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Dedicated to the Memory of Henya Federman - beloved and devoted Shlucha in the Virgin Islands

*Rabbi Boruch and Chaya Rozmarin,  
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## Spreading Light in Paradise

By Chaya Chazan

**Grenada (pronounced Gre-NAY-da), not to be confused with the Spanish city of Grenada (pronounced Gre-NAH-da), is a small Caribbean island off the coast of Venezuela.**

We've been confused for our sister city so often, we've created a pre-formatted email response for tourists, welcoming them to join us, but warning them they'd have to take a ten-hour flight from Spain if they chose to do so.

Of course, we were prone to the same error when we first got married. We were looking for open shlichus positions while my wife worked and I attended kollel. The American ambassador to Grenada, Michael Melnick, is a family friend. He told me he'd encountered so many Jewish students that would put their Judaism on hold while in the Caribbean. He'd been trying to get a Chabad rabbi down there for a while, and he assured me there was plenty to be done. I was doubtful. Merkos, the central shlichus or-

ganization, had been sending bochorim to Grenada every Pesach and Rosh Hashanah for the last twenty years. The bochorim had always reported crowds of no more than fifty or sixty. A full-time shliach for such a small demographic didn't seem feasible. Mr. Melnick promised his support, and begged me to just try it out for half a year.

I contacted Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky, CEO of Merkos, and updated him on Grenada's situation.

"Get me a list of at least one hundred Jewish students, and then we'll talk," he replied.

I immediately reached out to the Jewish Students' Association of S. George's University, and they were happy to supply me with the list of all their recent registrants. List in hand, I returned to Rabbi Kotlarsky. He gave me his blessing, and wished me luck.

"You have about four months until Pesach," he told me. "Try it out until then, and if you think a full-time Chabad house is feasible, we'll announce the opening officially."

Despite the lukewarm approval, we quickly packed up, and, one frigid December night a week later, flew to Grenada. When we landed, we frantically took off our coats and scarves and fanned ourselves.

"This must be an unseasonably hot day!" I told my wife.

I had no idea that Grenada enjoys balmy weather all year long. People may be surprised that we were ready to uproot our lives and move to a strange country we knew nothing about - not even its weather patterns. However, as someone brought up as a chassid, such behavior seems completely natural!

Our arrival to Grenada wasn't exactly propitious, especially since we planned to focus on students. We arrived just a day or two after winter break had started, and the entire university was deserted.

As I walked around the campus, I met Peter\*, who'd come to Grenada ahead of the winter semester to check out the island and campus. When I found out he was Jewish, I joyously invited him and his parents for Shabbos. They were the very first guests in our Chabad house.

Once the semester started, we advertised our first event. We were pleased to have thirty attendees. Our first official Shabbos meal also had thirty attendees! Baruch Hashem, the numbers have only continued to grow. Now, we regularly host over one hundred students on an average Shabbos!

S. George's University, or SGU, is renowned for its law and pre-med programs. It's estimated that one in every six doctors in America attended SGU! As can be expected from a culture which values careers as doctors and lawyers so highly, the school attracts a large percentage of Jewish students. Roughly 10% of the student population is Jewish!

One of my most prized possessions is a Tanya with a unique cover. It was printed in 1983, during America's invasion of Grenada. At that time, the Rebbe asked Colonel Jacob Goldstein, attached to the American troops, to print a Tanya in Grenada, and to give out menorahs to any Jews he met.

The Rebbe even sent the admiral a thank you note for his cooperation. Colonel Goldstein gifted me one of these Tanyas, printed with the US Army's green camouflage print on its cover.

Of all the services we provide to the students, we're proud to include *My Kosher Spot*, a small boutique that carries imported kosher goods. When students are craving Bissli, Bamba, Israeli pickles, meat, or cheese, they're welcome to browse our selection. This not only helps those committed to keeping kashrus, it's also a great way to strike up conversations and form new connections with browsing guests.

As is true in many prestigious universities, the pressure to excel is extreme, and, for some, altogether too much.

We were still wet behind the ears when we met Jennifer\*. She was a highly intelligent pre-med student who focused deeply on her studies. She came to Chabad often, and we struck up a friendship.

One motzei Shabbos, Jennifer came into the kitchen, asking for some Shabbos leftovers. We packed up a virtual feast, including some freshly made foods as well. As Jennifer thanked us and left, my wife turned to me, a frown furrowing her face.

"Something's off," she said. "Something's wrong with Jennifer."



It felt indecent to ask Jennifer prying questions about her mental health, so we shrugged it off, hoping it was just a figment of my wife's imagination. Unfortunately, we found out the next day that Jennifer had taken her own life. We were heartbroken, and threw ourselves into supporting her parents in their grief.

That tragic incident taught us the importance of being trained and prepared for mental health crises. We now know how to spot the signs of a breakdown, and how to counsel students on their mental health. To that end, we created a student lounge. It not only acts as a safe space for students to find peace and comfort, it also gives us the chance to talk with them. Students have told us we saved their lives - convinced them not to carry out their darkest plans. Each life saved is a zechus for Jennifer's neshama.

It was Jennifer's woebegone face and tired eyes that flashed in my mind when the school called me about Mark\*. He'd admitted to trying to end his life by overdosing. They rushed him to the hospital and pumped his stomach, but were concerned about his mental health moving forward. The school wanted to enroll him in a mental health clinic, but I urged them to release him to me instead, offering to accompany him on a flight home.

I used every one of my learned skills on that flight, but when I dropped Mark off at his parents' home, I was very uneasy. I tried explaining his fragile state to them, but his parents were from a generation that didn't believe in mental health. They were convinced that a couple of days in bed and a few bowls of chicken soup would soon have Mark back to himself.

I sat in their driveway, chewing my lip. I had a flight to catch, but I couldn't allow Mark to become a second Jennifer. I called his brother.

"I have a flight back to Grenada in a few hours," I told him. "I'm very worried about Mark. Please go to your parents' house as soon as possible and keep an eye on him."

I had to leave for the airport, but I was both saddened and relieved to hear that Mark's brother had arrived just in time to prevent Mark's second suicide attempt. This brought the seriousness of the situation to his parents' attention, and Mark got the help he so desperately needed. Baruch Hashem, he is now a happy, healthy, successful young man, with a sunny attitude towards life.

I was stopped outside a shop one day by a middle-aged woman.

"You look Jewish," she commented. "Is there some sort of Jewish community here?"

"There sure is!" I answered. "We have a Chabad student center here."

Tears welled up in her eyes.

"My name is Maryam," she introduced herself. "The last few years of my life have been so unpredictable! I emigrated from Iran, and made a new home for myself in the US. I then decided to switch careers, and put myself back in school. It's been so overwhelming, and I wondered if I was doing the right thing. I asked G-d to send me a sign that He's with me, even here in Grenada. And now, here you are!"

Maryam soon became a regular addition to our Shabbos table, and a dear friend.

Like many shlichim in remote areas, our children's chinuch and social life is a profound concern. Now that our kids are getting older, we've hired teachers from Israel that try to give them as normal a school day as possible. They leave the house every morning to go to their designated school room, where they have structured lessons, and even recess!

Before this was an option, we enrolled our children in a local daycare for just a couple of hours a week, knowing how important social interaction with children their own age is to their development. We made sure to emphasize the laws of kashrus to the teacher, and she was very accepting and respectful.

I was surprised to receive a call from my son one day, telling me his teacher was cutting up watermelon for the children. She told him he could have a slice, since I'd told her fruits and vegetables were okay.

"I know the watermelon is kosher, Tatty," he earnestly explained, "but what about the knife? Even though my teacher says I can have it, I don't think I should."

I hung up the phone, amused, but also inspired by my son's strictness.

Another time, he came home from school, proudly telling us he'd refused to sing along to the circle time song.

We knew there was nothing inappropriate or even religious in the innocuous lyrics, so we questioned him.

"I don't want to sing non-Jewish songs," our little boy simply declared.

Obviously, enrolling our children in a non-Jewish daycare was not optimal, and we spent a long time considering the decision. Nevertheless, we saw how that environment gave our children skills and challenges they'd never have to face otherwise. Their fierce, strong identity as shlichim of the Rebbe gave them the strength to shine in their surroundings.

As a Caribbean island, we're often visited by tourists. One of these, Dr. Dower\*, shared how uplifted he felt by visiting our Chabad house.

"I love being surrounded by all these young, eager, bright medical students," he told me. "It brings back memories of my own college days." After a short pause, he amended his statement. "Of course, things were very different back then. There was nothing Jewish here at all! I distinctly remember one Passover, where a few friends and I tried to make some semblance of a seder. We couldn't get matza, so we made our own flat bread. None of us were particularly religious, and had no idea how to lead a seder. Instead, we listened to a recording of the Passover story. That was our entire celebration. It's amazing to see such growth!"

Baruch Hashem, any Jew in Grenada that wants to participate in a seder is now more than welcome to do so! We host multiple seders each night, with hundreds in attendance! All this is thanks to the Rebbe's vision.

When my students ask about the man featured in the large picture on my wall, I tell them, "That's the Lubavitcher Rebbe. It's only because of him that you or I are here at all."

\*Names changed to protect privacy

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