pogrom, Getzel would worry about his beloved mother and sister. If anyone dare lay a hand on either one of them, that would be the last thing he would ever do.

They thought they were ready but something had gone terribly wrong. The revolution was quelled, the czar was still in power and all those affiliated with the Jewish Labor Bund were on the czar's hit list. At the

age of seventeen, Getzel Barabash was a fugitive. He had to flee for his life and leave his family behind, with literally the clothes on his back and nothing in his pockets.

With the cold night air wrapped around him, he cautiously made his way to the train station, sneaked on the train, and made his way out of Russia. The last thing he would remember would be his mother's tears.

Getzel Barabash, or Joseph Barbash, as he was known in the United States, died in a nursing home in Brooklyn, New York of pneumonia on September 5th 1964, complications of Parkinson's disease. He was seventy-six years old. He left behind a legacy of courage, honesty and a close-knit family. Included in this family was a granddaughter who would eventually grab and hold on to the torch of Torah. Though he wanted her to be given both his mother's names when she was born, his mother's legacy would continue with his first grandchild, Fruma Shaindel.

Getting Younger

By Judy Gruenfeld

I had been toying with the idea since my younger son entered first grade. On the one hand I wanted it so badly and on the other hand, I was not sure I would be able to rise to the challenge.

The children were both in school all day and my time was my own. I was a secretary before I had had the boys and I knew I did not want to be anyone else's "girl" again. The name on the door to the office in which I worked would be mine.

All I knew was that I wanted a college degree. Was I capable of taking college courses? I never particularly liked school, except for English, that is, and I was a little nervous about trying and failing.

"Go for it," my husband said. "I have more confidence in you than you do. I'm sure you'll do fine."

So, by the time the next semester rolled around, I was enrolled in a sociology course Ocean County College. Much to my surprise and amazement, I loved school, I loved the course, and I aced it. I worked hard, but did it! I became a career student for the next ten years or so, getting an associate's degree from Ocean County College and then going on to Georgian Court to get my bachelor's degree in Social Work. Kevin and I were seniors together, he in high school and I in Georgian Court. I had to go slowly because I took my role as a mother seriously, especially when it came to issues dealing with Ronnie, and there were always issues coming up that dealt with Ronnie.

Now it was time to look for a job. Kevin would be going off to college in the fall and Ronnie was now working in a sheltered workshop.

It's amazing but I found the college environment so sheltered compared to the

world at large. My professors were all very kind to me, especially since I was a mother and the mother of a disabled child. They always gave me the benefit of the doubt when "the dog ate my homework."

The first job I got was as the social worker at a long-term care facility. The job was part time and I shared it with a very lovely young woman. Naturally, we got to talking about our families and our kids while she was training me.

"My baby just started first grade," said my co-worker, "and I miss her already."

"Oh, really," I said, "my baby just started college. Although he is home now for a few days."

"No!" she said. "You can't possibly have a child in college! I thought you were about my age." (It must have been the make-up I put on for the Job).

"And, how old are you, if I may ask?"

"Thirty-six," she said. "How about you?"

I started laughing. "I'm forty-six."

I couldn't wait to get home to tell my husband about my first day back on the work force.

When asked about my first day on the job, I didn't tell my husband about any of the work I did but went right to the important business, the conversation I had with my co-worker.

"Guess what?" I said. "My co-worker thought I was the same age as she is and she is thirty-five."

"I told you that you look good for your age," my husband appropriately replied.

I happily got supper started when the phone rang. It was my mother.

"How was your first day at work?" she said.

"It was great," I said. "My co-worker thought I was the same age as she is and she has a daughter in kindergarten."

"That's wonderful," my mother said. "And how old is this co-worker?"

"Oh, I'm not exactly sure," I said. "About thirty-four."

"Well, we do have good genes," my mother said. "No one believes me when I tell them how old I am."

"Listen, Mom," I said. "I have to get supper on the table. I'll talk to you some other time." I hung up the phone.

At this point, Kevin was laughing.

"What's so funny?" I asked him.

"Mom," he said, "every time you tell that story, the woman gets a year younger. How much longer do you think you will be able to get away with it?"

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When Family Ties Unravel

By Judy Gruenfeld

I thought I was past that point. I didn't think they could hurt me any more. After all, it's been a long time. My son is grown. He's thirty-eight years old. They've had many years to get used to his quirks and idiosyncrasies.

It was hard when he was small, No one knew what to make of him or what to do - with him. I was made to feel as if he were a freak, something less than human. He is beautiful. He is sweet. He is kind. He is Autistic. My precious son, with golden hair and sapphire eyes, and I were made to feel like intruders whenever we visited one side of the family.

"I could never do it," my hostess would say as I fought back the tears.

"I don't know how you make it through the day. I'd pull my hair out of my head if he were mine."

Many snappy retorts would go through my mind but I couldn't speak for fighting back the tears. Nor did I wish to exacerbate the situation.

My hostess meant no harm. On the contrary, she thought she was paying me a compliment. She just lacked empathy, patience, finesse, and understanding. She had no idea how her words impacted my heart and soul.

The years went by quickly. All the kids grew up and we became somewhat closer with our family members. We would visit each other often and everyone seemed to enjoy being together.

That's why I was surprised when her latest remark hit me so hard: We were sitting at the breakfast table discussing the vacation we were planning with some friends when I was asked what plans I had arranged for my son while my husband and I were away.

"I'm not sure yet," I told my hostess. "My usual respite worker moved out of the area and the Division of Developmental Disabilities no longer provides in home respite care. I'll have to consider all my options and come to a decision. At this point I don't know what I am going to do."

"As long as you don't expect me to watch him for the week," came the reply from across the table.

Her words cut through me like the proverbial knife, as they had many years previous. I thought she had mellowed and I thought I was past allowing such remarks to bother me any more. But, in an instant, all the old, uncomfortable feelings came to the surface.

I remembered the look of pity on one person's face; the admonitions from another that I was spoiling him, advice from someone else to put my son in a residential school (institution), and yet another who told me to leave him be.

"After all," I was told, "nothing more could be expected of him."

I also remembered the surge of emotions I had when we left their house.

Instead of feeling comforted and surrounded with love from having been with family, I felt despondent and surrounded by contempt. So much so that I wouldn't get over it for days. Nothing my husband said could console me. If he took their part and said they meant well, I would feel betrayed.

If he made light of the situation, and said I was over reacting, I would feel totally lost and alone. My husband was struggling with his own feelings and chose to "play ostrich".

I was adrift on a vast sea with no land in sight, as if it were my son and I against the world.

I took a moment to compose myself and then excused myself from the table, stating that I had to make a phone call. I went to the guest room, closed the door and expected to have a good cry.

Instead, I began to daven, asking Hashem for understanding, not only for my son and myself but also for my insensitive relative. A new perspective appeared as I began to feel sorry for her and realized that it was she who was lacking, not I, and certainly not my son.

I would still prefer to hear positive rather than negative comments but other people's negativity has nothing to do with my son or with me. It is their agenda, not mine. Hashem has given me a priceless blessing for which I needed to be reminded, and I have my not so subtle relative to thank for reminding me.

Several people have told me that reading articles I have written from my own

personal experience has given them the strength and courage to deal with the day-to-day problems encountered when raising a child with a disability.

Perhaps you have encountered insensitivity or maybe you have someone in your life that has helped you cope with your child who has special needs. You may have questions and possibly even some answers that no one else has discovered. I would like to share this column with you when it is about families who have a member with a disability. It would be an open forum where you 'can ask questions, answer someone else's questions, or share your experiences with the rest of us. There are also resources that you may be familiar with that someone else is not. All those who wish, may, of course, remain anonymous.

Please direct all your correspondence to me at **judys_connection@yahoo.com**. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as the saying goes. Together we can accomplish what, alone, seems insurmountable.

I look forward to hearing from you and sharing with you.

All in a Daze Quirk

By Judy Gruenfeld

Life can be very interesting.

Sometimes you laugh, sometimes you cry, and sometimes you seem to be doing both at the same time. Many interesting and funny things have happened to me between raising a family, which includes a son with developmental disabilities, and my career as a social worker. At one point I worked at a workshop for adults with developmental disabilities. At another time, I worked at an adult medical day program, which also accepted clients with developmental disabilities who found the workshop routine to be too much for them. The pace at the medical day care was much more laid back. These were, by far, my favorite jobs. The pure, innocent neshamas that came to work (or play) each day crept into my heart and had me doubled over with laughter most of the time. I didn't get paid a whole lot, but as one co-worker put it,

"You can't put this in a pay check."

I would like to share some of these stories with you. Names have been changed to protect privacy but the stories are all one hundred percent factual. Believe me, you can't make this stuff up!

Wrap Me Up and Take Me Home

It was what I called a "rubber glove" day at the workshop. Several of the clients were incontinent of bowel and/or bladder and many had accidents. So far, I was okay. None of the clients were mine. Then disaster struck and I was summoned to the front office. Apparently one of "my guys" had wet himself. Fortunately, he did not live far from the workshop. I called his father and asked that he bring a change of clothes for his son. There was a shower in the men's bathroom and Dad would be able to shower and change Bill.

After I spoke to Bill's father, I gave Bill a clear plastic bag for his wet clothes and asked him to wait in the men's room. I told him his father was on his way with a change of clothes and he could return to his workstation once he had changed.

Bill must have gotten tired of waiting because as I was going up the hall, I saw Bill coming down the hall. He had apparently gotten tired of staying in the men's room and not wanting to parade around unclad, Bill had wrapped himself in the clear plastic bag.

Lady, I Think This is Your Stop

No doubt about it. It was a very trying day at the workshop. Mr. Murphy and his law reigned supreme. Nothing seemed to go right. Thank goodness, the day was almost over. I was working as a counselor/case manager at the time. We were loading up the buses when one of the job coaches called me back onto the floor.

"Carla won't get off her chair and go on the bus", I was informed. Carla was a very big girl and could not be budged.

After about ten minutes of cajoling I managed to convince Carla it was time to go home and assured her that she could return the next day. Boy, did I feel like a hero! For about fifteen minutes. That was when the receptionist paged me over the loudspeaker stating that the bus had pulled up in front of Carla's house and Carla refused to get off the bus!

My Usual Table, Please

One of the clients who attended the workshop began attending the adult medical day care center shortly after I started working there myself. One of the reasons she began attending the day care center was because the

workshop was very large and Tina was constantly getting lost.

It seems Tina took a liking to a particular place in the dining area at the center and would always gravitate to that spot. Staff tried to get her to sit at another table at times, to no avail. We wanted her to move freely about the center and acclimate herself to her new surroundings.

One Thursday morning Tina went to her usual spot upon arriving at the center and stood there waiting to be served her breakfast. Because no one else was seated at that table, staff wanted Tina to move to a different table and sit with her peers. Tina held her ground. She stood by her place, refusing to move, even though there were no chairs at that table. Since no one could get Tina to budge from the spot, naturally, the social worker was summoned. As I approached the table Tina stated she wanted to sit in her usual spot.

"You can't sit here", I told Tina. "There are no chairs at this table."

Tina looked back and forth at both tables, thought for a moment, and then took a seat where she was asked.

The Ability to Bounce Back

One of the jobs that was sub-contracted at the workshop was packaging sponges. For some reason, Annie loved packaging the sponges. She had a very unsteady gait and was, therefore, encouraged to sit while working. One day she decided she would stand. She did all right for a while but then became fatigued. She fell over into the box of sponges. What a Kodak moment we missed. The expression on her face when she bounced out of the box was priceless.

For Our Next Feature

Clients were usually kept busy at the workshop but occasionally there was no work.

This was referred to as "downtime". When such occasions arose we had several things for the clients to do. Among them were reading magazines, books, exercising, board games and videos. I happened to be walking through the workshop on one of these workless days and saw one group of clients glued to the television. I couldn't imagine what video could have effectively captured everyone's attention so I decided to go have a look. When I caught a glimpse at the screen I broke out into hysterics. It was blank!

It's a Good Institution

But, I'm Not Ready to be Institutionalized

I think the majority of people who work with those with developmental disabilities have a family member with a disability. That is certainly the force that drove me in that direction. Unfortunately, though, I often seem to have more patience with others than I do with my own son. Not always, but, and I am not proud of it but I am working on it.

One day, my son had me particularly aggravated. I don't remember why but I remember being at the end of my rope.

"You know," I told him. "I have one nerve left and you're getting on it."

"Are you going to put me in an institution?" he asked.

"Sweetheart," I answered. "You are going to put me in an institution long before I ever put you in one."

As I put these stories down on paper I am smiling. But my eyes are also filled with tears. The road has been bumpy but the journey has been filled with meaning and purpose, growth and love. And there are still many "miles to go before I sleep".

Not Such Distant Cousins

By Judy Gruenfeld

A few months ago I spoke to a cousin of mine that I haven't spoken to in over twenty years. What precipitated this reconnection is nothing extraordinary but I could definitely feel the hand of the Ultimate Orchestrator moving us closer to each other.

My mother had been trying to get in touch with her only sister. There had been no answer at my aunt's house for several days. And since my mother was worried because my aunt wasn't feeling well, she called my cousin.

Then it happened! My phone rang. It was my mother.

"Hi," came the familiar voice at the other end.

"Hi," I said back into the phone. "What's up?"

"I've been trying to reach your aunt for several days and no one is answering the phone. So I called your cousin," my mother informed me.

"Oh," came my astute reply. "What's going on?"

"Well," I was told, "Your aunt is in the hospital with Pneumonia. Your uncle was just released from the hospital after recovering somewhat from hip replacement surgery, and I just got off the phone with your cousin."

"You're kidding," I responded. "I'm glad Uncle Jake is all right. How is Aunt Sarah doing?"

"She's on the road to recovery, thank G-d. She should be home within a couple of days."

"I'm glad to hear that. I'm sure they will both be fine," I comforted my mother, as well as myself.

"Anyway," my mother continued, "I had a long talk with your cousin Naomi. She is also into writing. She wrote a novel and is now

trying to get it published. I got her email address. Why don't you contact her? I'm sure she'd love to hear from you, both of you being into writing, and all."

"Sure," I replied. "Give it to me."

The next thing I knew, I was emailing my cousin whom I haven't seen or spoken to in over twenty years. My mother has only one sister and they each have only one daughter. We grew up together, my cousin and I. We went to my grandparents for the afternoon meal on Shabbos, slept at each other's houses too often to count, went on vacation together (she threw up on me when I was four but I'll get into that another time), and although we are two very different people, we were always very close.

What I remember best about Shabbos, besides the Shabbos part is the quarter allowance my grandfather would give us Motzei Shabbos. (I still can't look at a quarter without thinking of my wonderful, gentle grandfather). My cousin and I would then go down the street to the five and dime, (it was safe for children to do that at the time), walk up and down the aisles that were filled with items that cost five or ten cents and carefully make our purchases. We would then go back to our grandparents' apartment and spend as much time as we could with our new toys. Our parents would go out or go home and we would stay overnight. Tired, though we were, we talked and talked until we lost the battle to our exhausted little bodies and fell asleep.

The next day, after eating a delicious breakfast prepared by our grandmother, our grandfather would walk us each home. I often wonder just how much the kids of today are missing, with extended family members scattered all over the globe.

Back to the present. I don't know why my cousin and I lost contact, I guess the fact that she lives in Connecticut and I live in New Jersey is not conducive to frequent visits. Life also took us down very different paths. My cousin is a professional and worked all her life. She has no children. I, on the other hand, preferred to stay at home with my children and didn't go back to work until they were both grown up.

But, just like the Pintele Yid, the "spark" was still there. The childhood bond had been forged forever.

I emailed my cousin. She emailed me back. And so it has been, for the past few

months. We caught up on lost time, filled in all the gaps and are critiquing each other's writing.

"It's funny," my cousin said. "We haven't spoken for so long, yet I feel we haven't missed a beat."

"That's because it's a heartbeat," I told her.

And so, an old "best friend" has now become a new "best friend." We may not email each other every day for the rest of, our lives but I don't think either one of us could allow another twenty years go by without feeling a tug at our heart strings.

Home Is Where the Guilt is

By Judy Gruenfeld

He put the key in the lock and turned it. As he opened the door to his apartment, he was greeted by darkness. He turned on the light and walked over to the phone. The number "one" blinked insistently on his answering machine.

"Not too bad," he thought as he pushed the message button. The machine began to talk at him,

"Thank goodness for answering machines. Otherwise I'd never hear your voice. This is the local chapter of the National Guilt Association. Call your mother!"

He chuckled to himself and shook his head as he pushed the delete button. He needed to call home anyway. His answering machine was on "the blink" and he wanted to ask his parents for any information they had in their consumer's magazine about them. Amazing how this message recorded with perfect clarity.

He picked up the receiver and dialed. It was 9:30 PM. With a little bit of luck; Mom would be asleep and he'd only have to deal with Dad. Not that they were bad parents, but one at a time was enough. He was a man now. He knew they meant well, but he wished they'd stop treating him as if he were still their little boy.

"There's nothing more challenging than an overprotective, Jewish parent," he thought. And in some ways Dad was more so than Mom.

The high-pitched "hello" at the other end of the line broke him out of his reverie.

"Hi, Mom," he said. How come you're not already asleep?"

"I haven't slept for days," she said. "I wanted to be sure I heard the phone in case you called."

"There's no hope for you," he said. "Or me, either, for that matter."

"My poor baby," his mom said. "What can I do for you? I'm sure you didn't call just to make sure we are both doing well."

"As a matter of fact, I did," he said. "You sound well enough to me. Now that we've gotten that out of the way, do you have any information on answering machines? Mine is not working very well. It seems yours are the only messages that come through clearly."

"I guess your answering machine knows how to treat a mother."

"Can you fax me the information you have at my work number?" he said, choosing to ignore the last comment.

"Sure, no problem. The information will be waiting for you when you get to work tomorrow."

"Thanks, Mom," he said.

"No problem; sweetheart," she said. "I love you."

"Love you, too," he responded. And then hung-up the phone.

"Who was on the phone?" Dad asked.

"Your son," replied Mom.

"My son? Uh oh, what did he do, or not do this time?"

"He didn't even ask me how my broken arm was. He knows I broke my arm. He just asked for information on answering machines."

Dad shook his head. "You know he means well. But like all men, he just doesn't think sometimes."

"I know. Perhaps he was so worried he just put the whole thing out of his head," she said jokingly. "I'll put his mind to rest."

And so, the following morning when he went to retrieve his fax, the cover sheet read:

"By the way, my arm is in a cast and the doctor said it should heal well. You

remember, one of the two arms that carried you around lovingly, without complaining, until you were old enough to walk without getting too tired."

Why the Big Deal Over the Glass

By Judy Gruenfeld

Is your glass half empty or half full? I am constantly asked that question, as I'm sure many of you are. This begs the next question. Why is a half - full glass associated with a positive outlook on life while a half - empty glass is associated with a negative one? As a child I was totally confused by this and, as an adult, it does not appear much clearer to me.

Recently, I had to undergo a series of Upper GI tests. Baruch Hashem, everything turned out fine. But, when I arrived at the hospital, I was presented with a disposable plastic glass and a little bottle of "liquid chalk" to drink. The nurse opened the bottle, poured the offending liquid into the glass and told me I had five minutes to drink its entire contents.

"This glass is filled to the brim," I said with dismay.

"I know, dear," said the nurse. "But you must drink it all."

A few minutes later, the nurse came over to me and asked how I was doing. I very proudly smiled, showed her the glass and said,

"It's half-empty!"

"Good girl," she replied.

Here was my glass, half empty, a fact, which elicited a smile from both the nurse and myself. I haven't been called a "girl" for many years, and that put another smile on my face.

Once the entire contents of the glass had been downed, I threw the empty glass into the trash, which elicited another smile.

"Thank G-d that glass is empty," I thought to myself.

I was ushered into another room where the doctor hooked me up to a monitor and watched as the chalky liquid passed down my GI tract.

"Everything seems to be in order," said the doctor.

Relieved, I pictured the empty glass in the trash, and smiled again.

When I came home and told my husband that everything was fine he preceded to pull a bottle of wine from the wine rack; and got two glasses.

"This calls for a celebration," he happily exclaimed and then filled both our glasses half way with wine.

"Wait a minute," I said with a sour expression on my face. "Why is my glass only half full?"

My husband laughed, filled up the glass the rest of the way, recited the blessing, and added a few thankful words of his own. We then drank our wine and expressed our gratitude to each other.

A few minutes later, I looked at my glass and frowned.

"What's the matter?" asked my husband.

"My glass is only half full again," I responded, at which point my husband filled it up.

So, from now on, when I'm asked if my glass is half-empty or half-full, I respond with,

"It depends on what's in the glass!"

The Chasuna (Wedding)

By Judy Gruenfeld

Judy can be contacted through email@judys_connection@yahoo.com

The envelopes were all addressed, the stamps were put on the envelopes, and the invitations were ready to be mailed. Mrs. Donnershtik took one more look at the Russian side of the last invitation before sealing it. The invitations read:

Mr. & Mrs. Mordechai Moontik

And

Mr. & Mrs. Dovid Donnershtik

Request the Honor of Your Presence

At the Marriage of Their Children

SHANE YINGEL

AND

SHAYNA MAIDEL

On Tuesday, the Second of September

Two Thousand and Eight

At Six O'clock in the Evening

Shalom Shul

Yenemvelt, Europe

Mrs. Donnershtik felt a tear roll down her cheek as she sealed the last envelope. It was a tear of joy. Her beautiful daughter was marrying a handsome young man from a very fine family. It was the up and coming event in Yenemvelt and all its inhabitants were talking about it.

Soon the replies started coming. Mr. & Mrs. Kumtahir would attend, as would Mr. & Mrs. Simchagait.

Mr. & Mrs. Gayveiter were traveling a long distance just to see Shayna Maidel get married; Mr. & Mrs. Fielekinder were coming with all their children, and Mrs. Rajinkas was coming mit Mrs. Mandlin.

Unfortunately, Mr. & Mrs. Keinekyach did not have the strength for such a long trip and had to decline the invitation, as did Mr. & Mrs. Fahrshaitnit.

Mrs. Donnershtik made a mental note to call Mrs. Fahrshaitnit in case there was some misunderstanding regarding the invitation.

The day of the chasana finally arrived. Everyone was all excited.

Mrs. Donnershtik received a phone call from Mrs. Rachmonas. Apparently Mrs. Krankheit wasn't feeling well and Mrs. Rachmonas did not want to leave her alone. . So both ladies would not be able to attend the chasana.

Mr. & Mrs. Schpatzeer decided to walk to the shul since it was only two blocks from where they lived. Mr. & Mrs. Shpatseemisht drove. Mr. & Mrs. Shluffengut arrived a little late but, Baruch Hashem, they didn't miss the Chuppah.

Mr. & Mrs. Goomisht forgot to bring the present and Mr. & Mrs. Kochleffel checked everyone's attire.

Mr. & Mrs. Essengut went right to the buffet table, Mr. & Mrs. Shicker went to the bar, and Mr. & Mrs. Tantsmaven went to check out the band.

Mr. & Mrs. Yenta greeted everyone as they came in.

One would have thought it was their simcha. Mrs. Klug looked very smart in her tailored suit and Mr. Vachzenolstdu wore his new suit.

Mr. & Mrs. Oysgapitst looked elegant. Mr. & Mrs. Zager were right on time but Mr. & Mrs. Farshpatig were detained and did not arrive until right before the Chupah.

Everyone from both sides of the family came, and ate, and danced and had a wonderful time. All agreed that it was one of

the nicest, most frailichen chasana they had ever attended.

The next day Mrs. Donnershtik called Mrs. Krankeit to see how she was feeling. Mrs. Krankeit said she was feeling a little better and wanted to know all about the chasana.

"What food did you serve?" she asked.

Mrs. Donnershtik told her all about the buffet and the chicken dinner and the delicious desserts.

"Did the neighbors come?" asked Mrs. Krankeit.

"Most of them," answered Mt. Donnershtik. .

"And what about the families?"

"Which family members came?" asked Mrs. Krankeit.

"Alla Moontiks and Donnershtiks," said Mrs. Donnershtik.

Tear Them Well

By Judy Gruenfeld

"Aaaaaooooowwww, Maaaaaaa," they hurt my feet. My toes are squooshed. I can't even wear these shoes to the store to buy new ones. I told you they were pinching me last week and now I can't even get my feet into them," five-year-old Fruma Shaindel complained to her mother.

"Oy, Sarah Heartburn," my mother said. "Such an actress. You can wear your slippers or your Shabbos shoes if your school shoes bother you that much."

And with that we were off. It was a three-block walk to the shoe store. In Brooklyn, in the 1950's everything was within walking distance, from the grocer to the shoe store to the homes of extended family members. One set of grandparents lived four blocks away and the other set lived across the street. My aunt and uncle on my father's side lived in the same building across the street as my grandparents and my aunt and uncle on my mother's side lived two trolley car stops away. (For those of you who are not aware, San Francisco was not the only place with trolley cars at that time). After we bought the shoes we would continue on to my mother's parents for lunch. My grandparents always liked it when we got something new and I could have sworn that once I saw Grandma give Mama seven dollars after I showed her the shoes.

The temperature was hovering above the freezing mark. I put on my warm coat and angora hat. From year to year, different types of hats would be in style. This year it was angora and if you didn't have an angora hat you pretty much tried not to go outside if it wasn't necessary. I tried to tie a bow under my chin but could not manipulate my little fingers as dexterously as the task required.

"Maaaa, my hat," I yelled.

"I'm coming, Sarah, stop yelling" she said.

As soon as my hat was tied we were off. The wind was cold on my face and blew my ISBN 0-76 long dark curls every which way. Mama's hair was thin, straight and "mousy brown" as she described it. I had hair like my father and Mama spent a lot of time combing it and putting bows in it. My hair would get lots of tangles and I would scream every time Mama combed out a knot. But, she was persistent and every curl was a work of art.

My parents wouldn't let me get shoes from Miles or National shoe stores. They said those stores carried cheap shoes and would ruin my feet. We went to Buster Brown. My parents didn't have a lot of money in those days but my shoes were one thing on which they wouldn't sacrifice quality. So, Buster and I were pretty good friends.

Since it was winter, I was getting navy blue closed shoes with laces. They would be for school (I was now in kindergarten) and play. After measuring my feet, the salesman brought out three pairs of shoes.

"You've grown two sizes since the last time you bought shoes," he said to me.

"I told you my shoes were way too small," I said to my mother.

She gave me one of those looks. I didn't say anything else.

The salesman tried all three pairs of shoes on me, felt them with his hand and had me "take a walk".

"They all fit fine," he said to my mother, "It's up to you."

"I like these," my mother said picking up one pair of shoes. What do you think, Judy?"

"I don't like the color."

"They're a beautiful shade of blue," she said.

"They're not blue, they're ugly blue and purple mixed together. They're blurple and I don't like them. I want those," and pointed to another pair.

"Okay," Mama said. "We'll take these."

After putting on the new shoes and paying for them, we were on our way to Grandma's house.

"*Trug es gezunt und Tzeras es gezunt,*" (wear them well and tear them well) the salesman said as we left the shoe store.

"No," I yelled. "I'm not going to tear my new shoes. They're too pretty."

"Grandma, Grandpa, look at my new shoes," I said as I ran into their apartment.

"*Tzeras es gezunt,*" they said.

"No," I yelled again. "Why is everyone telling me to tear my new shoes?"

"Come, let's have lunch," Grandma said. "We want you to be a healthy, happy girl. By eating properly and playing, that is what you will be." It didn't make any sense to me at the time but I was too hungry to argue.

Having only daughters and granddaughters, Grandma and Grandpa knew nothing about tearing shoes, not really; except for the old country where you wore them until they fell apart.

I raised two sons. They knew how to tear shoes. The only way to keep them in good condition was to keep them in the box. Every time they walked out of the shoe store wearing a new pair of shoes and would scrape the toes of the shoes on the pavement I thought of my grandparents' words.

"*Trug es gezunt und tzeras es gezunt,*" I whispered to myself.

One Jewish Daughter

By Judy Gruenfeld

As Pesach approaches, I can't help but ruminate over the events of the past few years. What steps were taken? What steps could have been taken? What can each one of us do in order to make this a better world?

Freedom is not free, as the expression goes. But, we are paying far too dearly for that which was already bequeathed to us on Mount Sinai thirty-six hundred years ago. As you well know, there are those who would not only see our land taken from us but will not rest until our very lives are also taken away. I, like you, am struggling to find an answer to that ever-haunting question, "Where do we go from here?" .

The following is a fictionalized account of one woman's struggle with these' issues and events. The facts contained therein, however, are unfortunately; all too true.

Sarah remembered the day very clearly. She woke with a start that fateful morning, the feeling of impending doom enveloping her like the blanket she had just kicked away. She sat bolt upright trying to catch her breath as tears started streaming down her face. She glanced to her left. Her husband was sound asleep in his bed, breathing steadily as his chest gently' moved up and down. The room looked the same. The sky blue walls stared back at her. She thought they were trying to tell her something but the message wasn't quite getting through. She was just short of grasping it.

Her husband's colonial style chest of drawers, the male version of her dresser, stood proudly in its place, having been polished the previous day. Her own perfume bottles and jewelry box were neatly displayed in their

proper places in the middle of Sarah's dresser, equally fresh from the previous day's cleaning.

Order. Sarah liked order. She could be thrown into a tailspin if things were not where they belonged. To say she was obsessive/compulsive would only cover part of it. Sarah was very tuned into her surroundings and was able to sense when something was wrong.

Sarah had been a little discomfited as the children were making the transition from slimmer camp to the new school year. Everyone was registered, supplies had been purchased, and classes had just started. All but one of her children would be off in the mornings. Only baby Aaron would remain at home with his mother. She would wait until the toddler turned three before enrolling him in day care. In the meantime, Sarah would give all her devotion to her eighth and last child. She had had a very difficult pregnancy and delivery with Aaron_ and the doctor had advised her against having any more children. Their rabbi had, naturally, told them to heed the doctor's advice.

For some reason, the alarm hadn't gone off. Sarah was sure she had set it but it failed to wake her up at seven-thirty. It was now eight-forty-five and everyone, including baby Aaron was still asleep. Dan, Sarah's husband, would be late for work and she would have to drive all the children to school. Apparently there had been a power failure and the clock's battery back up also failed to kick in. It was the watch on her night table that told Sarah she was running late. Sarah dried her tears, swung her legs over the side of the bed and slid her feet into her slippers.

"Okay," she thought. "Here goes."

She woke up her husband and told him what time it was.

"I have a meeting downtown," he said as he, too, sat bolt upright. "I'll never make it. I'd better call them."

After several tries, he turned to Sarah. "That's funny," he said. "There's no answer. It's almost nine o'clock. Everyone should be there."

Sarah shrugged her shoulders and turned on the radio. She stood there silent, in disbelief at what she heard. She then gasped.

"Dan, Listen to this."

The announcement that an airplane had crashed into each of the twin towers in downtown New York had them frozen in their spots. Little by little, more news unfolded. They were riveted to the radio and forgot to wake the children. Eventually, the children began getting up and also stood in disbelief at what they heard coming from the radio.

"The alarm," muttered Sarah, the full effect not quite sinking in. "The alarm didn't work. Otherwise, you would have been there, too." She turned to Dan and started crying again when the reality of the situation hit her. With wobbly legs she slid over to the kitchen table and sat down on the nearest chair. As it turned out, all the others, who had made it to the meeting, had perished in the inferno. A million times Dan asked himself, "Why? Why did they all have to die? Why was I spared?" And a million times he got no answer.

Life would never be the same after 9/11, for Sarah or for any of us. If she did not lose someone personally in the terrorist attacks, she knew someone else who did. The Twin Towers touched everyone. Just as in the 1940's events would be referred to as pre-Holocaust or post-Holocaust, in the new millennium events would be referred to as pre-9/11 or post-9/11.

When President Bush decided to send troops into Iraq; there were protests. "How quickly the non-Jewish population seems to forget that the United States was attacked" thought Sarah, "They seem to feel it is a "Jewish problem." Sarah smiled a bittersweet smile. "We truly must be a light unto the nations."

Events continued to- unfold as the world withstood more and more terrorist attacks. Talks between Arabs and Jews started and stopped several times. Finally, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided to disengage Jewish settlers from the West Bank and Gaza.

Sarah wrote the following letter to the Prime Minister.

9 Av, 5765

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Fifty-seven years ago the modern state of Israel was born when the United Nations voted to partition off a small part of the land that was then called Palestine. This land was to be a, Jewish homeland, according the United Nations resolution.

No heed was paid to .the fact that the land had been bequeathed to The Jewish Nation by the A-mighty, himself. The acreage granted us by the United Nations was only a fraction of the land that was promised to us by G-d.

Nonetheless, a haven was created for Jews who wanted to 'return' to Eretz Yisrael as well as those who wanted to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives after the Holocaust and begin life anew in the security and loving hands of Hashem.

British troops eventually withdrew and the Israeli people became sovereign over their own terrain. The quotas imposed by the British were lifted and Diaspora Jews from everywhere were free to come home.

Since then, many Jews from all walks of life have been making Aliyah and moving

to Israel. The land has grown from a dry, barren desert into a thriving, growing, prosperous nation, built with Jewish blood, sweat and tears. Indeed, when Mark Train visited Palestine in the nineteenth century, he could not understand why anyone would choose to live in parched desert, such as it was at that time.

But, there is no stopping the indomitable Jewish spirit. We took what was then a fruitless wasteland and turned it into one of the most celebrated paragons of freedom, democracy, and fertility.

Now, Mr. Sharon, you have decided to give away some of this very precious land to those who would see both Israel and the Jewish people disappear from the face of the earth. Eretz Yisrael is not yours, alone, Mr. Prime Minister. It is certainly not yours to give away. It belongs to all of us who are descended from our forefather, Avraham Avinu. It belongs to all of us who stood before the A-mighty at Mount Sinai and witnessed the beginning of our nationhood. By disengaging Jewish settlers from their homes, you will, in effect, be causing the very Jewish blood that made Israel what it is today, to have

been shed in vain, or literally, in vein, if you will.

By trading land for peace, you are putting all of Klal Yisrael in jeopardy. You are, in effect, signing Israel's death warrant.

Terrorists and "Palestinians" will not be satisfied with what they consider to be a small token of peace and a small concession on your part. They remain distrustful of us, and our motives, even -in the light of your attempts at reconciliation. ·

I do not claim to have the answers to all our problems. But, I urge you, Mr. Prime Minister, to let my people stay, and to seek counsel from those who are in a position to offer such advice, before selling your soul to the devil and selling Israel down the-river, piece by agonizing peace.

Sincerely,
Sarah Gold

Sarah looked in horror at the pictures in the newspapers that showed soldiers and settlers crying together.as the soldiers carried out their orders and evacuated the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. By the time Dan came home

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One Jewish Daughter Continued from p. 16

and read the newspapers, many of the words were blurred by Sarah's tears.

Land for peace? Absurd! The Native Americans lost all their land and most of their lives when they agreed to a deal similar to this one. And they have never been at peace since. Peace in the Middle East? The more active the terrorists became, the less likely Sarah thought it was possible. She wrote the following letter to the women's editor of her favorite newspaper:

Dear Editor:

"As Jewish women, we hold the fate of Klal Yisrael in our hands. For years we have been trying to talk to the Arabs. For years we have been trying to deal with the terrorists. And what · has come of 'it? More lives are being lost and hope fades with the light as the sun sets each day. I don't believe we can co-exist in peace with our enemy but I also don't believe in killing him before he kills us.

What we must do, as Jewish women, and keepers of the home and the faith is to encourage others to lead Torah true lives. We must teach not only our children but also our friends, our neighbors, indeed, all our fellow Jews how important each one of us is and what a difference each one of us can make.

We have the power. But, the power lies not in our weapons. The power lies in our emunah and in our bitachon. Encouraging others to live as the A-mighty wishes us to live is the only way we can bring Moshiach and, in my opinion, Moshiach is the only one who can bring peace to the Middle East.

You may be thinking, "I am only one. What can one do?"

Remember, Hashem is One and together with Him, the spark he breathed into each one of us can change the world.

The secular "powers that be" in Israel are arguing amongst themselves and nothing is being accomplished. The more we give, the more the Arabs want. They will not be satisfied until Israel no longer exists and the Middle East is "Judenrein". We are not about to let that happen. It is up to us, ladies. Continue to daven and lead people in the right path. The more educated we are, the more chance we have for our dreams to be realized and fulfilled in the Promised Land.

"A Zeisen Pesach from my family to yours. Next year in Yerushalayim."

Sincerely,
Sarah Gold

"Next year in Yerushalayim," Sarah thought as she tapped the "send" button on her computer. The words rang truer and clearer in her ears and in her heart than ever before.

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

By Judy Gruenfeld

One never knows when one is going to be bestowed with a special gift. Though I didn't know it at the time, on May 30, 1969, one such gift was given to me. We brought our beautiful baby boy, with his golden hair and sapphire eyes, home from the hospital three days later. He was definitely a gem! But we had no idea just how special this baby was or how our lives would change because of him.

Since I was nervous about being left alone with the baby, my husband had arranged to take a week off from work so he could help me. Funny thing, though. He never heard the baby cry during the night. And we only had a three-room apartment. My husband would give the baby his ten o'clock PM feeding so I could go to bed early. I was then on duty at two o'clock AM, six o'clock AM and ten o'clock AM. Finally, Daddy would meander out of bed at about eleven o'clock AM.

"I appreciate your feeding the baby at ten o'clock at night," I told my husband. "But I need more help. Why did you take this week off, anyway?"

His reply: "I just had a baby, I'm tired."

"Guess what?" I answered. "I'm tired, too! Tomorrow night you're on duty!"

Well, two o'clock rolled around and my husband rolled over in bed so I gave the baby his bottle. However, I would not take "no" for an answer at six o'clock A.M.

My husband stumbled out of bed and wheeled the bassinet into the living room. Ten minutes later, the baby was still crying so I got out of bed to see what the problem was. There was my husband, sitting at the dinette table, eating a bowl of cereal.

"What are you doing?" I gasped. "I thought you were going to help me! Why aren't you feeding the baby?"

His answer: "He has to learn patience."

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I think I did both. Then we had a little talk. By the time our second son came along, Dad was somewhat more attentive.

When we brought Ronnie for his one-month check-up, the doctor noticed that his head tilted to one side and he could not turn it to the-right, so he sent us to an orthopedist. The orthopedist said that Ronnie had a tight muscle in his neck. I would have to exercise his neck until the muscle loosened up and he could turn his head to the right and hold it up straight. Otherwise, he would need surgery. I can't imagine the torture my baby must have felt. But every time I had to turn his head and hold it in that position, I think I cried more than he did. For the next twelve months. I did this exercise with my precious baby seven times a day for five minutes each time. By the time Ronnie was thirteen months old, the orthopedist told me I had done such a wonderful job with the exercises that surgery would not be necessary. Years later I would wonder if these heart rending exercises could cause a child to retreat into his own world.

Out of the first thirteen months of Ronnie's life, only the first month was one of total joy.

From thirteen months to age two-and-a-half, we had another seventeen months of joy as our baby learned to walk, talk and do the 'things babies do. He was, truly, one of the most beautiful babies I had ever seen. His eyes became bluer and his hair looked like spun gold; a halo around my little angel's head. He had a decent vocabulary but did not seem to be able to converse like other children his age. He was able to count from one to ten, he knew the alphabet, husband some colors, and some

shapes. But he did not interact with other children. He remained a solitary figure, engrossed in his own private world. The gnawing in my stomach would not subside. I remembered the feeling I had had the day Ronnie was born. I was so overcome with joy with my new little miracle, I was afraid it would turn out to be only a dream, and my precious baby boy would be taken away from me. He was too good to be true!

By age three, things had not improved very much. Ronnie was able to count to twenty, knew a few more shapes and was finally able to peddle a tricycle. Prior to this, he would not sit on a riding toy and could not propel himself with his feet. But he still was not interacting with other children. And when spoken to or asked a question, Ronnie would repeat what was said to him rather than engage in conversation. The term for this is Echolalia, I would soon learn. He also began spinning objects and flapping his hands; all behaviors that are typical of Autism.

By now I was expecting again and was very concerned about Ronnie and my unborn child. We took Ronnie to a child psychologist who assured us Ronnie was not Autistic and diagnosed him with Minimal Brain Dysfunction; or MBD, today known as ADD or ADHD. I didn't know it at the time but this was my first-helming of what I call "alphabet soup".

I joined the LDA, or Learning Disabilities Association and went to their monthly meetings. While I was getting ready to attend one meeting, Ronnie, age four at the time, asked if he could come with me. When I told him the meeting was just for mommies, he answered,

"No, not just mommies, people, too!"

To this day, no one has ever been able to put me in my place so effectively.

He was so smart and we were so confused. The puzzle pieces did not fit. As each parent at the meeting described his or her child's learning problems I became more and more uncomfortable. They were not describing my child. Their children did not have all the "isms". "Isms" refers to behaviorisms typically associated with Autism such as isolation, spinning objects, flapping hands, echolalia, rocking back and forth, and head banging (which, fortunately, Ronnie did not do). In our heart of hearts we knew what the problem was. We took Ronnie to another child psychologist who confirmed our worst suspicions and diagnosed our little boy with Autism.

We were totally at a Joss as to where to proceed from there. There was no Early Intervention back then and the behaviorisms continued to escalate. I cried myself to sleep most nights and was worried that my second child would also be possessed by the same demon that had stolen my first-born child from me. I had another flashback to the day Ronnie was born, when I thought someone was going to take him away from me. Chills ran down my spine. Did I have some sort of premonition?

We enrolled Ronnie in a private nursery school and kindergarten where he did very well. He then went to a private, special education school where he remained until his graduation at the age of twenty-one. He is now employed at a workshop for people with special needs. He feels he is a productive member of society and is very proud of his accomplishments.

Fast forward to May 9, 2004. It's Mother's Day. I have been a mother for thirty-five years and have come to appreciate and delight in the special gift Hashem gave me all those years ago. The special neshama that was entrusted to my care is the sweetest, gentlest,

most caring human being to walk the face of the earth.

Whenever I wasn't feeling well, which unfortunately, was a little too often, due to my chronic sinusitis, it was my special son who brought me an ice pack to put on my face. When we were walking down the street and we saw a little old lady fall, it was he who ran over and tried to pick her up. He was five years old at the time. When I broke my toe, it was he who wrapped the blankets around me when I started shivering. He was ten.

And when my best friend passed away it was he who tried to console me. It wasn't until the following morning, when I saw how red and swollen his eyes were, that I found out he had been up all night, crying.

"Why didn't you come to us?" I asked him. "You don't have to cry alone."

"You were already upset," Ronnie said. "I didn't want to make you more upset."

Anyway, back to Mother's Day. My husband band gave me flowers, which he normally does. My younger son, Kevin, gave

me a book on diet and exercise, which I desperately need. He knew that if my husband had given it to me, he would have been in serious trouble. I don't know whether or not it was a conspiracy but as Kevin said to me,

"I know you want to eat healthy and lose weight and I know you would never put a son of yours in the "dog house." True enough!

And Ronnie? What did he give me? What he always gives me. A tear in each eye, a smile on my face and bittersweet Yiddishe nachas, this time on a piece of paper that read,

Dear Mom,

I'm sorry that I couldn't think of anything better to give you for mother's day.

That's because I'm out of money. Happy Mother's Day anyway. I love you.

Love,
Ronnie

It took many years to turn my world some

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The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Continued from page 10

what right side up again. And the years have taken their toll. I am definitely not the same person I would have been had I not been entrusted with this special neshama to nurture. Each day still brings new challenges and with it, more opportunities to grow. I have met many wonderful people that T otherwise; would not have been privileged to meet and I

have experienced many miracles that otherwise would have gone unnoticed.

I am very quick to say that if I had the power to change things, I would certainly have chosen a different path for my son and myself. But, knowing now what I didn't know when my world was first turned upside-down, can I really be sure?

An Eggceptional Meal

By Judy Gruenfeld

It's Friday afternoon and needless to say, you are running behind on your Shabbos preparations. The soup is cooking, the chicken is roasting, the kugel is baking, the gefilte fish is cooling off, the cholent is in your crock-pot and most of your salads are done. That is, all except the egg salad. The eggs are still in the pot. Five more minutes and they will be hard-boiled.

The children are due home from school any minute, your husband is at the store picking up all the last minute items you could not get to, the baby has been bathed, and clean sheets and towels have been prepared for your guests. When the children come home they will set the table and put the eggs away. This time you decide to chop them and add a little mayonnaise and onion. The thought of the chopped liver and egg salad has your mouth watering already.

Your younger children arrive home first, followed by your daughter who is in high school and then your yeshiva bochur.

"Children," you announce, "I am going up to prepare myself for Shabbos. When the eggs are done, cool them off in cold water and put them in the refrigerator, please. We will prepare the egg salad tomorrow.

You run upstairs before anyone can find anything else for you to do and get yourself ready. By the time you're done, all the children are bathed and dressed and the table is set. Your company has just arrived and the men have left for shul.

"Not bad," you think. Half an hour later you are all ready to sit down to the evening meal. Naturally, you receive a lot of compliments from everyone. You'd think they hadn't eaten since last Shabbos. Your guests, Mr. and Mrs. Rubin are Ba'al

T'shuvras and you have warned your children not to pry into their past.

"Just be friendly and hospitable" is your usual admonition.

By the time everyone is finished eating, the little ones have already been put to bed. The visiting young couple is very congenial and very interested in everything you and your husband have to say regarding Yiddishkeit. The older children each give a Dvar Torah and follow their younger sisters and brothers and head for bed. You and your husband explain the routine for the next day and all retire for the evening.

The next morning, the men and boys go off to shul, the little ones have their Shabbos cereal, your pre-teenaged daughter is getting the table ready and you are sitting and shmoozing with Mrs. Rubin, who absolutely has to have the recipe for everything she has eaten so far.

"Please allow me to do something," she implores. "You went to so much trouble and I want to feel useful."

"You know what," you reply. "Would you mind preparing the egg salad?"

"Not at all. I'd love to," she responds.

You take the eggs out of the refrigerator, along with the mayonnaise and the onions and place the eggs in a bowl. Add a fork and spoon and she's all set.

Shortly after your guest starts attending to the eggs your pre-schooler comes over and asks her to read him a book. The eggs now take second place to the, child and remain in the bowl.

"No problem," you say. "I'll get to them when I can," at which time you start putting other things on the table. You're busy

with your preparations for about half an hour when the men return home from shul.

"Good Shabbos," they all chime in unison

"Good Shabbos," you reply.

"I'm starving," your husband says.

"Let's make Kiddush and wash so we can eat," he encourages, as he ushers everyone into the dining room. After Kiddush, everyone goes into the kitchen to wash.

As you enter the kitchen, you see your pre-teenaged daughter sitting at the kitchen table, very painstakingly trying to peel the eggs.

You look at her incredulous. "What are you doing?"

She says, "I'm trying to peel the eggs."

You reply, "Mrs. Rubin already peeled them."

The Scrapbook in My Heart

By Judy Gruenfeld

Lots of people have scrapbooks. I have no idea why they are called scrapbooks as they are filled with precious memories, which are anything but scraps. I was looking through mine recently and I came across an article written by Erma Bombeck, a humorist of considerable note, who unfortunately passed away several years ago due to kidney failure.

I do not remember when the article was written, but I would like to share it with you as it has gotten me through many tough days.

Even though we know that everything Hashem does is for the best, sometimes we need to be reminded. I still cannot read the article without crying or getting goose bumps. It is entitled "Mother of Special Child Chosen by G-d" and follows.

"This year nearly 100,000 women will become mothers of handicapped children. Did you ever wonder how mothers of handicapped children are chosen?

Somehow I visualize G-d hovering over earth selecting His instruments for propagation with great care and deliberation. As He observes, He instructs His angels to make notes in a giant ledger.

Armstrong, Beth, son, Special angel, Michael. Forrest, Marjorie, daughter, Special angel, Deborah. Rutledge, Carrie, twins, Special angel, Daniel.

Finally, He passes a name to an angel and smiles; "Give her a handicapped child."

The angel is curious. "Why this one, G-d? She's so happy."

"Exactly," smiles G-d. "Could I give a handicapped child to a mother who does not know laughter? That would be cruel."

"But has she patience?" asks the angel.

"I don't want her to have too much patience or she will drown in a sea of self-pity and despair. Once the shock and resentment wear off, she'll handle it. I watched her today. She has that feeling of self and independence that is so rare and so necessary in a mother. You see, the child I'm going to give her has his own world. She has to make it live in her world and that's not going to be easy."

"But, L-rd, I don't think she even believes in you."

G-d smiles. "No matter. I can fix that. This one is perfect. She has just enough selfishness."

The angel gasps. "Selfishness? Is that virtue?"

G-d nods. "If she can't separate herself from the child occasionally, she'll never survive. Yes, here is a woman whom I will bless with a child less than perfect. She doesn't realize it yet, but she is to be envied. She will never take for granted a 'spoken word'. She will never consider a 'step' ordinary. When her child says "Mamma" for the first time, she will be present at a miracle and know it! When she describes a tree or a sunset to her blind child, she will see it as few people ever see my creations."

"I will permit her to see clearly the things I see...ignorance, cruelty, prejudice...and allow her to rise above them. She will never be alone. I will be at her side every minute of every day of her life because she is doing my work as surely as she is here by my side."

"And what about her Special angel?" asks G-d's helper, his pen poised in midair.

G-d smiles. "A mirror will suffice."

I'll Work It Out

By Judy Gruenfeld

I'm not one for exercising; the most I usually get is when I turn the pages of the book I am currently reading. As a matter of fact, I had joined the gym a couple of years ago but rarely went.

It's just not my thing. But, when I was recently diagnosed with Osteoporosis, I decided I had better start moving around a little more or I would pay the price, and possibly a dear one at that, later on.

The handwriting, as they say, was on the wall. My grandmother had Osteoporosis as does my mother. My mother has fallen several times and has broken her hip; her pelvis, and her thigh and now uses a walker. I was determined that that was not going to happen to me. Not that it's not possible to trip and take a fall, but if there was a way I could lessen the odds of breaking any bones I was determined to take those steps. (Sorry for the pun. No, not really). And besides, everyone who exercises says that you feel terrific after doing so.

Along with eating a healthier diet, with lapses allowed only for the Shabbos afternoon meal, I began taking my medication and joined the gym again. It's been an expensive proposition, so far. I also had to buy clothes to work out in; pants, tops and sneakers. But, I reasoned, I am investing in my health and my future. Certainly, I am worth it.

Needless to say, my husband was delighted. He's been going to the gym for over ten years and definitely feels it makes a difference. He doesn't like the exercise either but he says it makes him feel good.

When I signed up, I was offered a tour of the gym.

"I think I'll wait till the next time I come," I told the lady. "I really have exerted

enough effort today just coming in and joining."

She smiled a knowing smile but said, "You won't get anywhere if you keep putting it off."

I left in a hurry and got back home to the safety of my couch and my book. She may have been right but this lady was not my conscience.

I almost went the next day but I didn't want to face the judge and jury (the lady from yesterday).

The following day, I felt even more embarrassed and guilty, but I decided that if I was going to get myself into shape I had to stop worrying about what others might think or say. After all, I was a grown-up and didn't have to answer to anyone.

Reluctantly, I took my gym clothes and a towel, and drove to the gym. When I entered, I looked for my "friend". When I didn't see her, I heaved a sigh of relief. I went in the locker room, changed my clothes and prepared myself for the inevitable.

I may not have seen her, but she saw me. "Hi," she said as I left the locker room. "I see you've finally come back. I'm glad you did. Are you ready for the tour? You'll see, you'll feel great when you're done exercising."

"Oh, hi," I said. "I guess now is as good a time as any."

After the tour, I decided I would give the treadmill a try. I could walk. I've been doing it for years now. I started off at a slow pace and gradually built it up. After thirty minutes, I had walked a mile. All I could think of was "walk a mile in my shoes". I didn't feel great. I was exhausted and couldn't wait to get back to my couch. I did bring a book with me, though. I don't think

I would have lasted five minutes without it.

It's been two months now since I joined the gym. I go five or six days a week. I am

going three miles in the hour I am there and I still don't like it one bit. But, I will say this. I do feel great when I walk out of there.

Bad Dog!

By Judy Gruenfeld

It was a cold, blustery, January afternoon; the kind of cold that penetrated to the core of your being. The snow hadn't started falling yet but the clouds looked as if they were bulging and would explode any minute. If the forecast proved correct, we would be in for a foot or more of the white, powdery stuff.

I went to the supermarket, along with the rest of Monmouth and Ocean Counties, in order to stock up on food in case we couldn't dig our way out until the next day. My husband had left work early hoping to get home while it was still possible to do so. Normally, he was gone from seven in the morning until eight at night. Perhaps tonight we could all sit down to dinner together as a family instead of eating in shifts.

When he walked in the door at five o'clock, my husband was frozen to the bone. I made us both a cup of hot chocolate after he changed his clothes.

By then the flakes were floating to earth in delicately designed fashion. We sat and sipped our hot drinks and marveled at the contrast between them and the weather conditions outside.

Ronnie, our older son, who was nine at the time, was busy practicing the piano. Kevin, age five, was playing at our next door neighbor's house with his friends.

"I'm going to call Sarah and ask her to send Kevin home," I told my husband. "Maybe we can actually sit down together to a meal on a weekday."

"Sounds like a good idea to me," my husband said.

"Sarah," I said when she picked up the phone, "Can you send Kevin home? My husband just made it back from New York and we've decided to serve supper earlier. Besides, I'd like him home before the blizzard hits."

"No problem," said Sarah. "I'll send him right off."

I began preparing last minute things, putting them on the table, and had lost track of time when I glanced at the clock. It had been twenty minutes since the phone call to my neighbor and Kevin still hadn't returned home. I called her back.

"Sarah," I said, "What happened with Kevin? I'm sure they're having a good time but it's important that he come home now."

"I sent him home as soon as we hung up," Sarah said.

We ran to the front door in a panic. There, on the sidewalk, was my five year old son. He was standing and crying while he held one arm up in the air. In front of him sat a dog that was almost as big as he was.

My husband ran out to rescue our precious child. Finally, safe in my arms, he began to calm down a little.

"Sweetheart," I asked, "What happened?"

With his little body still heaving with sobs and his lips still quivering, he said,

"Sarah gave me two cupcakes; one for me and one for my brother. And the dog ate my brother's cupcake."

The Mechitza

By Judy Gruenfeld

The whirring of the ambulance's siren floated over his head as he drifted in and out of consciousness. The oxygen was helping him breathe but he wished the vice would stop squeezing his chest.

Eighty-nine year old Sam Levine had had an angioplasty seven years ago and was doing fine until last Tuesday, when on his daily two-mile walk, he began experiencing shortness of breath. He chose to ignore the symptoms until, when the pain became more intense, his wife called 9-1-1.

After what seemed like an interminable ride to his wife, they finally arrived at the hospital. Sam was rushed into the emergency room where they immediately began working on him.

The EKG showed that the stents Sam had received earlier were still working properly .but Sam had had a fairly severe heart attack and would need bypass surgery on different arteries, and a pacemaker.

One of the doctors spoke to Mrs. Levine as the other members of the medical team rushed Sam into the operating room.

"You may want to call your family," the doctor told Mrs. Levine. "There's a good chance that your husband will be okay but I think you will need someone to be here with you."

"I'll call my daughter," said Mrs. Levine. "Please, doctor. He has to be okay. I don't know what I would do without him."

"I understand," said Dr. Stem. "We will take good care of him."

It took five rings before her only child answered the phone.

"Donna," said Mrs. Levine, "Dad is in the hospital. He was having chest pains so I called 9-1-1. They're going to operate on him.

They say he needs bypass surgery and a pacemaker."

She then began crying uncontrollably.

"I'll be there in half an hour," said Donna. Her children were grown and out of the house. Her husband was at work. She would call him from the hospital.

Thirty minutes later, mother and daughter were crying in each other's arms.

"I didn't mean to scare you," Shirley Levine said, "But I need you here."

"Mom," said Donna, "This is where I belong. We'll get through this, you'll see. Meantime, I have to call Steve and tell him what is going on."

"I'll leave now," Steve said when he heard the panic in his wife's voice as she filled him in on everything she knew.

"It will take me a while but I will be there as soon as I can.

The trip from New York City to Central Jersey took Steve two hours. When he and Donna had first moved to New Jersey, thirty five years ago, the trip was an hour and a half. He thought that was long. But since the area had been built up, the trip got longer and today, especially, it seemed to last forever.

When he got to the hospital, his father-in-law was still in surgery.

"How are you two holding up? How's Dad?" he asked as he ran to them. Each began crying.

"It's been three hours since they took him into surgery," Donna said

The three of them waited. And waited. An hour later Dr. Stem came out and introduced himself to Donna and Steve.

"Sam is doing very well. He should be fine. We're going to move him to Intensive Care and as soon as he is ready, he will be

moved to a regular room. You can see him soon."

The three began to cry, only this time with tears of relief.

The following day the tube was removed from Sam's throat and two days later he was put into room 302. He got the bed by the window but there wasn't much of a view, just the roof of another section of the hospital. Shortly after Sam was brought to the room, the nurse drew the curtain and his roommate was wheeled in. Yaakov Cohen also had had bypass surgery and was also given a pacemaker.

Though the curtain was still drawn and the men were still weak, they began to converse.

"I'm Sam Levine. How are you doing?" Sam asked his roommate.

"Baruch Hashem, I'm Yaakov Cohen."

"Excuse me," said Sam.

"I said, 'Baruch Hashem,' "Thank G-d," replied Mr. Cohen.

"Oh," said Sam. "I don't hold with much of that religion stuff. When my parents came here they wanted to become Americans. They wanted no part of the backward old country ways. They quickly forgot all that nonsense and followed the American dream. I was able to go to college and become an accountant.

"My daughter is a psychologist and my son-in-law is a lawyer. They have a five bedroom house with a three-car garage. The only disappointment I have is that my grandson, who is thirty-seven, still can't seem to find himself. He's not married and although he has several degrees from several prestigious universities, he hasn't liked any of the jobs he's had. But, still, I am glad to be alive."

"And, why is that?" asked the rabbi. "Why are you glad to be alive? What is your purpose for being here?"

"Purpose?" repeated Sam.

"To make a good life for myself and my family. I told you. We're living out the American dream, from a shtetel in Europe to a five-bedroom house here in this land of opportunity."

"That doesn't seem to have lasted very long," Mr. Cohen said.

"What do you mean?" asked Sam, beginning to get a little annoyed. "What's your point?" Who was this fellow to judge him anyway, just because he goes by a Hebrew name?

"My point is that you say you are worried about your grandson. Your parents came from a shtetel where a Jew knew he was a Jew. You grew up in a home with immigrant parents where, no matter how much you attempted to Americanize yourselves, there was still some Yiddishkeit in your home.

"But, your grandson, your precious grandson, is so far removed from Yiddishkeit that chicken soup and matzoh balls are not enough to give him a sense of self and a feeling of belonging," said the rabbi.

"If you don't mind, perhaps we can continue our conversation later. I'm getting a little tired and I think I could use a nap before dinner."

"That sounds like a good idea," Sam said in agreement, the first thing his roommate said with which he fully agreed. But as he started drifting off, some of his words reverberated in his head.

Sam was very tired and slept long and soundly. When he awoke, the curtain was open and the other bed had clean sheets on it. His wife and daughter, who were visiting him, told Sam that the other gentleman had passed away in his sleep.

Sam was upset. He found that he had wanted to continue his conversation with him. Some of what he had said seemed to ring true

in his ears. Though he had never seen him; Sam felt he would somehow have an impact on his life.

"Here comes your dinner," said Shirley. "Are you hungry?"

"I think I have a little appetite," said Sam. He opened the cover to his dinner. It

looked halfway decent. The slip of paper said it was roast pork. He stared at the meat for a while and then rang for the nurse.

"I'd like a kosher meal, please," Sam said when she entered his room.

Third Family Member or Fifth Wheel

By Judy Gruenfeld

The day has finally arrived. You've married off your last child. Empty nest syndrome? I don't think so! Not as long as you have your disabled child at home. Your other children have left with your blessing but, unfortunately, none live locally. They are all devoted to you and their disabled sibling but they all have their own lives now. They visit when they can, which is your greatest pleasure. They even offer to take their disabled sibling for Shabbos now and then to give you a little break. But you don't want to impose too often. After all, they have their own hectic schedules and their own children to care for.

Life must, and does, indeed, go on; even though there is no one to stay at home with your adult child when you are invited to friends and family. A shiur, no problem! If it's for women, Dad stays home. If it's for men, Mom stays home. But when you're invited as a couple what do you do?

My son is capable of staying home alone for a while. We don't go far and we don't stay long, but we go. Sometimes I think it would be easier if he were lower functioning. It would be a black and white issue. Though it might be hard, you find someone who is willing to "baby-sit." You are very careful with whom you leave your son or daughter and, of course, there are many people who cannot care for a disabled person. But you don't have to decide whether or not to leave him or her alone. Either you get a sitter, or you don't go. Or, you bring him with you, or one of you stays home. I am in no way implying that if your child is lower functioning you have fewer problems, only that there are fewer "gray" areas.

I am very uncomfortable when we leave my son home alone. Sometimes I don't

know where I end and he begins. It is almost as if we were still connected by the umbilical cord. Whenever something happens, the first thought that pops into my head is, "What will I do with Ronnie?" He must be looked after before I can do anything else. Not so, my husband. Though he loves our son he feels I am "making myself crazy with worry" as he puts it. Unfortunately, there is what to worry about.

If someone knocks on the door Ronnie will open it. This is not very comforting to me when I am not home.

There was one occasion when my husband had gone to a shiur. I went upstairs to take a shower and Ronnie was busy with his computer. When I got out of the shower I heard voices downstairs. I decided to wait for the other person to leave before going downstairs. They continued to talk. She didn't leave. By the time I got dressed and went downstairs, Ronnie was gone, but the young lady was still standing in my foyer.

"Can I help you?" I asked.

"Was that your son?" she asked.

"Yes", I said. "What is this all about"?

"Well", the young lady continued, "I'm from an agency that protects the natural environment. I'm collecting money to keep our water pure and clean. Your son just went upstairs to get me a check".

"Did he?" I responded. "He doesn't have a check. My son is developmentally disabled. You didn't notice anything different about him"?

"No", she said. "I was just explaining what our agency does. I'm really sorry".

"No problem" I told her, "I have contributed to your agency previously and I will give you the check."

After I did she said thank you and left.

Naturally, I went up to my son's room where I found him already in pajamas and snuggled comfortably under the covers.

"Ronnie," I began, "I know you're not sleeping and I want some answers."

One eye peeked out from under the blanket.

"Do you know why that young lady was here?" I continued, "and why did you open the door when you don't know her?"

"Weeell", he began as he usually does. "She was here to collect money for politics."

"What was her political cause?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he answered.

"How much money did she ask you for?"

"Fifteen dollars."

"Why did you tell her you would give her the money and then go up to bed?"

"Weeell," he said again. "I didn't come back downstairs because I don't have fifteen dollars."

"Why didn't you tell her that?"

"I don't know," I was told again.

"What do we tell you about opening the door to strangers?"

"Not to," he correctly replied.

"Then why did you let her in?" I continued the interrogation.

"I don't know."

At this point we were going in circles and I was getting dizzy. I walked out of Ronnie's room before I started screaming at him. Ever frustrated, I thought,

"What has to happen before he learns not to open the door"? I wanted to put the whole incident behind me. But my son's very life could be at risk. To say it is difficult to leave him at home alone would not begin to explain my trepidation and angst.

There are times when it is appropriate for Ronnie to accompany us and times when it is not. For Shabbos, of course, he comes. For a family simcha, he also comes. But if we are invited to a Melava Malka, for instance, my husband insists that we go alone. I understand his point of view. We usually sit around a large table for several hours. My son cannot sit that long and we don't usually leave until about twelve or one o'clock in the morning, depending on when Shabbos ends. Ronnie likes to be in bed by ten o'clock. When he is tired he gets nudgadik and the autistic behaviors reappear. I enjoy an evening out with my husband and though I love my son with all my heart, I need a break from him at times.

This is not an issue that can be decided once and then forgotten but must be considered as each situation arises. We always have our cell phone so Ronnie can call us whenever he needs to. But one thing is certain. No matter where I am, he is always "with me". My husband keeps telling me to try and let go but I know I never will. Maybe I can learn to loosen up a little. And that's a big "maybe."

All for the Cause

By Judy Gruenfeld

During the past two years, I have written about many different topics, some of which may have made you laugh, some, cry and some, I hope, think. I keep coming back to the one topic, which is particularly close to home, and that is the issue of people with developmental disabilities and their families. I have written about my difficulties and my joyous moments with my son and about my difficulties negotiating "the system."

Two weeks ago there was an opportunity for our voices to be heard in testimonials, at various locations in New Jersey. -These testimony opportunities were put together by a coalition of organizations that are concerned about providing support for families who have a developmentally disabled member living at home.

Following is the testimony I gave, some of which comes from former articles I have written. Please call the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities at (609) 292-3325 for more information on the testimonies. It is too late to attend one of these testimonials but you can mail your testimony to: Budget Testimony, New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, P.O. Box 700, Trenton, N.J., 08625-071 or fax it to (609) 292-7114. I also urge you write to our legislators. The Council can help you with names and addresses here, too. I truly believe that together we really can make a difference.

New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities

Budget Testimony

May, 2006

My name is Judy Gruenfeld. I have been living in Jackson Township, which is in Ocean County, with my husband, Norman, and son Ronald, age 36, who is Autistic, for the

past thirty-five years. Needless to say, we are not getting any younger. I am almost sixty-one and my husband is sixty-two.

I am also a Social Worker who has worked in the disabilities field for fourteen years. So I've seen the picture from both angles, neither of which is pretty. I feel like Alice falling down an endless hole with no resolution in sight.

The system is playing football with us and with our children. And we are the football, being passed from one organization to another. We're all screaming for help and no one, not the owners, not the managers, not the coaches, is willing to take "time out" and really listen to us.

An article in the "Barrier Free Press" dated Fall, 2005, reads as follows,

"The Commission on the Handicapped and the Office for the Disabled have officially changed their names. The Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders has adopted a resolution acknowledging the official name change of both the Commission and the office. The new names, The Commission for Individuals with Disabilities and the Office for Individuals with Disabilities reflect Ocean County's commitment to "People First" language.

'In March of 1993, Ocean County adopted a resolution supporting "people first" language and its utilization in an effort to respect individuals living with disabilities. The Commission revisited the "people first" language issue in reflecting upon the Commission for the Handicapped and the Office for the Disabled names. Individuals serving as Commissioners emphasized the importance that language and perceptions play in society. Ultimately, the Commission

researched the issue further and requested the Board of Chosen Freeholders consider the name change. "People first" language declares that we recognize a disability as "what a person has, not what a person is." Furthermore, "people first" language puts the person before the disability and encourages us to move away from ago old stereotypes."

In the past thirteen years, when the consciousness of the people was supposedly being raised, and sensitivity to individuals with disabilities was supposedly being heightened, services to these very same individuals were cut back.

Sixty-five percent of the developmentally disabled population resides at home with family members, often aging parents, who find it difficult enough to care for themselves, much less care for a family member with developmental disabilities. And, it is much more difficult to care for an adult than for a child, whether physically or mentally challenged. Yet, only nine percent of monies allotted for the disabled population go to those who reside at home.

On the other hand, more money was allotted to build or purchase more group homes but there were no additional funds allocated to run them. What has happened to these group homes? What has happened to the money set aside for them?

In addition, services to those residing at home have been drastically cut. Five years ago my husband and I decided to go on a well-deserved vacation; the first real vacation since we had been married. I called DDD, the first entry on my alphabet soup list. (I, for one, have had an overdose of alphabet soup for the soul). I asked to speak to my son's case manager, or CM. When I was put through I requested respite care in my home for my son while we were away. This worked out very well. The woman who stayed with my son was

kind and caring and made it easy for us to be away for an entire week, knowing that our son was well cared for.

Last year my husband and I decided we needed to get away again. Again I called my sons CM at DDD (forgive the second helping of alphabet soup) and requested in home respite care.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Gruenfeld" was the response I received, "but we no longer provide those services."

I was stunned! I didn't know what to say. "What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to get away for a while? The toll of taking care of an adult child with special needs is beginning to be severely felt by my husband and myself. We're not getting any younger. We desperately need a vacation. Where are the services that were promised to those of us who choose (considering there are no group home spots available) to keep our sons and daughters at home?

The case manager also did not know what to say. "There are no funds available, Mrs. Gruenfeld. I'm sorry."

That was it! "I'm sorry." No prospects of incoming funds. No promise of things getting better. Just, "I'm sorry." Well, I'm sorry, too! I'm sorry just won't do any more!

The only other option would be to have my son stay in a group home during the week we were away. As my son had never been in a group home, I was unwilling to do this.

"What happened to all the services that were promised to families with a developmentally disabled member living at home?" I asked. "I thought our legislators promised us things would get better. This is definitely not better! I'm getting older and it will be increasingly difficult for me to care for my son. We need more services, not fewer."

"Besides the money," the case manager said; "there aren't any people who want to work as in home respite care providers."

"Of course not," I retorted. "We're back to the bottom line. How do you expect people to work if they aren't paid a decent living wage?"

"I empathize with you," she said, "but there is nothing I can do."

"And what about permanent group home placement? I was told, when my son was thirty; the ball would start rolling in about five years. He is now thirty-six. And nothing has been done."

"Well," the case manager hesitated. "The way things are going now, I wouldn't count on a permanent group home spot for another ten years, at least. Bottom line, again. There is no money to Build or buy any new group homes."

By this time I didn't know if I was more exhausted or more frustrated. So, I thanked her politely for her time and patience, told her I would arrange for family members to look after my son while we were away and hung up the phone. I was about to start banging my head against the wall but I quickly realized I had just done that. I definitely had the headache to prove it.

Fortunately, other family members were able to pitch in and took turns staying with my son and we went on our much-needed vacation. I am very fortunate in that my parents, though well into their eighties, were able to supervise my son for a few days. For the remainder of the week, my younger son was able to take a few days off from work to stay with his brother. But, Grandma and

Grandpa won't be able to do this much longer and my other son may not always have the flexibility to take a few days off from work to stay with his brother.

As I stated in the beginning, I am all for political correctness and for "typical" people being sensitive to those with special needs. We can plant the seeds of political correctness. But, in my opinion, we are planting them in sand. I think we need to get our priorities straight. One can say, "a disabled person" or "a person with a disability" but, if we do not have the proper garden, with the necessary tools available to assist and nurture that person, he or she will not have the opportunity to bloom or to blossom. And care givers will soon need care themselves, putting an additional strain on "The System."

Society in general, and those of you in government particularly, needs to rethink its priorities, especially those concerning the value of human life. Instead of turning a blind eye towards excessive spending by special interest groups and allocating funds to those with the loudest voices and the most votes, perhaps the powers that be ought to take a long, hard look at their budgets and at their consciences. Cutting funding to those who cannot speak for themselves and who, for the most part, do not vote, is no way to run a country, or a state. We need to be sure all 'of our citizens, including those with special needs and their families, have access to dignified, meaningful lives, with needed services available, in order to encourage and facilitate independence, in the least restrictive environment possible. And we need to do it now!

It's A Miracle

By Judy Gruenfeld

Many of us complain today because we are not witness to the open miracles that our forebears were privileged to see. We question Hashem and wonder why certain things occur, not realizing that it is we who have turned a blind eye towards these miracles.

Though I was raised in a totally secular home, the Pintele Yid remained a smoldering spark during my youth to be fully ignited when I reached adulthood. I don't know if it is in spite of my secular upbringing or because of it that I am very sensitive to the wonders of the world around me.

There is an old expression. "Some things need to be seen in order to be believed." I have heard a new take on this old expression. "Some things need to be believed in order to be seen." Several things have happened in my daily life that I feel not only uphold this the theory but have also allowed me to personally experience Hashem's miracles.

The first incident occurred about ten years ago. I had been buying only kosher meat for about five years prior to the incident although my husband would not allow me to kasher the kitchen at that time. It was my father's birthday. He happens to like a particular cut of beef that is difficult to get in its kosher form.

I decided that, regardless, I would prepare this dish for my father. When I took the meat out of the oven, it looked very soft and very juicy. I could not resist temptation and I took a bite of this extremely tender cut and broke my tooth! The meat was so soft that I didn't need a knife to cut it but, nonetheless, my tooth broke! A front tooth! A coincidence? Somehow, I don't think so. I have been very careful with my kashrus since

then. The false tooth stares at me in the mirror every time I put on lipstick.

The second incident, or incidents, occurred a year later. It was my niece's birthday and I decided to take her shopping for a present. So, on that frosty, winter, Saturday morning I got in my car and headed out to pick up my niece. I never made it to her house. I skidded on a small patch of ice, drove into a telephone pole and totaled my car. I was very lucky. Although I did not come away from the accident unscathed, I only broke one bone in my hand.

The message was clear. Especially since the previous Friday night my son's car ended up in a ditch, also totaled. Thank G-d, my son did not have a scratch on him.

The Saturday after my accident, my husband also skidded into a pole. His car was also totaled but he escaped with only facial bruises from the air bag.

What are the odds that, out of seven days of the week, my car, my son's car and my husband's car would all be totaled on Shabbos? And what are the odds that out of three totaled cars, there would be only one broken bone and one bruised face?

I have not been in a car on Shabbos ever since.

The last incident occurred just last week. I went to throw something in the garbage and saw a steak knife in there. A strong, solid, stainless steel steak knife, folded in half like a piece of paper.

"What did you try to cut?" I asked my husband.

"It wasn't me," he said.

"I guess we'll have to wait until Ronnie comes home from his workshop before we know what happened," I said.

At three-thirty my son walked in the door.

"Hey, Ron," I said. "How did you break the steak knife?"

"I tried to cut something," he replied.

"That much I know. What did you try to cut?"

"A piece of cheese," he said.

Now that my milchig and fleishig are properly separated in my kitchen, I asked,

"You tried to cut a piece of cheese with a steak knife?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Ronnie," I said. "Why would you use a fleishig knife to cut a piece of cheese? And how could a steak knife break while cutting a piece of cheese?"

"I don't know," he said.

I grew silent for a moment as I let the reality of what had happened sink in. When I regained my composure, I said,

"We had a miracle happen right here in our kitchen! Hashem did not want you to cut the cheese with that knife so He caused the knife to break. I'm glad it was the knife and not your tooth."

Ronnie smiled. I could see his pure neshama glowing in his eyes.

Thank you, Hashem, for allowing me to witness your miracles firsthand. Thank you for bringing me to where I am today, and thank you for paying attention to the small details as well as the big ones.

The Yolk's on Me

By Judy Gruenfeld

Aside from the fact that we are commanded to eat only kosher food, what is one to believe about one's diet with regard to 'nutrition and health? With the myriad of diets now on the market claiming to slim you down, build you up, take off weight, put on muscle, lower your cholesterol and blood pressure, increase the length and quality of your life, and decrease our chances of contracting deadly diseases, what is one to do?

Since cholesterol is a major factor regarding heart disease, everyone seems to be watching his or her cholesterol level. One day margarine is considered better than butter. The next day margarine is no good because it contains trans fats. One day you're told to count calories. The next day you're told to count carbs. One diet espouses high fat, low carb. Another diet espouses low fat, high carb. Yet another stresses the glycemic index. The list is endless. Red meat is out. Chicken and fish are in. And eggs! Ah, the incredible, edible egg! I can think of a dozen reasons to support their ingestion and a dozen reasons to avoid them. Perhaps we should hard boil them and learn to juggle. (Now, there's a good exercise!) Every day, results from one study come out and contradict the results of a previous study.

I refuse to have my cholesterol checked. (Although I'm not advocating that anyone else follow suit). If not for an incident with my aunt when I was a child, I probably would have the lowest cholesterol level imaginable. I only ate the egg whites. This was okay with my mother. I have no idea what she did with the yolks but they never ended up on my plate. Then I visited my cousin for a couple of days. I had slept over the night before and was ready for breakfast.

What would you like? asked my aunt. An egg, I told her.

Okay, she said. But I am not going to waste the yolk (she knew my eating habits). I'll be happy to make you an egg but only if you eat the whole thing.

This lady meant business! I was only five at the time so, naturally, I acquiesced. From then on, I ate the whole egg. I'm thinking of calling my aunt and telling her that she is to blame if my cholesterol level is high, which is one of the reasons I won't go for testing. She still means business! She's eighty-seven, smart, slim, feisty, -exercises every day and is in better shape than I am. And she eats the whole egg!

Because exercise also plays a major role in maintaining optimum levels of health and fitness, I recently joined a gym. You know, one of those places for older women who aren't in such great shape. I was talked into the lifetime plan. Join once (only one membership fee) and you're set for life, which they claim will be longer and of much better quality because you are working out. And, you can work out at any of their locations. So, even if you're on vacation, you can remain in shape. (No, being on vacation does not mean that it is okay to eat what you want and take a vacation from your exercise regimen.)

They automatically withdraw money from my checking account every month. (If the pounds would only disappear as quickly and as easily as the dollars). This is so I don't have to bother to remember to pay them. I guess they really are looking out for me. There's one bill I don't have to worry about. So, since I pay every month, I go. Do I like it? No. But I go. And, because I'm signed up for life, it has now become part of my daily

routine. Unless I get a note from my doctor stating that I cannot exercise for any particular reason, they will continue to withdraw money from my checking account on a monthly basis. It really does feel good. When I stop. Sort of like banging your head against the wall.

When I told my aunt I joined a gym, she said the exercise would lower my cholesterol.

What Did You Say, Dear?

By Judy Gruenfeld

Is the agony of a bitter heart worth the ecstasy of revenge? Is being miserable a price you are willing to pay for being right?

Do you ever have disagreements with your spouse? I didn't think so. Neither do I. Or at least I didn't. That is, until he developed an opinion of his own.

We used to get along fine. Shalom bayis was always a priority, as it should be. I would tell him what to do and he would do it, eventually. But lately, things have changed. He seems to feel that with advancing age he is entitled to his own opinion. Even if it disagrees with mine.

Now, I wouldn't say that I am a demanding person. I'm just used to getting my own way.

As an only child, I was doted on by my parents and when we got married my husband took over where they left off.

"Spoiled rotten", I bet you're thinking. But, you'd be wrong. My needs were always met but I didn't always get everything I wanted.

So, you can imagine my shock when my husband suddenly decided that he no longer wanted carpet on the living room floor.

"What's wrong with the carpet?" I asked.

"It's old and it needs to be replaced," he replied.

"So, we'll buy new carpet," I said.

"But, I don't want new carpet", he insisted. "I want a wood laminate floor. It's the "in" thing."

"The floor will be cold," I insisted. "You know I don't like to wear shoes. And, since when are you concerned about what's 'in'? "You've been wearing the same Shabbos shoes for the past twenty years."

"It won't be cold," insisted my husband. "I looked into it. The salesman said the laminate retains warmth."

"What salesman?" I inquired. "You went shopping for something for the house without me!"

"It's not as if I bought anything," my husband defended himself. "I only went looking."

"You usually ask me to go and pick something out," I said, astonished.

"I know," he said. "But this time I knew exactly what I wanted so I checked it out. Come with me to the store. I'm sure you will like it."

"Okay," I acquiesced.

When we arrived at the store my husband took me over to the salesman who had waited on him previously and introduced me.

"Your husband has excellent taste," offered the salesman.

"I already know that," I thought to myself. "After all, he picked me, didn't he!"

"Follow me," he said. "I'll show you the floor."

I did as I was told.

"Well, what do you think?" asked my husband.

"It's very nice," I responded. "But are you sure you wouldn't rather get another carpet?"

"No," he insisted, uncharacteristically. "I like the wood look and I want this floor. I promise your feet won't get cold."

Well, due to my husband's newfound assertiveness, I found I had no choice but to let him have his way. We bought the wood laminate floor. It looks great, but that's not the best part. Did you know that, without shoes

on; you can slide all the way across the floor?
The children think we've lost it. They have no

idea what we've found again.

Fruma Shaindel

By Judy Gruenfeld

Rivka woke with a start. She was crying and couldn't catch her breath.

"What's the matter?" Avrom, her husband asked. "Are you feeling okay? What's wrong?"

"I just had a terrible dream," answered Rivka, visibly shaken.

Avrom tried to comfort his wife. "It's all right," he said. "It's just a dream. Are you and the baby okay?"

Rivka had given birth to a beautiful baby girl the previous day. They named her Tova.

"The baby is fine, Baruch Hashem. But, I think I made a terrible mistake. My mother came to me in my dream and asked me why I didn't name the baby after her."

"Avrom," she continued. "Since I left Russia, I haven't seen nor communicated with my family. I don't know if my mother is still alive or not. How could I have named the baby after her, not knowing? But, if she is niftar, how could I not?"

"Rivkie," soothed Avrom, "You did the only thing you could possibly do. Your mother will have a name, I promise. If not in this generation, surely in the next."

Rivka was somewhat comforted by her husband's words, but the nagging feeling never left her. She adored her baby and gave her all the love a mother could give but she remained unsettled.

Twenty months later Rivka gave birth to another baby girl. This baby, they named Chaya Goldie. And again Rivka was plagued by nightmares. Her mother continued to come to her in her dreams and asked Rivka why, this time, having been given a second chance, she did not name the baby after her. Rivka felt even guiltier. She had had the chance to right a

wrong but, for whatever reason, chose not to do so.

Avrom, again, was very understanding and patient with his wife. "Rivkala," he soothed, we still do not know if your mother is deceased. You can't take the chance and name a baby after her. You will see. One day, we will have our little Shaindel and she will make us all very proud."

Only Avrom's gentle understanding could comfort Rivka who went on, with her husband at her side, to raise Tova and Chaya Goldie to be lovely, young, Jewish women.

Tova and Chaya Goldie got married a week apart. Two and a half years later Tova gave birth to a baby girl. Since Rivka was the youngest of eight children, it was assumed that Rivka's mother, Shaindel, had long since passed away. Tova named her baby Shaindel Basya. Needless to say, Rivka was very pleased, and her pain, somewhat assuaged.

A year and a half after Shaindel Basya was born, Chaya Goldie also gave birth to a baby girl. Naturally, Chaya Goldie wanted to name her baby Shaindel, after her mother's mother, but Chaya Goldie's father-in-law had other ideas.

Chaya Goldie's father-in-law, Getzel, had been orphaned of his father when he was three years old. His first-born son, Avrom Yankel, Chaya Goldie's husband, was naturally named I after the grandfather he never knew. Getzel's mother, Fruma Raizel, was a single parent in late nineteenth century Odessa, who raised her three children in dire poverty, never remarrying.

When Getzel came to visit his first grandchild in the hospital, his pride and his emotions overtook him. A very strong-willed

and determined man, he broke down and cried. Finally, there would be someone to name after his beloved mother, Fruma Raizel.

"Goldie," Yankel said when they were finally alone. "We have a problem."

Goldie's face blanched. "What's the matter? Is there something wrong with the baby?"

"No, no, nothing like that," he reassured.

"You scared me half to death!" Goldie said. "What could possibly put such a worried look on your face?"

"Well," Yankel stalled. "I know you promised your mother that if the baby was a girl, we would name her after her mother, but my father has different ideas. He wants the baby to have both his mother's names. And, he figures that since your grandmother already has a name, it would only be fair that we name our baby Fruma Raizel."

"But, that's not fair! It would break my mother's heart if we did not give our daughter her mother's name. Yankel, please, talk to your father. Try to make him understand. We will use one of his mother's names. But both! That's just too much to ask!"

"I will try," Yankel said to his wife.'

And, true to his word, he did try. But Getzel would not concede. "There is only one name that can be given to that child and that name is Fruma Raizel! I will not hear of anything else!"

Goldie and Yankel were distraught. They did not know what to do. They did not want to hurt Yankel's father nor did they want to hurt Chaya Goldie's mother, but a decision had to be made. Shabbos was approaching and the child would have to be given a proper name in Shul.

Yankel spoke to his father. "Papa, please understand. We are trying to do what is right for everyone. We have decided to name the baby Fruma Shaindel. Goldie's father and I are going to shul on Shabbos and we would like you to join us." But, Getzel would not look at his son, nor would he speak to him.

Yankel left, dejected, but knowing in his heart he and Goldie had done the right thing.

On Shabbos, father and grandfather went to shul together to welcome a new Jewish daughter to Klal Yisrael. Getzel's absence was palpable but Yankel was powerless to change his father's mind. He had tried his best.

When Shachris was over and Yankel and Avrom turned to leave the shul, they noticed a familiar face sitting in the last row.

"Papa," cried Yankel as they embraced.

"I'm sorry, my son," said Getzel. "We must not let a new life tear us apart. She is bringing two families together. Our Fruma Shaindel will give us all much nachas.

This is my story, and I am sticking to it. How did my mother get Judy from Fruma Shaindel? That, dear reader, is another story.

The Lung and the Shirt Of It

By Judy Gruenfeld

Monday night Ronnie was fine. He shut down his computer at 10:00 and crawled in between the soft flannel sheet and his fluffy down comforter. Within minutes he was suspended between reality and the place where anything is possible and all dreams come true. The night passed uneventfully.

My alarm went off at 6:45 AM on Tuesday, fifteen minutes after Ronnie's was set to go off. It was only after I washed *Nagel Vasse* that I noticed the absence of any noise or movement coming from the direction of my son's room. When I went to check on him, Ronnie was still sound asleep. I gently prodded.

Ronnie, it's time to get up. You'll be late for your workshop.

He jumped out of bed with the aplomb of an airplane beginning its ascent off the ground.

Oh, I forgot to set my clock! he said with alarm.

No problem, I reassured him. There's plenty of time for you to get done.

He completed his morning rituals, got dressed, and came downstairs for breakfast.

You don't look so good, I said as I saw the color of my son's face. Do you feel all right? Maybe you should stay home from work.

I'm fine, he reassured me. I can go to work.

Trusting his judgment, as Ronnie, even as a child, would tell me when he didn't feel well, I said,

Okay, then you'd better get done. There's not much time left.

Ronnie hurriedly ate his breakfast, made his lunch and was ready to leave the house at the same time I was. The workshop

van arrived, and sped away just as quickly, after Ronnie had gotten in. I, then, left for my job.

At 10:00 I received a call from Ronnie's case manager at the workshop.

Ronnie doesn't look very well; the voice on the other end of the phone said. Can you come and pick him up?

Sure, I'll be right there, I told the voice.

Fortunately, I have a flexible job and my supervisor understands that I have a son with special needs. So, off I went to pick up my child, long after such actions should be necessary.

When I arrived at the workshop, my son was waiting for me, coat on and lunch bag in hand. His face was ashen and his lips were the color of his computer screen. I put my hand on his forehead. He was burning up.

I thanked his supervisor for calling me and I drove my son home. Thermometer in hand, or in mouth, I should say, I took his temperature. 103.7. Quite high for an adult!

Does anything hurt you? I asked my son. Your head? Your throat? Your stomach? Your muscles, in general?

No, no, no, no, no, he said.

I gave him some Tylenol, a sports bottle mixed with orange juice and water, and told him we would wait for any symptoms to appear. By evening his fever had gone down to 102.8 but he still was not complaining of any symptoms.

If you still have a fever tomorrow, I will take you to the doctor, I said.

I don't feel like going to the doctor, he said. Why can't the doctor come here, instead?

An excellent question, I told my son. But your about fifty years too late.

Let's compromise, he said. If I still have a fever the day after tomorrow, I'll go to the doctor.

Sorry, no deal, I told my disappointed son. If you still have a fever tomorrow, we can't wait another day. You will have to go to the doctor.

He was too tired to argue and began drifting off to sleep before he could come up with another counter proposal.

The following morning, Wednesday, his temperature was 102.5. I called the doctor and was given an appointment for 1:45 that afternoon.

The doctor put the stethoscope inside the front of Ronnie's shirt and asked him to breathe. He then put the stethoscope inside the back of Ronnie's shirt and told him to breathe deeply through his mouth, at which point Ronnie started coughing and turning red. The doctor looked concerned.

Take him for a chest x-ray, (want to see what is going on with his lungs.

Well go as soon as we leave here, I said, my face beginning to register the same look of concern.

We went right over to the hospital and after several minutes, the technician called Ronnie in to be x-rayed.

While waiting right outside the x-ray room, I heard the technician telling Ronnie to hold his breath while he took each x-ray. By the time the three x-rays were taken, Ronnie was coughing and turning red. His chest sounded congested, as did his head.

Please have a seat in the waiting room, the technician said, also with a concerned look on his face. The doctor will probably want to speak with you after he reads the x-rays.

We went to the waiting room and sat down, many unpleasant thoughts swimming around in my head. Two minutes later, the technician came out.

You can go home, now, he said.

What about the doctor? I questioned. You said he would want to speak with me.

If he were overly concerned, he would admit your son to the hospital, the technician made a weak attempt to reassure me. He didn't succeed. Here is a prescription for an antibiotic. Your doctor will call you tomorrow with the results of the x-ray.

I brought my son home, told him to go to bed, and then went to fill the prescription. I gave him his first dose when I returned. His fever still raged that day and the next as I anxiously waited for the phone call from the doctor.

Finally, it came. The nurse told me my son had Pneumonia, which, due to the concerned looks on the doctor's and the technician's faces, did not surprise me. But, thank G-d, it was not a severe case.

When I went to tell Ronnie, he became very perplexed.

Am I going to die? he asked. I know people die from Pneumonia.

No. You're not going to die, I reassured him. Only old, weak people who can't fight off the Pneumonia die from it. You're young and strong. You'll be just fine. But you have to stay home and do as I tell you until you get another chest x-ray next Wednesday to see if your lungs have cleared up.

Can I go to the wedding on Sunday? he asked with eager anticipation, knowing, I think, what my answer would be. A dear friend's daughter was to be married in three days.

I'm afraid not. I don't want you doing anything until you get the chest x-ray on Wednesday. We want to be sure your lungs have cleared up. Pneumonia is serious and I don't want you to resume your normal activities until we are sure you are all better.

Ronnie didn't have a cold that turned into bronchitis. He wasn't coughing and he wasn't sneezing. Monday night when he went to bed he was fine. Tuesday morning he woke up with Pneumonia. Pretty scary, to say the least! We, as parents, cannot take anything for granted. We must be ever so vigilant with the precious lives that have been entrusted to us.

And, poor Ronnie! When I stop feeling sorry for myself, my heart really goes out to

him. He is so good and deserves pleasure in life just as we all do. So, since it was too late for my friends to call the caterer and cancel his dinner, we brought it home for him. As he ate his meal, we told him all about the wedding; the music, the dancing, the food, and how everyone missed him. As he ate, he smiled. He was definitely feeling better and so was I.

My Husband's PGPS or Personal Global Positioning System

By Judy Gruenfeld

"How do you get to Airport Road?" my husband asked, car keys already in hand.

"Why do you have to go to Airport road?" I asked in return.

"Fed Ex tried to deliver a package this morning. Obviously, neither one of us was here to sign for it, so I have to go to their office on Airport Road to pick it up."

"Why don't you just wait until tomorrow," I said looking at the card the Fed Ex mail deliverer had left. "It says here they will attempt to make another delivery then."

"I won't be here tomorrow morning either, will you?"

"No," I said.

"Well, then I have to go pick it up this evening," my husband said.

"Okay."

So, how do you get to Airport Road?" my husband repeated.

"There are two ways," I said. "You can take Route 9 to Route 70. Take the jughandle onto 70. Continue on Route 70 until you get to Airport Road and take that jughandle. Then you make a left into the first shopping center."

"What's the other way?" my husband asked.

"I think you should go that way," I said. "It's easier. The other way may be shorter, but it's more complicated."

"Give me the other directions, anyway. Then I can decide which way I want to go."

"Okay," I said. "You take Clifton Avenue to New Hampshire Avenue. You know, where the ball park is. Make a right onto New Hampshire."

"In the ball park?" he asked.

"Not even close," I said. "Pay attention."

"You tum on to New Hampshire. Make sure you're not in the ball park. Then go two or three traffic lights to Oak Street. Make a left into Oak Street. Go to the end and make a right onto Airport Road. Right before you hit Route 70, you will make a right into the shopping center."

"It's in a shopping center?"

"What's the difference?" I yelled.

"Calm down," my husband said. "That doesn't sound so complicated. "I think I'll try that way."

"I really think, with your sense of direction, you'd be better off taking Route 9."

"No," said my husband. "How lost can I get?"

"You're asking me? I've been riding around in the car with you for forty years and we still don't know where we're going. You know how lost you can get."

"It took Moshe Rabeinu forty years to take the Jewish people through the desert," he said. "I'm taking Clifton Avenue."

"Good luck," I said as my husband left the house.

Fifteen minutes later the phone rang. I had just gotten hooked up to caller ID the week before. Reluctantly, I picked up the phone. "Congratulations. You exceeded my expectations."

"I'm lost," he said. "I couldn't find Oak Street."

"No kidding. Where are you now?"

"New Hampshire and Route 70."

"You passed Oak Street. You have to tum around."

"Okay, one minute."
Silence,
"Okay, I turned around."
"Go slowly. You should see Oak Street soon."
Silence.
"Well?" I asked.
"I still can't find Oak Street. I think I'm almost back to Clifton Avenue."
"You went too far, again. You need to turn around."
"Okay, one minute."
Silence.
"Okay I turned around. Can't you help me in?"
"Why didn't you take Route 9?"
"I thought this way would be easier."
"I told you 'you'd be better off with Route 9."
"Well, I'm on New Hampshire now. Can't you just tell me what to do?"

"Okay. I give up. Continue on New Hampshire and tell me when you're almost at Route 70.
Silence.
"I'm approaching Route 70," my husband said.
"Make a right when you get there."
"Okay. One minute."
Silence.
"I'm on Route 70. What do I do now?"
"Let me know when you see a gas station."
"Okay."
Silence.
"I see a gas station coming up."
"Very good. When you get there, pull in and ask for directions."
"Very funny," my husband said. "By the way, did you see my briefcase?"

Clearing Out the Cobwebs

By Judy Gruenfeld

Why is the-sky blue? Why do the stars only come out at night? If we dig a big enough hole in the ground, will we get to China?

I'm sure there isn't a parent around who hasn't had to face these questions at one time or another. I used to love to turn the tables around on my children when they were little and ask them thought provoking questions. As I looked into their eyes, I could see the wheels turning in their heads as they tried to make sense of what had been laid out before them.

As they got older, the questions posed were, naturally, more difficult. Not only those asked by me but also by my children. For example, how does a goldfish go to Shamayim if you flush it down the toilet? Where did the two inches I grew come from? And my all time favorite: How can the same thermos keep something hot in the winter when it is cold outside and cold in the summer when it is hot outside?

The children and I would sit down together and brainstorm. We would put several ideas on the table as possible solutions to any given question. We would then work in reverse and see if these solutions could be a result of the question Posed. The concepts they came up with were very interesting. Free of all artificial barriers placed on adults, the children did not feel they had to color inside the lines. They were able to think outside the box. Their young minds, clear of all of society's constraints, were able to rid themselves of all the cobwebs that clutter adult brains. This led the way to very simple solutions to very complex problems.

For example, my aunt tried desperately to teach my cousin how to make coffee when she got married. My cousin and her husband

do not drink coffee. They never have. But when my uncle, who could do anything with his hands, went over to fix something for them, all he wanted in return was a cup of coffee. My aunt purchased several different kinds of coffee makers, but for some strange reason, my cousin could never master the art of making a cup of coffee. Her chicken soup remains the best, to this day. Her cholent has never been equaled. But, somehow, although no one could figure out why, a simple cup of coffee was beyond her reach.

After many years of trying and failing to make a good cup of coffee, my cousin and I were engaged in conversation on the phone when my son overheard us. Naturally, we were attempting to come up with a solution to what had long ago been dubbed the skeleton in the family closet.

My older son, who was about fourteen at the time, had been learning many skills in his special education school. Being autistic, he spent most of the time in his own world, but occasionally would join us in ours. That is when he overheard the telephone conversation I was having with my cousin.

I still don't understand what's so difficult about making a cup of coffee, I said to my cousin.

My son repeated, what's so difficult about making a cup of coffee several times and then added, use instant coffee.

Both my cousin and I started convulsing with laughter.

When I inquired at the school, I was told that the students in my son's class had been preparing coffee for the teachers breaks all year. Another simple solution to what had become one of the most complex (though, thank G-d, not serious) problems over the

years. All it took was someone with a clear head, who was open to the endless possibilities available, to zero in on the solution that is sitting on the top shelf in everyone's cupboard.

Several years ago I read a philosophy book where the author stated that living life meant going from the end of one problem to the beginning of another. This may or may not be the case. But my sons, though now grown, and I, are still asking each other thought provoking questions. My younger son, who recently came for a visit, posed the following problem to me:

Mom, he said, if a frog is dying and it can't make any noise, do you say it's croaking, or it's not croaking?

You don't actually expect an answer to that, do you, I asked my son.

I'm in no particular hurry, he responded.

Good, I said. Remember those brainstorming sessions we had when you were a kid? Just clear the cobwebs away from your eyes. The solution will be right there before you.

Making Difficult Decisions

By Judy Gruenfeld

After attending a day program for several years, subsequent to his graduation from his special education school, my son, who has Autism, decided that he was again ready to try his hand at a job in the competitive employment field.

To Employment Specialists, who obtain jobs for special needs individuals and train them, this is supposed to be the ideal; independent employment, out there, in the real world. Though I was an Employment Specialist at the time, I was not sure I wanted my son out there in the real world again as he had previously encountered several negative experiences. But he insisted.

I secured a position for him at a local fast food establishment. He was in charge of putting away the supplies. However, I was not his job coach, for obvious reasons. Ronnie learned his tasks well and did a good job. The manager at the time said that Ronnie was his best worker.

A taxi would pick him up at ten-thirty in the morning and drive him to work and also pick him up at three o'clock in the afternoon, when his shift was over, and drive him home. Unfortunately, this was a problem as the cab company was very unreliable. I received many panicky phone calls while at work from Ronnie when the cab was late or never showed up. I would have to leave work, pick him up, take him to work, and then go back to work myself.

I was used to these morning phone calls and took them in my stride. I was not used to the phone call I received one afternoon at three-thirty. When I picked up the receiver, I heard,

"Hello, this is Ronald. I never should have been born. I think I am going to commit suicide."

I tried to remain calm. I was pretty sure that Ronnie could no more harm himself than anyone else.

"How are you going to do that?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

"Ronnie", I said, "Take deep breaths, put on your coat, and walk around the block until I come home. Promise me you won't hurt yourself. I'll be home in half an hour".

"Okay", he said.

"You promise?" I insisted.

"Yes," he said.

That was the longest half hour of my life. When I arrived home I found Ronnie pacing back and forth in front of our house. As soon, as I got out of the car Ronnie ran over to me and told me what happened. He'd been picked on several times by the high school boys at the job but never so viciously.

Ronnie began, "This kid called me a retard and a baby and said I never should have been born. "I'm stupid and worthless," he added, "And I want to die. I don't deserve to live."

"And that is this kid's opinion?" I asked him calmly, while my insides were about to explode.

"Yes," he answered.

"And you believe him?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered again.

"Why?" I asked.

"I don't know. Because he said so."

Ronnie was becoming more and more agitated. I tried to reason with him.

"Remember, I told you that people treat other people the way they, themselves, have been treated?"

"YEEEEES!" he stomped.

"Well, obviously this boy hasn't been treated very well," I tried to reassure him.

"This has nothing to do with you."

Ronnie wasn't convinced.

"I tell you what," I said. "How about you and I take the day off tomorrow and do something special together?"

"You mean I don't have to go to work tomorrow?" he asked.

"That's exactly what I mean," I said.

"It's Friday. We'll both have a long week-end."

"Okay," Ronnie answered, somewhat appeased.

"Now I'm telling you that you're smart, you're an adult, and I, for one, am glad you were born. Do you believe me or that mean kid?"

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

"You think about it. In the meantime, I'm going to call your manager and tell him what happened."

The manager apologized profusely and said he would take care of it.

When I hung up to phone I noticed that Ronnie had a red mark on his neck.

"What's that?" I asked him.

"Well, he said, the boy said he was going to slit my throat and he grabbed me with a sharp tool," my son informed me.

"Get your coat!" I said. We're going over there".

When we showed the manager the red mark on Ronnie's neck he was totally nonplussed. He said he would take care of the matter. Ronnie never saw that boy again.

Eventually, this wonderful manager left and was replaced by one with little finesse and fewer people skills. After several months of Ronnie being up tight and stressed out from

this manager, he was finally fired after six-and-a-half years on the job. He was told to leave at two o'clock in the afternoon. After being at the job for so long, suddenly he was not allowed on the premises. He had no place to go and his cab wasn't due to come for him until three o'clock. Obviously short sighted, this manager didn't take into consideration that he would have nowhere to go for another hour.

When I returned home from work, Ronnie was at home and he told me what had happened. Naturally, I went over to the store. The manager apologized to me and told me that Ronnie was not listening to her and was obsessed with taking out the garbage whether it was full or not and was being careless about the way he stacked the supplies.

"As the situation got out of hand," she also informed me, "The police had to be called."

I later found out that it was Ronnie who called the police, complaining that they would not let him into his place of employment. He was offered a ride home, but declined, stating that he would wait for his cab. He was absolutely devastated by the loss of his job. We tried to explain to him that it wasn't totally his fault, that he should have been listening to his boss and if he could hold down a job for so long, he had to have been doing something right. Eventually, we got passed this, but my poor Ronnie did not come away from it unscathed.

He is now attending a workshop. Gone are the panicky phone calls regarding a late taxi or an insensitive co-worker. We're both more relaxed. For the first time since Ronnie has been born, when it came to making a decision, I took my own feelings into account. Though he wanted another job in the community, I felt he would be better off in a more sheltered environment and I, myself did not feel up to dealing with the world at large

and Ronnie's place in it. I felt a little selfish, but we both had to go on with our lives. While our children are our main concern, they must have healthy parents if they are to thrive. The workshop turned out to be the better of the two options for both of us.

I don't know if the job had anything to do with it, but Ronnie became obsessive-compulsive and at age thirty, for the first time in his life, had to be put on medication. The psychiatrist told me that Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, OCD, (another small

portion of the alphabet soup I ingest daily) often accompanies Autism and ADD and manifests itself at about the thirtieth birthday.

"Well", I said to the doctor. "He's right on target with that milestone!" Sometimes we develop a sick sense of humor. But, at least it keeps us laughing and is definitely a good way to release tension. I was concerned about any short or long-term effects from the medication. But, bottom line, you can't worry about tomorrow if you can't get through today.

I'm Waiting

By Judy Gruenfeld

I hate to wait. I'm not very good at it, either. I can't remember the first time I was made to wait but I'm sure I was with my mother at the time, sleeping in my carriage, and was too young to realize that I was spending my time doing nothing, or, in other words, waiting. We were probably on line at the bank, or the butcher, or the bakery, or the grocery store. There were no supermarkets in Brooklyn to speak of at that time. Certainly no "supermarket-cities", as I refer to our "super" supermarkets of today.

Last Thursday was an exceptional "waiting" day for me: First I waited on line at the drive through window at the bank. I didn't feel like getting out of the car and I paid dearly for that convenience. Fifteen minutes, sitting in the car, waiting. Engine on, engine off. At least I didn't waste too much gas, or cause a lot of wear and tear on the soles of my shoes.

When I finally got my money, I went on my quest to spend it. First stop: Everyone's favorite supermarket. The problem was, everyone was there. I had been thinking of transferring my checking account to the bank in the Supermarket, but I don't think I'd accomplish anything. I'd only have to wait on line there, too:

After spending an hour and a half loading - up my shopping cart, I went to get on line to pay for all my newly acquired possessions. I scanned the aisles to see if there was one I could get on that would actually get me home in time to cook some of the items I was about to purchase. There was one. Unfortunately though, it was an express line, which I am sure you were able to figure out without my having to tell you. So, naturally, I chose the line I thought would get me out the quickest. Silly me! There is no such thing as

"quicker" when you're on line in the supermarket on Thursday afternoon.

Half an hour later, I was on my way, slowly, because I didn't want any of my bags, which were piled way over the limit, to fall off the shopping cart. My eggs were either on the bottom, at the mercy of all the king's men," or on the top, waiting to roll off and pull a Humpty Dumpty and become scrambled right there in the parking lot. Fortunately, I made it to my car without incident and loaded my groceries into the trunk.

Next stop: the butcher. The line for the cashier spanned the entire length of the store.

"Do I go in, or not?" I thought. I really had no choice. There are certain items I prefer to buy there. Besides, I was not going back to the supermarket!

"Why did you wait until Thursday afternoon?" I kept asking myself. Actually, I had no choice. I had spent too much time waiting with my son in the doctor's office on Monday, waiting in the dentist's office, myself, on Tuesday; and waiting at home for the repairman to fix my dishwasher on Wednesday. There was, literally, no other time to run these errands unless I wanted to wait until Friday, I didn't!

I quickly grabbed what I needed at the butcher's and got on the end of the line at the back of the store. At least I was headed in the right direction. It took a half hour to work my way up to the cashier and out of the store, and another five minutes to get out of the parking lot.

One more stop and I was done for the day. Mind you, I wasn't finished with my shopping but I felt I would explode if I had to wait on one more line. I would also be able to wait in the car again, this time. I needed gas.

Gas prices have been fluctuating greatly of late and one must be an alert consumer if one is to take advantage of the best price available. The gas station I normally patronize was packed, as usual. There were three or four cars waiting at each pump.

"Should I wait here or go to my second choice?" I pondered. The other gas station was ten minutes in the other direction. I decided to check it out.

Ten minutes later I realized I had made a mistake and wasted ten more minutes of my time going to this gas station, that I could have, spent waiting on line at the first gas station. The situation here was no better.

"I think I'll go back to the first gas station," I said to myself. "Maybe the line will be shorter now."

It wasn't. But, I had learned my lesson. I turned off the engine and proceeded to wait. Again.

Twenty minutes later, trunk filled with gas, I exited the gas station, only to realize I had forgotten an essential item at the supermarket. I had no choice. I had to go back. Just the thought of waiting on another line made me break out in a rash. But, at least I could get on the express line!

I quickly drove back to the supermarket. It took me several minutes to find a parking space. I rushed in, grabbed my one item and headed for the express line. There was a young woman in front of me with a few items she had put in a baby carriage, along with her sleeping child.

I looked at the baby. How peacefully she was sleeping, oblivious to all the waiting that was going on around her.

"Better get used to it," I thought. "This is only the beginning!"

Refusing to Go Postal

By Judy Gruenfeld

Some things must be believed in order to be seen. The following true story is a perfect example.

The phone rang incessantly, Faigy had no time to talk to anyone, but do to the Bar Mitzvah that evening, everyone seemed to be calling.

"Someone please get the phone," Faigy shouted. "I'm busy with the fourth batch of cookies."

One of the kids came to her aid.

"Hello," the young voice said.

"Hi," said the older voice on the other end. "I know mommy is busy, but I need to talk to her."

"Just a minute," the young voice piped in again. "Mommy, someone wants to talk to you," shouted the child.

"Tell them I'll be right there," Faigy shouted back.

"Hello," she said when her youngest daughter handed her the phone.

"Hi," came a hoarse, nasal voice from the other end.

Faigy's eyebrows knitted together. "You sound terrible, Yehudis. What's the matter?"

"I just came from the doctor," said Yehudis. "Would you believe I have a sinus infection and a strep throat? I'm so sorry. We've been looking forward to this Bar Mitzvah almost as long as you have. My husband will, of course, come to the seuda tomorrow night."

"Wait a minute, didn't the doctor give you an antibiotic," Faigy said. "If you're on an antibiotic for twenty-four hours, you can also come to the seuda tomorrow night."

"Oh, that's wonderful. At least I'll be able to be at part of the simcha," Yehudis said. "I'll see you then. And, mazal tov."

"Thank you," came Faigy's reply. "Take care of yourself. We'll see you tomorrow night, *Im Yirtse Hashem* (G-d willing)."

Motzei Shabbos, the voice still nasal, the throat still scratchy, Yehudis showered and got dressed for the Seudas Bar Mitzvah. She wasn't feeling any better but at least she was not contagious. She would have hated to miss the entire Bar Mitzvah since she and Faigy were such good friends, and the Bar Mitzvah boy was like a nephew to her.

When they arrived, Yehudis' husband found a seat in the men's section of the large room and Yehudis proceeded to the women's section. She sat down next to the Bar Mitzvah boy's grandmother.

"How are you feeling?" asked Bubby.

"Not too good," came Yehudis' reply. "But I'm glad I was able to make it this evening. How did our bocher do this morning?"

Bubby's face lit up. "Not one mistake!" she said.

"I knew he could do it," said Yehudis, with an equally big grin.

"Ah, here she is," Yehudis heard Faigy's voice coming towards her. "How are you feeling?"

"Not great. But the main thing is that I'm here."

"It wouldn't be the same without you. We missed you this morning. I want you to meet someone." Faigy said, showing someone to the seat on Yehudis' other side. "This is Jackie. We've been learning on the phone for the past nine months and we just met in person"

a month ago when she came for Shabbos. Wait till you hear her story!"

After duly attending to the social amenities, Yehudis finally said, "So what is your story? I can't wait any longer."

"Well," said Jackie. "I decided I wanted to learn more about Judaism so I called Torah Partners and they paired me up with Faigy. After learning for about six months, I decided that I wanted to become observant."

"That's wonderful," Yehudis said. "It's a really big step."

"More than you can imagine," replied Jackie. "You see, I worked for the post office and I was required to come in on Saturday. I couldn't quit my job because I am divorced and have two children to support but I could no longer work on Shabbos. It was quite a dilemma."

Yehudis nodded. "I can see that it would be, but if you want to be observant, what choice did you have?"

"None," said Jackie. "So I quit my job."

"Without another one lined up?" asked Yehudis. "Gutsy move!"

"Yes," said Jackie. "I just called them one day and said I would no longer be coming

in. I knew I was doing the right thing but I was nervous, nonetheless."

"I would imagine you would be, under your circumstances," responded Yehudis. "What happened?"

"Well," said Jackie, "I got a part time job to tide us over but things were really tight. Faigy and her husband were on the phone with me, back and forth, several times a day. Faigy's husband kept telling me to have faith and was sending my resume out to several different companies. A month ago, a company that does business with his firm said they needed someone for a position for which I am qualified. Faigy's husband sent them my resume. I went for an interview and was hired on the spot, and for almost double the salary I was earning at the postal service.

"That's absolutely amazing! But not surprising. With your permission, I would love to share your story with others."

"My pleasure," said Jackie. "There is definitely a message that needs to be passed along. If we have *emunah* and *bitachon* (faith) in Hashem, we will realize that He will never let us down."

A Disability by Any Other Name

By Judy Gruenfeld

As the mother of a developmentally disabled son, excuse me, as the mother of a son with developmental disabilities, I have become sensitive to political correctness, but I feel compelled to comment on the recent resolution adopted by The Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

An article written in the *Barrier Free Press* dated Fall, 2005, reads as follows:

The Commission on the Handicapped and the Office for the Disabled have officially changed their names. The Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders has adopted a resolution (which will follow) acknowledging the official, name change of both the Commission and the office. The new names, The Commission for Individuals with Disabilities and the Office for individuals with Disabilities reflect Ocean County's commitment to People First language.

In March of 1993, Ocean County adopted a resolution supporting people's first language and its utilization in an effort to respect individuals living with disabilities: The Commission revisited the people's first language issue in reflecting upon the Commission for the Handicapped and the Office for the Disabled names.

Individuals serving as Commissioners emphasized the importance that language and perceptions play in society. Ultimately, the Commission researched the issue further and requested the Board of Chosen Freeholders consider the name change. People first language activist Kathy Snow declares that we recognize a disability as what a person has, not what a person is. Furthermore, people first language puts the person before the disability and encourages us to move away from age old stereotypes.

The Resolution, dated May 18, 2005 follows.

WHEREAS, THE Ocean County Commission on the Handicapped and the Ocean County Office for the Disabled were established to recognize the needs and issues of individuals living with disabilities in Ocean County; and

WHEREAS, as on March 16, 1993 the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders adopted a resolution supporting Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 102 urging the State Legislature to ensure that people first language be utilized in an effort to respectfully recognize that emphasis should foremost be placed upon the individual acknowledging that a disability is a characteristic of an individual; and

WHEREAS, the Ocean County Commission on the Handicapped, recognizes that language influences perceptions and behavior and therefore supports a change in title of the Commission and the Ocean County Office for the Disabled to reflect the County's commitment utilizing people first language.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by the BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS of the COUNTY OF OCEAN, STATE OF NEW JERSEY that the name "Ocean County Commission on the Handicapped" is hereby changed to the "Ocean County Commission for Individuals with Disabilities" and the name "Ocean County Office for the Disabled" is hereby changed to the Ocean County Office for Individuals with Disabilities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this resolution shall be made available to the Ocean County Commission for Individuals with Disabilities,

Ocean County Office for Individuals with Disabilities, Ocean County Finance Department, Ocean County Counsel and the Ocean County Clerk.

The Resolution is signed by Daniel J. Hennessy, Clerk of the Board.

Now, I am all for putting people first. I am all for realizing that a disability does not define a person. I am all for emphasizing a person's abilities rather than his or her disabilities, and I am all for affording a person opportunities which will maximize his or her potential. But, I am appalled at the time, money, effort and attention paid to what I consider a semantics game. I mean a game of semantics that lasted from March, 1993 to May, 2005.

In those twelve years, when the consciousness of the people was supposedly raised, and sensitivity to individuals with disabilities was supposedly heightened, services to these very same individuals were cut back.

Over sixty percent of the developmentally disabled population resides at home with family members, often aging parents who find it difficult enough to care for themselves, much less care for a developmentally disabled family member. It is much more difficult to care for an adult than for a child, whether physically or mentally challenged. Less than ten percent of monies allotted for the disabled population go to those who reside at home.

On the other hand, more money was allotted to build or purchase more group homes but there were no additional funds allocated to run them. What has happened to these group homes? What has happened to the money set aside for them? Either the group homes or the money must be sitting somewhere, doing nothing to benefit those for whom it was intended.

In addition, services to those residing at home have been drastically cut. Several years ago my husband and I decided to go on a well-deserved vacation; the first real vacation since we had been married. I called The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD in our world of alphabet soup), spoke to my son's case manager, and requested respite care in my home for him while we were away. This worked out very well. The woman who stayed with my son was kind and caring and made it easy for us to be away for an entire week, knowing that our son was well cared for.

Last year, five years after the previous vacation, my husband and I decided we needed to get away again. Again I called my son's case manager at DDD and requested in home respite care.

I'm sorry, Mrs. Gruenfeld, was the response I received, But we no longer provide those services.

I was stunned! I did not know what to say. What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to get away for a while? The toll of taking care of an adult child with developmental disabilities is beginning to be severely felt by my husband and myself.

We are not getting any younger. We need a vacation. Where are the services that were promised to those of us who choose (considering there are no group home spots available) to keep our sons and daughters at home?

The case manager also did not know what to say. There are no funds available, Mrs. Gruenfeld. I'm sorry.

That was it! I'm sorry! No prospects of incoming funds. No promise of things getting better. Just, I'm sorry!

Fortunately, other family members were able to pitch in and took turns staying with my son and we went on our much-needed

vacation. I am very fortunate in that my parents, although in their upper eighties, were able to supervise my son for a few days. For the remainder of the week, my younger son was able to take a few days off from work to stay with his brother. But, Grandma and Grandpa won't be able to do this much longer and my other son may not always have the flexibility to take a few days off from work to stay with his brother.

As I stated in the beginning, I am all for political correctness and for normal people

being sensitive to those with special needs. We can plant the seeds of political correctness. But, in my opinion, we are planting them in sand. I think we need to get our priorities straight. One can say, a disabled person or a person with a disability. But, if we do not have the proper garden, with necessary services available to assist and nurture that person, he or she will not have the opportunity to bloom or to blossom.

All's Right with the World

By Judy Gruenfeld

Friday, December 3, 2004

It was one of those days where nothing could go wrong. The sun was shining and the crisp autumn air made me feel grateful to be alive. The medley of reds, yellows, browns and oranges on the leaves elicited another thank you from me for the World's Greatest Artist.

Though it was only seven o'clock in the morning, my eyes were wide open and I was happily getting ready for work.

Another day, another mitzvah, I thought to myself. As a social worker, I get a lot of gratification helping those who are in need of my services.

After davening, I made myself a cup of coffee and began to sip the hot liquid as I once again admired the scenery outside my window. My coffee was the precise color of some of the leaves that danced before me. The cool air and the hot drink combined and warmed my heart.

I wondered what surprises were in store for me that day. I thought, would a client give me a hard time?

Would a supervisor be dissatisfied with the way I'd handle a situation? Don't be so cynical, I reprimanded myself. Today was meant to be enjoyed. I was determined not to let anything spoil this beautiful day that Hashem had placed before me.

I woke my husband and son, who were equally as pleased to greet the new day, eventually.

I, myself, was not usually so cheerful in the morning but this extraordinary day was beckoning.

By 7:45 I was out the door and after taking a few deep breaths, I put the keys in the ignition and turned on the car. I backed out of the driveway after making sure no one was

coming down either side of the street. With eager anticipation

I was on my way to face the day. While driving along County Line Road, I began to slow down as I approached the corner where I had to make a right turn. I put the directional signal on and pumped the brakes so there would be no doubt the driver behind me would be alerted to the fact that I was about to make a turn. As I rolled into the side street, the driver behind me rolled into my car. So much for the perfect day!

I got out of the car, as did the Hispanic man behind me.

"I'm so sorry," he said.

"I looked in the rear view mirror for a second to see if there was anyone behind me before I made the turn and that's when I crashed into you."

He looked very young and very nervous.

I went around to the back of my car to assess the damage. The bumpers on my car were made of solid rubber and could really take a hit. As a result, there was very little damage. Part of the bumper was scraped, part was punched in and part was cut into.

"I'm tempted to say, forget it," I said to the young man, "but I'm afraid the part that has been cut into may get worse".

"I understand," he said. "Boy, am I going to pay through the nose. I'm under twenty-one and my insurance premiums going to go through the roof."

"I tell you what," I suggested. "Why don't we exchange information, as we are supposed to do?"

Sometimes one has to trust people. "If you are willing to pay for the repairs, I will be

willing to take care of this without going through our insurance companies."

"Oh, that would be wonderful," said the grateful young man.

"My friend's father owns a body shop. I know he can fix your car."

After exchanging our personal and insurance information, I said to the young man,

"Call me next week. I will meet you at the body shop. If you pay them while we are there and the owner gives me a receipt stating what is going to be done on the car and marks the bill paid in full, we can consider the matter resolved."

"I really appreciate this," the young man said. "I only hope my parents are as understanding."

"I'm sure they will just be glad you weren't hurt."

"Every new driver has to have his first accident. If this is yours, you're very lucky."

My son totaled his car but thank G-d, he wasn't hurt. Have a nice day,"

I told him, "It's not the end of the world."

"Thank you. Thank you for everything," he said as he took his leave."

Was the young man going to call me? I certainly hoped so. If he wasn't going to call me, and the same scenario presented itself again, would I react the same way? I would like to think that belief in Hashem makes it easier to believe in one's fellow man.

Monday, December 6, 2004, 12:00
Noon

I just received a phone call from the young man with whom I had the accident. We were going to meet the following Wednesday evening at the auto body shop. Thank you, Hashem, for allowing Your trust in people to inspire them to live up to Your expectations.

Another Glitch

By Judy Gruenfeld

In my house another glitch in the computer translates into another glitch in life. Why? You ask. The answer is simple. My developmentally disabled son knows more about computers than I do. And if he has a problem with his computer or with his hand-held palm computer, I have a problem, too.

It was a quiet, peaceful Sunday morning. I was enjoying the cup of coffee my husband had offered to make me. And then disaster struck.

"My palm's not working," came the cry from upstairs. "I don't know what's wrong with it. I didn't do anything and it keeps freezing up." Down he came, palm in hand (no pun intended) and showed me the offending piece of modem technology.

What's wrong with it? he asked.

I don't know, I answered. You know more about this contraption than I do.

We have to take it back to the store. If they can't fix it, I need to get another one was my son's solution to this dilemma. Fortunately, I had purchased a contract when I bought him the palm to fix or replace it at no charge within a period of two years if something should go wrong. I know with whom I am dealing and how my cookies crumble.

Okay, I told him. Put everything in the box and put the box in a bag. We'll go to the store when I'm done with my coffee.

Off to the store we trudged. It was very crowded. Very crowded. We got in line at customer service. Some twenty minutes later, a voice asked,

How may I help you?

"My palm's not working," stated my son. "It keeps freezing up on me."

"We have a replacement contract," I informed the customer service clerk, "It states

that you will repair or replace the item at no charge to me if anything goes wrong with it within the next two years. We bought this eight months ago."

"First, you'll have to have the technician check it out," the clerk stated.

"Where is the technician?" I inquired.

We were pointed in the right direction, at the opposite end of the store and took our place at the back of the line waiting for the technician. Another twenty minutes passed.

"How may I help you?" asked the friendly young man behind the counter.

"My palm keeps freezing up," stated my son.

"We have a contract," I also informed this fellow.

"I'll have to check it out before I can authorize any repair or replacement."

"That's fine, be my guest," I replied.

My son handed him the palm and we waited while the young man checked it out. And we waited. And we waited. Finally, after about fifteen minutes he said,

"I don't know what's wrong with it" as he handed it back to me with a note authorizing replacement of the computer.

"Take this back to customer service and they will give you a new one."

Thank you," I said, as we headed back to customer service.

I went up to the young man behind the counter who had helped us before and told him that the technician had authorized replacement of the dysfunctioning piece of equipment.

"You'll have to get at the end of the line," he said.

"But we have already waited on this line and the line for the technician."

"I'm sorry, Ma'am," replied the young man. "I can't take you ahead of these other people."

So, to the end of the line we went, malfunctioning pocket PC in tow. Ten minutes later, it was our turn again. I handed the man the box with the PC and the note from the technician. The young man took the bag and examined the Palm.

"We no longer make this model," he informed us. "Would you like to see a comparable one?"

"Yes," I said, "As long as it performs the same functions as this one and is comparable in price."

"I'll have to get one of the other sales people to help you. I'm not familiar with the Pocket PCs."

Another nice young man with a plastic smile approached us and asked us what the problem was. After repeating the story for the third time, he said he would check out the inventory and see what he could offer us. We watched this young man fiddle with one of the store's computers for about another ten minutes. Finally, he said he would get us model PPC-1234B, if that was okay with us.

"Is it comparable to the other one as far as price and functions?" I asked.

After being told that it was, I agreed to the exchange.

"If you'll wait here, I'll get it for you," offered the young man.

"That would be very nice," I said while attempting to control my contempt. We had already been in the store for an hour.

About ten minutes later he returned with the new model. My son checked it out. It passed inspection and we decided to take it. In the meantime, the other young man was checking out the computer we returned.

"Where is the recharging cradle?" he inquired.

I turned to my son. "Where is the recharging cradle? I told you to put everything in the box before we left the house."

"Oh," he said. "I guess I must have left it home."

"I'm sorry," said the salesman, "but I cannot give you the new model unless you return all the parts of the old model. You'll have to come back with the missing parts."

"Okay," I said, mumbling under my breath. "We'll be back, eventually." I turned to my son and motioned for him to leave the store. We were back in the car and on our way home before you could say Pocket PC.

"When can we come back to the store to exchange my Palm?" my son inquired.

"I'm not sure," I told him. "I don't know when I'll have time again."

Needless to say, neither one of us was very happy. When we got back home, I did the long awaited laundry and tried to put the entire incident out of my mind. The thought of going through the whole process again made me break out in hives.

The following day, while my son was at the workshop, I decided to brave the store again. I grabbed the bag, which now contained the delinquent recharging cradle, and headed for the store. Naturally, there was a different person at the customer service desk. After going through the whole story, I was told that I would have to have the technician who was now on duty, check out the old equipment.

But, I already did that, I protested.

"I'm, sorry, Ma'am," he said. "But since I wasn't here yesterday, I can't exchange it for you unless I have the technician check it out."

Okay, I sighed, and reached into the bag for the little computer that was causing me very big problems. I was not surprised, but extremely upset to discover that the computer was not in the bag. He took it with him to the

workshop! I screamed. I can't believe it. Again, I made the trip for nothing.

So, homeward bound again, and mumbling under my breath again, I couldn't wait for my son to return home so I could pounce on him and the Pocket PC.

When he came home, I asked him, "Guess where I went today?"

"Where?" he asked.

"To the store to exchange your computer. And guess what else?" I asked him.

"What?" he asked.

"The computer wasn't in the bag," I said in a controlled but rather shrieky voice.

My son looked at my face, turned on his heel and rail up to his room. He didn't come downstairs until dinner. By that time, I had calmed down somewhat and told my son that if he left all the parts of the computer at home I would try to go back to the store again the following day. I would get there early, before the crowd and, hopefully, not have to wait on too many long lines.

Well, I got there early all right but it seems that a lot of other people had the same idea. I dutifully got on the customer service line and waited about ten minutes for my turn. Naturally, there was a third salesperson there

who was totally unfamiliar with my saga. So I began,

"My son's pocket PC is not working. This is the third time I'm here. I have a replacement contract."

"Okay," said the young man. "But. First you'll have to have the technician look at it."

While waiting on line for the technician, I called my husband.

"If this happens again, it's your tum," I said in a somewhat modulated but irritated voice.

"You're a good Mommy," he said.

"That, and six hours on line at a computer store will get me a new pocket PC and gray hair," I complained to my husband.

"You're still a good Mommy, and your hair is not gray, How about I buy you a cup of coffee?"

"Are you asking me for a date?" I inquired.

"Absolutely," he replied.

"Okay," I said. "I'll be home soon. I hope."

"The coffee will be ready when you get here. No waiting on line."

'Sinkle' or Double

By Judy Gruenfeld

"We need a new sink," I told my husband the last time a milchig plate ended up soaking in a fleishig pot.

"We don't need a new sink," my husband said. "There's nothing wrong with the old one."

"I'm tired of milchig plates and fleishig pots ending up in the sink together. I want a double sink."

"My mother never had a double sink, and we grew up just fine. How come I don't have any trouble with just the one sink?"

My voice raised a few decibels.

"That's because whatever plates or utensils you use never make it to the sink."

"Just be more careful and wash out any fleishig items that are in the sink before you put in any milchig items," advised my husband.

I was becoming a little agitated at this point. "That's it! No more discussion. I'm calling the plumber and asking him to get us a new sink."

"Let's be practical about this," my husband said in one final effort to change my mind. "There will be less counter space if you get a double sink."

"Why are you worried about counter space?" I asked. "All you do in the kitchen is eat!"

My husband threw his arms up in the air. "I give up. If you want a new sink, get a new sink."

Not one to miss an opportunity, I called the plumber immediately. "I want a double sink," I said when the voice on the other end answered the phone.

"I'll come and measure tomorrow. How is ten o'clock?"

"Fine," I said, a little surprised. "I'll be expecting you." I gave the plumber my address and hung up the phone.

The following morning at 10:00 my doorbell rang.

"Could that be the plumber? On time?"

It was!

"Please come in. I'll show you to the kitchen."

Once in the kitchen, he took out his measuring tape, measured the sink, the counter, opened the doors in front of the sink and measured inside.

"A standard double sink is what you need. I'll get it at the store and install it for you this afternoon."

"Terrific!" I said. "I'll be here all day."

At one o'clock my new sink arrived. "Are you sure this will fit?" I asked. "It looks awfully big."

With his hand on his heart, Mr. Plumber said, "I promise it will fit."

"Okay," I said. "Would you like a drink before you start?"

"No thank you, I'm good," he said while carefully sliding the sink out of its box.

"I hope so," I thought to myself.

As promised, the sink was installed, all the pipes and hoses were connected, the faucet was hooked up and I, once again, had hot and cold running water in the kitchen. And, I had my double sink! No more confusion. No more accidents. A lot less hassle.

The following week, I reached under the sink to get a new container of scouring powder. It was in the back, and it was wet.

"Maybe someone reached under here with wet hands, I hoped.

I put a towel on top of the scouring powder. "I'll wait until tomorrow and check it out again."

The next day the towel was dry. "I guess it's all right," I thought, and then forgot about it. But, I decided to leave the towel there, on top of another container of scouring powder.

Two weeks later, when I reached for the other container of scouring powder, my hand met with a very wet towel.

A little upset, I called the plumber. His answering machine picked up so I left a message. "This is Judy Gruenfeld, You installed a new sink for me a few weeks ago. Something is leaking. Please call me back. I would like you to come look at it."

That evening when I picked up the ringing phone, a voice said, "This is the plumber. I got your message. Tell me, if you couldn't find your husband's contact lenses how did you manage to find a leak in the sink?"

I began laughing heartily. "I guess you read the American Jewish Times."

"Indeed, I do," he replied.

"Well, actually, I didn't find the leak, I just found the water."

"Okay," he said "I'll be over tomorrow afternoon to take a look at it. But promise me one thing.

"What's that?" I asked.

"That you won't write a story about this."

Again I laughed "If you come over tomorrow and fix the leak, I promise I won't write the story.

Well, tomorrow came but the plumber didn't. I am writing this article as I sit home, the day after tomorrow, waiting for him to call. He's a really nice guy and an excellent plumber, but I figure I'm entitled to write the story now.

Postscript: The plumber came as soon as I finished the article and fixed the problem in about five minutes. Then he read the manuscript I proffered and said,

"Of course you can put it in the paper. I don't even mind if you mention my name. But now you have to add that I did, in fact, come."

Again, he made me laugh. "Everyone's a critic! I don't think I can do that. You'd have to pay to advertise. But, yes, I will add that to the story."

Now, it was his turn to laugh. "Okay," he said "Call me if you need any more material."

The Ol' Factory Challenge

By Judy Gruenfeld

I can remember, as a little girl, going to my grandparents' house and waiting for my grandfather to return home from work.

Each morning, before the sun came up, he would ride the "el" from Brooklyn into Manhattan, where he would catch the Hudson Tubes for Newark

My grandfather worked in a factory as a tool and dye maker. He had worked there since my mother was a child, probably about the same age as I was then. Every day. Five days a week. Up before the sun. Home long after it had been swallowed up by the dark night.

I wondered if the sun also shone in Newark; if my Grandfather ever saw daylight.

I also remember when my grandfather retired at age sixty-five. There was no big retirement party. No gold watch. Just grandpa. At home. After the sun came up. The ol' factory buzzed on, without him. And a loud buzz it was. By the time my grandfather retired, he had lost about fifty percent of his hearing to the endless blare of loud factory noise that invaded his ears, day after day, year after year.

"It's not such a bad thing," my grandfather would tell me when my ears would perk up at the slightest noise that invaded the environment. "Sometimes Grandma gets angry with me and she yells. I don't really hear what she is saying so when she comes over to me I just smile and she stops yelling. I don't know if she thinks my smile is an apology or if she just likes it when I smile at her. But it avoids a lot of arguments."

"It's funny," I thought. I never remembered them ever raising their voices to each other, much less arguing. Grandma's

words were always precious gems as far as Grandpa was concerned and Grandpa's words always went

Many years have passed since then and, although I can still hear my grandfather's words resounding in my ears as if it were yesterday, it seems to be my turn to face the ol' factory challenge. I have lost a slight percentage of my hearing, but it is not a hearing loss to which I am referring.

I am olfactorily challenged. By this, I mean I don't smell very well. Due to seasonal allergies which, by the way, include every season, and chronic sinusitis, my nose just doesn't have the scents it was born with.

I was talking to a friend of mine about this the other day.

"It comes in handy when you have to change a diaper," Shoshana, mother of three small children, and fellow sinus sufferer said.

"I suppose you're right," I acquiesced. "But, on the other hand, how do you know when the diaper needs to be changed?" (My kids are grown and I get a chance to pamper myself once in a while, now).

"Kinda by the way they walk," Shoshana answered. "If they look as if they just got off a horse, I check to see if they need to be changed."

"I guess that's as good a system as any," I shrugged. "But, what about cooking? I almost burned the house down the other day just by making a slice of toast. I was right there in the kitchen and didn't smell it burning. My husband yelled from upstairs and when I went to check, sure enough, my toast was, well, toast!"

Shoshana agreed that that wasn't such a good thing. But, as they say, you take the good with the bad. Come spring, she'll be able to

smell. Her allergies and sinuses only bother her in the fall and the winter.

I wonder if she'll be calling me to change her kids' diapers.

Dassy's Best Friend

By Judy Gruenfeld

Everyone had just returned home from the funeral. Twenty-one year old Dassy had just lost her best friend and confidante when her grandmother died of a heart attack. Dassy's grandmother was everything to her. She loved her parents. And she also loved her other grandparents, who had passed away. But no one could compare with the grandmother she had just lost, who was so aptly named Pearl.

Dassy became very angry and withdrawn, refusing to allow anyone to comfort her.

It's not fair! She thought. She wasn't even that old. Many of my friends have older grandparents who are still alive. Grandma was the only one who really understood me and loved me unconditionally. The only one I could really talk to without feeling judged or inadequate.

It was stifling in the house. Dassy felt she had to get away from all these well meaning but intrusive people. She got in her car and drove. She had no idea where she was going but she wanted to drive to the top of a mountain and scream. The last thing Dassy remembered was the other car coming towards her.

She looked around, totally unfamiliar with her surroundings. She had just woken up and, for a minute; was completely disoriented.

Where am I? she thought. Why am I in such pain? And why am I so weak?

Dassy started groaning and as she did, she felt a hand stroke her head. She looked up and saw her mother, above her, with a very worried look on her face.

What happened to me? Dassy heard her voice say, although she was not quite sure where the voice was coming from.

"You had an accident," Mom said.

"What kind of accident?" the same voice asked. "I can't seem to remember."

"Just rest now," Mom said. "We'll discuss the details later. I'm just grateful you aren't in more serious condition. You have a concussion and a few broken ribs.

Dassy closed her eyes. Everything hurt. From her hair to her toenails. She really wanted to know more details about the accident but was much too weak and in too much pain to ask a lot of questions now.

I hurt all over, Dassy groaned.

I'll get the doctor to put more pain medication in your IV drip, Mom tried to reassure her. In the meantime, why don't you go back to sleep. You need your rest.

Dassy had no strength to argue and felt herself drifting off, despite all her attempts to the contrary. She was drifting and floating; her head spinning out of control, contrary to the heaviness she felt in the rest of her body.

Then Dassy lost consciousness: The monitor beside her bed started beeping incessantly. When the doctors could not revive her, they wheeled her into surgery. A quick assessment showed that one of her broken ribs had punctured her lung and they began to operate.

"What's going on?" Dassy's Dad asked in a panic.

"The doctor will be out in a few minutes to explain the situation to you," a nurse they had not seen before advised them.

About an hour later; Dassy began to feel better. Her head didn't throb and it didn't hurt to breathe. She slowly sat upon the gurney and let her feet dangle off the sides. Gradually, she allowed her feet to touch the floor. She took one step, then another. This pain medication is really working wonders, she

thought as she started walking down the hallway. When she came to a door she pushed a button and the door automatically opened. Dassy walked through. The doorway led outside the hospital. It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining and Dassy couldn't see a cloud in the sky.

"Come this way," a familiar voice beckoned.

"Which way," asked Dassy. "I can't see you. I can't see," she began screaming.

"Of course you can see," the voice said. "Just walk a little farther. There is a light glaring in your eyes."

Dassy did as she was told. When she was first brought to the hospital she was semi-conscious and did not realize what beautiful grounds surrounded the complex.

"What a beautiful garden!" she exclaimed. "I don't believe I've ever seen anything so magnificent."

"Ah, I guess your sight has been restored," the voice said. "Yes," said Dassy gleefully, as she looked up. Then her face turned ashen.

"Grandma!" Dassy's heart skipped a beat. She could not catch her breath. "Where am I? Why am I not in any more pain? Am I dead?"

"Look down, child," Grandma said.

As Dassy looked down she saw an operating room with a young girl on the operating table.

"That's you," said Grandma. "The doctors are desperately trying to save your life."

Dassy looked down again and did indeed see herself on the operating table. She became confused and frightened and tried to run away but found she could not move her legs.

"Don't be afraid," my darling Dassy, Grandma comforted. "I will help you."

"Grandma," she whispered, barely audibly. "Oh, Grandma, I have missed you terribly. I must have dreamt you and I were both dead but here you are visiting me in the hospital."

"No; my darling Dassy. I am not visiting you. You are visiting me. Your heart stopped for a couple of minutes. The doctors are trying to revive you right now. You are on the other side. Very few people are privileged to see the other side and then go back and resume their lives. I know you never forgave me for leaving you, but it was my time to go. It is not your time yet. Soon it will be Rosh Hashana. You must go back and right all the wrongs you have done. You must ask forgiveness from those people whose help you refused when I died. You must not be so angry but must go on with your life, make something of yourself and give back to others who are in need of help. Helping others is the best way to overcome your own problems. You are being given a second chance, Dassy. Make the most of it. You can still talk to me whenever you feel the need. I will always be here for you. You only have to look into your heart."

All right, Grandma. You always did know best. I love you. I promise to make you proud of me."

"You already have. And Dassy, remember, I love you and will always with you. When you feel a breeze on your cheek, it will be me kissing you and when you feel warm and cozy inside, my arms will be around you, hugging you securely. You must go back now. Be well, my darling granddaughter."

Dassy felt herself coming out of the anesthesia. She was very groggy and could not focus her eyes too well, but she thought she saw Mom and Dad by her bedside.

"Mom," she groaned. "What happened to me?"

"One of your broken ribs punctured your lung. You will have to take it easy for a few weeks but the doctor has reassured us you will be just fine."

Suddenly, everyone heard a noise as something fell to the floor. Mom bent down to pick it up. It was the pearl ring that had been left to Dassy, when Grandma died. She had been clutching it in her hand when she had the accident.

"You must have this ring sized," Mom said. "You don't want to lose it."

"No chance of that happening", replied Dassy. "In Grandma's merit, I must start

preparing for Rosh Hashana with my teshuva, tefila, and tzeduka right now. Im sorry for all the trouble I've caused you."

"It's okay, Mom soothed. Grandma's memory will put smiles on our faces and love in our hearts. We will continue to serve Hashem, as she always did. May we all have a happy, healthy New Year and may we all be inscribed in the book of life."

LShana Tova, Dassy.

LShana Tova, everyone

My First Real Shabbos

By Judy Gruenfeld

I will never forget my first real Shabbos experience fifteen years ago. I had been learning every week with Mrs. Cohen for several months when she blurted out,

"I think it's time you came for Shabbos."

"Oh," I said having eagerly anticipated this moment and yet, feeling somewhat unsure at the same time. "I'd love to come," I said a bit haltingly.

Two days later I was standing in front of Mrs. Cohen's house, flowers in hand. After ringing the doorbell, I heard several different voices chatting back and forth before the door opened. Six children, standing in a row, oldest first, down to the youngest, who had obviously just learned how to walk, greeted me.

"Please come in," said Mrs. Cohen's eldest daughter. "My mother will be down in a minute."

"Thank you," I said as I entered a new and exciting world for the first time, not knowing what to expect.

"Can I get you a drink?" the girl asked.

"No thank you," I replied. "I'm fine."

Then my friend appeared. "Good Shabbos, Good Shabbos," I heard as Mrs. Cohen came gliding down the stairs.

"Good Shabbos," I said in return as I handed her the flowers.

'Oh, they're beautiful," came the appropriate response. "Thank you."

"You're very welcome," I duly replied.

"Okay", said Mrs. Cohen. "Now that the social amenities are out of the way, what can I get you to eat? How about a piece of potato kugel?"

"Now you sound like my grandmother," I laughed.

"I'm sure I do. By the time you leave, you'll understand why," came the knowing response from Mrs. Cohen.

Unfortunately, I was not raised with much Yiddishkeit. But, I do know a good potato kugel when I taste one. I took one bite into the proffered 'golden cube and said,

"Grandma!"

"Aha!" said Mrs. Cohen. "We're off to a good start. Keep your heart and mind open, as well as your mouth and by this time tomorrow you won't be the same. There will be no turning back"

"You're on", I replied. "I'm open to your suggestion. No pun intended." We both laughed as we walked towards the candles.

"It's time to bentch licht," my friend informed me.

"Okay," I replied. "As I told you, I have been lighting Shabbos candles for several years now."

"I know you know the bracha," my hostess proclaimed proudly.

"Indeed, I do," I proclaimed just as proudly.

Mrs. Cohen lit a match and then handed me the box. I watched as she lit each candle, two as commanded in the Torah and then one for each child, totaling eight. She then recited the bracha and added her own supplications. I lit two candles and recited the same bracha, followed by my own heartfelt supplication to learn more Torah and do more mitzvahs.

After wishing everyone a Good Shabbos, the men left for shul and we sang Lecha Dodi to welcome in the Sabbath Queen.

When Mr. Cohen and sons returned home, Mr. Cohen made Kiddush and then we all went to wash. My first bite into the challah

elicited another Grandma! response from me. I do not remember Kiddush as a child, nor do I remember anyone washing and reciting *Al Natilas Yodoyigm*, but I do remember the challah; food that comforted not only the stomach but the soul, as well. Up until now, the only pathway to my soul was through my stomach. But, I was about to be infused with Torah that needed no detour to reach its mark. The meal was exquisite but the food for the soul was incomparable. It nourished that part of me that had been so lacking, so hungry and yearning to be fulfilled. By the time we were done with our meal, everyone was charged up and exhausted at the same time.

Mrs. Cohen and I cleaned up the kitchen and went to bed. As I lay there feeling safe and secure, many new and interesting ideas began swimming around in my head. Eventually, I started drifting off to sleep. But something was very different. I did not hear the television blaring in the background. What I heard, instead, was Mr. Cohen, learning and chanting and singing praises to Hashem. I'm sure my mother sang lullabies to me as a child. And although it has been a long time since I was a child, listening to Mr. Cohen made me feel like a child again. Hashem's child. I slept peacefully through the night, not waking up until morning, which is unusual for me.

Needless to say, Mrs. Cohen was delighted when I told her how soundly I had slept.

The remainder of Shabbos was equally inspiring, but the many years of a secular upbringing coupled with a learned cynicism regarding life in general, had its effect on me. The cynicism kept creeping into my mind and doing battle with my newly found spirituality.

When Shabbos was over, I approached Mrs. Cohen and said, "This has been a wonderful experience, but a battle has been raging in my head all day. I have been trying to figure out why it is that I slept so soundly last night. I know the atmosphere on Shabbos is especially holy but my mundane background keeps rearing its ugly head and interfering with all that I am learning now. Maybe it was something as simple as the wine's effect on me that caused me to sleep straight through the night without awakening. I'm not much of a drinker and the alcohol goes straight to my head."

"Ah," said Mrs. Cohen. "Maybe so. But remember, it was kosher wine. And I did say to keep an open mind."

A very wise lady," my friend Mrs. Cohen. She continues to inspire me to serve Hashem to the very best of my ability and to continuously expect more of myself. I haven't really had any more wine, but I do sleep more soundly. Especially on Friday nights!

Gaslight Revisited

By Judy Gruenfeld

Life definitely has its ups and downs. Do you ever feel as if you are losing your mind? Your equilibrium is knocked out of kilter and you lose your balance. You must call, upon every resource you possess in order to, avoid stumbling and falling. But, stumble and fall, you do.

I'm sure we parents of developmentally disabled children, whether they are still children or are now adults, have questioned our sanity more often than we'd care to admit. We have a lot on our plates, what with our other children, our husbands, our homes and our jobs. It is a day- to- day struggle just to stay afloat. We sometimes feel overwhelmed and inadequate and have difficulty coping. This is to be expected. But, I must warn you, it is not always your fault. You may be losing your marbles, but that's only because they keep drilling holes in your head.

Remember the cookie that was sitting by your cup of coffee when the phone rang? When, you got off the phone, it was gone. You're sure you put it there, but maybe you didn't. I'm losing my mind, you think. Maybe I didn't take a cookie. So, you go help yourself to another one. It's not a major incident so you dismiss it, but not quite.

Get a grip," you tell yourself. "If I lose it, what will become of my family?"

Two minutes later your toddler comes into the kitchen and says,

"More cookie, Mommy".

You sigh with relief as you give your little darling another cookie.

"Maybe I'm not losing it," you think, much to your relief. But your self-confidence is short-lived. You are now searching for the library book that is due today, or, at least you think it's due today. Without the book in your

possession you can't be sure. You always put the library books on one particular shelf on one particular bookcase and it's not there. Since you only took out the one book this time there is no other book on the shelf for reassurance. The book is nowhere to be found.

When your teenage daughter comes home from school she remarks,

"That book you took out of the library was great, Mom."

"Excuse me," you say.

"Yeah," she says. "You know, the one about the adopted girl who finds out that her biological parents are Jewish, meets them, and then becomes a Baalas Teshuva."

Of course you couldn't find the book. There is not a clean spot in which one can stand on the floor in your daughter's room, much less a place to look for and, hopefully, find something.

Again, somewhat relieved, you go about the business of preparing dinner. You look for the frozen knishes to go with the hot dogs you decided to serve that evening. There are only two places they could be. In the freezer in the kitchen, or in the freezer in the basement. You bought a brand new box last week; twelve knishes in a box. Well, they're not in the kitchen freezer so you look for them in the basement freezer. Nope, not there, either. Maybe you missed them in the kitchen freezer so you go and check there again. Nope, they're still not there. You know you bought the knishes because you were planning on serving them for dinner that night. So, you go back down to the basement. Not a knish to be found in the entire house.

"Kinderlach!" you yell. "Front and center!" "Does anyone know what became of the box of frozen knishes I bought?" you ask.

"Yeah," they were delicious," says your high school son.

"They?" you respond. "There were twelve knishes in that box."

"I know," your son says. "Last Sunday a few of the guys came over, We're learning a particularly difficult tractate so we decided to go over it together. We got hungry."

Okay, so maybe you're not losing your mind. And that's a big maybe. At this point you feel as .if you have one foot off the deep end and the other one on a banana peel. One more little push and you're a goner.

"I have to run to the store and buy more knishes," you tell your children. "I'll be right back."

Lo and behold, your car keys are not hanging up with the rest of the keys.

"I give up," you think. "There is a conspiracy going on and they're all out to get me. Maybe my memory is not going, but my mind certainly is," you think as you become more and more paranoid.

There's no time to look for the car keys and then get dinner on the table so you open up a couple of cans of baked beans instead.

Just as you put dinner on the table, your husband walks in.

"Honey, I'm home," he sings as the children rush to greet him.

He puts his keys on the dining room table and turns to go wash for supper.

"Not so fast," you call after him.

"What?" he says, totally bewildered.

"Look at the key chain," you say in a trembling voice. "It says, 'A moment on the

lips, forever on the hips'. "Correct me if I'm wrong but, aren't those my keys?"

"I'm sorry, Hon," he says. I couldn't find my keys and I didn't have enough time to look for them this morning, so I borrowed yours. I left you a note."

Needless to say, you found no note. That is, until your pre-schooler now brings you the beautiful picture he made....on the other side of your husband's note.

"I give up," you say in a totally exasperated tone. By this time you are completely exhausted. You ask your daughter to serve dinner, which she does and your husband to pick up your developmentally disabled child from the after-school center, which he readily agrees to do.

"I'm going to lie down," you tell your family. I have absolutely no energy left." You fall asleep in an instant. The next thing you know, Moishe is there, sparkling clean. Your daughter gave him a bath and your husband gave him a hot dog.

"Mommy, eat," he says as he hands you the hot dog. "Moishe make for you."

"Thank you, darling," you say as one lone tear trickles down your cheek. "How about I eat the hot dog from one end and you eat it from the other?"

"Okay, Mommy," he says. "Moishe hungry."

Before he takes a bite, he smiles as only Moishe can smile. In that one instant the troubles of the day melt away. All you know is you are now holding the most delicious hot dog and the most delicious little boy in the entire world.

If A Teenager Answers ... Back

By Judy Gruenfeld

Mom, Dad, welcome to the teenage years. I know you've been there and done that, but you are about to go back and do it again. If you think it was hard for you the first time, brace yourself. Fasten your seatbelts and make sure the airbags are in good working order because the ride has gotten much more hazardous since you were the one in the "driver's seat." In case you are not already aware, let me clue you in. Teenagers know all there is to know. My girlfriend had a sign on her kitchen wall that read,

"Hire a teenager while he still knows everything."

To begin with, there is a magazine in the secular world called Teen People, which, in my opinion, is an oxymoron. Teens are not people. They will become people one day, G-d willing, but right now they are suspended in that no man's land between childhood and adulthood. A thirteen year old will behave as if he were three one day and thirty the next.

When my younger son (seven lbs. at birth, and all of it mouth) turned thirteen it was almost as if aliens had invaded his body. I was sure that one of us would not make it through his teenage years. I wasn't sure which one, but I knew we both would not emerge unscathed.

The next four incidents will illustrate my point.

My son was given a telephone for his Bar Mitzvah. Up until that time he had been using the phone in the kitchen and had quick conversations with his friends. But now, with one in his own room, he was constantly on the phone.

One morning my mother called and complained that she had tried to reach me until ten o'clock the previous night and couldn't get

through. "To whom were you speaking?" she inquired.

"I wasn't on the phone last night" I informed my mother. "But, I'll give you one guess as to who was." Needless to say, she guessed right away,

"I'll call the phone company as soon as we're done and I'll order call waiting," I told my mother, which is exactly what I did.

When my son came home from school, I told him, "Grandma tried to reach me on the phone until ten o'clock last night. First of all, you need to be off the phone by nine-thirty unless there is some sort of a problem with homework. "Second, I ordered call waiting. We will have it in two days. I want to explain how it works."

"I know how call waiting works," he assured me.

"No, you don't" I retorted.

"Yes, I do," he insisted.

"Indulge me," I admonished.

He listened, under "duress," and I began,

"Suppose you're on the phone with a friend and you hear a click. You tell your friend, one minute, please. You push the reset button and say hello. When the person on the other end asks to speak to Dad or me, you say, one minute please. You push the reset button again and tell your friend that your parents have a phone call and you have to hang up. Then you push the reset button a third time and tell whoever is on the line that you will get us, at which point you let us know we have a phone call."

"You mean your calls always take priority over mine?" my son asked.

"Now you know how call waiting works!" I reassured him. He wasn't too happy but he knew better than to argue further.

Scene Two: same son, three months later.

He came over to me to complain about our vacation plans.

"It's not fair," my son informed me.

"Most of my friends go away for a week or two and we only go away for three or four days at a time."

"I understand exactly how you feel. You've got a legitimate gripe," I empathized. "If it weren't for you and your brother, your father and I could probably go away for a month."

Fortunately, he took the hint and didn't complain any more.

Scene Three: same son, two years later.

I had forgotten to purchase something for my son at the store that he needed for a school project. When he came home from school and asked for the item, I had to admit that it had completely slipped my mind.

"Mom," he said. "You're getting senile."

Not wanting to be out done by a wisecracking fifteen year old, I replied,

"Son, if I ever get senile, the first thing I hope I forget is you!" Not too nice maybe, but definitely justifiable.

Scene Four: same son, another two years later.

I'm sure you're aware of the fact that at age twenty-one, your child can legally purchase liquor and drink in a public bar. At age eighteen, he can legally vote, serve his country in the armed forces, and purchase cigarettes. And at age seventeen he can obtain a driver's license in this state. But, did you know that at age seventeen he can also legally donate blood, with parental consent? Neither did I until my son came home from school one day and waved a piece of paper in front of my face.

"Mom," he said, "Can you sign this, please?"

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's just a piece of paper that says you give your permission for me to donate blood. If I were eighteen, I wouldn't need your permission but at seventeen, I do."

"How come you want to donate blood?" I naively asked.

"It's our civic duty to help others if we can," was my son's altruistic response.

"Sure, I'll sign the paper," I told him. "Easy for you, since you've drained all of mine!"

Well, we both made it through. My son is no longer a teenager and is a delight, thank G-d. Unfortunately though, I think I've been scarred for life.

From Steerage to First Class in Two Generations

By Judy Gruenfeld

The day began as any other. The sun rose in the sky. The birds chirped. And the leaves on the trees, with the aid of a breeze, performed their ritual dance. But that's where all reference to mundane, ordinary events ceased and an eerie feeling began to overcome me. It was not a feeling I could define, nor was it one I could explain. We were going on vacation; about to embark on a cruise to the Bahamas. Though it was hurricane season (or perhaps because of that fact) we were going to set sail on one of the largest luxury liners for almost half price. Why did I feel so uneasy? My mother's words echoed in my ears.

"How can you even consider going to the Bahamas during hurricane season? That's crazy! Please, don't go!"

Perhaps Hurricane Frances had something to do with my mother's trepidation and my discomfort. Frances had already ripped through the Bahamas and was wreaking havoc in Florida this very moment.

The crew assured us, when we boarded the ship, that although no one would be put in harm's way, they would do their best to stay on course.

"Why?" I asked the steward.

"Why, what?" he responded.

"Why is it so important to stay on course if the ride will be uncomfortable?"

"Madam," he said. Although the final decision is the captain's, I can assure you we would never put any lives in jeopardy."

Needless to say, I was not a happy sailor. Images of my grandmother immigrating to this country, traveling steerage for three weeks in the hot, stuffy bowels of a 1912 steamship did to my head what the choppy waters and the endlessly rocking motion of the ship did to my stomach. I lost the battle.

"You waited too long to take the seasickness medication," advised my husband as we were being seated for dinner.

"Now you tell me!" I retorted with the trite expression. "I'm going back to the room," I informed my husband. "I won't be able to eat and the smell of all the different foods is exacerbating my already weakened condition."

When I returned to the room, I took a nice, hot shower in the squeaky, clean bathroom and lay down on the crispy, white sheet that covered my full size bed. As I started drifting off to sleep, my mind began to conjure up more images of my grandmother. It had been over ninety years since she crossed the ocean in search of a better life for herself and her progeny. Now, here I was, just two generations later, a soft, spoiled American. I was cruising to the Bahamas, complaining about the raw deal we had gotten with regard to the weather, and throwing up into a sanitary toilet I could flush after each episode.

Try as I might, I could not transform myself back to the very different voyage that occurred over ninety years ago. I was coming from a totally different time and place, both literally and figuratively. I had no frame of reference regarding hardship (no pun intended) and suffering. My grandmother had, indeed, accomplished her goal.

I am fortunate that I have never experienced any overt anti-Semitism first hand. And though I have never wanted for anything, I do not come from a privileged background, nor am I "ungashtupt mit gelt". Yet, here we were, your average, middle-aged baby-boomers, cruising across the sea, being waited on hand and foot, and being treated with the utmost dignity and respect.

Because of the hurricane, the ship could not dock anywhere for several days. I even found myself getting bored from time to time. I do not like indoor pools because I find the artificial heat and humidity oppressing. So, when my husband went swimming, I would go back to our stateroom, crank up the air-conditioning, pick up the remote control for the television and go "channel surfing" until I found a suitable program to watch, while I waited for my next meal to be served to me.

Seven days and six nights later, we disembarked from the ship and headed home in a limousine, provided free of charge, by one of my husband's clients.

As we drove along Route 9, heading towards Lakewood, I attempted to sort out my thoughts and my feelings regarding the two very different journeys of old world Rivka Shlopak and new age Judy Gruenfeld. I came to the conclusion that there are many lessons to be learned by juxtaposing my experiences on board ship with those of my grandmother. However, I will not proselytize. Instead, I will allow you, dear reader, to extract those lessons that you feel will help you examine the meaning of your life and the veracity of your values.

Technology and Me Or How I Learned to Survive Outside the Cave

By Judy Gruenfeld

There's no doubt about it. The technological age is definitely here to stay. Whether or not you, personally, make use of this technology, you must admit our lives have been changed forever.

As you are well aware, mainstream American society is hooked on the television. Studies have been taken that reveal very interesting results. For instance, brain waves monitored on children watching TV showed less activity than when the children were sleeping. It has also been proven that children bum fewer calories while watching television than they do when lying, motionless on the floor.

Your average couch potato, before the advent of the remote control, at least got some exercise when getting up to change the channel. Now, one does not even have to remove one's self from one's chair, which incidentally, has come to be shaped like the user's derriere, in order to flip the channel.

So, I decided I would take a stroll around your typical American neighborhood and take a poll, to find out how much of a toll on everyone's life, took this remote control. I asked every family to take into account every faction and rate how much of a distraction to familial interaction they'd consider this contraption. As you can imagine, I got every reaction from "I'm sorry, I can't talk now, my favorite show is on" to shouts from couch potatoes who would not even get up to answer the door. It seemed that all I got for all my trials, were vacant looks and empty smiles. As for those who did come to the door, their backs were hunched and their knees were bent, for all the time before the tube they spent. It seems

the only part that was not numb, obviously, was each one's thumb.

Kudos to those of us who are not slaves to this ubiquitous box.

The invention that has me .most baffled is the computer. It seems the computer was born, grew up, and took over the world before I even knew that when someone said "Macintosh" he was not referring to an apple and when he said "apple" he was not referring to a fruit. Needless to say, I had to come out from under my rock and join the rest of the world. I decided I would learn to work computers if it took a year or three. The do's and don'ts of DOS and FONTS would not get the better of me. I'd sit down really anxious to apply what I had learned. And wouldn't you know, the darn thing was obnoxious, and "on" it couldn't be turned. My frustration would build as I would pore and more know ledge I would seek. I hoped I would learn a little more at my lesson the following week. My husband continued to reassure me the computer couldn't be broken. But he had to constantly remind me that it, I should stop pokin'.

He asked me, "What do you fear? Why stay up all night? The problem's only slight"

I answered him, "Now listen, dear. The problem is, it bytes."

He insisted that I come back to bed as it was the middle of the winter and told me that the mouse had slid through the window and was hiding in the printer.

I did not appreciate his teasing me and told him to stop. He then tried to reassure me.

"There is no need to dread," said he, "though you'll never learn to hack." "But, mark

my words, the day you'll see when at it you'll get back.”

Amazingly, he was right. It took a good two months but I learned "Word" and then e-mail. I can now type articles on the computer and email them to the American Jewish Times.

My next project is to learn how to make full use of my cell phone. It seems that every time we get a new phone and a new contract to go with it, another improved feature comes out that we want. They've got us

coming and going, hither and thither and yon. It's supposed to make life easier but it's really not much fun. When I was small, Ma Bell owned all. It was really easy to call. You'd pick up the phone, hear a dial tone, and hope the party was home. No call waiting or answer machines, now it seems really weird. Those little cells, one day I fear, will be grafted to our ear. But, who am I? What do I know? I no longer can bury my head. So, with a sigh, I have to go. Do I answer the phone, the doorbell or the e-mail, instead?

Strolling Through Life

By Judy Gruenfeld

The other day I bumped into a friend of mine at the supermarket. We hadn't seen each other for quite some time and, as you can imagine, we were both anxious to catch up on what was happening in each other's lives. The last time we spoke, she had mentioned that she had started babysitting for her grandson when her daughter went to work and I had mentioned that I had started writing.

"I read your latest article in the American Jewish Times," she told me.

"Oh?" I responded.

She said nothing.

I stood there like a kid who had just asked his mother for another scoop of ice cream.

She laughed. "Of course, I liked it," she finally said. "How do you come up with ideas for all the articles and stories you write?"

"Life is one big story that is constantly unfolding," I philosophically stated. "I just change my hat from that of wife, mother, daughter, friend, etc. and put on my writer's cap; usually right on top of one of the other hats. I am then able to gain a new perspective on whatever is going on. I see things through different "glasses", so to speak. "Everything is a potential story;" I added, insightfully.

"I suppose you're right," she admitted. "Do you know what happened to me last week?" she asked.

"No, but I have a feeling I'm about to find out" I surrendered.

"I needed a dress for my nephew's chasana," she began. "So, I decided that after my daughter drops my grandson off, I would go to the mall and try my luck at finding something. You remember I told you last time we spoke that I watch him from Tuesday morning until Wednesday afternoon, when my

daughter goes to work. Anyway, by ten o'clock on Tuesday morning, the baby was secure in his car seat, the stroller was in the trunk and we were on our way."

"I just couldn't seem to find anything appropriate," she continued. "I walked up and down the mall for hours. Eventually, we stopped and ate our lunch and then continued on what seemed like an endless quest. Finally, at four

o'clock, I found something suitable. I paid for the dress and whisked the baby off to the car. The poor thing was exhausted. I think he fell asleep as soon as I put the key in the ignition."

"When I pulled into the driveway and took the baby out of his car seat, he didn't wake up. Since it was late and I had to prepare dinner, as my husband was due home soon, I put the baby in his crib."

"After dinner we went to check on him. He was breathing normally and was not warm to the touch, so we figured he was knocked out from the exhausting day. It wasn't until my husband took the stroller out of the car that I realized just how totally exhausted my poor, little, two year old grandson must have been."

"I can't wait to hear this," I managed to squeeze in when she paused for a moment to catch her breath.

"My husband came in the house with the stroller and asked, "What happened to the foot rest? It's not here."

"I collapsed with laughter," added my friend, "when I realized my poor grandson had literally been running up and down the mall with me all day."

"Poor baby," I consoled her as I, too, started roaring with laughter. "You see, as I said before, you never know when a good story will cross your path."

My girlfriend could only nod in agreement. But let me interject here, just as a word of caution; if you run into me in the supermarket, or any place else, for that matter,

you may want to weigh your words. You never know. You could be the subject of my next article.

The Yiddishe Mama Vs. The Little League

By Judy Gruenfeld

It's mid-April, tax season is finally over, and all the CPA's heave a sigh of relief. But not for long. Little League season is about to begin. As a dutiful Yiddishe mama, I take my son to register him for Little League. He loves the game and at age six is thrilled that he finally qualifies to play. Duly registered, he is assigned to a team, issued a uniform and given a schedule of practices and games for the season.

As soon as we arrive home, sonny goes to try on his prized uniform and I sit down to check the schedule. Practice is three times a week, plus a game on Sunday afternoon. No problem. Of course I can fit that into my schedule. I have little else to do. After all, I'm only a housewife and mother. A couple of

minutes later I am confronted by my all-star,

"How do I look, Mommy?" he asks."

"Like a professional", I tell him as he smiles from ear to ear. "But remember, baseball is an outdoor sport. If I catch you throwing or batting the ball in the house, you're off the team."

"No problem", says my future Hall of Famer. "I'm going to call Bubby and tell her. Naturally, my mother wants to talk to me.

"Vus is de mare mit du?" (What is the matter with you") asks my mother. "He'll get hurt. He's only a little boy. It's a very dangerous game. He could get hit with the bat or the ball."

"I'll look into it", I told my mother as I, myself was becoming more and more apprehensive about the whole thing.

And so, it began. School, homework, Little League practice, Talmud-Torah, game. School, homework, Little League practice, Talmud-Torah, game, on and on throughout the season. Fortunately winter was over. But

they practice and play if it drizzles, if it rains, or if it pours. Naturally, I complain to the coach.

"Mrs. Gruenfeld", he says, "the boys must get their practices in. I assure you we wouldn't put their health in jeopardy, Chas Veshalom. All the other teams practice, rain or shine, and if we don't have all our practices, we will definitely be at a disadvantage and that wouldn't be fair to the boys. As you know, games are not cancelled due to weather and we must be prepared."

"You mean you play in the rain, too? These are little boys. Is it so important not to miss a game?"

"We want to give our boys every advantage possible. It would not be fair to them to forfeit a game just because of the weather", the coach informed me. "And if the other team shows up and we don't, we will forfeit the game".

"Oh, I see", I told the coach, although I couldn't see his reasoning at all.

Fortunately we made it through most of the spring with the sun shining and the boys having a wonderful season. Then it happened. One Sunday morning while picking my son up from Talmud-Torah, it started raining.

"It's raining", I said to my husband when we returned home.

"So", came his response.

"They won't cancel the Little League game due to the rain", I informed him.

"You don't have to come", he said.

"That's not the point", I told him. "I don't want to miss the game. I just don't want our son out in the rain all day".

"He'll be in the dugout most of the time", my husband tried to appease me. "The

nasty raindrops will only get their chance to attack him when it's his tum to play."

"Not" funny", I responded, as we got ready for the dreaded game.

When we arrived at the baseball field, my husband and I took our seats in the bleachers. I put a plastic bag down for us to sit on and, naturally, opened up a large umbrella.

As my son stepped up to the plate, bat in hand, I felt a knot in my stomach. "Oy, vey. He'll get sick. I know he'll get sick", I lamented.

My husband tried to comfort me, to no avail.

My son hit the ball and started running around the bases.

"I'm very proud of you", my husband leaned over and told me.

"Why?" I asked.

"I surely thought you would have run the bases with him, holding the umbrella over his head".

"Don't be ridiculous", I retorted, a little annoyed that he was able to read my mind so clearly.

Growing Up in Shtetelham, U.S.A.

By Judy Gruenfeld

Our culture is replete with stories and parables. This, you know.

My grandmother never lectured me or told me what to do or what not to do. She always used a story to get her point across. And the point always hit its mark.

We never rebelled. There was nothing to rebel against. How do you turn your back on a warm story that is accompanied by a warm hug and a huge dose of love?

We were allowed to be children but there were expectations of us. And we children would never entertain the idea of not living up to those expectations.

The worst punishment that could be meted out was for a parent or grandparent to be disappointed in us.

Grandma never heard of psychology, Freud or The Gestalt Theory. We were raised with the Gevalt Theory. If you did something wrong, she would clutch her chest and say, "Oy, Gevalt!"

Whatever it was you did, you never did it again! A little guilt, well placed, went a long way.

Grandma and Grandpa lived across the street. Aunts, uncles and cousins lived down the block. If you didn't like what Mom was making for dinner, you could always manage to get an invitation elsewhere.

I can recall one afternoon when my cousin was playing at my house. It was getting close to dinner time and she asked if she could stay.

My mother, of course, told her she was more than welcome but we were having veal cutlets for dinner and my cousin didn't like veal cutlets.

"I'll eat it", she said. And she did.

My mom gave my aunt the recipe and veal cutlets were never a problem again.

Then there was the time I was playing at her house. As dinner time approached, I was invited to stay at her house.

"What are you having for dinner?" I asked my aunt.

"Meatloaf", she answered.

"Nah", I said. "I think I'll eat at home, But, thanks anyway".

We had more than one home but we weren't split in half. On the contrary, the whole neighborhood was our home. And neighborhoods were safe.

On Shabbos I would get dressed up and go shul-hopping with my cousins and friends and then to my Grandmother's for the afternoon meal.

One particular Shabbos a neighbor joined us. After the meal, my cousins and I went about the business of being children and making noise as children do. When the neighbor questioned my grandmother as to why she allowed us to make so much noise, my grandmother replied,

"My grandchildren don't make noise. My grandchildren make music".

If my parents went out Motzei Shabbos, I got to sleep at my grandparents' house.

As a matter of fact, I usually slept over anyway. My grandmother would sneak me a piece of candy before my grandfather said, "Gay shuffen. Es is shpate und du bist meed". (Go to sleep. It's late and you are tired).

Yawning, I would deny the accusation and sneak the candy into my mouth while covering up my yawn. Those were delicious days.

I would lay my head down on the pillow, enveloped in love and warmth. As I started drifting off to sleep the stories would start swimming around in my head.

As the years went by, my head was filled with many more stories, some of which happened to me and some of which were told to me by my grandmother. Are they true?

Whether or not they actually happened is not what is important. What is important is

that they took on a life of their own and in doing so created their own reality.

And that reality exists today every time I tell my children a story to make a point. Do they listen? I really couldn't say. They're all grown up now and living their own lives; lives that are much richer, I think, because of all those stories.

Father Does Indeed Know Best

By Judy Gruenfeld

On April 20, 1999 two very troubled youths opened fire on their classmates at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. When the shooting finally ended, twelve students and one teacher lay victim of these two troubled youths and the troubled times in which we live.

Darrell Scott, the father of one of the slain students was asked to speak before the House of Representatives. The following is a portion of his statement. It also contains a preface by a concerned citizen who has taken up the cause and is e-mailing Mr. Scott's message to everyone he knows.

Darrell Scott's Testimony

I guess our national leaders didn't expect this. On Thursday, Darrell Scott, the father of Rachel Scott, a victim of the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado, was invited to address the House Judiciary Committee's subcommittee. What he said to our national leaders during this special session of Congress was painfully truthful. They were not prepared for what he was to say; nor was it well received. It needs to be heard by every parent, every teacher, every politician, every sociologist, every psychologist, and every so-called expert!

"These courageous words spoken by Darrell Scott are powerful, penetrating, and deeply personal. There is no doubt that G-d sent this man as a voice crying in the wilderness. The following is a portion of the transcript:"

"Since the dawn of creation there has been both good and evil in the hearts of men and women. We all contain the seeds of kindness or the seeds of violence. The death of my wonderful daughter, Rachel Joy Scott, and the deaths of that heroic teacher, and the other

eleven children must not be in vain. Their blood cries out for answers."

"The first recorded act of violence was when Cain slew his brother Abel in the field. The villain was not the club he used. Neither was it the NCA, the National Club Association. The true killer was Cain, and the reason for the murder could only be found in Cain's heart.

"In the days that followed the Columbine tragedy, I was amazed at how quickly fingers began to point at groups such as the NRA, the National Rifle Association. I am not a member of the NRA. I am not a hunter. I do not own a gun. I am not here to represent or defend the NRA, because I don't believe that they are responsible for my daughter's death. Therefore, I do not believe that they need to be defended. If I believed they had anything to do with Rachel's murder I would be their strongest opponent.

"I am here today to declare that Columbine was not just a tragedy, it was a spiritual event that should be forcing us to look at where the real blame lies! Much of the blame lies here in this room. Much of the blame lies behind the pointing fingers of the accusers themselves. I wrote a poem just four nights ago that express my feelings best. This was written before I knew I would be speaking here today:"

Your laws ignore our deepest needs,
Your words are empty air.

You've stripped away our heritage,
You've outlawed simple prayer.

Now gunshots fill our classrooms, And
precious children die.

You look for answers everywhere, You
ask the question "Why"?

You regulate restrictive laws, Through legislative creed.

And yet you fail to understand, That G-d is what we need!"

"Men and women are two-part beings. We all consist of a body and a soul. When we refuse to acknowledge this second part of our makeup, we create a void that allows evil, prejudice, and hatred to rush in and wreak havoc. Spiritual presences were found within our education systems for most of our nation's history. Many of our major colleges began as theological seminaries. This is a historical fact. What has happened to us as a nation? We have refused to honor G-d, and in so doing, we have opened the doors to hatred and violence. And when something as terrible as Columbine's tragedy occurs, politicians immediately look for a scapegoat such as the NRA. They immediately seek to pass more restrictive laws that continue to erode our personal and private liberties. We do not need more restrictive laws. Metal detectors would not have stopped those two troubled boys. No amount of gun control can stop someone who spends months planning

this type of massacre. The real villain lies within our own hearts."

"As my son Craig lay under that table in the school library and saw his two friends murdered before his very eyes, he did not hesitate to pray in school. I defy any law or politician to deny him that right! I challenge every young person in America, and around the world to realize that on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School, prayer was brought back to our schools. Do not let the many prayers offered by those students be in vain. Dare to move into the new millennium with a sacred disregard for legislation that violates your G-d given right to communicate with Him. To those of you who would point your finger at the NRA, I give you a sincere challenge. Dare to examine your own heart first."

We, as from Jews, know the importance of having Hashem in our lives. We are truly a light unto the nations. I implore each and every one of you, myself included, to reach out and do our part to restore wholesome family values, with our Father in Heaven as Head of the "Household", to both Jew and Gentile alike.

Zaidy's Menorah

By Judy Gruenfeld

Dear Ainaclach,

When Zaidy and I were first married, we naturally, had to be sure we had everything necessary to set up a proper Jewish home. Some things were given to us as gifts, and other things we had to go out and buy.

When Zaidy had his upshiren (first haircut) at age three, Alte Bubby Miriam's mother gave your Zaidy a menorah as a gift, I think you know the one I am talking about; the silver one with the Star of David on it. This menorah was very special to Zaidy and he polished it every year before Chanukah until it sparkled. I will now tell you the story behind the menorah.

As you know, Bubby Miriam and Zaidy Dovid are from Europe. When the Nazis came and arrested Alte Bubby and Zaidy and their parents and took them to a concentration camp, they stole all of their possessions as they did with every other Jewish family (may their blood be avenged).

Bubby Miriam and Zaidy Dovid were told to pack a few things and be ready to leave in one hour. They did not know where they were going or what they should pack. Did they need clothing for warm weather or cold weather? Could they take any of their paintings, crystal, china, silver? They had no children yet, but they wanted to pass along some of their prized possessions should they somehow manage to survive the war and have a family. Alte Bubby was very smart. She knew the paintings were too big and the china and crystal could break. She very carefully wrapped the menorah that her mother had given her father for Chanukah the first year they were married, in an old dress and stuffed it into her bag along with a few other things.

They suffered for many long years in the concentration camp. But, every Chanukah they sneaked out the menorah and pretended to have candles to light. This brought hope to many prisoners.

Finally, the war was over and, through many miracles from Hashem, they all survived and came to America. Alte Bubby Miriam's father passed away before your Zaidy was born and your Zaidy is named after him. Now you know why that menorah is so precious to Zaidy to this day.

One year, Zaidy was sick and just didn't have the strength to polish his precious menorah. His mother, Alte Bubby Miriam, tried to comfort her son but Naftali refused to be comforted. He had a bad case of the flu and a high fever. The doctor told his mother that Naftali must stay in bed and rest.

His fever was so high that Naftali became delirious and kept repeating, "I have to polish my menorah. Chanukah starts tonight."

When Zaidy's father, Alte Zaidy Dovid came home from work he looked in on his son. Naftali was burning up with fever.

"Don't worry," said his father, "I will polish your menorah for you. You just rest and get well."

Alte Zaidy Dovid polished Naftali's and his own menorah until he could see his reflection in them.

"Well," said Dovid to himself, "The menorah is ready. Please, Hashem, make Naftali better so he can light the candles tonight."

About five minutes before it was time to light the menorahs Naftali walked into the dining room.

The Legacy of the Pogrom

By Judy Gruenfeld

As the High Holy days approach, one cannot help but think about what one has accomplished during the past year and what one would like to accomplish in the year to come. And thus, the years are linked together. As more and more years are linked together, generations are formed. And they, too, are linked together, each one having an effect on the next one and so on down the line.

My story is no different.

In the 1840s the genteel, German Jewish woman began arriving in the United States. She belonged to a Jewish community that had already begun to take giant steps along the path of modernization. She was generally of wealthy or middle class background and was greatly influenced by the Enlightenment.

Jews of the Enlightenment began to shed their orthodox ways in favor of a more secular, more assimilated way of life. While Jewish boys continued to be educated in traditional Jewish studies, Jewish girls were taught social graces and secular studies.

Western society offered the up and coming Jewish woman a social and intellectual status she felt was denied her within the confines of the traditional Jewish community. And so, the educated Jewish woman in Germany abandoned her Jewish tradition in favor of the secular community that afforded her more opportunity to be a part of the intellectual and cultural world.

Nevertheless, while Jews in Germany had assimilated into the German culture they were not considered "full citizens" and did have some of their rights restricted. They, therefore, immigrated to the United States in search of full equality. With them they brought their middle class values and education and

established a community that functioned smoothly within the mainstream of American society.

In contrast, Eastern European women were a totally different breed. They were robust, aggressive, energetic, hard working and intelligent, even if uneducated. They had to be in order to protect their children from the anti-Semitism that surrounded them.

They came to this country impoverished, seeking freedom from the pogroms of Czarist Russia. These poor women had to continue to run their homes while seeking work outside the home and more often than not deserved the credit for keeping body, soul and family together. They were highly respected for their maternal, domestic, and business acumen.

It is the Eastern European woman who came to be maligned as the stereotypical domineering, overprotective "Jewish Mother" who pushed her children unmercifully to succeed. She was accused of being loud, pushy, and emasculating her husband.

But it was not the Eastern European Jewish woman who had changed so much as the way in which she was perceived. As stated above, these characteristics were crucial for her in order to maintain her family's stability in the midst of the poverty and persecution they encountered in every day shtetl life.

And although the shtetl conditions and overt anti-Semitism did not exist in nineteenth century America, the pattern of behavior had been so ingrained for generations that it was woven into the very fabric of the Eastern European woman's psyche.

In one such shtetl lived the Shlopak family. The eldest child was a daughter, followed by six boys and then another girl.

This last girl and youngest child, Rivka, was my grandmother. She passed away at age ninety-one and was fortunate enough to live to see two great grandsons.

Her picture hangs on my dining room wall. For me, it is like looking in a mirror. She was in her late teens at the time and my resemblance to her is uncanny. When I look at the photograph I see myself.

The deep-set eyes, the thin, aristocratic lips, the strong prominent nose all seem to define my existence. She had the strong-willed look on her face of someone who is determined to succeed.

It could not have been easy for her to leave her entire family. But, a young, Jewish girl, if she intended to grow old, had to escape the pogroms of Czarist Russia. Being beaten, ravaged, or killed was not in my grandmother's plans for her future.

Rivka's father begged her not to leave. She was his youngest and favorite child. She learned better than the boys did and he would have endless discussions on Talmud and Torah with her. Though girls were not given any formal education, Rivka would hide in another room when the rabbi came to teach the boys. She was like a sponge and could recite backwards and forwards what it took the boys much longer to learn.

And so it was, at the age of nineteen, Rivka left her family of origin and came to these United States amidst protestations of her aging parents who needed her to take care of them. She packed her bags with a few articles of clothing and a suitcase full of guilt.

She met and married a kind, gentle and wonderful man and together they had two children. When my mother was born, the second of the two girls, my grandmother had a dream. In the dream, her mother came to her and asked her why she did not see fit to name one of her daughters after her. Communication

was nearly impossible and Rivka never knew when her parents had passed away.

More guilt! So much so that she felt guilty for having a loving husband and two normal, healthy children. She didn't deserve this much good fortune! But wasn't that why she came to America? Naturally, when I was born I was named after my great-grandmother.

Rivka was very overprotective of her children as was her mother. But, Baruch Hashem, there were no pogroms in America. Only guilt. What care she could not provide for her parents she lavished on her children and husband.

The girls were never allowed out of her sight. Nor were they allowed to argue as normal siblings do. If my grandfather was late coming home from work, my grandmother imagined the worst. My grandmother was very histrionic and if one of her children fell and got hurt, or became sick, my grandmother would appear to be in more pain than her child.

As a result, my mother was always afraid of upsetting my grandmother and went out of her way to please her. When she, herself, became a mother the overprotective tradition continued. As an only child I, too, wanted to please my mother and often went against my own inclinations in order to satisfy her. At times this caused a lot of stress and anxiety and feelings of loneliness and alienation.

After becoming a parent I, too, have been accused by my sons of being an "overprotective Jewish mother." And this, after three generations of living a pogrom free "American dream."

When I think about our legacy I try to transform myself back in time and become the young woman in the picture that is hanging on my dining room wall. What was it like to be a young Rivka with determination on her mind

and fear in her heart? All the clues are not easily read on the face staring back at me.

Who was she? What was she thinking? How did it feel to be her? I can only guess at the answers, and only one thing comes to mind (with the help of 20/20 hindsight). She is thinking of coming to America and building a new life for herself and possibly having a granddaughter that looks just like her.

When my grandmother came to this country she brought with her not only her fears, but also her hopes and dreams for the

future, an undaunted spirit and a steadfast belief in Hashem. She taught me how to sew, how to daven, how to read and speak Yiddish and ignited the "Pintala Yid" in my neshama. This spirit is still alive in me. It is an essence that, once captured, sets the soul free to soar to unimaginable heights.

L' Shana Tova to all of you. May you all be inscribed in the Book of Life for the coming year.

Intro. to Cleaning 101

By Judy Gruenfeld

As the car pulled out of the parking lot, tears started streaming down my cheeks. We had just dropped my youngest off at college and I was far from ready to part with my baby, even though he was eighteen years old at the time. He, on the other hand, couldn't wait to spread his wings, unencumbered by his parents.

"Why are you crying?" my husband asked.

"He won't eat right. He won't get enough sleep. He'll forget to wear a sweater if it's cold. He'll get sick. He needs his mother."

"That's not the way he sees it," my husband tried to console me. "He'll be fine. He's mature enough to take care of himself. And besides, we're only fifty minutes away. Remember the 'blood oath' we had to sign promising him we wouldn't show up at his dorm room, unannounced?"

I smiled and wiped away my tears. "I guess I can wait until parent orientation, which is just before Yom Tov, but things will never be the same."

The trip home was the longest car ride I had ever taken. The fifty minutes from my son's college to our home might as well have been fifty years. When we walked into the house there was an eerie silence. I ran right up to his room, saw the empty bed, neatly made, probably for the second or third time since my son had been sleeping in it, and started crying again. His absence was palpable.

"Come on," said my husband. We'll go out for dinner. You'll feel better."

Reluctantly, I agreed. And in spite of the gnawing in my stomach, we actually had a very pleasant evening.

We spoke to my son on the phone a few times and he assured us everything was

going well. He was enjoying his classes, was making new friends, and was scouting out all the different extra curricular activities the school had to offer. I managed to get through the next three weeks, and we excitedly went to the parent orientation.

When we arrived at the dorm, I tapped on the door with my foot. Neither my husband nor I had a free hand as we were carrying bags of food, clothing, and various items that my son requested we bring him. Since none of the items was perishable, we figured we might as well bring the supplies to him at that time rather than wait until after Yom Tov.

My son opened the door and we took two steps into the room. That's as far as we could go. There were books, clothing, and various and sundry items spread out all over the floor. I don't know why I was surprised. It looked just like his room at home had always looked.

Maybe I thought he had matured a little. I was wrong. We managed to step over several things and made our way farther into the abyss. There was nowhere to sit. In one fell swoop, my son cleared everything off his bed and motioned for us to sit down, which we did. Then my husband got up and went to use the bathroom. When he came out, he said to my son,

"Next time I come, I'm going to bring some cleanser and show you how to clean the bathroom."

My son just shrugged his shoulders.

The next time my husband went to the school was to pick my son up for Thanksgiving break. When they came home, my husband said he had forgotten to bring the bathroom cleanser and asked me to remind

him to take it with him when he drove my son back to school on Sunday night.

"No problem," I told him. But, naturally, we both forgot.

"I'm sure they have bathroom cleaner at the college," I told my husband. "I remember getting it from the dorm supervisor."

"I suppose you're right," my husband conceded.

The next time I spoke to my son I reminded him to get something to clean the bathroom. He told me not to worry, that everything was under control. But somehow, I was not- appeased.

At the end of the semester, my husband went to pick up our prodigy, lock, stock and barrel. Along with him came several loads of

dirty laundry which I immediately proceeded to wash. After I put up a load of laundry I asked my son,

"Did you remember to get the bathroom cleanser from the dorm supervisor?"

"Uh, no." I was told. "I guess I forgot."

"You forgot?!" I responded, feeling as though there were bugs crawling up my skin.

"Did you use anything else?" I asked.

"No," came the casual reply. .

"Let me ask you something," I said to my son: "Do you mean to tell me that you didn't clean the bathroom once during the entire semester?"

He looked at me, his face totally void of expression, and said, "It didn't need it."

Standing Still and Moving Backwards

By Judy Gruenfeld

We keep hearing that the world is getting smaller. Sometimes I wonder, though. Naturally, with the advent of the Concorde, newer, sleeker cars and trains, increasing speed limits, and millions and millions of miles of highways and byways, one would think it would be quicker and easier to get from point A to point B. It used to take weeks, and sometimes months, for the pony express to deliver mail from its point of origin to its destination. Now, letters are delivered, depending on how far they must travel, within a day or two. Usually. The quickest way to correspond, of course, is via e-mail. You type your message, click "send" and in an instant the message appears on the addressee's screen. Ours has become a world in which nothing but instant gratification is acceptable.

We're also hearing a lot about road rage. People are becoming less and patient and tolerant while behind the wheel of their cars and lashing out at drivers of other vehicles, often with disastrous results. With more and more vehicles on the road today we often find ourselves spending more time sitting in traffic than actually moving towards our destination.

My husband and I moved to Jackson (which is four miles north of Lakewood) back in 1970. It took an hour and a half to get from Jackson to my parents' home in Flushing, Queens. Needless to say, with my husband at work all day and only one car (which he used to commute to work), I felt as if I were exiled to yemenvelt, miles from civilization, stuck in the house with my then fifteen month old baby. My husband's commute into Manhattan was an hour and a half, which was not much longer than it took him to travel by bus and subway from Whitestone, Queens.

A while ago I went to visit a friend of mine who lives in Forest Hills, Queens. I hadn't seen her in years and was looking forward to spending a pleasant afternoon catching up on all that had transpired since the last time we had gotten together. In order to get to her house I needed to take the Brooklyn Queens Expressway to the Long Island Expressway (otherwise referred to as the world's largest parking lot). And that was back in 1970! I left the house about nine o'clock in the morning figuring that rush hour would be over. Now, we've been living in New Jersey for thirty-four years. Traffic has gotten terrible here. Or so I thought. There are definitely more cars and more traffic in this area than there was all those years ago. And, naturally, we all complain if it takes us a few minutes longer than we think it should to reach our destination: So, you can imagine how totally unprepared I was for my adventure on the BQE and the LIE. There is no such thing as "rush hour" anymore. Cars seem to be bumper to bumper twenty-four/seven, or, in our case, twenty-four/six. I've never seen such congestion! Where did all these people come from? And why weren't they either at work already or at home? Fortunately, I had a few Torah tapes that I keep in the car. I decided that since there was nothing I could do to eliminate all the other cars (or, one in particular that I would have liked to instantly transport to my friend's driveway) I would relax and learn a little while driving. And I use the word driving loosely. It took me two and a half hours to reach my destination; a good hour longer than it would have taken in 1970. Fortunately, my air conditioning was in good working order and the Torah tapes were very inspiring. But, when I got out of the car it took

me quite a while until I could straighten up. I'm also thirty-four years older than I was back in 1970.

Nevertheless, my friend and I had a wonderful time. We brought ourselves up to date on every aspect of each other's lives. By three-thirty I decided I had better leave if I wanted to avoid the evening rush. How foolish of me! The ride home took three hours! The

next day I bought a digital camera. From now on my friend and I are going to talk on the phone and send each other pictures via the computer. The distance between Jackson, New Jersey and Forest Hills, Queens is just too great. I could not travel any faster than great-grandfather did with his horse and wagon.

This Land is My Land, This Land's Not Your Land

By Judy Gruenfeld

Long ago, in a land all too close to home, lived a man named Curly. Curly (a nickname given to him by his father when he was a boy) was a very proud fellow, but not haughty. He stood and walked tall with his chin held high. He was the pillar of his community. Whatever he had, he shared with his neighbors, who came to rely on Curly to help them with family problems and to settle any disputes that erupted in the normally peaceful area in which he lived.

He provided well for his family and even built his own house from the ground up, on a prime piece of land. He chose only the finest materials available. Nothing was too good for his wife and their precious children. His children and his neighbor's children were the hope for the future, their future on their land. As Curly would always say,

"The land was not only given to us by our fathers. We also borrowed it from our children. When the time comes, we must return it to them in pristine condition."

A family man, Curly liked to sit by the fire at night and smoke his pipe.

Curly did not feel as if he "owned" the land. He felt as if he were part of it, just as his right hand was a part of him.

In another town, not too far from Curly, lived a man named George. George was a daredevil sort of guy who liked to take chances. He, too, was proud. But where Curly was humbled by the daily miracles he saw unfold around him, George was arrogant. He was the sort of man who, when he saw something he wanted, he took it. It didn't matter what the cost. He always made sure he got his way.

Now, George was not satisfied with his own piece of property. He had heard about Curly's neighborhood and decided to have a look see. After all, who was this Curly and what right did he have to live in such a desirable area? George would definitely investigate the situation.

Once in Curly's neighborhood, George decided he wanted the land. It didn't matter that no one wanted to leave. George would have his way. No one, not even Curly and his neighbors, who all banded together, could stop him.

"Wait a minute," Curly tried to reason with George.

"Maybe we can work something out. We all have several acres of land. None of us wants to move but we will be willing to let you have part of it. There's no need to argue.

But, George was not satisfied. When he wanted something, nothing would stand in his way. And he really wanted this land. Curly tried to bargain with George. Curly tried to explain that his ancestors had lived on the land for generations, He tried to explain the spirit in which it was given to him and how he wanted the land for his children and his children's children. But this meant nothing to George. He wanted the land all of it.

George had lots of connections. He managed to drive Curly and his neighbors from the land. Curly's attempt at bargaining did not work. He and his family were driven farther and farther away from the land that was rightfully theirs, while George and his cohorts took over the land, one acre at a time, one life at a time.

Curly's efforts to maintain the peace by giving George some of his land turned out to be a disaster for Curly and his people.

You know Curly as Crazy Horse, chief of the Sioux Indians, who, in 1876, defeated George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn

A soldier, who was forcing him into a jail cell, killed Crazy Horse in 1877 at Fort Robinson, Nebraska.

Human nature has not changed. You cannot bargain with terrorists. Trading land for peace is not a fair trade. Mr. Sharon has gone out to lunch and no one is minding the store. May Hashem watch over Israel and all our people.

Judy The Obscure

By Judy Gruenfeld

I went to a shiur last week. That in itself is not news. But when I introduced myself to one of the women, she asked,

"Did you write something?"

"I wrote several things," I told her.

"I think I read an article of yours in the American Jewish Times," she informed me.

"Yes," I replied. "I have been writing articles for the American Jewish Times."

"Your article was very good," my newfound friend and fan said.

I thanked her and began laughing to myself. When the shiur was over and I was safely secluded in my car, I broke into hysterics. Then I called my husband.

"Guess what?" I said. "Someone at the shiur whom I do not know recognized my name from the American Jewish Times."

"What's for dinner?" asked my husband, unimpressed.

Taking great umbrage at his indifference, I asked, "Did you hear what I just said?"

"Huh?" Oh, yeah, sure. What's for dinner?" he repeated.

"Dinner?" I questioned. "I'm too famous to make dinner. You'll have to take me out. But we'll have to find a restaurant where no one will recognize me. Otherwise, we won't be able to eat in peace."

"I'm sure there's a restaurant a couple of blocks away," my husband suggested.

"Not funny," I said. "I'll stop off at the butcher on my way home. I also think we should start packing for the seminar we'll be attending this week-end."

"Yes, dear," came the usual reply.

We arrived at the seminar by 4:00 Erev Shabbos, registered, and went to our room to unpack, shower, and change. As I was

thumbing through the packet we received, I came upon "The Label." You know, the label that says, "Hello, my name is".

I "Do you think I need to write my name in?" I asked my husband.

He looked at me," shook his head, filled out his own label, opened the door, and motioned for me to proceed and join the rest of the crowd downstairs. My husband went to Mincha and Maariv and I went to bentsch licht. After Maariv, we went to dinner. (I had already decided to put my name on the label). We met some very lovely people, although no one recognized my name, and had a wonderful evening,

Shabbos morning we went to Shachris, breakfast; and then started our round of lectures.

At 12:00 we went to the dining room for our afternoon meal. While on line, waiting to be seated at our table, one of the presenters noticed the name on my label.

"I don't believe it," he said. "Judy Gruenfeld." I smiled at him, delighted, trying not to feel too important.

"You have a very famous name," said this connoisseur of fine talent.

"Do I?" I said, trying to act nonchalant.

"Yes," he continued. "Have you ever heard of her?"

"I beg your pardon," I replied, somewhat confused.

"Have you ever heard of her?" he repeated. "Dr. Judith Grunfeld."

"N-no," I stammered.

"She was very famous," the rabbi continued. "They called her "The Queen." "She was very influential in the Bais Yaakov movement which furthered Jewish education for girls."

"Oh," I managed to respond. "And we both have the same name."

"Yes, you do," I was reassured.

I'm now thinking of changing my name, but I'm wondering if that would be fair

to my already established following. Either way, I don't think my ego will ever recover.

To Be Here or Not To Be Here

By Judy Gruenfeld

Have you ever wished you could be in two places at once? With life being so hectic today and with so much to accomplish during the course of any given day, many of us wish we were two people. Now, with the advent of cloning, I would be willing to bet there are those of us who have given more than just a passing thought to having ourselves cloned. This way, we would be able to pick up two kids at the same time (provided we could also drive our car). We could do the grocery shopping while cleaning the house. And we could do the laundry while catching up on all the reading we wanted to do. The possibilities are endless.

The other day I was on line in the supermarket. Again. It was a very long line. It was Thursday afternoon. Everybody's shopping cart was filled to the point of overflowing. Now, if there were two of me, one could be home making dinner while the other one stayed on the checkout line at the supermarket. But that brought about another problem. Which "me" would I want to be? Would I prefer standing on the checkout line in the supermarket or would I prefer being at home, doing a juggling act with the pots and pans? It sounded like a simple question but there didn't seem to be a simple solution.

There's also the possibility of encountering problems when dealing with inter-personal relationships. For instance, if your husband said he didn't like the way his shirts were ironed, you could always blame it on the other you.

"It wasn't my fault," you could defend yourself. "I didn't iron them. The clone did."

"Well, next time, you iron them! The clone put too much starch in the collar. I

couldn't breathe," your husband might complain.

Since the whole idea of cloning yourself is to eliminate problems, you may want to avail yourself of more options. This way you would be prepared, should you be confronted with any other situations of a similar nature. For instance, the shirts could be taken to the laundry. Your clone could drop them off and then you and she could go out for lunch. After lunch, while you're getting your nails done, the clone could pick up the shirts, pick up the kids, and go home and make dinner. If the dinner doesn't come out to your husband's liking, what do you do? Blame it on the clone, of course!

I realize this, too, could become a little old after a while. I don't know about your husband, but eventually mine would hold me accountable regardless of who was ironing his shirts or preparing his dinner. Maybe this isn't the perfect solution, after all.

The other day I thought of another solution. Accomplishing this feat may be a bit more arduous, but if it could be worked out, my problems would be solved forever. My husband told me he was talking to a friend of his about our cell phone service. The friend told my husband that he can make calls from his cell phone, to anywhere in the contiguous United States, and he was not charged any extra fees. All his minutes were freebies. As long as he called from where he was.

"What?" I asked my husband, totally confused.

"That's what he said. I'll have to check into our contract and see if it offers the same benefit."

"Wait a minute," I said to my husband, while trying to get his words into focus. "What

are you talking about? "What do, you mean if you call from where you are? Where else would you be?"

"Hmm," my husband said, with a serious look on his face, ignoring my last question. "I'll check with him again. Maybe I misunderstood him, I'll find out exactly what he meant."

"You do that," I said, shaking my head. Where is my clone? I think I would rather have her deal with this.

The next day my husband came home from work with a big smile on his face. "I talked to my friend again about his cell phone coverage," he informed me.

"And what did he say?" I, asked with both anticipation and trepidation.

"He said I understood him correctly the first time," my husband proudly proclaimed, with the same serious look on his face, as the previous day. "As long as you're calling from where you are, there is no charge for the phone call."

By this time, I was getting really frustrated. Although I can't speak for the friend, my husband is not a stupid person.

"Think about what you are saying," I told him, my voice rising several decibels. "Where else could you be, but where you are?!" By now, I was screaming.

Eventually, though, I did manage to calm down somewhat because there actually was a logical explanation for what he was saying. What he meant to convey was that if you are calling from the area where your cell phone is contracted, your calls are free. However, by this time, my mind was well passed the situation and I was thinking of numerous outrageous possibilities.

"You know," I said to my husband. "If I can think of away to be somewhere, where I'm not, I'm going there, and I'm not coming back."

That should get me out of doing all the chores I'm trying to avoid, to say nothing about having to deal with frustrating people. I actually tried to do this. But, I didn't get very far and it didn't last very long. My clone got me on my cell phone. She couldn't deal with my life, either.

The Anti-Social Worker

By Judy Gruenfeld

As a social worker, I have had to make many decisions regarding people's lives. Some decisions were easy to make. The solutions were obvious. Fortunately or unfortunately, these types of cases are few and far between. Most often, cases fall in the gray area. You end up caught between the proverbial rock and the hard place, doomed if you do and doomed if you don't. Thus, social workers from various agencies have come to be much maligned both by those they service and by those who feel they, themselves, could provide better, more comprehensive services. But the social worker is not the villain here. Social workers can have a caseload ranging from one to two hundred and sometimes, more. It is impossible to service so many clients satisfactorily. And, unfortunately, many fall between the cracks. And even more unfortunately, there are too many cracks in which to fall in today's society. Who is to blame? The caseworkers? The supervisors? The agencies? The legislators? Why don't the agencies hire more caseworkers? Why aren't more people applying for jobs as social workers? What's the bottom line? What is always the bottom line? If the word "money" didn't pop into your head, give me a call. I would like to sell you the proverbial bridge.

Social workers are in the "people" business. Today's society does not place much value on people and thus, social workers are grossly underpaid. The Wall Street Journal, in an article several years ago/referred to social workers as the "elite poor." I can't vouch for the "elite" part but I certainly can identify with the "poor" part.

Now, I happen to be in a unique position where I am afforded a birds-eye view from both ends of the spectrum. Aside from

being a social worker; I am also the mother of a developmentally disabled son. And, as a parent, I have also had to make many difficult decisions.

I recently called my son's case manager at the Division of Developmental Disabilities requesting respite care for him when my husband and I go away on vacation. The last time we went away, three years ago, I had a lovely woman stay at my home. Since she was a former co-worker of mine, I was very comfortable leaving her with my son. However, she no longer lives in the area and is no longer available for respite. When I called my son's case manager to request another respite worker,

I thought there would be plenty of time for my son and myself to get to know someone else and for the new respite worker to get to know my son. Imagine my surprise when the case manager informed me that they no longer provide in-home respite care. The only other option would be to have him stay at a group home during the week we were away.

"What happened to all the services that were promised to families with a developmentally disabled member living at home? I asked. "I thought our legislators promised us things would get better. This is definitely not better! I'm getting older and it will be increasingly difficult for me to care for my son. We need more services not fewer."

"Bottom line?" she asked.

"The bottom line is always the same. Money," I said, while trying not to take my revenge out on her.

"It's not only that," replied the case worker, "unfortunately, there aren't any people who want to work as in-home respite care providers."

"Of course not," I retorted. "We're back to the bottom line. How do you expect people to work if they aren't paid a decent living wage?"

"I empathize with you," said the caseworker, "but there is nothing I can do."

"And, what about permanent group home placement? I was told when my son was thirty, the ball would start rolling in about five years. He is now thirty-five."

"Well," the case manager hesitated. "The way things are going now, I wouldn't count on a permanent group home spot for another ten years. Bottom line, again. There is no money to build or buy any new group homes."

By this time I didn't know if I was more exhausted or more frustrated. So, I thanked her politely for her time and patience, told her I would arrange for family members to look after my son while we were away, and hung up the phone. I was about to start banging my head against the wall but quickly realized I had just done that. I definitely had the headache to prove it.

When I calmed down a little, I called a Jewish agency in New York and poured my heart out.

"Can you help me?" I asked the lady. "I'm getting nowhere in New Jersey and besides, I would only put my son in a Jewish group home, anyway."

"Certainly," came the reply. "I can't give you a time frame but your son will have to establish New York residence. Do you have an address in New York you can give me?"

"Sure," I answered.

"And if we call there looking for your son, will we find him?"

My mind started racing. What do I tell her? I decided I had better up front.

"Honestly," I said. "He won't be there. How long does he have to be in New York to be considered a resident?"

"Once your son's name moves sufficiently up the list, he will have to have New York residency and go to a day program or have a job for at least two years. But, you also must understand, there is never any guarantee."

"You're asking me to throw my son out of an airplane without a parachute," I said incredulously.

"That's the best I can do for you," said Ms. New York.

"Thank you, anyway," I said as I replaced the phone in its cradle.

Second round of head banging over, I began to cry. Then I stopped crying and began to daven. Not for Hashem to will group home placement for my son but for government and for society to rethink their priorities. Instead of turning a blind eye towards excessive spending by special interest groups and allocating funds to those with the loudest voices and the most votes, perhaps the powers that be ought to take a long, hard look at their budgets and at their consciences. Cutting funding to those who cannot speak for themselves and who, for the most part, don't vote, is no way to run a country.

We need to be sure all of our citizens have access to dignified, meaningful lives, with needed services available, in order to encourage and facilitate independence, in the least restrictive environment possible. And that includes social workers and those they serve.

Making a Clean Sweep

By Judy Gruenfeld

I think I'm really getting old. Needless to say, I'm not as young as I used to be, although my mother says I'm still a baby. I guess compared to eighty-something I am. But, believe me when I tell you, I'm not twenty-something or even forty-something. If bend down to clean a commode I seem to freeze in that position. It takes me longer to get up than it did to clean the darn thing in the first place. So, I came upon the perfect solution. Hire someone to clean the house! Ingenious! Why didn't I think of it before? When I ran the idea passed my husband, he said,

"You'll have nothing to do. You'll be bored."

I might add that I quit my job several months ago, telling my husband that when

I said "I do" almost thirty-eight years ago, the question wasn't "Do you plan on working full-time when you're almost sixty years old?"

"Okay," my husband said, "Whatever you want." He knew it would be useless to argue. And so I began my search.

First to appear at my door was a wisp of a lady from England. I took her on a tour of the house. As we went from room to room, Little Miss England kept shaking her head.

"My, my," she said as we entered each room. "This really does need a thorough cleaning, doesn't it?"

Dollar signs started flashing before me.

"How much do you charge?" I asked her.

"Fifteen dollars an hour," was her reply. "And I don't do windows!"

"How long do you think it would take you to get the house in order?" I then asked.

"Oh," she pondered. "About three days."

"Three days at fifteen dollars an hour?" I asked incredulous.

"Well, my dear," she said in the "king's English." "It looks as if the house has been neglected for quite some time."

I had to agree with her on that point but a quick calculation of fifteen dollars an hour for three days kind of put her out of the running.

"I'll have to think about it," I told her. "I'll get back to you."

"Very well," she replied as she handed me her business card and took her leave.

Later that day a rather large lady from Eastern Europe rang my bell.

"Please come in," I invited. She smiled at me as she entered the dusty portals of my home.

"I'll show you around," I said to Miss Eastern Europe.

She smiled and nodded her head. .

We first went into the living room, followed the by the dining room and then the kitchen as I explained what I wanted done in each one of serious those rooms. She kept smiling and nodding.

"Are you okay with all this?" I asked. She smiled and nodded.

"Do you speak English?" I inquired.

"English," she repeated. "No. No English."

I led her to the door and waved good-bye.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I don't think this will work."

"Work," she repeated in anticipation.

"No. No work," I insisted.

She turned around, crestfallen, and walked away I don't know where she went.

There was no car waiting for her. I thought of calling her back to ask her how she would get home. But since I wouldn't be able to get my message across, I just shut the door and waited for the next candidate.

About an hour later a very hearty looking lady rang my doorbell. She had a serious expression on her face and got right down to business.

"Hi, I'm Mrs. Jones," she said as she stepped into what I was now referring to as "the abyss."

"Please come in," I told her.

"Honey" she said, "Before we get started I want to let you know I charge eighty dollars for the day no matter how long I'm here. I don't do windows and I don't do laundry."

"But, I have a lot of laundry that needs to be done including sheets, towels, etc."

"I'm sorry, honey," she said "But I won't handle anyone's dirty clothes and bedding. I want to be up front with you."

"I appreciate that," I told her. "But, I don't think this is going to work out."

"Suit yourself," she replied as she turned and exited my home.

By now it was almost time for dinner and I had nothing prepared as I was interviewing cleaning ladies all day. I called my husband, told him about the interviews, and asked him to pick up something for dinner on his way home.

"Why didn't you ask the last one if she cooks?" he inquired.

"Not funny," I retorted.

"I have two more ladies coming tomorrow. Better get extra in case we need it."

The next day I was scheduled to interview someone at ten o'clock in the morning but she never showed. So much for her! One more to go.

At two o'clock the doorbell rang. As I opened the door I saw a well-groomed, stately looking matron standing before me.

"I'm Mrs. Green," she said. "I believe we have a two o'clock appointment."

"Yes, please come in," I invited.

As she entered my home, she seemed to assess the entire "job" in one long, serious look.

"Do you do windows?" I asked.

"Why, yes, I do," she replied.

"How about laundry," I timidly asked.

"Of course," came her answer.

I was ready to hire her on the spot.

"How much do you charge?" I inquired.

"Eighty-five dollars for the day," I was told, the serious expression never leaving her face.

"Oh," I said, my face becoming almost as serious as hers.

"Is there anything you won't do?" I cautiously proceeded.

"The inside of the refrigerator, the inside of the oven, or ironing."

"Oh, I see," I looked at the stately lady. "I'm afraid that won't do."

She turned on her heel and left without saying another word.

I still haven't found anyone to clean my house. I still don't clean it, either. But at least I don't do it for free.

Keeping in Contact(s)

By Judy Gruenfeld

I was very busy at work when my vibrating cell phone began dancing across my desk. Seeing my home phone number pop up on the screen, I decided I had better answer it.

"Where is my contact lens case?" asked the familiar voice on the other end.

"You're joking, right?" I responded.

"No," he said. "It's gone. I had it last night and now I can't find it. You're always putting my things away. What did you do with my contact lens case?"

"First of all," I came to my defense, "If you put your own things away, I wouldn't have to pick up after you. Second of all, I have not seen nor do I have any idea where your contact lens case is."

"What am I supposed to do?" he asked very seriously.

"You'll have to figure that one out yourself," I advised. "I have to get back to work."

As I hung up the phone, I started shaking my head. He wasn't joking. My husband has very poor vision, even with his glasses. He needs his contact lenses. I felt bad, but I was in no position to go home and help him look for them.

Besides, he's always losing everything and then expecting me to find it. I know I'm not alone in this, either. I have spoken to several other women who wholeheartedly empathize with my situation.

"My husband is the same way," they all say. "Men are so helpless. They lose their keys, their wallets, their pens. Anything that isn't attached, as the saying goes."

Maybe so," I interjected, "But I think my husband gets the gold medal, which, by the way, he would probably lose, also." Everyone laughed. They all know my husband.

Fortunately, my husband works from home so he didn't have to drive anywhere. Even more fortunate, when I came home that afternoon, my delighted spouse told me he had found his contacts.

"Guess where?" he asked.

"I wouldn't know where to begin," I replied. "And, I'm not sure I want to know, either."

"Aw, come on," he said. "You won't believe it."

"Sure I would," I told him. "We've been married for thirty-eight years, remember?"

"One guess," he pleaded.

"Okay," I acquiesced. "In the hamper."

"Nope."

"I give up. But don't tell me. I don't think I could cope with the truth."

"Just one more guess," he begged.

"No," I said. "And stop playing games. If you want to tell me, ten me. Otherwise, just drop it. I didn't have such a great day, either."

"Okay," he relented. "You know how, when I drink from a glass, I put the glass down upside down so the water won't get moldy inside."

I looked at him and rolled my eyes. "Continue," I said, although I wasn't at all sure I wanted him to do so.

"Well," he said. "I got up during the night, took a drink of water, put the cup down, and went back to bed. What are the odds, in total darkness, of my putting the glass right on top of my contact lens case?"

"Obviously when it comes to you, they're pretty good," I said not knowing whether to laugh or cry at my husband's lack of (oh, so many words come to mind)!

"I'm glad you found them. Maybe next time you'll think twice before you accuse me of doing something terrible to one of your things, like putting it away."

"I promise," he said. But somehow, I was not reassured.

After supper, I went to use the computer. My husband's shoes were under the desk.

The next morning, while I was at work, my cell phone rang again. Against my better judgment, I answered it.

"Where are my shoes?" asked the familiar voice on the other end.

A Town Called Yenemvelt

By Judy Gruenfeld

Judy can be contacted through email@judys_connection@yahoo.com

Long ago and far away there was a town called Yenemvelt. It was the next town over from another town you may have heard of but Yenemvelt did not get as much notoriety as this other town.

In Yenemvelt, lived a lady by the name of Mrs. Yenta. Now, Mrs. Yenta was a very nice lady but she just could not seem to mind her own business. Most of the people who lived in Yenemvelt were used to Mrs. Yenta and knew that she meant no harm. That is, all the people except for Mrs. Gantzaknocker, who thought she knew better than everyone else.

One day Mrs. Yenta and Mrs. Gantzaknocker got into an argument (no one remembers what it was about) and stopped talking to each other.

Mrs. Gafairlach would walk around town shaking her head, thinking what a terrible thing it was that the two most well known ladies in the neighborhood had stopped talking to each other.

Mrs. Gafairlach decided to go to a neighbor for some advice as to how to get the ladies to make up.

First, Mrs. Gafairlach knocked on Mrs. Oysgamitchit's door to ask for help.

"We've got to do something to get Mrs. Yenta and Mrs. Gantzaknocker speaking again," said Mrs. Gafairlach. This is a terrible situation."

"I'm sorry," said Mrs. Oysgamitchit, but I am much too busy to help you. My children are sick and my husband needs me to mend his clothes."

"I hope your children feel better," said Mrs. Gafairlach, and she went on her way.

Mrs. Gafairlach then went to Mrs. Luftkup's house.

"Can you help me get Mrs. Yenta and Mrs. Gantzaknocker to make up?" she said.

"I wouldn't know what to do," said Mrs. Luftkup.

"Besides, "I'm enjoying watching my grass grow."

Sighing, Mrs. Gafairlach went to the next house on the block where Mrs. Gadainknit lived and knocked on her door.

Mrs. Gadainknit promised to go with Mrs. Gafairlach to talk to the ladies but when the appointed time rolled around, Mrs. Gadainknit forgot to show up.

Mrs. Gafairlach thought about going to Mrs. Tsimmis but then decided that Mrs. Tsimmis might make matters even worse.

As she continued down the street, Mrs. Gafairlach came to Mrs. Incass' house.

When Mrs. Incass answered the door Mrs. Gafairlach asked, "Will you help me get Mrs. Yenta and Mrs. Gantzaknocker to make up?"

"I certainly will not," said Mrs. Incass. "I am not speaking to either one of those ladies."

Mrs. Gafairlach was getting more and more upset with each refusal.

When she got to the end of the block, Mrs. Gafairlach noticed that there was only one house she hadn't gone to.

Mrs. Gafairlach knocked on the door.

"How nice to see you," said Mrs. Saichel when she opened the door and saw her neighbor standing there.

"Mrs. Saichel," said Mrs. Gafairlach, "Mrs. Yenta and Mrs. Gantzaknocker had a terrible argument and are not speaking to each

other. I was wondering if you could help me get the ladies to make up. I just don't know what to do."

"Of course I will help you," said Mrs. Saichel. "You call Mrs. Yenta and tell her to come to my house. Tell her that Mrs. Gantzaknocker wants to make up with her. I will call Mrs. Gantzaknocker and tell her that Mrs. Yenta wants to make up with her."

"What a great idea!" she said, and ran home to call Mrs. Yenta.

When all the ladies were assembled at Mrs. Saichel's house, Mrs. Saichel said,

"Ladies, you are both so knowledgeable about the neighbors and you

know everything that goes on in this town. What a shame you are not speaking. Together, you can do so many mitzvahs and make Yenemvelt a place where more people would like to live and visit.

And so, with the help of Mrs. Saichel and Mrs. Gafairlach, Mrs. Yenta and Mrs. Gantzaknocker renewed their friendship and made sure the town ran smoothly.

Yenemvelt assumed its rightful spot on the map and its two "head ladies" checked in on all their neighbors to make sure there was Shalom Bayis everywhere they went.

On The Outside Looking In

By Judy Gruenfeld

As Naomi gazed at the house across the street, her glance turned towards the window. She and her husband had just moved into the neighborhood and boxes that were daring her to unpack them surrounded her.

Naomi didn't mean to stare, but what she saw captured her attention and she couldn't pull herself away. As she sat there, rooted in her spot, her eyes looked on with disbelief as she observed the scene unfolding before her. There were eight menorahs in the neighbor's living room window. One by one, each person came and lit his; father; mother, eldest son, and so on down the- line until only one menorah was left unlit. Then, very gently, the father lifted a small frame from a tiny wheelchair that stood in their midst. Naomi hadn't noticed the wheelchair until she saw the child being lifted from it. The candles illuminated her face as she anxiously waited her turn to light.

The father struck a match and lit the shamas. He then put the candle in the child's hand and securely placed his own hand over hers. One by one, as the candles were lit, they reflected the sparkle in the little girl's eyes.

Oh, how Naomi longed to be part of that scene. As a child, she grew up in a house with no siblings, no menorahs, and no Yiddishkeit. Naomi was very lonely, had few friends and occupied most of her time reading books. With each book, she felt transformed into someone else and transported somewhere else. One week Naomi was a princess in England and the next, a safari guide in Africa. The characters in the books seemed more real to her than she, herself, did. Naomi's life consisted mainly of school, homework, chores, and of course, her precious books.

As she grew up, Naomi felt very different from everyone else and began searching for something meaningful in her life. She looked into eastern religions, prominent religions in the west, meditation, and anything else that promised to fill the hole in her soul. But as each approach failed to fill the void, Naomi became more and more isolated and dejected.

Then, one day, while on her endless quest in the bookstore, Naomi asked the clerk, a nice young man about her age, why he always wore a yarmulke. After all, he wasn't in synagogue.

"I'm an orthodox Jew," he told her. "We must always cover our heads."

"Oh," Naomi replied. "I'm Jewish, too but no one in my family wears a yarmulke all the time."

"As I said," responded the young man. "I'm orthodox. Since you're Jewish, would you like to read about what observant Jews do and why we do it?"

"Sure," Naomi told him.

"Wait here," said the boy. "I'll get you a few books."

When she got home, Naomi began reading the books like a drowning person reaching for a life preserver, which was literally the case.

"This is it!" she thought. "This is just what I have been searching for!"

Little by little, Naomi began making changes and taking on more mitzvos.

Naomi is now a Baalas Tshuva, married to that nice young man from the bookstore, and living a meaningful Torah life.

Just then, Naomi's husband walked in the door and noticed her looking at the

neighbor's house across the street. She pointed to the house and asked,

"Do you think we could go over there and wish the family a good Yom Tov instead of waiting for them to come over and welcome us to the neighborhood?"

"I don't see why not," answered her husband. "Why don't we light our menorahs and then go over and introduce ourselves."

"That sounds like a plan," she smiled.

Half an hour later, Naomi and her husband were ringing their neighbor's doorbell.

"Hi," the young couple said when the door was opened. "We're your new neighbors."

"Welcome, welcome," responded the lady of the house. "Please come in. We are about to sit down to our meal. We would be honored if you would join us."

Naomi couldn't remember when she was made to feel so comfortable and accepted. Her husband also took an instant liking to these warm, hospitable people and by the time they left, their stomachs and their hearts were full.

"Please come again," their new friends invited.

"Oh, we will," Naomi said feeling very much at home. "This is the first house I have ever visited that has a ramp for my wheelchair."