

# Women's Outlook

## Heart To Heart

By Rosally Saltzman

**A**t 37, Rachel Schitskovsky-Ivker was living a good life. She was the CFO of the Masorti movement in Israel, had worked at the Ministry of Social Affairs as the director of the Office of Municipal Budgets, and was happily married with two children and one on the way. Then she was diagnosed with breast cancer and her world came crashing down around her. However, she was lucky. At 30 weeks, she was too far along in the pregnancy to have it terminated or to begin chemotherapy, so she underwent a lumpectomy and carried the baby till she could be safely induced. "I call her my miracle child," Rachel says of her youngest daughter.

After a year of treatment at Shaarei Tzedek hospital in Jerusalem including chemotherapy, a bilateral mastectomy and radiation, and six months in the States for reconstructive surgery, Rachel founded *Hadadi*, a support organization for women with breast cancer.

"I don't see this as a gift," she says of her battle with the illness. "And it hasn't restructured my priorities because my family always has been, and still is, my number one priority. What did change for me was that I felt with my professional background in finance and management I had the qualifications and

the obligation to make this center happen. This is the only venue of its kind in Israel. And it's so essential." Rachel's decision has been a gift to the 400 women a year diagnosed with breast cancer in Jerusalem alone.

*Hadadi* (a play on words, *hadadi* means mutual and *dad* is one of the Hebrew words for breast) is currently being run out of the Schitskovsky-Ivker living room. But thanks to a generous donor, who

has contributed \$150,000 for the center, Rachel is negotiating for an apartment that she can convert into a drop-in-center for women at any time of the day.

This non-profit organization, which is only in its toddlerhood, has already helped at least 100 women. It is a comprehensive support center that offers a range of services, doing everything for a woman, except provide medical treatment. Resources include a wig and hat bank (for the women who will be undergoing the 10-month hair loss resulting from chemotherapy), a book and movie library, (women like to clear their heads by watching romantic comedies where no one is sick and no



Rachel Schitskovsky-Ivker

one dies), lectures, support groups, a children's activity room (for mothers with small children), coffee and cake and most important - an understanding heart, listening ear, and support from women who've been

there and come back to provide the kind of support only they can provide.

"When I was going through this, I discovered there was a lot missing for women. When they're going through the nightmare of being diagnosed, it's hard for them to grasp the implications. They don't have the ability to focus on making the right decisions regarding treatment, and their doctors, no matter how dedicated, don't have the time to ad-

dress all their concerns. And each doctor has his own preferences regarding treatment. They're unable to process the information at the moment of diagnosis because of their emotional state. They need the information to come slowly. When women hear about it from other women, at their own pace, they are better able to make a decision."

After a year, Rachel was given a clean bill of health. Breast cancer has a very good survival rate when diagnosed at an early stage. "Women know they can die, but they hope they won't. This is one of the ways in which breast cancer is unique and why it requires a special kind of approach."

When Rachel was undergoing treatment, her husband, a physicist, was very supportive and took over childcare. Their son was then 6 and their daughter 4 1/2. It's traumatic for young children. While she was going through chemo, her daughter got sick and Rachel wanted to give her Tylenol to bring the fever down. Her daughter refused to take it because she was afraid the medicine would make her hair fall out. One of the important functions of the children's activity room at the center is having its social workers help children in their struggle with their mother's illness.

Rachel recommends a Hebrew book called *Ma'ale Karachol* (Bald Heights) by Efraim Sidon and Yossi Abulafia for any child whose mother is going through chemotherapy and losing her hair. The story is about a city where everyone is bald and the mayor has the smoothest hair.

"Losing my hair was more traumatic for me than losing my breasts," says Rachel who now keeps her beautiful brown, slightly graying hair long. Surprisingly, she says she's heard this from other women even though their hair grows back when treatment stops. The Center has a wigifter who comes in to help women with this sensitive issue.

Another unique thing about breast cancer is that it is a very feminine type of cancer, affecting a woman's self-image, and sometimes the relationships they're in. The issues are different than those connected with other types of cancer.

Continued on p. M41

## Dear Dr. Yael

By Yael Respler, Ph.D.  
with Cliff Respler, Herman, Ph.D.



one another, and this is an area where we would greatly benefit from providing more support. I will pass on your information to the letter writer. *Hatzlachal!*

Dear Dr. Yael:

ness that I believe there is a place called Darkah (in Brooklyn) that helps young women suffering from anxiety, bipolar, etc. I am not sure if they accept people with schizophrenia, but it's something she can look into.

who have not yet used a *mikvah* came out of curiosity. Others who had recently discovered this wonderful *mikvah*, with its many fringe benefits, came out of excitement. Still others came to celebrate the centrality of *mikvah* to Jewish family life.

The excitement in the room was palpable. Shimona spoke and held her audience enthralled. Suddenly, the building shook and... BOOM! An earthquake, which registered 4.7 on the Richter scale, hit Southern California with its epicenter about 20 miles away. Everyone took out their cell phones and called home to determine that their loved ones were all right. Within minutes, after assessing that all were safe and sound, the program continued. The crowd went home feeling they had just been to an earth-shattering event, in more ways than one. One woman who had never seen a *mikvah* before, and whose first

When the *mikvah* was actually built, a Jewish rabbi Institute was created to promote its use. The results were remarkable. Women started inquiring and learning about this ennobling *mikvah*, and many to whom this *mikvah* had been foreign until then actually started using it. I remember a couple telling me, "We don't keep Shabbat or kosher yet, but we've become committed to the *mikvah* of Family Purity and the use of the *mikvah*."

After this newfound excitement and *mikvah* resurgence, the committee sent guidelines, packets, advice, and questionnaires to all *mikvah* throughout America. THE RESPONSE WAS OVERWHELMING! Many calls were received from *mikvah* committees asking us 'how to do it right'. Queries came from Monsey, New York; Williamsburg, Brooklyn; Los Angeles, California; Far Rockaway, New York; and other large Jewish centers,

women's celebration of our newly remodeled *mikvah*. I realized it was perhaps a reminder for us to "shake up the world again" with this precious *mikvah*. We urge and beckon all Jewish communities to build new *mikvah* and beautify existing ones. Moreover, to teach people about this meaningful and important *mikvah*, outreach programs and tours should be made available and well publicized.

Let the power of this time-honored and hallowed practice penetrate the Jewish world once again, replacing apathy, ignorance and assimilation with holiness and purity.

*For general information about mikvah, or for advice and guidance on creating a mikvah revival in your area contact us at [ivanarcus@gmail.com](mailto:ivanarcus@gmail.com) or call Ronye at (562)426-4894.*

## Paula Kelly in the Catskills

By Debby Flanckbaum

My friend, photographer, Paula Kelly, loves her summer weekends in Loch Sheldrake. She sleeps late, reads novels and cooks up some mean bbq for her friends. On Saturday afternoons Paula, who is not Jewish, often dons a wet suit and swims across the lake and stops at a local hot spot for iced tea and a burger.

A professional photographer, Paula is constantly on the hunt for the perfect angle—the perfect shot. Many nights we find her out on our deck setting up her camera to take after dark photographs of the lake. We are thrilled when she emails us her latest pictures of our dock or the mist rising from the water. My favorite photos are the ones she takes of people when they don't know she's lurking around with her camera. Some of her candid shots are simply priceless. Paula is an artist, with an amazing eye.

One Sunday last summer, Paula was sitting on the shore of Loch Sheldrake watching a large group of Hassidic kids in rowboats, paddleboats and canoes. Outside of the Catskill Mountains, this is not some-

thing you see every day. And besides an occasional trip to B&H photo, Paula had never even had a conversation with a Hassidic Jew. So, Paula took out her camera and began shooting what she jokingly refers to as the Hassidic Armada. She thought that the black and white outfits that the young men were wearing looked particularly picturesque against the blue of the sky. Basically, this was a great photo-op.

Suddenly, Paula heard two young boys in a paddle boat screaming for help. With her long distance lens, Paula could see that their boat was taking on water and sinking into the lake. Quickly, she jumped into a rowboat and made her way over to help these kids in distress.

Paula reached her hand out to them, and one at a time, they got into her rowboat—nearly capsizing it in the process. The two kids thanked her profusely as she rowed them back to shore. They joked with her about their summer camp that they referred to as a "Jail". Paula was tickled to discover that these boys were kids—just like any other kids. They were

no longer subjects to capture on film—they were real human beings. By the same token, I imagine that these boys never experienced anyone like Paula before—a single, professional, non-Jewish woman. But in a split second, Paula became a real person to them as well.

During the winter, when our bungalow was closed and the lake was frozen, I thought about Paula's act of bravery. She made a split second decision to save the lives of two strangers—two Hassidic Jews. For a brief moment in time, these boy's lives intersected with Paula Kelly. And so what?

It's a very frightening time in the world. The economy is in shambles and not coincidentally world wide anti-Semitism is on the rise. It's easy to feel victimized and to pull back into our own world and try to block the rest of the world out.

But, then sometimes something happens; it may be small and it may not be reported on the nightly news. However, it is important to take note of those moments—of those valiant acts, those acts of bravery or kindness. It is important to acknowledge them and be grateful for them. So, thanks to you, Paula Kelly. May you continue to go from strength to strength.

## SALTSMAN

Continued from p. M36

Most people want to speak to someone who has had a similar experience. The Center has a café kind of ambience where women can come any hour of the day to talk and network. Besides breast cancer survivors who come and speak to the women, Hadadi has a volunteer staff of social workers and doctors, each volunteering in their field of specialization. There's one who offers a couples support group, another for children with post-traumatic disorder and a psychologist who helps adolescent girls who are blossoming into womanhood while their mothers are grappling with breast cancer.

Hadadi has a board with an oncologist, an architect, interior designer, social worker, an economist and a businesswoman. The center also has lecturers and an MD who combines home visits with standard treatment. A Shiatsu school sends intern volunteers, and there's a yoga teacher who is a breast cancer survivor herself. Hadadi caters to everyone and Rachel wants women to consider Hadadi like a second home.

Statistics show that one in seven Israeli women will have breast cancer sometime in her life. Hadadi helps ensure that each of those women will have the support they need to G-d willing deal with the experience, survive it, overcome it, heal and come back and help other women.

To contact Rachel: [rachelsi@actcom.net.il](mailto:rachelsi@actcom.net.il), [dadi.israel@gmail.com](mailto:dadi.israel@gmail.com) or visit their website: [www.hadadi.org](http://www.hadadi.org) Donations are always accepted and can be sent to:

*US tax exempt donations made out to AFNCI to: AFNCI (American Friends Of New Communities In Israel), c/o Rabbi Meir Strasberg, 169-10 73<sup>rd</sup> Ave., Flushing, New York 11366. (Mark checks: "donation marked for Hadadi, Jerusalem"). Besides monetary donations, the center is interested in donations of books, hats, and toys.*

*To make a donation to the breast cancer site, which provides free mammograms to underprivileged women in the United States: [www.thebreastcancersite.com](http://www.thebreastcancersite.com)*