

These Lights We Kindle

By Alan D. Busch

“Mr. Busch?” a stranger’s voice inquired.

“Please G-d. No!” I quietly pled, my body trembling.

“Not again,” I girded myself for I knew, with a parent’s intuition, that something bad had befallen one of my children.

“Yes,” I acknowledged reluctantly. “This is Mr. Busch.”

“Mr. Busch, my name is Ann,” she began calmly. “I have just left your daughter Kimberly.”

“Kimberly!” I panicked. “Is she alright? Is she hurt? Tell me where she is!”

“Mr. Busch,” Ann continued as calmly as she had begun. “We’re about an hour south of Chicago at mile marker 80. Kimberly was involved in an accident, but she isn’t hurt, not a scratch,” she assured me.

“I’ve already left the scene,” Ann further explained, “but when I saw it happen, I pulled over to offer whatever assistance I could. That’s when I met Kimmy. I promised her I’d call you as soon as the police and rescue arrived.”

“Listen Ann,” I interrupted her as politely as I could. “Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You can’t imagine how much I appreciate what you did.”

I hung up but realized that, in my haste, I had neglected to ask Ann for her last name and phone number.

“Jan,” I called Kimmy’s mother. “Sorry to call you at work but, but ...”

“But what,” she asked haltingly. I swallowed hard.

“Kimmy was in an accident.”

“Kimmy, my baby!” she cried out.

“But she’s fine, not a scratch,” I hastened to add.

“What, what happened?”

“Listen ‘Hon,’” I interrupted her with an old term of endearment.

“I’m leaving to get Kimmy right now. She’ll tell you later.”

I gathered my things and ran out.

I had driven the route often on my way to visit family in St. Louis. This portion of the trip, however, took only about ninety minutes, but it afforded me enough time to revisit the memory of the day Kimmy was born. And, as I had done on the occasion of my first-born son’s birth, I dressed in surgical garb and, with the assistance of the nurses, scrubbed along side of the obstetrical team. My job, as proud dad, was to count fingers and toes. I am thankful to The One Above for having given ten of each to all three of my children. For Kimmy, however, there was an additional gift.

“Ma,” I called my mother. “It’s a girl. Yes Ma, ten of each, but with red hair and,” I continued excitedly, “the most magnificently shaped and graceful fingers you could ever imagine.” I’ve marveled at them ever since that day.

I exited at mile marker 80 and turned into a gravel lot about a half-mile off the interstate. She stood in front of the service station that had towed her car. Appearing exhausted and emotionally fragile, I couldn’t help but see the little girl whose red hair I used to put up in a ponytail like that of Pebbles on The Flintstones.

“Daddy, I ... I’m so sor ...” Kimmy trembled as I held her, her head on my shoulder, sobbing.

“Shh, *shayneh madele*.”

“Dad, can we go home?”

“Yes Sweetie,” I assured her, “in a few minutes. I’ll meet you by your car. Don’t forget your bags.”

I walked over to the garage’s office.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” Bill, the paunchy garage owner, admitted.

“And I’ve seen quite a few of these in my time,” he added, scratching his head.

We settled up.

Kimmy and I stared incredulously at what had been her candy apple red, white-topped convertible Toyota Solara. The collision crumpled the front end within several inches of the dashboard, as though it were the bellows of an accordion. The driver’s side door, to my amazement, opened cleanly. I got in, took hold of the steering wheel and slumped down in the seat. The deflated air bag lay crumpled up on the passenger side. “My baby girl almost died here,” I muttered, straining to avoid an emotional breakdown in front of my daughter. I opened the door.

“Kimmy,” I invited her. “Come sit by me.” I slid over. “I need a few minutes,” I softly pled. She nodded understandingly.

Then they came back to me ... the eight words I’d never forget:

“Mr. Busch, I suggest you come down immediately.”

Dr. Ibrahim Yosef, on call that morning in the ER of Cook County Hospital, called me at 10 o’clock in the morning. Chicago Fire paramedics had transported my first-born son Ben in only minutes before.

“Mr. Busch? Are you the father of Benjamin Busch?”

“Yes, sir,” my voice quivered.

“I’m sorry but Ben has suffered massive internal injuries from a traffic accident,” he explained. It was then he “suggested” I come down immediately. I sped away to the hospital in a state of focused desperation. I knew how this day would end.

Two hours later, my father and I witnessed our twenty-two year old son and grandson die on the emergency room operating table.

“Dad, wake up,” Kimmy urged, shaking my shoulder. “It’s time to go home.”

The near loss of my second child led me to revisit the death of my first. It would not surprise me if Kimmy, who had been a loving sister to Ben, had gone there too. We got out of the car. I kissed her on the forehead. “Okay, sweetie. I’m ready to go home now.”

I thank The Almighty for “His miracles that are with us every day” and for ending this day differently than He had the other when, several years before, I began the day with three children but ended up with two.

We didn’t talk much. Kimmy was skittish, gasping every time I braked or switched lanes.

“You okay?”

“Yes Dad. Just beat.” An hour and a half later, I dropped Kimmy off at her mom’s house. My heart sank. I wanted to spend more time with her, but I had to keep the promise I had made to her mother.

“We’ll get together later,” I reassured myself. As I pulled out of the driveway, I saw the *chanukiah* Kimmy’s mom had placed in the front window. The *shamash* and the first candle shone brightly. Chanukah, The Festival of Lights, is the season of miracles some old, others new and for showering chocolate coins upon the heads of children.

“My G-d,” I chastised myself. “Tonight’s the first night of Chanukah.” I felt bad at first, but quickly realized The One Above had enabled Kimmy and me to live the eternal message of Chanukah: “*nes gadol hayashani*”—a great miracle happened there.

Later that week, Kimmy joined Zac, her younger brother, and me for dinner Friday night.

As it happened, it was the one *Erev Shabbat* of the year when the candles of both Chanukah and Shabbat are lit. We gathered around the table.

“Sweetheart,” my voice cracked as I began a short speech.

“Yes Dad,” she responded laughingly while drying a few tears.

“This Shabbat is extra special.” I lifted the Kiddush cup. “I am so thankful to have you by my side.”

My right hand trembled slightly. I let a moment pass. The candles shone more brightly at that instant, illuminating the serpentine path of a single drop of wine running down my hand.

Reflecting on how that day might otherwise have ended, I chanted the blessing over the wine and thanked The One Above for her life.

It was a wonderfully simple moment when I rejoiced in my Chanukah miracle whose fingers I held tightly in the palm of my hand, the best gift any dad could ever hope to receive.