

HERE'S my STORY

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A SPECIAL VISIT

MR. DAVID HIMBER



I grew up in Brooklyn, in a Modern Orthodox family — though the term did not exist in those days. We were Torah observant, and I got a religious education from grade school through high school.

During that time, my parents operated a grocery on Albany Avenue near Lefferts Avenue, and they counted among their customers the Gourary family. When I was a teenager, Rebbetzin Chava Gourary suggested — seeing as I was hanging out in the streets during the summer vacation — that I take a job as a waiter in Camp Gan Israel, which was the Lubavitcher kids' camp.

This I did. It was in the late 1950s I think, or maybe the early 1960s. My job, as one of twenty or twenty-five waiters, was to set up the tables and serve the food.

All the waiters lived under the dining room, where there was one huge room set up with bunk-beds for us. Now imagine what that room looked like after a couple of days. To be polite, we weren't the neatest human beings in the world. Although the camp authorities did come down once in a while and try to make us clean up, the place

was a real mess.

Then, all of a sudden — it was in July or August — word came down the grapevine that the Rebbe was coming to visit the camp. Now, with all due respect, at that point I had no idea what that meant, but it sounded to me like someone important was coming to inspect the operation.

All of a sudden, painters showed up, and cleaners showed up, and handymen showed up — everyone was very busy fixing up the camp in advance of the Rebbe's visit.

I remember someone coming down and banging nails into the wall of the waiters' room, so that we could hang up our Shabbos suits and our Shabbos shirts because, until then, they were either on the floor or in our suitcases. And I must say, the waiters' bunk really shaped up rather nicely.

The big day arrived. When the Rebbe came through, we were all standing by our beds, kind of like at attention, while he conducted his inspection. He looked around, and I heard him say, "Why don't these boys have closets?"

And this part amazes me to this day — that he cared about closets for the waiters!

He continued his tour of the camp, asking questions like, "Where is the basketball court?" Or, "Where are the lights for the playground?" Half a century later when I remember this, I am amazed all over again.

A few days later, closets appeared, and bulldozers appeared and steamrollers appeared to build a basketball court, and lights went up. It was like magic.

That was my first encounter with the Rebbe. I realized that I had been in the presence of a very special person, and I was in awe.

When I returned home after camp was over, I decided to attend the Rebbe's *farbrengens*. And what I found amazing was the Rebbe's power to focus on the individual.

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 the over 1,100 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. mystory@jemediia.org

There were hundreds or maybe thousands of people in attendance, but when I held out my little cup of vodka and the Rebbe nodded to me to say *l'Chaim*, I felt like I was the only person in the room.

I never met the Rebbe in private, but I felt as if I did. These *farbrengens* were very personal experiences to me, which I will never forget.

Also, I will never forget the sweet fervor that filled the room during those gatherings. The *chasidim* would begin a melody and, on occasion, the Rebbe wouldn't react to it. So then, they would start a different *niggun*, and the Rebbe would smile and encourage them. The more he waved his arms, the higher the singing went, the louder they sang, the deeper the experience. And when he stopped waving his arms, the entire assembly would stop dead in their tracks. That was something to see.

Every month, I looked forward to the *farbrengen*. I really didn't understand everything that the Rebbe said when he delivered his teachings, but it always sounded meaningful to me.

Another special occasion I remember was Simchas Torah. Someone told me that on Simchas Torah the Rebbe comes out at five o'clock in the morning, and he teaches a new *niggun* which becomes the melody for the year.

Being young and looking for something exciting to do after my synagogue finished dancing with the Torah, I came to Chabad Headquarters and waited. The Chabad guys had gone out to *shuls* throughout New York to liven things up, and so they started their own celebration of Simchas Torah much later. I stayed up the whole night waiting until the Rebbe came out. Unfortunately, I don't remember the year or what the melody was that he taught, but I remember being there and being tremendously inspired.

Then I started learning *Tanya*, and even if I didn't join Chabad, I got really caught up in the spirit of the movement.

The Rebbe came to mean something special to me. For example, I worked at Yeshiva University for eighteen years as a counselor, and I kept a little picture of the Rebbe where I could see it, though not necessarily where anybody else could see it. It just gave me strength to have it there. Also, once in a while, a student connected

with Chabad would come in to talk to me about personal issues or school issues or whatever. And, in the course of the conversation, I would take the picture of the Rebbe, and I would show it to the student, who took it to mean that "You're one of us." And that would really change the interaction between me and that student.

Today, I am a member of the Jewish Motorcycle Club. And I have a little picture of the Rebbe taped to the windshield of my motorcycle, so when I am riding, I see him.

Two decades after his passing from this world, the Rebbe continues to inspire me. I've gone through ups and downs in life, but it is the Rebbe's inspiration that has kept me on the right path. And, to this day, he continues to fill me with a love for *Yiddishkeit* and love for the Jewish people.

Past president of Chai Riders, a Jewish Motorcycle Club, David Himber lives in Sea Gate, Brooklyn. He was interviewed in the My Encounter Studio in May of 2014.

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

This week in....

> **5734 - 1974**, in a letter, the Rebbe wrote to the Lubavitch Youth Organization of Israel that while visiting prisoners they should explain to them that even negative situations are really a vehicle to lead to a more positive life than before. In the case of a prisoner, they are now given the chance to meditate, without any distractions, on the good that exists within them. The Rebbe also instructed that Chabad provide the inmates with Jewish books if requested.¹
2 Elul

> **5745 - 1985**, the Rebbe spoke at a rally for children returning from summer camps about how G-d helps each one of them in the struggle with their own evil inclination, and how thinking about this very fact will help them overcome hardships. At the conclusion of the rally, the Rebbe distributed three coins to be given to each child; two for charity and one for their own personal use.²
4 Elul

1. Igros Kodesh vol. 29, p. 234 2. Toras Menachem 5745 vol 5, p. 2849

Mazal Tov to **Shaina Cunin**
on her Bas Mitzva

by **Leib and Esther Lerner** and family

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