

HERE'S my STORY

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BEAUTIFUL ON THE INSIDE

MRS. SUSAN SHUSTER



The Shul of Bal Harbour

I grew up in New York in a secular family. I became a nurse, married a doctor — a plastic surgeon like my father — and eventually moved to Hollywood, Florida, where we raised our family.

I received almost no Jewish education. Our involvement with Judaism started through my son, Kenny, who was befriended by Chabad *chasidim* while attending the local Hebrew Academy. They invited him to spend Shabbat at the Landow Yeshiva in Miami Beach, and he ended up enrolling there.

Naturally, before we allowed him to do this, my husband and I went to check out the place and we got to know Rabbi Sholom Ber Lipskar, the Chabad emissary in Bal Harbour, and the other Chabad emissaries there. They made a wonderful impression on us, and that's how we were inspired to take our first steps toward Torah observance

as a family.

Shortly thereafter, we decided to travel to Crown Heights to meet the Rebbe. It was an amazing experience which I lack the words to describe. We felt we were in the presence of a very great, very holy man, who made us feel most welcome.

I recall in that first audience telling the Rebbe that my husband and I were leading a very busy social life, yet that I felt empty inside.

He looked at me and said, "But you are Jewish. You have your religion." And I understood that I should become more involved in Judaism — that this is what was lacking in my life. I had not figured this out for myself until the Rebbe pointed it out to me.

As well, in that first audience, I asked the Rebbe's advice concerning my children's health. They had come down with colds while we were visiting in New York, and being a nurse I was able to detect symptoms which suggested that they had caught the croup. I said to the Rebbe, "I am worried that this is serious. Do you think I should take them to the hospital?"

"No, you don't have to," he responded, "Just take them home and give them tea with sugar."

I was very relieved and very happy. I started to give them tea with sugar, but my husband was not sure. So he took one of the boys to a local pediatrician to ask if antibiotics should be prescribed. But the pediatrician said, "No, just give him tea with honey."

After that first meeting with the Rebbe, we returned time and again to see him, as we became more religiously involved. In a subsequent

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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 1400 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@jemedial.org

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audience, the Rebbe said to me, "Your husband is a plastic surgeon; he makes people beautiful on the outside. It should be your mission to make people beautiful on the inside."

I took these words to heart and, from that point on, I began inviting people to our home for Shabbat meals in an effort to help them find spiritual meaning in their lives. I took great pains in preparing these meals and in making the table very beautiful, so that it reflected the inner beauty of Judaism.

On another occasion, the Rebbe told us to put up a big Chanukah menorah in front of our house — he said, "Big enough to light up the whole street." And he even arranged himself for a menorah to be there, so that when we returned to Florida from New York, it was already waiting for us outside. Ever since, it has been our custom to light this giant menorah each Chanukah.

After a time, we had a minyan in our house with complete prayer services every Shabbat, which eventually led to my husband buying a house and having it converted into a synagogue. We ran this synagogue — which was called the Levi Yitzchak Synagogue — for about ten years, until the Rebbe gave us permission to turn this task over to someone else.

In the years that followed, when the Rebbe was no longer granting private audiences, we would come to Crown Heights and stand in line when he was handing out dollars for charity in order to receive his blessings.

We often brought him fruit baskets from Florida, from our own orchard, as it was my husband's hobby to raise exotic fruits. And when we did that, the Rebbe always gave us an extra dollar, adding "This is for your Garden of Eden." He also made it a point of inquiring as to the age of the trees since it is Jewish law not to partake of fruit from a tree less than three years old, and the Rebbe was very strict about that. He never accepted the fruit without asking about the age of the tree.

On one occasion while I was standing in line to receive *lekach* (honey cake) before the High Holidays, after I received my piece, he called me back and explained to me, "Earlier when your husband passed by, I asked him to grow a beard, I first want to make sure that it's okay with you." He wanted to be positive that this wouldn't affect my relationship with my husband in a negative way. Can you imagine? He was so caring, so sensitive about everyone feelings.

Whatever you might hear about the Rebbe can never fully describe him. It is just impossible to put into words who he was. He had uncommon insight into people; he understood where each person was coming from, what was bothering each one, what each needed to hear.

It was a privilege and an honor to know him, and I am only sad that this generation has not had a chance to meet him and know him in person and to appreciate him in the way that we did.

Mrs. Susan Shuster resides in Bal Harbour, Florida, where she was interviewed in March of 2011.

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

This week in....

> **5725 - 1964**, at a Shabbos *farbrengen*, the Rebbe recited his first formal dissertation on Rashi's commentary on Torah. This series continued over the following weeks, months, and years, until there were some 800 in-depth talks on Rashi. In each talk, the Rebbe would offer an interpretation of one of Rashi's comments, based on principles which Rashi had followed when writing the commentary. Over the course of 25 years, the Rebbe developed an entire set of rules and principles explaining Rashi's approach to interpreting Torah. ¹ 10 *Cheshvan*

1. A *Chassidesher Derher, Vov Tishrei, 5775*

לע"נ
ר' רפאל משה
בן ר' יעקב מנחם מענדל הכהן

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