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— THE TOMS RIVER MAGAZINE —

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**A CONVERSATION WITH
TOMS RIVER
SWIMMING INSTRUCTOR**

MRS. FRAIDY JERUSALEM

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A CONVERSATION WITH TOMS RIVER SWIMMING INSTRUCTOR MRS. FRAIDY JERUSALEM

BY: HADASSAH MEER

This week, Achdus Magazine speaks with Toms River resident, Mrs. Fraidy Jerusalem, founder of a unique swimming instruction program. Mrs. Jerusalem tells us how she got involved in the swimming industry and what makes her program so unique. This is an informative interview that you don't want to miss.

Welcome to Achdus Magazine! Please tell us a bit about your background

I grew up in old time Lakewood. I actually grew up on the same block as BMG, on 7th St. My parents' original plan was to stay in Lakewood as part of the BMG Kollel for a year after their marriage, and then move to Montreal where my mother comes from. She is one of only two siblings, and as a daughter of Holocaust survivors, she felt that she needed to be near her parents. However, it turned out that they loved Lakewood so much, that they ended up staying in Lakewood and raising all of their children there.

Where does your father come from originally?

My father is Israeli and grew up in Kiryat Atta, but he was sent to go learn in another city at the young age of nine. Apparently, this was an accepted practice in Eretz Yisroel at the time. An interesting story occurred years later, when my father went to daven at the kever of Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk zt"l. He met his old neighbor who had lived right across the street from him back in Kiryat Atta, who had come with his son to daven for a shidduch. My father shared that he too, had come to daven for a shidduch for his daughter. They were overjoyed to find each other, and brought each other up to date while reminiscing about their hometown. They realized that they each had a child in shidduchim, so the boy's father jokingly said that they should do a shidduch together. This old neighbor

did indeed end up having an official shadchan call and follow up, and before long the young couple was engaged!

Please tell us how Lakewood differed back in the days of your childhood.

When I was growing up here, it was like growing up in a very small community. We had a community list that hung in our kitchen cabinet, which consisted of a few stapled papers listing all of the local frum residents. Most of them were affiliated with the yeshiva. The generation of my parents and their acquaintances who lived in Lakewood had mainly all come from around the world in order to join the Lakewood Yeshiva. At that time, many Lakewood residents didn't have family nearby, so neighbors and friends filled this role. As a result, they grew extremely close, helping each other out in every way.

Did anyone live past the famous Lakewood Lake then?

Very few people did, and we kids viewed those families as practically living "out-of-town". Similarly, as a child, I used to feel that driving further out, down Route 9 South, was like going beyond where humanity lived. I just couldn't imagine anyone actually living there! Fast forward until today, and the sheer growth of the frum population here is mind-boggling. I never knew anyone that had lived out of Lakewood proper then, yet today, I myself live in Toms River.

Can you tell us about your decision to move to Toms River?

When my husband and I were ready to buy a house, we naturally began our search in the Lakewood area. We soon realized though, like many others, that the prices were way more affordable in the developing Jackson and Toms River communities. In addition, many of these homes were well

kept up, without any need for renovations before moving in. Toms River, in particular, had beautifully maintained homes, and ultimately that is what drew us here. We were the first frum family on our block. The whole community where we reside was scattered with frum families, yet we became close and considered ourselves neighbors, even though we were all living on different blocks. By now, the neighborhood has filled in. B"H it's a wonderful place to live and we couldn't be happier.

Let's talk about your swimming business; did you swim as a child?

I sure did. My mother was determined that all of her children should receive swimming lessons from a very young age. I began lessons when I was in primary. Some homes in old time Lakewood had pools too, though not as many as here in Toms River. The summer especially, centered around being near a pool, and I really enjoyed swimming. I was a shy kid, yet since I was a very good swimmer, my confidence blossomed in this area. As soon as I could, I took a lifeguarding course to become a certified lifeguard.

Why was your mother so interested in having her kids learn how to swim? Not all parents are like that.

She wanted to give her kids what she didn't get. My mother suffered from ear infections as a child and her pediatrician told her in adamant terms that she was not allowed to put her head underwater in a pool. Since this was a rule, when my mother attended camp in the summer, she never participated in swimming activities. My mother always felt bad that she had missed out on this experience. Therefore, she was very proactive in enabling her own children to learn how to swim from an early age.

Additionally, my mother was a little scared to swim. Her mother, my maternal grandmother, was fearful of water and she subconsciously passed this fear onto her kids. My mother had also watched two of her friends almost drown by the seashore, and had felt so helpless. A different time, my mother heard of two boys that she knew who had drowned; one of whom was the only son of a Holocaust survivor. This deepened her fear of water. She never enjoyed the pool like girls her age did every summer, as she didn't know how to swim. She really felt that she had missed out and didn't want her children to go through what she went through. She felt a responsibility to make sure her kids would know how to swim.

My mother told me that it was not easy having a big family, while always needing to drive the kids to swimming lessons and spending all of that money, but it meant so much to her. She'll never forget the time when one of my brothers ran home in the middle of his swimming lessons because his instructor had yelled at him. She realized then that the instructor makes a big difference. She therefore switched all of her boys to a different instructor and they all did well. My mother feels that it's never too late for swimming lessons. She's currently semi-retired and is now making the time for things she didn't do when she was younger, and encourages others her age to do the same. Make sure to learn how to swim now if you were never able to; it may take longer, but it's still a really worthwhile skill. You just need to get a really patient instructor. Have fun in the sun, pool, and ocean, and you can have such a great time with your kids and grandkids too!

Whose responsibility do you feel it is to ensure that a child learns how to swim?

It's the parent's responsibility; it says so in the Torah. Often, a parent will tell me that they tried teaching their child to swim, but it didn't work, and that's why they are signing up for lessons. By sending their child to a swimming instructor, they are fulfilling that responsibility. Some parents want to believe that it's the camp's responsibility to teach their children to swim; however, they don't always realize that camps aren't giving swimming lessons anymore like they used to.

Sometimes, a parent will forget about giving their child lessons and only remember when their child is older. Better late than never, though it's so much easier for kids to learn when they are younger. Older children may feel embarrassed or may have developed fear around water.

At what age did you become a life-guard?

I had just turned 15 and was in 9th grade at the time. We learned CPR and water safety and had to build up our endurance. I recall having to swim for many laps at a time, and having to pick up a heavy brick from the bottom of the pool. I enjoyed the course though. I was B"H an excellent swimmer and did not find the work too strenuous. At the age of 19, I signed up for WSI, which is a course one takes in order to become a certified swimming instructor. This was much more challenging for me.

Why was that so?

I was surprised to hear that I wasn't wanted in the WSI class. The instructor told me that my front crawl was totally wrong. She told me that she doesn't think the class is for me, as it's too hard to unlearn something and relearn it; it's easier for those that never learnt it in the first place. However, I knew that I wanted this, and I was going to put in the work. In truth, she was right; it was hard. She was a perfectionist when it came to each stroke, but I was rewarded. If I had thought I loved swimming until then, I was now gifted with a whole new level of swimming enjoyment. It's true that WSI is to teach one how to give swimming lessons, but in addition to that, I received a personal gift of learning to enjoy the water even more. When you swim correctly, it feels different, and it is so much better.

Did you begin giving lessons right away?

Providentially, right after the course ended, I was asked to teach a group of children and that was my first venture as a swimming instructor. I enjoyed it very much. The next summer, I worked at a pool park supervising all day. Of course, we lifeguards got some breaks to jump into the cool pool too, and that was great fun which I enjoyed together with my friends. Things changed though, when I took a full-time office job that did not give off during the summer. For the next 15 years, I put my swimming interests aside and concentrated on moving up at my workplace. Honestly, I thought my days of teaching people how to swim were over forever.

So, what changed?

I was once on a neighborhood chat where someone posted that she was looking for a swimming instructor to give her kid private lessons. In a quick moment of longing for the pool, I messaged her that I could do it. The night before beginning, I remember thinking, "what did I just commit to?" I had not taught swimming for 15 years, was I up to the task? What I had gained in the me-

antime though, was life experience, people skills, and managerial abilities. I found that all of these skills mixed together, combined with the teaching of actual swimming strokes were extremely useful. I was a way more capable instructor than I had been as a young teen. The parent of this child was thrilled with my work, and she quickly began telling her friends about it. Before I knew it, I was inundated with requests to give swimming lessons.

So, did you do that?

In 2020, I formally began offering private lessons. The next summer, I offered more slots and was booked solid throughout the summer months. The following year, I began giving lessons as soon as the weather warmed up in May. This year, I'm moving things up even more and will I"YH begin my program in March. Right now, as a business owner, I get to make my own schedule that allows me to offer more slots to the community. Also, it did take effort, but B"H I found someone really special and amazing to join me in giving lessons this season, as the demand gets bigger each year.

How will that work with the cold weather in March and April?

I contracted with an indoor heated saltwater pool for those times, and there are limited slots available. Once May comes, we'll be giving lessons outdoors once again in our heated saltwater pool. It's important to me that the pool is saltwater, as it's much easier on the eyes and skin than chlorinated water is. Also with a saltwater pool, the water looks even more inviting. The water in these pools is crystal clear, unlike chlorinated pools where the water may sometimes become cloudy and it may even be difficult to see the bottom of the pool.

How do you teach children that are scared of the water?

I provide that safe space for them; kids and adults feel very safe with me and they trust me. When I sense more anxiety than usual, I make it clear to them that there is a rule in Morah Fraidy's pool that you don't do anything that you don't want to do. I then see the child visibly relax. One can only learn when they are relaxed and ready. I put a huge emphasis on building up a foundation of water skills before actual swimming instruction takes place. These pre-swimming skills can be learnt before coming to lessons at the pool. I have written up this information and am now sharing it with anyone who can benefit from it. I had kids come to lessons already able to swim across the pool but they were scared;

that's not ok. I love creating that comfort and love of water from the start. This way, swimming is always an enjoyable experience and never stressful.

In general, do you find personality types influence how quickly a child will adjust?

Yes, that is very much the case. Children who are cautious or anxious by nature, will need to feel extra safe and need more time. They will also need to understand how it all works. Kids with ADHD or with very energetic personalities are already under water before you finish your sentence, and they do very well by copying, instead of needing to listen to instructions. Kids with sensory issues need more time as they stretch their comfort zone slowly and steadily.

My program is different than others in this regard. I see every child as a unique individual and they get lessons that match their personality. I'm a creative person by nature, so it's not a one size fits all approach. Rather, it's figuring out what will work best for each client. This is the most effective way in teaching others how to swim. The confidence that success at the pool brings out in each student is priceless.

Do you also teach adult students?

Yes, most adults want to learn to perfect their strokes, although I teach others who have never learned to swim before as well. There are also adults who have had trauma associated with water and are looking to overcome their fear. I've heard some stories of how things used to be done in the past and can well understand their fear.

Can you share such a story with us?

One student was a camper in a day camp, where on the last day of the program, all of the campers were thrown into the deep water for a shtick. Of course, the ones who couldn't swim were given life jackets first. Yet, it still was traumatic for the kids who were not comfortable and were pushed into the pool against their will. My student was a shy second grader at the time and was too embarrassed to tell her counselor that her life jacket zipper was not working. As a result, when she landed in the deep, it slipped off and she began drowning. Luckily, she was spotted flailing and was pulled out of the water, but the trauma of that event left her deathly afraid of swimming pools. B"H we worked through it

together, and I was able to help her gain the courage and confidence she needed in order to learn how to swim.

In general, do you see a lot of irrational fear among children?

Only if the fear was subconsciously passed down by the adults in their lives. Even kids who are anxious by nature will loosen up as soon as they realize that, with the right instruction and techniques, they can control the water instead of the opposite way around.

Do you teach diving skills?

Yes, I do and in fact, I recently taught a 55-year-old woman who wanted to learn how to do so. She felt that she had always missed out on the fun as a child because she couldn't dive. Now that she owns a pool, she was ready to make up for those days! In fact, both jumping into the water as well as diving, is very thrilling to children and adults alike. It takes the enjoyment of swimming up a notch and people have loads of fun with these activities.

What are the main elements of your instruction once you are past the foundational level?

I teach each stroke step by step, and focus tremendously on how to breathe properly. People do not realize that if proper breathing techniques are employed, they can swim effectively for great lengths of time without getting tired. Also, it gets really fun with all of the surface diving and having fun with the diving board.

Is your swimming program different than others in any other way?

Like I mentioned before, I'm very focused on building up a foundation before swimming instruction actually occurs. After teaching so many kids how to swim, I noticed that some kids were ready to swim right away, while others first needed to learn how to become truly comfortable in the water.

One day, I thought to myself, why wait until the summer? These water skills can be taught before we begin swimming lessons; kids could even pretend that their bathtub is the pool! And so, my water skills program was born. I began teaching these water skills remotely, working with both the parent and child to get the child comfortable around and in the water. I've worked with children from Florida to Israel to

New Jersey, and have received amazing feedback on my program. I've condensed it into a short summary of the skills that I teach, so that parents can go through it with their children and prepare them for the summer, when they will learn how to swim. The summer swimming season can feel short, so planning ahead goes a long way in helping to make the most out those joyous water-filled summer days.

We heard that you work as a business consultant as well. Can you tell us a little about that?

I worked at Kars4Kids for 15 years. It was the most amazing experience. I built up the customer service inbound sales department, and managed teams around the world. I couldn't do it alone; I am good at seeing the potential in others and the best part of my job was coaching all of my leaders. I now help business owners, executives, and managers develop effective business-related strategies that work in optimizing their company's growth. In fact, I use many of my business skills while teaching swimming, using my deep understanding of people to build upon the services that I provide regarding swim instruction.

As an aside, where does your unusual last name stem from? Is your husband's family originally from Yerushalayim?

The name was originally Yerushalimsky, meaning "the son of Yerushalayim". The name indicates that an ancestor was originally from Yerushalayim. My husband's grandfather was from Melava, Poland. He arrived in America in 1950 after surviving the Holocaust. He switched his name to Jerusalem, so as not to have a Polish sounding name, as he had witnessed the anti-Semitism of the Polish. He was chosen by the Sadovna Rav in Boro Park to be their Chazan for Yomim Noraim, a position which held for 40 years. He always spoke about Emuna and that we should be proud that we are Yidden, and was a very special individual.

I'm excited to share my free water skills program with Achdus readers, as I'm passionate about giving everyone the opportunity to enjoy water! Please email fraidy@fraidyjerusalem.com or Whatsapp 732-994-9193 for more information.●