

## **Yvonne (Stamelman), now, Rebbetsin Chava Tucazinsky**

### **Nostalgic Notes and Thoughts after Matric**

As a small child, when I heard how Shlomo Hamelech chose wisdom above wealth, I prayed with all my heart that I would be granted wisdom, strength, courage and understanding. Little did I know how I would have to suffer to acquire a measure of each!

When Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hash-m to show him His glory, he was answered that no man could see His face and live – Hash-m would shelter Moshe and show him His back. (Chumash: Shmot: Ci Tissa 33: 21-23) A brief explanation from Rav Nissan Ahron Tucazinsky ztz'l, (cf. Rashi and the Targum) is that we cannot see clearly what will be (we might see, but will not understand) – only afterwards will we see and understand why things transpired as they did.

Now, looking back, I can see how every step, every mistake, every repetition of all I endured, was a necessary process in the acquisition of wisdom. I see how, even though, and possibly because, I then had no in-depth Torah learning, Hash-m guided my footsteps and saved me from the horror of the depths of the abyss into which I had sunk.

When I was three years old, I amused my mother by drawing of a picture of her, starting from the feet up. (Standing outside at a chuppah in Israel as an adult, I suddenly realized why: little children clamoured to be picked up to see the bride – at their size, all they could see was a maze of feet and legs – even to see their mothers' faces, they had to look way up!) At the age of about five, I had astounded family with a realistic and detailed drawing of our garden, with cars parked outside. So my parents bought me a drawing manual and a book of reproductions from the masters of painting ...

In my last years at school I spent much time in extra-mural activities, swim-training 2 hours daily, learning for stage productions of English set-works, etc ... I gave little time to study, relying on my memory for all other subjects. In retrospect, I set minimal value on learning towards making a living, although I did want an academic education. My greatest ambition was to be a housewife and mother, and to paint portraits.

My favourite memory of our school years were the many evenings when we would all listen to classical music together – and now that I spend so much time alone in my home which was always full of people, I enjoy music all day as background to my work.

When I first went to university, to study for a B.A. with Fine Arts and Practical English as majors, I thought I could continue to rely on my quick grasp and excellent memory. I did not bargain for the volume of work, and learned a very hard lesson. Only diligence, constant repetition of copious notes and attending all tutorials would lead to "success" ...

After a brief course in secretarial skills, I worked in legal offices until I married, and then as a housewife and mother with occasional work as a substitute teacher in primary school. I also learned pottery, satisfying to some extent my artistic inclinations, working at Lieberman Pottery. About two years before my divorce, I began studying fine arts again, by correspondence, alternately passing with distinction and failing courses. Ironically, the students I taught privately all graduated with distinction. When I was finally invited to do a Masters degree, I declined, as the subject matter for that year was nothing short of obscene.

By then, financially, things were very difficult, and I worked part-time in three jobs, mornings, afternoons and evenings, to enable me also to transport my children to various extra-mural activities, studying whenever possible. Eventually, I took a full-time job as a telephonist (!!)

in the Johannesburg City Council. The work was insufficient for me, even with the addition of

editing and typing reports for Council. So I prepared and ran a training course in report writing for officers of the Organisation and Methods Department, which accorded me a promotion and doubled my salary.

Just at this point, after eight years alone, with the permission of three gedolei Yisrael, I became engaged to HaGaon HaRav Nissan Aharon Tucazinsky ztz'l and left the Council. My boss, Mr Ken McGee, was very kind, and backdated my promotion so that I would have extra funds for the wedding. He also organized for the traffic department to guide the traffic on the night of the wedding!

And then my life became a wonderful dream to replace the nightmare years ...

It is impossible to condense the amazing series of miracles in the last months before, and all the years during my marriage, and even now as a widow. My daughter is writing my 'biography', and hopefully will finish within the next year or two ...



In addition to all the housework, my work during my marriage to HaRav Tucazinsky ztz'l involved helping him with translations of lectures from Yiddish to English<sup>1</sup>; doing the English correspondence for the Yeshivah of which he was Dean and Director for over 50 years; preparation for travelling overseas twice a year on behalf of his Yeshivah (over 170 years old, with well over 1,000 students from kindergarten to post-graduate studies); helping with driving and talking to people about the Yeshivah while overseas; taking telephone calls<sup>2</sup>; receiving guests day and night through the week; collecting and distributing charity funds; attending weddings, bar mitzvahs, often six simchas in an evening, in one door and out the next<sup>3</sup>; funerals, condolences, hachnasat sefer Torah<sup>4</sup>

Chava's living room in the Old City of Jerusalem. For religious observance reasons, Chava did not wish to have a photo of her published and shares her living environment with us in this way [Brian]

<sup>1</sup> [When people asked him how his English had so improved, he told people he had an *Ivan dictionary* (i.e. *Yvonne*, me – pronounced heavily accented as 'Eevan')!]

<sup>2</sup> [before I was more fluent in Ivrit, someone called a wrong number ... thinking at least I knew what that was, I answered "tanur!" instead of "ta'ut" – afterwards I said, 'I'm sure he didn't want to speak to an "oven"; - he definitely knew he had made a "mistake!"

<sup>3</sup> [In the early years, I often didn't know whose simcha or what occasion it was, and just looked for the best-dressed hostess in the hope that I was blessing the right recipient. I didn't know either Yiddish or Ivrit well enough to understand an answer, even if I could manage to ask! On one occasion, I was hurried to the paupers' table, as they didn't know I was the Rav's new wife, and thought I had just come for a free meal. Not wanting to embarrass anyone, I just sat there, struggling to communicate with some elderly ladies for a while, with the Rav waiting outside!]

<sup>4</sup> [At the hachnasat Torah\* of HaGaon HaRav Moshe Sternbach's new synagogue, I heard from my sister in South Africa that my mother o.b.m. was very sick, perhaps near the end. I said psalms for hours during the proceedings and dinner, and suddenly began to weep;

later I heard it was exactly at the moment of her passing ... ] (\* Hachnasat Torah is the dedication of a new Torah Scroll, Ed.)

My husband's illnesses never deterred him from continuing whatever work was necessary, even when in the emergency room on several occasions. While his pacemaker was implanted, he cheerfully spoke exhilarating words of Torah to the doctor. When they asked if he felt the pain, he answered that they were working for his benefit, so why should he think about it – as long as he was learning Torah, he did not notice! The surgeon and his nursing sister afterwards ran around the heart department telling everyone!

While in hospital for some weeks after foot surgery, (also speaking words of Torah until the doctor said he was afraid he would concentrate more on listening than operating!) he prepared the Luach Yisrael (Jewish Calendar with laws of prayers for all the year, together with calculations for the new moon and eclipses) and sat in bed finalizing it with the printer. When people came to visit him in hospital, anxiously trying to think of what to say to him, he gave them words of comfort and encouragement! On our travels (even though he needed constant care, and between all our appointments with institutions and donors I changed bandages, checked blood pressure, and gave the necessary medications), when he was with people he was so cheerful that no-one knew he was so ill. When in agony, he would sing "Hodu leHash-m ki tov, ki laolam chasdo!" (Give thanks to G-d, because His kindness is forever!) He explained, "laolam" is past, present and future – that means always, [in this life and towards the next] – and if so, in every situation. And if His kindness is in every situation, it is indeed good to thank Him!" And among all the wonderful words of wisdom I learned from my dearly beloved husband, HaGaon HaRav Nissan Aharon Tucatzinsky, a genuine saint of blessed memory, these words constantly help me to carry on my life and work with a happy heart!

Looking back 51 years - who says there is only one life? I've had a few in this world - and possibly all of you have too!

Schooldays many of us shared - some continued to share early married life, most of us separated into our different worlds for the most part. Lives have interwoven at intervals, some breaks longer for some than for others .... and personal life breaks have been painful, although ultimately beneficial.

And now I am a great-great grandmother and a widow (and, hot-off-the press news, soon a 'grand-mother-in-law' as the eldest daughter of my youngest daughter will be married in early April) .... but I only feel my age when I can't catch up when my grandchildren play catch with me, or when I suddenly doze off for no apparent reason, or when I look into the mirror - or try to stand up and my knees don't want to straighten ....!

On reflection, childhood and early adulthood must have been a bit on the wild side - roof-climbing, hikes, even parachuting ... but at last, I think I might just have made it to being a more straight-laced (?!), sensible (?!) young(?) old(!!!) lady...

Although I studied fine arts, I have worked as a secretary to lawyers, accountants, popcorn processors (!), various types of school - have taught at primary school level, technical collage, and lectured privately to groups of university art students, painted, crocheted, sewed, done all sorts of household chores, nursing and wound treatment - and now I write and give lectures in Torah, preparing for marriage, guide various people suffering from PTSD through personal or war-faring trauma - am I just an overgrown crazy, mixed up kid? I don't think so. The variety of skills I have learnt and whatever I have done at the different stages of my life have been useful in developing a deep understanding of the human psyche (not to forget that they also provided a degree of financial support!).

Most of all, the wonderful, blessed years I spent with my amazing second husband of blessed memory, have taught me very clearly that life here is just a preparation for life hereafter, and that we have an obligation not only to one another, but most definitely to our Creator; anyone who would like to argue with me on this point is welcome to contact me. Many miracles led to this (my second) marriage, upheld it despite the very long and severe illness of my husband, and prepared me for handling widowhood serenely.

May we all show our gratitude to Hash-m for creating such a wonderful, beautiful universe and may we all have the strength and courage to continue working with happy hearts, in good health, until our last day!

Warmest regards and blessings,  
Chava

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