

HERE'S my STORY

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THE YOUNG HEADMASTER

RABBI JEREMY ROSEN

My father came from a Lithuanian — that is, *non-chasidic* — background. He was born in England but was educated at the Mir Yeshiva in Russia, where he received rabbinic ordination. Upon returning to England, he worked as a communal rabbi in Manchester and in Glasgow, finally setting up a Jewish school of his own about fifty miles west of London.

This school was called Carmel College, and it was a Jewish high school for boys, the aim of which was to combine the best of a *yeshivah* education with the best of a secular education.

At the time, the top high schools in England were Eton and Harrow, and most upwardly-mobile Jews in England felt that, if their children didn't go to these schools, they wouldn't be able to make it in English society. However, my father saw that Jewish children were losing their connection to Judaism in these schools, so he sought to offer an alternative. He wanted to establish a rival school that would not only offer the very best in secular education but also the very best in Jewish studies.

Early on, Carmel College did attract some exceptional pupils who helped it establish a phenomenal academic reputation, but the majority of the students came there because they hadn't been able to get into the top English schools, and this was the next best thing. They were not religious and not interested in a religious education, an attitude which was not aided by their non-religious parents.

I myself attended Carmel College as a youngster but, at age 16, I was sent to *yeshivah* in Israel. While there, in 1961, I received a call with the terrible news that my father was gravely ill with leukemia, and I rushed home. Upon return, I found him dramatically changed — he was wearing *chasidic* garb, and I learned that he had recently been to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe in New York.

When we had a chance to talk about it, my father told me about this visit and the great impression it made on him. He said he told the Rebbe that he wanted to be a *chasid*, but the Rebbe, praising his work with Carmel College, said, "I don't want you to be my disciple, I want you to be my partner."



Why did my father make such a dramatic turn at the end of his life? He said that he came to the conclusion that the Chabad Movement had been most successful in bringing the concept of *Ahavat Yisrael* — love among Jews — to the forefront of Jewish thought.

After my father passed away, I enrolled at Cambridge University, where I majored in philosophy but, when I finished my studies, I decided I wanted to be ordained as a rabbi, so I returned to Israel, this time attending the Mir, the same *yeshivah* that had ordained my father in Russia.

It was in Jerusalem that I — like my father — became connected to Chabad, studying the *Tanya* and other Chabad teachings. Once I returned to England in 1968, I continued to follow in my father's footsteps, taking a job for three years as a rabbi in Glasgow.

Meanwhile, my father's school, Carmel College, had gone into decline. The headmaster had suddenly resigned, and it was proposed to me that I apply for the job. This idea — that I should rebuild the school which my father established — appealed to me; however, I also realized that I had no experience in running a school, and that I was only twenty-seven and unmarried.

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MY ENCOUNTER
with the **REBBE**

An oral history project dedicated to documenting the life of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. The story is one of thousands recorded in over 1300 videotaped interviews conducted to date. These stories are based on the recollection of the individuals recounting them. Please share any corrections, comments and suggestions. mystory@jemedi.org

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The governors of the school were divided as to my candidacy. One of my supporters among them — a professor of nuclear physics at the University of London named Cyril Domb — was in close contact with the Rebbe, and he decided to ask the Rebbe's opinion on the matter.

As a result, the Rebbe wrote to my mother; his letter read in part:

"It came to my attention recently that the present headmaster of Carmel College has resigned on account of ill health and that a successor is now being sought to fill the vacancy. I

will suggest, if I may, that you look into the situation with a view to the possibility of your son in Glasgow obtaining the headmastership. There, of course, may be some reservations as to his age and the fact that he's not yet married, but these cannot be serious objections, especially when there are many considerations which would make him more eligible for the post than any other possible candidate. At any rate, it might be advisable to suggest that he should first be considered as "acting headmaster" or even on a trial basis, which would make his entry into Carmel College acceptable even to those who may have their reservations."

The Rebbe went on to say that he would have written to me directly but feared that his involvement might make me uncomfortable. He urged my mother to encourage me in this direction, and also to find individuals who would support my candidacy.

As it happened, his suggestion — that I should be appointed "acting headmaster" — convinced the skeptics and, in 1971, shortly after getting married, I got the job.

About a year later, while struggling to address the school's many problems, I went to New York to see the Rebbe in person. I had never met him before, but I immediately sensed that he was a remarkable man, and I felt a deep connection to him.

He looked straight into my eyes and said, "Now tell me



Rabbi Dr. Kopul Rosen

what's happening at Carmel College."

So, I started telling him about the problems I had with the teachers — only four of whom, out of a staff of fifty, were Jewish — and the problems I had with the parents and the governors.

In response, the Rebbe recommended which problems I should address first. The school had become co-educational, and he urged that I separate the boys from the girls. His second recommendation was that a *mikveh* be built on the premises to attract more religious teachers.

I told him that I doubted that I could get the governors' approval for any of this, but he urged me to "just keep on trying."

I did try, but I succeeded only partly. The school remained co-educational and, though I got approval and raised the money for a *mikveh*, it was never built. However, eventually, I was allowed to hire a couple of observant teachers — Lubavitchers, I might note.

In 1983, after thirteen years of working to improve the religious standards of the school, I left. The school lasted another dozen years and then it closed.

Throughout my career in the rabbinate, I have remained an unreserved admirer of Chabad. I firmly believe that what the Rebbe has done for *Yiddishkeit* outranks any other effort by any single individual in the last two thousand years, with the exception of the founding of the Chassidic Movement by the Baal Shem Tov. Doubtless, *Yiddishkeit* today would be a lot weaker the world over without the Rebbe's great achievements.

Rabbi Jeremy Rosen worked in the rabbinate in England and Belgium until his retirement in 2008. He is presently a scholar-in-residence at the JCC in Manhattan. He was interviewed in March of 2015.

לע"נ ר' ישראל יעקב וזוגתו מרת קריינא ע"ה לאקשין
ע"י בניהם ר' נחמן ור' אברהם ומשפחתם שיחיו

This week in....

> **5711 - 1951**, approximately thirty university students visited the Rebbe in his office. The Rebbe spoke to them about the necessity of performing practical mitzvot.¹ 24 Elul

1. My Encounter with the Rebbe interview with Rabbi Azriel Chaikin, May 7, 2015

*In sincere appreciation to
Rabbi **Jeremy Rosen**
Recognizing the role he played in establishing
Chabad of Scotland over 45 years ago.*

*By
Sholom and Pessy Jacobs and family*

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