

# ILLUMINATIONS

CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.

*Rabbi Raphael and Goldie Tennenhaus, Chabad of South Broward, Hallandale, FL*

## Dancing Through the Tears, Chabad of South Broward Part II

By Chaya Chazan

**“Evacuate!” screamed every headline, radio announcer, and TV ticker tape.**

It was mid-August, 1992, and the sultry summer air made it difficult to imagine hurtling hurricane winds, but every news reporter, meteorologist, and law enforcement officer repeated the same warning: Hurricane Andrew would be a Category 5 hurricane, and it would be making landfall in Broward County. The eye of the storm was the Dade-Broward line, exactly where we lived.

“Evacuate now, because we can’t guarantee your safety later,” police loudspeakers blared through the streets. “If you don’t evacuate to safer ground, we won’t be able to risk rescue efforts later!”



It was sobering to drive past the thousands of empty body bags being readied for the aftermath of the storm. Florida was preparing for a mass casualty event; a catastrophe of never-before seen proportions.

Like every other Floridian, we were anxious and worried. Unlike many others, though, we had someone upon whom we could rely.

I called 770 and asked to speak with Rabbi Leibel Groner A”H - urgently!

“Please ask the Rebbe what we should do,” I asked, explaining all the pertinent details.

“Of course, I will,” Rabbi Groner replied. “But, as you know, since the Rebbe’s stroke a few months ago, the Rebbe is no longer able to speak. Communication can be difficult sometimes. I will do my best, but I can’t guarantee an answer. Don’t tell anyone you called, so you won’t raise false hopes.”

An hour later, Rabbi Groner called back, his voice sounding slow and breathless. “The Rebbe was quite emphatic. You should *not* evacuate! Stay where you are!”

Years later, Rabbi Yingy Bistritsky told me he’d been in the office when my call had come through.

“Rabbi Groner asked the Rebbe five different times, changing the inflection of the question each time, to be sure he understood the Rebbe’s head motions. ‘Should they evacuate? Should they stay? Will they be safe?’ No matter his phraseology, the Rebbe’s response remained the same.”

For us, all the doubt, worry, and anxiety were at an end. I changed the outgoing message on my

answering machine, telling all callers that we weren’t sure whether Hurricane Andrew would land or not, or whether it would cause as much havoc as they said it would. The only certainty we had was in Moshiach’s arrival.

The news of the crazy rabbi who planned to stay directly in the path of disaster made headlines, not only in Miami, but in Israeli newspapers as well. Other shluchim in nearby areas called 770 as well, to see if the same instruction applied to them.

“Rabbi, what are you thinking?” yelled one community member over the phone. “There’s going to be a pool of water twice the height of your house shortly! You *must* evacuate!”

While thousands of our friends and neighbors fled south, north, and west, we sand bagged the doors and windows, sealed everything we could, opened our doors to all who needed a safe haven, and erected a large sign on our front line, reading *Torah in Action*.

Then we hunkered down for the night and waited for the storm to hit.

That night, we were awakened by vicious winds ripping through the streets at 150 mph. The house shook, swayed, and moaned, and we tried our best to remain calm, repeating the Rebbe’s assurances over and over to keep up our spirits.

Against all predictions, Hurricane Andrew veered course at the last minute. Aside from the winds, which caused some damage to the area, Broward County was spared. The thousands of casualties expected numbered no more than 44, many due to being on the road, instead of safely at home. In the areas where Andrew did touch down, including, unfortunately, Kendall and Homestead, where many people from our area had fled, it caused massive destruction, making it amongst the top ten costliest storms in U.S. history.

Our sign, *Torah in Action*, still waved proudly from our front lawn, proudly holding up its weathered head in the now calm and sunny breeze.

When a reporter from *Newsday* called, asking for my story, I pointed to my sign.

“There’s a bank next door that also had a sign out front. Their *Savings and Loans* signs is now buried deep in a pile of debris, but our sign is still there. Money, wealth, and physical achievements come and go with the wind, but Torah is eternal.”

We were zoche to witness colossal miracles, thanks to the Rebbe’s timely advice, guided by Heaven.

On Monday, Chof Zayin Adar, 1992, the Rebbe prepared to go to the Ohel by immersing in the mikvah. He then visited his office briefly, where he signed a letter that had been typed up and waiting for the Rebbe's approval and seal. That letter, the last one the Rebbe ever signed before suffering a stroke later that day, was a two page letter, addressed to Congregation Levi Yitzchak Lubavitch of Hallandale Beach in honor of their 11th annual dinner.

A graphologist once examined the letter and commented that signing it had clearly cost the Rebbe a lot of effort: the Rebbe had to lift his hand up three times just to sign his name.

We are zoche to have received that letter, and treasure it to this day.

While I've been advised to discontinue our yearly dinners for other, more efficient fund raisers, I insist on continuing the tradition. The Rebbe expended great effort to sign a letter for our annual dinner, and we will continue hosting them as long as we can.

Baruch Hashem, we've just celebrated our 44th annual dinner, celebrating over four decades of shlichus in Hallandale Beach.

We'd already hosted Chanukah Festival Celebrations in public for a few years, but, in the autumn of 1986, I dreamed of doing more.

"How can we reach even more people with the message of Chanukah?" I wondered aloud at my Shabbos table. "It would be amazing if we could get a whole football stadium's worth of people to see a menorah lighting..." I sat up quickly as a germ of an idea flooded my mind. "Why don't we light the menorah in the stadium, right before the game? That will be the biggest pirsumei nissa possible!"

As I thought about it more, I grew more and more excited about the idea. We even had an "in" with the owner: one of "our" guys was friends with Brian Robbie, the son of the owner of the Miami Dolphins. In fact, Brian used to drop by on Sundays, to eat the leftover herring from our Shabbos Kiddushin.

I asked Brian to raise the idea with his father, who agreed to meet with us. After hearing our plans

for the *Festival of Lights Celebration*, Mr. Robbie agreed.

"We'll do it at the opening of the game, with both the Dolphins and the Redskins out on the field," he explained. "But you better be brief! Every minute of overtime will cost you \$5,000!"

We were ecstatic. I asked Rabbi Pinny Andrusier, who assisted me, to announce this event at the farbrengen in 770. Rabbi Andrusier stood up and told the Rebbe "the Dolphins and Redskins will be celebrating Chanukah!" The Rebbe answered with a wide smile, a sure sign of approval.

The Dolphins were playing in the brand new stadium, and thousands of fans packed in to see Dan Marino in his prime playing days. There were 80,000 fans, plus more watching from home. We hadn't advertised this event beforehand, so everyone was shocked to see a menorah, of all things, right there on the yard line! Signs all over the stadium pronounced the NFL as the Night of the Festival of Lights, and ESPN as Evening Salute to the Precepts of Noah. As Cantor Shneur Zalman Baumgarten intoned the blessings, thousands of dazed eyes watched our every move.

Although we ended up going ten minutes overtime, it was a success beyond our wildest dreams!

Later, a Reform rabbi shook his head and told me, "For years, we've been trying to tell the American people that Jews are just like them. In ten minutes, you've undone 50 years of our work!"

Doug\* was one of the fans seated in the stands, alongside his brother. He listened lackadaisical to the National Anthem, but started up suddenly when he heard the brachos being recited. He rubbed his eyes in disbelief. He hadn't even known it was Chanukah! How could his two worlds - football and Judaism - converge in such a bizarre manner? Who would've thought Judaism could even appear on the football field?

It intrigued him so much, he decided to learn more about Judaism - after watching the Dolphins win, of course!

Today, Doug is a proud Jew. He learns Chassidus every day, and sports a beard, peyos, and tzitzis like any other chassid. If Judaism could come to football, then it surely could become a part of his everyday life!

The Beth Shalom Jewish Day School was the pride of Hollywood. Over 700 students were enrolled, from backgrounds of all types. The principal, Rabbi Malavsky, had spent several years of his youth in 770. Although he didn't identify as a Chabad chassid, he was warm and friendly, and always allowed me to address the student body when I asked to teach them about special days of the Chassidic calendar.

A woman I knew from the Jewish Educational Board begged me to help the school. Apparently, Rabbi Malavsky was staggering under two million dollars of debt, and unless something was done immediately, the school would have no choice but to close.

Together with Rabbi Korf, I wrote to the Rebbe, asking if we should get involved in another organization's school.

"It should be according to the counsel and advice of the Chabad activists where you are," the Rebbe replied.

Rabbi Korf gathered all 20 Floridian shluchim (today there are over 300!) for a special, emergency meeting. We all voted unanimously to save the school, but only if it would remain an unaffiliated school, rather than a school run according to the precepts of Chabad. There were already two schools that catered to Chabad children, and the Chabad community simply wasn't large enough to sustain a third.

Rabbi Korf contacted Mr. Jerome Schottenstein, and we were able to help the school get back on its feet.

Since the entire episode started just before Pesach, I suggested that Rabbi Malavsky name the school "Maimonadies" in honor of the Rambam's birthday.

While the community were suspicious of our altruism, some accusing us of trying to force a Chabad takeover under their breaths, everything went smoothly.

The entire board of the school accompanied us to visit the Rebbe, and the Rebbe received a lot of nachas from the school and its accomplishments.

Many families of Brauser Maimonides Academy today are probably ignorant of the significant role the Rebbe had in keeping the school alive and thriving.

*\*Names changed to protect privacy*

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5 Iyyar 5786

**\$645**

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Yitzjak



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