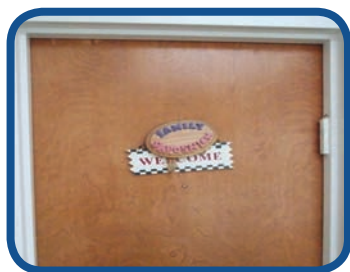




FAMILY

By Yaakov Kornreich

Meet the Family Next Door



Saposnick's front door

chance to look around and get a feel for their home, while Sara Leah was busy in the kitchen putting away the food she had just bought for Shabbos at the local supermarket.

I noted that their apartment is well kept, bright, and tastefully, if modestly, decorated and furnished. A few minutes later, Schmuel and Sara Leah came in and the interview began.

Sarah Leah immediately made it obvious that she is the conversationalist of the family. She was eager to answer my questions about her family background, how she and Schmuel met and married, and what their life together has been like.

Occasionally, I would ask Schmuel a question, but he was content to let Sara Leah do most of the talking. He preferred to sit quietly most of the time, watching and listening intently to my questions and adding occasional comments and points of information to Sara Leah's lively narrative.

Sara Leah told me that she grew up in an Orthodox home in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, was the youngest of 5 children, and that she had been living with her father on Long Island before she married Schmuel. Her family is not chassidish, but her father's cousin knew Schmuel and his family, who are Bobover Chassidim, from the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx.

She particularly enjoyed telling me the story of their first date, and how Schmuel took her out to Kosher Delite, which

is still their favorite restaurant. By the end of their fourth date, the couple was engaged. In fact, Sara Leah made a point of telling me that Schmuel asked her to marry him twice. When I asked Schmuel whether he had to ask twice because she turned him down the first time, he said no, that she had accepted the first time, but he decided to ask her again, just to make sure. Sara Leah also recalled how nervous Schmuel was when he brought her home late that night, worried about how he would tell her father that they were engaged, but everything worked out well in the end.

For her part, Sara Leah said she never had any doubts, and feels very lucky that she is married to Schmuel. "He is the only one who has been willing to take me the way I am," she told me. In his own quiet way, Schmuel made it clear that he feels the same way about Sara Leah, whom he described as "a good wife," who takes good care of their home.

It was not easy to put all the necessary arrangements in place, but within six months of their engagement, Schmuel and Sara Leah were married. It was on October 31, 1995 that they began their life together with all the help they needed.

Yes. Schmuel now age 39, and Sara Leah, 42, have developmental disabilities. Since they got married, they have been receiving residential support and supervision from HASC Center, designed to help them to live a normal and satisfying life together.

According to Dr. Chaim Wakslak, the Clinical Director of HASC Center, the fact that marriage has worked so well for Schmuel and Sara Leah does not necessarily mean that it would be appropriate for many others with developmental disabilities. He pointed out that it succeeded for this couple because they are relatively high functioning, and are physically and psychologically capable of sustaining a healthy family relationship. Also, HASC Center carefully prepared Schmuel and Sara Leah for marriage, including its halachic aspects, and continues to supply everything all the things they need in their daily lives which they cannot provide for themselves.

Schmuel has been holding down a regular job for many years. Before taking his current position, as an "order picker" at the Paskesz kosher candy warehouse in South Brooklyn, he worked at the Kedem winery in Williamsburg, and continued working with Kedem when the winery moved to New Jersey, commuting back and forth to work on his own every day.

Sara Leah keeps busy until 3 o'clock each afternoon volunteering for various schools and communal organizations as part of a day habilitation program. She serves lunches to the students at a local yeshiva, and particularly enjoys visiting nursing homes, where she gets a chance to exercise her musical talents. Sara Leah is an accomplished piano player. One of her most precious possessions is a Casio electronic keyboard, ▶

I was lucky to find a parking spot near the house. I was worried about being late, because I knew that Schmuel, the husband of the couple I was interviewing, had to leave within an hour to be on time for the mincha minyan at his local Breslav shul.

Frankly, I didn't know what to expect. Schmuel and Sara Leah Saposnick were unlike any other couple I had ever interviewed during my long career as a journalist. But in the end, I decided to treat them as I would any other interview subject – put them at ease and encourage them to tell me what was important to them. I'll let you, the reader, judge how successful I was.

From the outside, the multi-family house where the Saposnicks live looks very much like the others on their busy Boro Park cross street. When I knocked on their apartment door, and asked to come in, I learned that Schmuel had just come home from work. He had been delayed because the B-11 city bus he takes to and from his job each day was late. I was asked to wait a few minutes at the dining room table to give Schmuel a chance to freshen up. I secretly welcomed the

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◀ which her father gave her as a present not long before he passed away. She often brings the keyboard with her to entertain those living at the nursing home.

When Sara Leah comes home from day-hab in the mid-afternoon, a HASC Center counselor is at their apartment to provide whatever assistance Sara Leah might need with the normal household tasks, including the shopping, cooking and housekeeping. The same counselor has been working with Schmuel and Sara Leah since they got married thirteen years ago. She says that during that time, they have become more capable and independent. For example, Schmuel and Sara Leah can now handle their money and household finances by themselves. Sara Leah boasts of the cooking and baking skills that she has learned in her day-hab program, and the varieties of challah she bakes every Thursday for Shabbos.

The HASC Center residence manager in charge of their apartment said that Schmuel and Sara Leah had been living there for the past six years, hav-

ing previously lived in a much smaller supervised flat in a different part of Boro Park. She recalled that Sara Leah took an active role in the preparations for their move six years ago by picking out the furniture and linens for her new home.

The couple has won acceptance and put down roots in their local community. Schmuel davens at a nearby Breslover *minyán* three times a day, and regularly attends the Gemara *shiur* in Mesechtas Yuma given by its Rav. A few weeks before this interview, he and Sara Leah hosted a *seudah* in honor of the *yahrzeit* of Schmuel's mother, and more than 50 people from the shul came to their apartment. One of the highlights of their social calendar is going to the Rav's home every year for the Purim *seudah*. Sara Leah also enjoys her close relationship with the Rebbetzin and the wives of other members of Schmuel's shul.

Sara Leah has a very close relationship with her stepmother, who comes to visit and have lunch with her every Sunday. Sara Leah also takes the credit for being the *shadchan* who

arranged the first meeting between her father and her stepmother.

Schmuel and Sara Leah enjoy going to their families' *simchas*, and visiting the homes of their siblings to spend time with their nieces and nephews, who adore them. During Schmuel's summer vacation time, as well as for Pesach and Sukkos, the couple enjoys going away to a kosher hotel, with HASC Center providing the transportation, support and supervision needed to make the trips possible.

Schmuel and Sara Leah understand who they are, appreciate the assistance they receive that allows them to lead



a productive and satisfying life together, and made it very clear that they want their story to be told. Sara Leah says, "I take good care of my husband, and he takes good care of me. My life is full of flowers."

By the time the interview was over, I felt that I had made two, very interesting, new friends. Meeting this happy couple and getting to know them on their own terms was an enjoyable experience, which I highly recommend to all of you. ■

Yaakov Kornreich is the Senior Editor of Building Blocks.




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