

# HERE'S my STORY

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## FAR ABOVE MEDICAL SCHOOL

**MRS. SUSAN BLAUNER**



I would like to tell a very beautiful and very moving story about my son, myself and the Rebbe.

When my son, Shmaryahu, was a baby, he was very sickly. He was feverish all the time. If someone sneezed three miles away, he would get a cold. He had almost no immunity, and his health was of great concern to me.

At fourteen months, he ended up in the hospital — Cedars Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles — and that was the first big scare I had with him. At that time, he was tested for cystic fibrosis, a horrible prospect for a mother to hear. The first set of tests was pointing that way, and I was really in a panic since cystic fibrosis can be hereditary and I was seven months pregnant with my second son. I started to get contractions just because of the stress.

We wrote to the Rebbe, asking for a blessing. And then the doctors did some more tests which showed that they had made a mistake. He did not have cystic fibrosis but a milk allergy.

When I heard that I was so happy and so thankful at this

turn of events. For whatever reason, I had to go through that angst but, in the end, it was something very minor.

As time went by, Shmaryahu got stronger but he did not get much bigger. He was very tiny and was not growing as a child should. He was just very small compared to other children his age.

When he was five, my pediatrician — a very well-known doctor — said to me, "I'm going to send you to the top endocrinologist in California. People come to him from all over the world. It's very hard to get an appointment with this man, but I've arranged one for you. He doesn't take any insurance. You have to pay up front — one thousand dollars for the visit."

In those days — this was the early 1980s — to pay a doctor a thousand dollars for just a few minutes of his time was almost unheard of, but we were so desperate that we were willing to do anything.

So we went to this endocrinologist, and he looked at my son and he looked at some of the tests. He ordered more blood-work and told us to come back a week later. That's when he said, "We need to give him human growth hormone."

He explained that Shmaryahu would have to get these shots until he was twenty-one years old, which meant for some sixteen years, as he was five at the time.

I didn't like this news one bit, and I said "I have to talk to my Rebbe about this. This is not something I'm going to take on my shoulders alone."

He didn't care what I did. He just wanted his thousand dollars. He said, "Well, call me when you decide."

Of course, both my husband and I wanted to help our son grow. We wanted him to reach his full potential, but there was something about this growth hormone treatment that bothered us. So we were not willing to go forward without the Rebbe's advice.

*continued on reverse*

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 1200 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](mailto:mystory@jemedi.org)

continued from reverse

I sat down and I penned a letter to the Rebbe, telling him everything about the situation — who this doctor was, what he recommended, and so forth. It was a very long letter.

We got an answer back almost immediately. The Rebbe had taken my letter, crossed out the words “growth hormone” with large X’s and wrote there in Hebrew, “Absolutely not!”

It was clear that his opinion was not to do this, and it was not just a “no,” it was “absolutely not.”

Furthermore, we received a message that the Rebbe recommended we go to another specialist and that this specialist would lead us in the right direction.

So I went back to my original pediatrician who had sent me to the expensive endocrinologist, and I said to him: “The Lubavitcher Rebbe says no.”

And he started screaming at me: “What do you mean?! Do you know what I went through to get you an appointment with this doctor? This man is the finest, the best, the most wonderful, world renowned! People come from all over the world to him! He is the one who can help you!”

I looked at him, and I said, “If my Rebbe says no, it’s no. I want a referral to another endocrinologist.”

He got even more angry. “What does the Rebbe know? Did he go to medical school?”

I smiled and said, “Well, the Rebbe is far above any medical school.”

In the end, he calmed down some but I could see he was disgusted with me and had written me off. But he did what I asked, and that is, refer me to another endocrinologist — Dr. Sheldon Lavin.

I went to this Dr. Lavin and was happy to see he was a little Jewish guy with a very pleasant personality. I told him the whole story, including what the Rebbe advised, and he smiled at me and said, “It will be okay.”

He pointed out to me that I and my husband were small — I am four-foot-ten and my husband is five-six — and so we could not expect our son to be big. He also said, “To tell you the truth, I’m not really sold on this growth hormone. We haven’t had enough years of experience to know what the end result of this treatment is going to be. So I don’t recommend it at all. What I recommend is that we x-ray your son’s wrist every six month and see whether his bones are growing or not.”

And that’s what we did. Every six months I would go to Dr. Lavin and he would smile and he would take another x-ray, and we would celebrate every little bit of Shmaryahu’s bone growth on the chart.

And then one day, he called me into his office. He was very serious and he asked me to sit down. He opened up a medical journal and he said to me, “Do you remember that the Rebbe had crossed out the words ‘growth hormone’ and told you ‘absolutely not’?”

I said, “Of course, I remember.”

“Well, then I want you to read this article.”

I read the article and tears came into my eyes because the article reported that many of the children who had had been given that growth hormone in the past year had died.

This would not happen today, of course. Today, they have a synthetic growth hormone, but back then, they were making this hormone from cadavers, from dead people, some of whom had died of communicable diseases. Back then tests for these diseases did not exist. So these children were infected, and they died.

But the Rebbe had saved my son’s life.

Today Shmaryahu is thirty-six years old. He is not a big guy, but he is alive. All because of the Rebbe’s incredible wisdom. And I shall never cease to be grateful for what he did for my son and my family.

*Susan Blauner is the Director of Operations for the Saving Lives Drug and Alcohol Coalition and the Executive Director of Prevention Outreach for Evolve Treatment Centers. She was interviewed at the Chabad of the Valley in Encino in 2011.*

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

## This week in....

> **5721-1960**, The Rebbe wrote to professor Dr. Isaac Lewin of the need for historically accurate narratives of the Holocaust telling the stories of observant communities, which many other histories of the time period ignore or downplay. <sup>1</sup> 3 Kislev

1. Igros Kodesh vol. 20 p. 48

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Mr. Sam Cagen - יהושע בן פנחס הכהן  
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