

FROM THIS
DAUGHTER'S HEART

"Mommy," I cried, "tell me it isn't real... tell me that this whole thing is just a terrible nightmare and I'll soon wake up."

"I wish I could, Renie. I wish I could comfort you as I did when you were a little girl, and I would hear you cry out at night, and I would come to you, sit on your bed and tell you... Don't worry... All this... it didn't really happen."

I felt my tears flow freely as sobs shook my body. My mother sat silently beside me, allowing me to cry undisturbed. Finally, when I felt that there were no more tears left, I accepted the handkerchief that she offered me.

"I don't understand." I looked at her helplessly, still sniffing. "How does a person go on? How can Hashem do this, especially to a person as good and special as Nechama?"

My mother did not respond immediately, but when she did she spoke gently but firmly. "As hard as it is to understand, Renie," she hesitated a moment, "we must remember what we've been learning and believing all these years. Whatever Hashem does is for the best."

"I know that is what I have always been told, and until now I really did believe it..."

"Yes, Renie," she continued softly, as she soothingly smoothed my wet hair behind my ears. "It's easy to believe in Hashem's ways when everything is going well for us. The hard part, the real test, my darling," she looked me directly in the eye, "is having faith when things are not so good for us."

"But Mommy, this is terrible," I cried out despondently. "She had her whole life before her... and now, nothing. Maybe it's even worse than dying."

"Don't ever say that, Renie," she shook her head vehemently, "Hashem has His plan. And Nechama has a future. Hashem never sends anything to anyone who cannot deal with it..."



Estie Florans

Tefillas Chanah

Mrs. Chana Stavsky, A"H

When I wrote this segment in *Conquer the Darkness*, where 13-year-old Renie's mother breaks the news that Renie's best friend, Nechama, is blind, I did it with my own eyes squeezed shut. While my fingers tapped away on my keyboard, my mind was reliving a different scene, with a different mother and daughter.

"We have to be thankful to Hashem..."

"Where's Daddy?"

"We have to be thankful to Hashem for giving Daddy an extra two years—"

"But where's Daddy?!"

"Daddy got to see simchos..."

"But where is Daddy? Is he here? HERE?"

"No," my mother shook her head slowly, "but we have to thank Hashem."

That was the way my mother, Mrs. Chana Stavsky, broke the devastating news to me and my younger brother when our father was *niftar*... with words of *emunah* and *bitachon*, with words of gratitude to Hashem.

My brother had just turned 11; I was almost 13.

My mother was only 45.

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**SUKKOS
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ON NEWSSTANDS 10/10/2016 IY”H

Chanah, the childless wife of Elkanah, went to the *Mishkan* to *daven* to Hashem, begging Him to give her a child.

“*V’Chanah, hi midaberes al libah, rak sefasehah na’os, v’kolah lo yishame’a.* — And Chanah spoke from her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. Chanah was the first person to *daven* quietly to Hashem. That was why Eli HaKohen thought she was drunk. When she explained to him how heartbroken she was, that she wanted a child so badly, he realized that her whispered entreaties were true *tefillah* and he *bentched* her, telling her that Hashem would soon answer her prayer.

Chanah named her son Shmuel, because “*Shama Kel* — Hashem heard...” He heard her pleas, He heard her sincere *tefillah*. And as she had promised, when Shmuel turned two she brought him to Eli so that he could dedicate his life to Hashem.

Chanah could have been heartbroken as she parted from her beloved son. But she was not. She was filled with *tefillah* and gratitude to Hashem.

“*Vatispallel Chanah ... alatz libi baHashem...*— ...my heart is filled with joy in Hashem.”

“*We have to be thankful to Hashem for giving Daddy an extra two years...*”

Two years before my father’s untimely *petirah*, he had a severe heart attack that almost killed him.

But.

“*Daddy got to see simchos...*”

During those next two years, he enjoyed the marriages of my two oldest siblings, as well as the birth of his first grandchild, born thirty days before Sukkos.

That Erev Sukkos, excitement mounted as we built the extra-long *sukkah* across our yard and filled the freezer and

I remember clearly my mother’s blessing to all when making a *simchah*: “May your *simchah* be with *simchah*.”

refrigerator with delicacies. My newborn nephew’s *pidyon haben* would be on the first day of Chol Hamoed.

And it was.

After we returned home from my father’s *levayah* and *kevurah*.

We *aveilim* entered the *sukkah* to eat our *seudas havraah*’ and then the *Kohen*, along with the many guests, arrived to celebrate the *pidyon haben*.

I vividly remember the shock that ran through me as I realized that my Daddy would never again be with us at

I will never forget my mother’s message when she broke the horrific news to us ... She expressed not bitterness... but gratitude.

another *simchah*. And I remember clearly my mother’s blessing to all when making a *simchah*: “May your *simchah* be with *simchah*.”

But most importantly, I will never forget my mother’s message when she broke the horrific news to us “younger ones” upon her arrival home from the hospital the night before. She expressed *not* bitterness... but gratitude.

“I prayed to Hashem to give me the right words,” my mother later told me.

Those words, at that time when my heart was so open and vulnerable, built a strong foundation for me for the future. With hearts full of sorrow, we still thank Hashem.

“*Alatz libi baHashem...*”

Dear Readers...

I’ve been writing the column “From Their Daughters’ Hearts” for several years. I’ve interviewed dozens of people for this column and for other human interest stories featured in *Binah* as well.

But this is the first time I am interviewing myself.

My mother was a school administrator, prolific writer, teacher and principal, filling so many more roles within all those roles.

And she was my mother.

I’ve interviewed many. They’ve graciously opened their hearts to me to share a part of their hearts... with you.

And I am trying to learn from them. Please join me as I endeavor to speak to you from *this* daughter’s heart.

Mommy was born in New York on August 8, 1927, the eldest child of Yaakov Yosef and Bracha Eider. Nineteen months after Mommy’s birth, her sister Rivka² was born, followed by her brother, Shimon Dovid,³ over a decade later.

Born in Austria, my grandfather, Yaakov Yosef, came to the United States in his early 20s. He was one of those unwavering *shomer Shabbos* Jews who lost his job every Friday afternoon when he informed his boss that he would not be *mechallel Shabbos*. My grandmother, Bracha, was born in a small village in Dombrova, Poland. Although girls at that time were not taught how to read *Lashon Hakodesh*, she was determined to hire a *melamed* to teach her *kriah* in order to be able to *daven* from a *siddur*. She earned this money by delivering the cholent from the bakery oven to the various villagers every Shabbos.

Growing up in Bensonhurst, where there were no Bais Yaakovs, Mommy attended public school during the day and Talmud Torah in the afternoons. She often reminisced that the walks she took with

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her very learned father, discussing the *parashah* every Friday evening after the *seudah*, gave her a solid foundation in *Yiddishkeit* and *emunah*.

Another strong influence throughout Mommy's childhood and adolescence came from her Bubby Sarah, who lived with the family. Mommy fondly recalled conversing in Yiddish with her Bubby while she washed and combed her grandmother's *sheitel*.

As a young teen, Mommy worked in a bakery after school to contribute toward the family's rent. Along with her job, attending school and Talmud Torah, Mommy used her "spare" time to write. We recently discovered an assortment of short stories, essays and poems Mommy had written in her teen years.

Indeed, Mommy harbored a "secret" dream of becoming a writer one day.

But there was something she longed for even more.

In her high school yearbook, next to a graduation photograph of her in cap and gown, is written:

"EIDER, ANNE Sec. to Miss O'Rourke;
Marquis Rep.; Legend Rep.; Red Cross Rep.;
Monitor for Mr. Serota. Ambition: *To reach the
top of the ladder of success — Marriage.*"

Reaching the top of *that* ladder didn't take long when, at 19 years old, Mommy met and married my father, Moshe Mordechai Stavsky.

Daddy was born in 1919 in Dbrowa Gornicza, Poland. His mother, Leah, descended from a family of Strettiner Chassidim, and his father, Chaim Tzvi, was a follower of Rabbi Aharon Dovid Twersky, a grandson of the Trisker Maggid, Rabbi Avraham of Trisk. Daddy arrived in the United States at age 2, the family settling on the Lower East Side. They *davened* in the Polisher *shtiebel* on Henry Street, with my father and his brothers enrolled in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef (RJJ).

My father was drafted into the army in 1941 and, as blessed by the Strettiner Rebbe, Harav Yitzchok Isaac Langner, *zy"ta*, Daddy remained in the continental U.S., stationed in Fort Lewis, Washington, for the duration of the war.

Although Daddy didn't engage in combat, army life had many spiritual battles. When the base's chaplain insisted that a bugle for Rosh Hashanah was "good enough," Daddy traveled sixty miles to the closest Jewish community to obtain a kosher *shofar*... and blew it for all the Jewish people at Fort Lewis.

The National Jewish Welfare Board provided a limited amount of kosher food; therefore, Daddy ate mostly vegetables and eggs throughout those years. He chose the corner bed in the army barracks for privacy, so he could *daven* undisturbed, donning *tefillin* each day.

Daddy always wore his *tzitzis*, claiming that it served as a protection from the myriad challenges that destroyed far too many of the U.S. Army's Jewish souls.

Within a few months of my parents' wedding, Daddy was offered the opportunity to join a thriving business on the West Coast. Year-round pleasant weather and a beautiful, suburban home on a sprawling piece of landscaped land beckoned... truly the American dream!

But there was a problem.

That city didn't yet have an established *frum* community with yeshivos and a Bais Yaakov. So my parents stayed in their tiny Williamsburg apartment where my two eldest siblings, Yitzchok Isaac and Chaya Sara (Sukey), were born. When Yitzy turned 4, my family moved to Boro Park, choosing to *daven* in the shul of Harav Dovid Twersky, *zt"l*, the Skverer Rebbe of Boro Park. My father became the *shliach tzibbur* during the Yamim Nora'im, sparking the beginning of a special connection between our families.

Every Sunday was "visiting day," alternating between visits to our paternal grandparents on the Lower East Side and our maternal grandparents in Bensonhurst; that is, until our Zeida Yaakov Yosef became ill, a few years after the birth of my second sister, Penina. Sukey vividly remembers that last summer of Zeida Yaakov Yosef's life, how Mommy shlepped by bus to Maimonides Hospital each day together with her three young children in tow, leaving them playing on the hospital's porch while she visited with him. There was no car, no day camps, no babysitters. But there was an abundance of *kibbud av va'eim*.

When he was *niftar* the following June, the family didn't want their newly widowed mother to be alone for the summer. Mommy and her sister, along with their

That city didn't yet have an established *frum* community with yeshivos and a Bais Yaakov. So my parents stayed in their tiny Williamsburg apartment.

families, moved together into a two-bedroom bungalow with each family taking one bedroom, my grandmother sleeping on a bed in the kitchen, and my Uncle Shimon, a teenager, sleeping on the screened porch. After that summer, our grandmother and uncle moved into an apartment house next door to our family.

Our Uncle Shimon often expressed appreciation to our parents for their powerful influence throughout the years — from the time my father wrote his bar mitzvah *pshetl*, continuing during his teens when they provided

Mommy was unusually resourceful, doing whatever she could on a low budget to make our home attractive and welcoming.

him with another place to call "home."

One of my earliest memories is of my mother calling me her "miracle baby."

Yes, all babies are "miracles." But because of direct *hashgachah pratis* that occurred with my birth, Mommy always felt an extra dose of gratitude, never tiring of expressing her wonder at Hashem's goodness. That gratitude did not diminish when, less than two years later, Mommy informed me that she was bringing home a baby for me to play with, and soon afterward introduced me to my younger brother, Yaakov Yosef (Yanky).

Mommy used to tell me and Yanky a continuing bedtime story each night about a family who was going on a trip to Eretz Yisrael... with many mishaps along the way, making us children the main characters in this adventure. One time we sneaked into a suitcase in the "story" in our desperation to get on that airplane. But I don't recall any other details.

I do remember, though, the tremendous feelings of love and longing for Eretz Yisrael that began growing in me at that young age. Mostly, I won't ever forget that feeling of being enveloped by my mother's love as she used her creativity to nurture and educate us.

We were young children, old enough to play outside on our own, but too young to be allowed to cross the street. One time, I couldn't resist the thrill, and gingerly took one, then two steps, managing to get as far as the middle of the street. Suddenly, I felt someone grip my arm. "Wait till your mother hears what you did!" a woman said as she pulled me along, rang my doorbell, and promptly informed my mother of my dangerous escapade.

As soon as she loosened her grip, I fled... under the table.

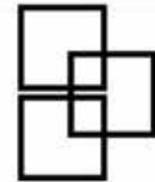
When Mommy found me, she told me to come out, assuring me that she would not *potch* me, but instead had something she wanted to show me.

Mommy led me outside, clutching a banana in one hand, my hand in the other. She placed the banana on the road, and told me to watch what happened to the banana.

We watched. A car came, and I saw what happened when the car ran over the banana.

I never ran into the street again.

Mommy was unusually resourceful, doing whatever she could on a low budget to make our home attractive and welcoming. Together with Daddy — who could never throw away something that had potential — they'd fix and redesign what others might have considered junk. Stripping and painting old furniture, sewing curtains and drapes for the house, getting down on her hands and knees to wax and buff the floors, Mommy's joy overshadowed the hard work. Mommy also sewed pretty clothing for us girls, and knitted sweaters for all the newborn grandchildren throughout the



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ON NEWSSTANDS 10/10/2016 IY"ח

years, her fingers never idle.

I don't remember my mother ever *not* working.

Sukey recalls those earlier years when Mommy was employed as a secretary to a lawyer and had often expressed her desire to stay home and focus on helping her children's schools. At that time, she served as editor of my brother's yeshiva's newspaper, which she named "The MYTE" (Mesivta Yeshiva Toras Emes) and to which she contributed articles, each one with a hashkafic theme and a creative twist.

In September 1962, Rabbi Yisroel Garber opened a branch of Esther Schoenfeld High School in Boro Park with Rabbi Ephraim Oratz, z"l, serving as principal. Rabbi Oratz and his wife, Shulamis, were family friends, having known my father from the Lower East Side. Recognizing Mommy's capabilities, Rabbi Oratz asked my mother to become his secretary.

And so a new chapter began — Mommy's entrance into the *chinuch* world. From that first year at 47th Street and 14th Avenue⁴ with one tenth grade and two ninth grades, Mommy helped Esther Schoenfeld, later to be called "Bais Yaakov Academy," grow into a "home away from home" where generations of *talmidos* would flourish.

Mommy's title was "secretary," but she was really much more.

My Mother's Siddur

By Mrs. Sukey Gross⁹

I thought I knew my mother.

I knew that my mother was a strong person who always wished to develop herself further in her *Yiddishkeit*. I grew up with English *sefarim* and books in the house and my mother would read them, learn from them, discuss deep philosophical issues with my father, and work on herself to become a better person.

After *shivah*, we opened up my mother's *siddur* and were struck with astonishment. The *siddur* was not only the means with which my mother *davened*. My mother's *siddur* was a testimonial to who she was and how intrinsic *tefillah* was to her life.

The pages were well worn and delicate from constant use and many tears. On one paper in the introduction, my mother had written a list of *zechuyos* one receives when saying a *brachah* or answering *Amen*. There were little notes throughout the *siddur*: "Be careful, applies to women also." "Personal request." "Declaration — accepting *ol Malchus Shamayim*." "Say with *kavanah*."

I thought I knew my mother but apparently I only knew an outer layer. When scrutinizing my mother's *siddur*, I met a person of depth beyond what I could ever have imagined, someone who had a personal relationship with Hashem, who clung to Hashem while doing His will. I discovered this secret side of my mother between the pages of her *siddur*.

I thought I knew my mother. I know her better now.

It might have been "just plain" typing. But for Mommy, nothing was "just plain" anything. Mommy planned the course professionally...

Rabbi Oratz regarded her as his assistant, often requesting her womanly input in dealing with the girls. For example, if a girl wore a skirt that was too short, Rabbi Oratz might comment, "Mrs. Stavsky, Ruchi* has gotten taller during her vacation." Mommy would escort Ruchi into a different room and help her take down her hem. The teenagers loved shmoozing in her office or coming to our house. In the words of Mrs. Helen Feintuch, class of '66, "Your mother always made us feel welcome and comfortable. There was nothing we couldn't discuss with her!"

When Rabbi Oratz added typing to the curriculum, he offered the teaching position to my mother. I remember her nervousness before that first day and I recall her repeating Rabbi Oratz's words each year before the new term began. "The best teachers are *always* nervous before the first day of school."

It might have been "just plain" typing. But for Mommy, nothing was "just plain" anything. Mommy planned the course professionally: *homework, rules, no slouching*; using her ingenuity to help the girls become expert typists while utilizing the course to integrate *ruchniyus*. Mrs. Hindy Selengut, a former student, reminded us during Mommy's *shivah* that those annual "term papers" that Mommy assigned had to be on a specific growth-oriented topic. Her year (the early '70s), the subject was *tznius*.

Just plain typing?

Mommy was with B.Y.A. throughout the school's moves to Ninth Avenue, and then to 18th Avenue. Mommy's position evolved from secretary who taught typing to the school administrator who continued teaching typing.

Mommy also taught adults in an after-school program, and for a period, was Beth Oloth's American coordinator. (B.Y.A. had partnered with Beth Oloth, an orphanage in Eretz Yisrael for newly arrived and underprivileged Israeli girls. The B.Y.A. students enthusiastically raised much-needed funds through extracurricular activities.)

Beth Oloth had always been part of my childhood, but Mommy's passion to help them grew even more after her visit to Beth Oloth when she met the orphans and witnessed what the orphanage offered. My brother Yanky and I frequently accompanied her to the thrift shop she established at a storefront on 18th Avenue to enable outside customers to purchase goods, with the proceeds going to Beth Oloth. She'd comb through catalogues and drive to warehouses to find merchandise. All during her own "extra" time...

Mommy was always "doing," and whatever Mommy did, Mommy did 100 percent. There was no such thing as half a job. If it was Pesach preparations, it was homemade applesauce, borscht and whatever else a Yiddische *balabusta* felt must be done. If guests entered our home, it was deep, meaningful conversations that went on for hours — saving engagements, marriages and *Yiddishkeit*!

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 Stay At The Top Of The Mountain

It's not that she didn't know how to relax. She did. But it was done consciously and with the purpose of recharging... and with the recognition and appreciation of the surrounding beauty of Hashem's creations. Mommy delighted in sitting near the bay or listening to the sounds of the ocean's waves hitting the seashore. Whether it was during road trips or leading us on other explorations through the woods, Mommy imbued us with gratefulness and excitement at the *niflaos haBorei*.

I witnessed that connection with the *Ribbono shel Olam* in both of my parents from a young age. It wasn't just from hearing my father's beautiful voice with his *hartzige davening* floating through the small windows of the *mechitzah* at the Skverer Rebbe's shul or the way he formed close connections to Rebbes and *Roshei Yeshivah*.

It was in everything he did... in the way he constantly spoke of Hashem and the way he faced life. It was in the way he told my mother that while waiting for his car's motor to warm up each morning, he would say *Tehillim* so he could warm his *neshamah* before beginning the day. Mommy learned from Daddy. When she started driving, she, too, began her day warming her *neshamah* while warming up the car.

Mommy often spoke in awed tones about the meaning of the different *tefillos*; on her own, she learned the English translation, marveling at the beauty of the words. I vividly remember her exclaiming after learning the meaning of *Nishmas*, "We're so fortunate to have such a *tefillah!*"

Our parents saw the details in life, but even more so, valued the magnificence in human beings. Great-Uncle Larry*, who had no family; the lonely, divorced painter, Mr. Fishman*, who lived in my parents' attic; Handyman Jack*, who hung around our house fixing things... there were loads of guests in and out of our home all the time.

As we sat *shivah* for my mother, a former guest introduced himself. "My name is Mordy Ishakis. It was approximately 1968-69, and I was learning in Scranton with your brother Yitzchok. I mentioned to him that I didn't want to go back home to Detroit for Sukkos, but hoped to spend Sukkos in New York. Your brother invited me.

"I felt at home right away, with the entire Stavsky family making me feel welcome and comfortable. When I met your mother, I saw that she was a bubbly, animated person, always with something positive to say. The conversation, the meals... it was truly wonderful!

"I hadn't seen your mother since that Sukkos... but I felt I had to make the trip (to Lakewood) to be *menachem avel* the family."

I must have been in fourth grade. My friend invited me to come to her house straight from school, but then added, "But first I have to ask my mother."

What? You need permission to bring friends home?
We always had a ready audience for our "performances."
Even Erev Pesach.

Everyone (parents and siblings) was invited to the basement. Curtains (old quilts) hung from the vents by the ceiling. The audience had to sit on the couch as Yanky and I sang and acted out the Pesach story.

Indeed, our parents were always our delighted audience, prodding us on, encouraging us to develop ourselves and keep reaching higher. Whether it was a newspaper Sukey edited, or a dance Penina choreographed, *divrei Torah* my brothers related, or a "book" I put together as a youngster, our parents gave us the confidence that everything is possible... as long as the talent is expressed within the ideals and purity of a Torah lifestyle.

My mother was not afraid to voice her opinion in public.

She wrote a groundbreaking article in the *Jewish Observer* (October 1970, "Broadway, Here I Come?") about a trend she noticed creeping into the Bais Yaakovs and sleepaway camps that "may appear to be quite innocuous and even commendable in many ways" but may, in fact, be far from harmless. Mommy foresaw the dangers of the Broadway productions performed in camps and Bais Yaakovs. She worried for the purity of innocent Bais Yaakov girls who participated in the "censored" version in camp and upon returning home might see nothing wrong with attending the uncensored version performed on the Manhattan stages.

This article was the first publicly written expression about this ongoing debate⁵, yet Mommy wrote the article anyway, and was not afraid to put her own name — as opposed to a pseudonym — in the byline.

When our father was *niftar* and she was plunged into

During that overwhelming year, my mother decided that one night a week, the four of us still at home would go out to eat in a restaurant.

widowhood, into becoming the sole breadwinner, Mommy returned to graduate school while taking upon herself additional teaching commitments. She felt it was essential to instruct women how to balance checkbooks and other life skills, and ended up mentoring many other widows. During that overwhelming year, my mother decided that one night a week, the four of us still at home, Mommy, Penina, Yanky and myself, would go out to eat in a restaurant so we could get together in a relaxed atmosphere.

"She was my 'mommy' away from home. We felt free to discuss anything with her. We spent more time speaking to her in the office than in the classroom."

When her adult students at her clerical skills classes, Holocaust survivors, tried consoling her upon her recent widowhood and she heard *their* stories — she cried for *them*. In fact, Mommy cried easily when hearing of the suffering of others.

But she never remained in tears for long when it came to her own suffering.

She went on.

She embraced the next chapter with hope.

And always with her *siddur* and *Tehillim* nearby and with Hashem's name on her lips. "See how good Hashem is to me?" she'd say when different opportunities came her way.

Rebbetzin Esther Twersky, *shetichyeh*, had often asked my mother to join Tomer Devorah's staff. When I entered eleventh grade, Mommy finally acquiesced by becoming the English principal of the newly-established Tomer Devorah High School. Its first quarters were in the Nitra shul, and as Mrs. Esther Halberstam recalls, "The building was not conducive to a proper school atmosphere, but your mother managed to run the school with full decorum. She expected us to learn and excel in our studies, and indeed we did."

Mrs. Rochel Kalmanowitz was co-president of the first graduating class, and had an especially close relationship with my mother. She says, "I wasn't the only one who felt this closeness. We loved her and she loved us. Years later when living in Eretz Yisrael, *all* the girls wanted to get together when your mother visited.

"Your mother had sensitivity to everything — the type of music we listened to, the trips we took... Your mother stressed the importance of not copying what others do. When doing a project for the G.O., I'd suggest, 'I'll call another school to see what they do,' but Mrs. Stavsky would say, 'No, we don't look at what others are doing.'"

In a separate conversation, Mrs. Gitty Gurwitz, Rochel's co-president that year, reiterates almost the exact same words. She adds that she never missed calling my mother to wish her a good year. "Your mother nurtured us with love, raised us with *chochmah*, and taught us with skill."

I knew that Mrs. Fraidy Pilchick had been close to my mother. That's why I was taken aback when she said, "Mrs. Stavsky was not my principal."

What?

"She was my 'mommy' away from home. We felt free to discuss anything with her. We spent more time speaking to her in the office than in the classroom."

"Mrs. Stavsky once wanted to illustrate how people cave in to peer pressure," Mrs. Esther Malka Viznitzer recalls. "She clipped pages from newspapers and magazines, and showed the



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advertisements that screamed: 'BE IN STYLE! BE UP TO DATE! BUY THINGS JUST BECAUSE EVERYONE ELSE DOES!' It is over 30 years since I left the doors of Tomer Devorah and I still feel her lessons guiding me on my life's journey. She made us into the people we are today."

"Yes, she was our English principal," says Mrs. Hadassah Deutsch, "but from the meaningful discussions that took place between Mrs. Stavsky and the girls who crowded into her tiny office, you might have thought she was our *hashkafah* teacher..."

Mrs. Esther Henny Jaroslawicz remarks, "In our high school yearbook, your mother wrote, 'Klal Yisrael is compared to the fish in the sea, for when necessary, fish swim upstream against the tide.' Your mother wanted us to feel confident in the knowledge of right and wrong and that no matter how tempting the thrills of the outside world, we should always remain strong and behave as the *Eibershter* would want a *bas Yisrael* to conduct herself."

Mrs. Jaroslawicz's voice fills with emotion. "Your mother led by example. Although her *koach hadibbur* was powerful, we had only to look at her to emulate how she spoke, dressed and treated every individual with fairness and respect. As I interact with individuals of varied backgrounds, I often find myself thinking, would these actions/words make Mrs. Stavsky proud?"

"I can still see your mother standing in front of our classroom the day before the major trip, enthusiastically explaining each place we'd be touring," Bracha Bergman* shares. "Mrs. Stavsky was in front of the school building, ready to board the bus with us early in the morning, and when we returned from the trip late at night, she waited until each girl went home. She traveled to our destination on one bus, and returned on the other, maximizing her time with all her students, telling us about her family and asking about ours."

"We were a lively bunch of ninth-graders," Mrs. Yehudis Kviat reminisces, "and we once behaved incorrectly toward a teacher. Mrs. Stavsky entered our classroom. Without saying a word, she slowly and ceremoniously removed her glasses. We knew we were in for it!"

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"She then ordered us to take out our *siddurim* and to turn to 'Al cheit.' We were told to rise and 'klap al cheit' as we said, 'Al cheit... b'zilzul horim u'morim.'

"Very little spoken on her part, but a huge lesson for us..."

Mrs. Ruchi Margulies says, "My friends and I remember your mother driving around the mountains during the summer selling the personalized stationery she created to help raise funds for the school. She always had new and creative ideas to widen our horizons by giving us classes in embroidery, sewing, *sheitel* combing, etc.

"One of the most important lessons she conveyed, though, was

"As a principal, I've learned from Mrs. Stavsky. Trust your students. I never suspect girls of trying to cut class when they say they don't feel well."

through her consistent hard work. She began the school, *yeish me'ayin*, building it from the ground up. And now, look at the magnificent edifice she created!"

"One time I wasn't feeling well in school," Mrs. Sarah Fruma Goldberg recalls, "Your mother dropped whatever she was doing to drive me home."

Mrs. Menucha Horowitz relates a similar experience. "One Thursday afternoon, I was suddenly stricken with intense pain. When your mother heard, she came to me. She couldn't reach my mother, but managed to call my father, who was the *menahel* of Torah Vodaas. Your mother waited with me until my father came and took me to the emergency room, where it was confirmed that I had appendicitis. My surgery was over right before *licht bentching*."

"Friday morning, Friday afternoon, Motzoei Shabbos — your mother called my house, anxious to find out how I was, and then called twice a day thereafter until I returned to school almost three weeks later."

"As a principal, I've learned from Mrs. Stavsky. Trust your students. I never suspect girls of trying to cut class when they say they don't feel well. I try to treat them with the care and respect with which Mrs. Stavsky treated me."

My mother's secretary of many years, Mrs. Tova Libby Lebovitz, was reluctant to take the job. "When friends heard that I was about to accept the position as secretary in Tomer Devorah High School, they discouraged me. 'The office is tiny,' they warned, 'Mrs. Stavsky is a hard worker who expects her employees to work along with her.'

"And it was true. Your mother demanded a lot from me and from the teachers. But we all knew she demanded more from herself. We also knew that we were working as a team, toward a common goal. I observed her passion and her emotions in all situations. When something funny happened, your mother would let out a hearty, contagious laugh. And when she heard sad news, real tears rolled down her cheeks."

"During our many conversations, your mother constantly spoke about you children, her true pride and joy, with a huge joyful smile, proudly mentioning each of you by name with your individual accomplishments. But mostly how good you all were to her..."

"I witnessed her devotion toward your grandmother. After a long, difficult day in school, she often headed to visit her mother, frequently stopping to run errands for her on the way. I recall your elderly grandmother sitting in the audience during each graduation, your mother always acknowledging and thanking her publicly."

"Those years of working alongside your mother are not only some of my most cherished memories, they were a tremendous learning experience for me that continues to affect me every day of

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Sep. 21, 2016

Eye
Complications
Miraculously
Healed

"Avi," I said to my son, "Are you okay?" He was rubbing and rubbing his eyes.

"My eyes are just really itchy, Mommy," he replied. "They have been bothering me all day."

The next day was the same, as was the day after. Concerned, I made him an appointment at the eye doctor. She didn't think it was allergies, but she did feel that he needed a stronger prescription of glasses. We ordered new ones, picked them up and he began wearing them every day. But nothing changed. His eyes were still watering, still itching, and he still complained that he couldn't see.

I tried a new doctor, who was highly recommended by a friend. This doctor found a more serious issue. He told me that Avi had something wrong with the muscles in his eyes and said that we needed to see a specialist. I was terrified that Avi was going to need surgery or have problems for life. I scheduled the appointment with the specialist and then contacted Tehillim Kollel to daven for my Avi, hoping their Tefillos davened in the early morning, a very special time of day, would help.

We sat in the waiting room, nervous and edgy. The doctor called us in and while checking Avi, was very quiet. He did one test after the other, using different scopes and tools to analyze Avi's eyes. When he was done, he turned and said, "Nothing is wrong. Avi's eyes look completely healthy." We went home amazed and in shock, and over the next few days, Avi's eyes simply returned to normal. No more itching or watering and he could see! B"H, Tehillim Kollel's special Tefillos truly healed our Avi!

15
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my life.”

When my mother left Tomer Devorah, she never really left Tomer Devorah, and not just because she continued to travel in twice a week to give classes in “methods” to the seniors. The “girls” remained a part of her life after they graduated, married, had children and became grandmothers. My mother valued and saved every invitation she received from the “girls”; first from their own weddings, then from their sons’ bar mitzvahs and

An Educator’s Educator

My mother left a powerful impact on *mechanchos* who continue to educate others...

Rebbetzin Beela Kviat taught *limudei kodesh* in Tomer Devorah, but had formed a close relationship with my mother when still in high school. “When I reflect about your mother, I see someone who always exuded warmth, yet with a tremendous level of discipline, a discipline that wasn’t just for others, but was a ‘self-discipline.’ One never questioned the credibility of what she said. As both a student and a colleague, I observed her requirements of the students, which came from a genuine desire to be *mechanech* the girls with true *yiras Shamayim*.”

“I was a young girl, still in seminary,” relates Mrs. Feige Arieli, vice principal, Mesores Rochel Seminary. “I heard that Tomer Devorah High School was looking for a ninth-grade world geography teacher. With the confidence of the young, I applied — and was accepted — for the job. Mrs. Stavsky was very much on top of my class and what I was teaching. She always had the right thing to say, and even when it was critical, it was constructive criticism at its best. I look back fondly on that period, some 36 years ago. That was my first teaching position and the beginning of a life’s career!”

Mrs. Shaindy Bluming, *Menahelas*, Bais Brocho High School, recalls, “Mrs. Stavsky taught in methods classes how to engage all the students, the less motivated and distracted, as well as the more enthusiastic ‘*kli mekablos*.’ Her tried-and-true method of keeping the more animated students involved ensures that the rest of the class will join the developing lesson. Later on, working in *chinuch*, I realized that perhaps she also meant that each person can be compared to a classroom. Concentrate on one’s *maalos* and the average *middos* will improve, while the negative *middos* will fall away.”

A former student and popular seminary teacher in Eretz Yisrael, Mrs. Shayne Mandelbaum fondly reminisces, “We feared her and we revered her. It’s astounding the way I continuously meet alumni throughout the world who after so many years share a common trait that your mother sought to instill in us: that uncompromising and staunch commitment to *emes*.”

then from their children’s weddings. She responded to each invitation, with the girls saving and valuing her responses and *brachos* as well. “I actually thought your mother must have loved me just as much as she loved you, Estie,” one of my mother’s *talmidos* told me.

Truthfully, she never stopped teaching.

During the next “chapter” of her life she authored three novels: *A Time to Live*, and its sequel, *A Time to Heal*, as well as the historical fiction, *Tomorrow May Be Too Late*. Each was a platform to teach *hashkafos* and relate history in an engaging manner.

Over 20 years ago, after moving into an apartment in Lakewood, Mommy didn’t allow herself to feel “down” due to less space and the absence of *frum* neighbors on Kennedy Boulevard. Instead, she sewed curtains and matching linen, hung photos, and decorated with secondhand finds, cheerfully commenting on how beautiful and airy her apartment was. She arranged *shiurim* in her apartment for the other women “retiring” to Lakewood, went swimming, helped us with our mending, and began working on her next book.

And she got involved with Ruth, an elderly lady in the nursing home, who “didn’t have anybody.”

And she continued teaching methods in Lakewood, learning every available English *sefer* and writing checks for every *tzedakah* envelope mailed to her home. She continued speaking publicly, knitting, babysitting for grandchildren and great-grandchildren, mentoring former *talmidos* and anyone who needed a listening ear.

She continued and continued — until she couldn’t.

She was *niftar* on the morning of Rosh Chodesh Sivan. At the *levayah*, my brother, Yitzchok spoke about *Sefiras HaOmer*, pointing out that we count the days in ascending order, anticipating *Kabbalas HaTorah*, making each day count. And that’s the way our mother lived her life... *making each day count*.

There was no time to contact thousands of former students, the myriad guests, the people befriended through her various *chessed* activities... the many she touched through her books, her speeches, her smile, throughout her almost 89 years on earth.

There were no *hespeidim*, no *Kel Malei Rachamim*[®]. Silence, a dignified silence, as everyone rose and followed the *aron* —

As told to me by my sister, Mrs. Penina Feigenbaum

Mommy loved being here in Eretz Yisrael. She couldn’t sit still for one minute! Running to the Kosel, Kever Rochel, even Me’aras Hamachpelah. Mommy went to *shiurim* in Neve and The Israel Center, and would talk to everyone, interested in everything, always learning something new, meeting with her former students, and only traveling by bus so she could drink in the Israeli experience.

The first time we went to Meron on Lag BaOmer was with Mommy. She wanted to “feel” the experience — the *meduros*, the *chalakos*, the *davening*, the dancing, the singing!

We even took Mommy on a safari truck through *Midbar Yehudah*. It was sand and sky for miles, but it was Eretz Yisrael, and it was living *Tanach*, and Mommy loved it!

And of course, once word got out that Mommy was here, her visit extended and extended as Mommy was asked to give a lecture series on teaching methods in one of the seminaries.

children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. *Banim u’vnei banim*...

All those years back, my mother called me her miracle baby. Really, though, my mother was a living miracle.

Mommy, born and bred in America of the ’20s and ’30s, held on to the *mesorah*, and passed it on to the next generation with love and care. She had so many challenges throughout her life but she never said, “Why me?” She saw every minute as a gift from Hashem, an opportunity for growth. Through each chapter of life, the difficulties and the triumphs, she proceeded with as much positivity as she could muster... *making each day count*.

My mother never stopped climbing. She ascended each rung with optimism, with *tefillah* on her lips, with “*Alatz libi baHashem* — my heart rejoices in Hashem.” ●

*Name has been changed.

Estie Florans, a writer of fiction and nonfiction is a personal biographer and is the author of “Conquer the Darkness,” “Set Me Free,” “Lift Me Higher” and the recently released book “From Their Daughters’ Hearts.” She can be contacted at erflorans@gmail.com.

1. The first meal eaten by mourners after the burial.
2. Mrs. Jeanne Fogel, *shetichyeh*.
3. Harav Shimon Dovid Eider, *zt”l*, *posek* and *mechaber sefarim*.
4. The Machzike Talmud Torah building.
5. See *Binah* Issue 480.
6. Mrs. Esther H. Jaroslawicz is director of operations at Bikur Cholim of Boro Park.
7. Mrs. Menucha Horowitz is *limudei kodesh* principal of Bais Tziporah in Boro Park.
8. The *kevurah* took place a few hours after the *petirah* on Rosh Chodesh.
9. Mrs. Sukey Gross is a published author.

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