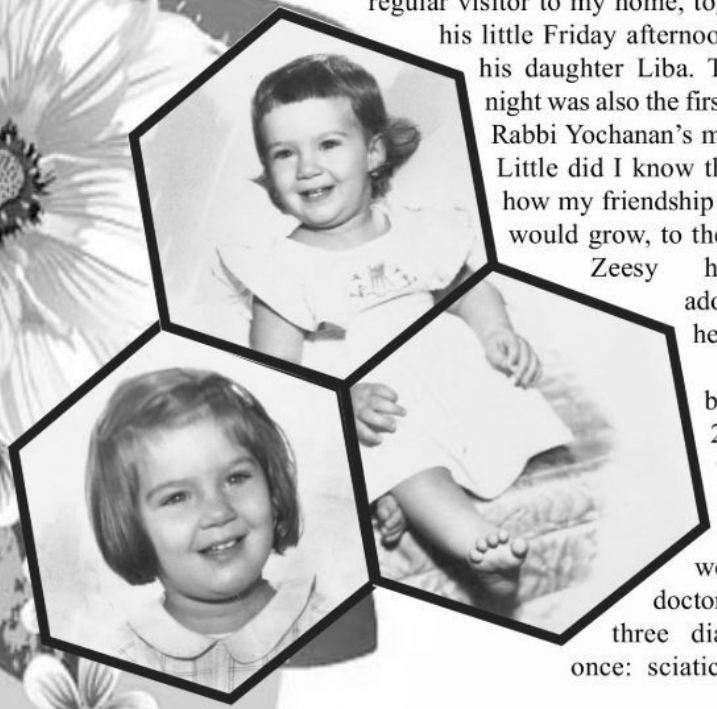
Still Spreading Joy!

By Elsa Macks

In 2009, my friend Beth Gottesman asked me to join her at a Friday night Shabbat dinner at Chabad of Skokie. At the Shabbat dinner, a friendship began that would become pivotal in my life: I met the young and dynamic Rabbi Yochanan Posner, who impressed me with his kindness and politeness. Rabbi Yochanan became a regular visitor to my home, together with his little Friday afternoon sidekick, his daughter Liba. That Friday night was also the first time I met Rabbi Yochanan's mom, Zeesy. Little did I know that evening how my friendship with Zeesy would grow, to the point that Zeesy has since adopted me as her sister.



In the beginning of 2010, I wasn't feeling well so I went to the doctor. I received three diagnoses at once: sciatica, irritable bowel syndrome, and cancer of the liver which was really colon cancer that had spread. It is terminal.

After hearing the diagnosis, and the grim prognosis, I sent letters with checks to three rabbis: the Rabbi of the Conservative synagogue to which I belonged; Rabbi Daniel Moscowitz, head of Chabad of Illinois; and Rabbi Yochanan Posner of Chabad of Skokie. In the letters I shared the news I had received, and asked them to pray for me.

The day after I mailed the letters, Rabbi Moscowitz called me and asked if he could come visit me. I was nervous about him coming to visit me because he is the head of Chabad of all of Illinois. But he really seemed to want to come, so I agreed. He was so nice; I had worried for nothing. Later, he gave me a gift of a book of Psalms, bound in white leather and with my name on it, which I keep in my living room.

Rabbi Yochanan Posner became a regular visitor and a good friend. His support has meant so much to me, given my new circumstances in life. I have become very close with him and his family.

I did not hear from the Conservative Rabbi until weeks later when I received what seemed to be a form letter saying,

We were a motley crew!



"Thank you for the donation. Your name has been added to our misheberach list."

Much later, the Conservative Rabbi came to visit me and only then did he ask me for my Hebrew name, which is Esther Rochel bas Gittel Bracha. My question was: If you didn't know my name until now, how could you have added me to the misheberach list? He stayed for fifteen minutes and then left.

I asked the oncologist how long I had left to live. He replied, "Without treatment, you have about three months. With chemotherapy, you might have about two years."

It is now January of 2012, two years since he said that, and I'm thank G-d going strong. Is it because of all the mitzvos I do?

For example: Rabbi Yochanan set me up with some brides from families on very tight budgets. I take these young ladies on shopping expeditions. I love to shop and Zeesy says I'm great at it (it's true). So I started buying these brides sheva brachos outfits, coats, whatever they need. We also buy things for their new homes, like pots and dishes and silverware. Macy's, Bloomingdales, here we come! It's a blast.

As soon as I got busy shopping with the brides, my oncologist informed me that my five tumors were shrinking. He said this is quite unusual for someone with my condition!

Chabad of Skokie recently bought a new storefront to serve as office space. I immediately started helping Zeesy with decorating and making the place beautiful: carpeting, furniture, window treatments, a fresh coat of paint, artwork. Now the place is looking as beautiful as a Chabad office should look.

One day that stands out in my memory was the day I went with Rabbi Yochanan, his mom Zeesy, and a few of the small Posner grandchildren, to an IKEA which is about a 45-minute drive from the neighborhood where we all live. I went along to help choose furniture for the new Chabad offices. Even though I needed to lean on a shopping cart to keep walking, I enjoyed every minute of it. We were a motley crew! In middle of the shopping trip, Zeesy's cell phone rang. It was her sister from New York, the one who works for this magazine.

"What's going on?" she wanted to know. "It sounds wild!"

When Zeesy tried to describe the scene to her, her sister almost didn't believe it.

"Who would take along a bunch of children on such a shopping trip?" she wanted to



know.

"We would!" said Zeesy bravely.

"This outing sounds like it would make a good article," said Zeesy's sister the magazine editor. "Get that woman Elsa's email address for me, wouldja? I want her to write for us."

And she emailed me, which is what got me to organize my thoughts into this article.

(We bought so much stuff that day that it would not fit into Yochanan's van, and had to be delivered by truck.)

Unfortunately, the chemo which is prolonging my life had some serious side effects which put me in the hospital temporarily. So right now, I am off of the chemo, and I feel good. No pain, no complaints. I think of people who have it worse, which helps – people who are wheelchair-bound, or on oxygen. Thank G-d I can still enjoy life.

I still like to have fun. I joke around with people. I don't look or act sick. At my cousin's wedding recently, all I heard was, "You look wonderful!" Since then, I lost my hair which bothered me because it made me look sick. I've gotten used to wearing a wig or hats, and with the proper makeup I look fine. Zeesy says I look beautiful, especially when I wear earrings.

There's something special about Chabad people. They are so jolly and upbeat and full of life. When I visit restaurants in the Chicago area, I like to sit quietly and observe everyone there and figure out who the Chabad people are just by the smiles and happiness I see on their faces. I enjoy being with them.

They have plenty of problems just like everyone else but I think they work on it. They smile and laugh when others might not, because they know that making that choice brings them to a state of inner joy, too.

For as long as G-d will give me life, I will believe and trust in Him. I will continue to do mitzvos. And I will smile and spread joy, like the rest of my Chabad family. ■

Thank G-d I can still enjoy life.