

ENCOUNTERS

Samantha Maya Finch

Rosh Hashana - the "head" of the new year - is upon us. As Jews, we are actually promised four "new years" each year. Surely that should be enough for anyone. Nevertheless, when I found myself on the day before Thanksgiving in Salem, Oregon, trapped in my crushed car, I really needed one more new start, and Hashem, in His mercy, saw to it that I got one.

We have all noticed the many huge and intimidating SUVs that have taken over the roads lately. The one that broadsided me at sixty-five miles an hour was absolutely monumental: my last memory before impact was that the headlights which were closing in on me were higher than my whole car. Luckily, an off-duty EMS worker saw the whole thing as he drove by in the opposite direction and immediately stopped and came over to help.

"Hi, I'm Dave. What's your name?"

He is so calm and casual, I thought to myself, so how bad could it be? Forty minutes later, with me still trapped in the wreckage of my mother's old blue Mercedes, Dave was running out of questions. Only then did it occur to me that he may indeed have been a very friendly guy, but the questions were really about keeping me from losing consciousness.

The fire trucks and an ambulance had arrived right after Dave and had been working the whole time to get me out. The "Jaws of Life" were unable to pry open the car door, so they covered me with plastic and proceeded to knock out all the windows with a sledge hammer. Still no luck. They pulled out a blow torch at this point and severed the roof from the car; this somehow released the car door and they were able to lift me out. I had been pinned for a long time between the caved-in door and a center island between bucket seats and was starting to panic. (I never saw Dave again. Thank you, Dave. You were generous and kind and sent from Hashem. I never got to answer your last question: My favorite color is green.)

In the emergency room, I was none too pleased to see my best clothes cut from my body and thrown out. I was only on the way to the market; why was I wearing all of my favorite clothes, anyway? When the doctor came in after x-rays, I assured him I was fine and could probably go home later that day. How he listened to this without laughing out loud is beyond me. By then the massive doses of morphine were working just fine and he was probably used to patients on such heavy medication not really playing with a full deck. Of course by then he had seen the x-rays and knew that my pelvis was fractured in seven places, that there were additional fractures of the lower vertebrae, and that



a rib was cracked. The prognosis for healing completely was one full year, but they wisely did not tell me this until much later.

My dear sister had arrived and was holding my hand. I later found out how she had heard about the accident and about the "psychic" Divine Intervention that made her rush to her car and find me in the hospital: She had been at work just a few blocks from the collision waiting for a colleague to arrive so they could start a scheduled meeting. He arrived and apologized for being late, saying there was a horrible accident out on the highway and he had had trouble getting around it. On hearing this, and for no explainable reason, my sister froze and demanded to know the make and color of the car involved. When he answered that it was a green Mercedes, she wasn't relieved. Instead, she corrected

him saying no, it was a BLUE Mercedes and flew out of the meeting, somehow knowing it was me who had been hit.

As I write this, it has been nine months since the accident. The hospital stay was followed by a stint in rehab, and from rehab my wheelchair and I went to my sister's house and a rented hospital bed in her living room. With wonderful support from a visiting physical therapist, I could finally walk with a crutch three months later. This meant I could get on a plane and fly back home to New York.

Because I didn't die, because I was forced to spend so many weeks so far from home, wonderful things happened. Believe it or not, this horrible accident made possible scores of experiences and insights that will feed and support me for the rest of my life. The first gift was rediscovering my sister. Living such different lives and at opposite ends of the country, we had been drifting apart for years. After the accident, and with the natural generosity of her heart, she transformed her home and her life in a matter of hours to take care of me as I healed. This turned out to be a two-for-one blessing as I got to know her husband, Kyle, for the first time. They both learned to read the kosher certification symbols in the market and figured out the finer points of Shabbat, like finding candles that would burn the halachic minimum amount of time, not turning the flame off under the hot water, and not handing me the phone when someone called on Shabbat. They were kind, generous and supportive. Kyle even went to the lumber yard and built a ramp so I could get out the back door and up to the level of the driveway for much needed escapes into fresh air and civilization.

There were so many more blessings over the months. The Jewish community in Salem (who knew there was one?) sent visitors to the hospital and lent me a siddur and candlesticks. Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald called every week from *(cont. on reverse)*

CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV

WEDDINGS

Jamie Gluckstadt and David Chubak

Mazal Tov to parents

Shari and Maurice Gluckstadt

Joelle Levine and Richard Horowitz

Mazal Tov to parents Renee and Irwin Levine

Sarah Ruth Steinberg and Chananel Greenwald

Mazal Tov to parents

Shaindel and Yaakov (Tom) Steinberg

Dr. Evelyn Slade and Howard Sickles



on the birth of a girl, Michal Naomi

Nancy and Alan Miller, on the birth of a girl,

Shoshana Rivka

Jill and Rabbi Mark Wildes, on the birth of a girl,

Avigayil Ruth

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Aaron Joseph Adler

Mazal Tov to parents Karen and Stuart Adler

Rachel Shifra Belfer

Mazal Tov to parents Dr. Michelle Friedman Belfer

and Benjamin Belfer

Jacques Emery

Mazal Tov to mother Lori Singer

Avraham Yosef Gilman

Mazal Tov to parents Zev and Pat (Chana) Gilman

Margolit Salig

Mazal Tov to parents Michelle and Eli Salig

Max Weiner

Mazal Tov to parents Sandy and Marc Weiner

CONDOLENCES

Jane Fuchsberg, on the loss of her mother,

Esti Fuchsberg

Lou Jacobi, on the loss of his wife, Ruth Jacobi

Steve Reich, on the loss of his mother, Jane Carroll

Barbara Sommer, on the untimely loss of her daughter,

Jennifer Sommer

Dr. Marc Wilkenfeld, on the loss of his father,

Max Wilkenfeld

The family of Jeff Levinson

SPEEDY RECOVERY

Shlomo Dov ben Sarah Rachel

CONGRATULATIONS

Miriam and Dr. Marvin Belsky, on their 50th

Wedding Anniversary.

Charlie Bemhaut, on the launch of his weekly one-

hour radio program of cantorial music (for time

and station: www.cantorsworld.com)

Norton Goodman, on the celebration of his 85th

birthday (Correction).

Stuart Hample, on the opening of his new musical

Children's Letters to G-d, at the Lamb's

Theatre, based on his international best-selling

book.

Lt. Colonel (Ret.) Scott Rutter, who will be serving

as the lead military analyst in Iraq for Fox

News for 3 months starting September 7, 2004.

Jonathan Spanbook, on being honored by the

Abraham Joshua Heschel School for his

exceptional dedication and service.

TZEITCHEM L'SHALOM/FAREWELL (To live and/or study in Israel)

Yuliya (Yael Tamar) Vladymyrova

THANK YOU

Dr. Leonard Davidman, for his selfless devotion to the Beginners Service and for leading the Service

Ruth Jacobi

The passing of Ruth Jacobi is a great loss for the Beginners community. Wife of famed actor Lou Jacobi, Ruth simply loved Yiddishkeit. After "graduating" the Beginners Service, Ruth spent many hours each week studying Torah with great enthusiasm. She will be sorely missed.

Jeff Levinson

The Lincoln Square Synagogue family mourns the untimely loss of our beloved Executive Director, Jeffrey Levinson. Jeffrey was thoroughly devoted to our synagogue and to the Beginners Service 24/7. His kindness and sweet manner will be deeply missed. Condolences to his entire family.

