

# Sweet Success!

Bracha Rosenthal is a 15-year-old high school student, business owner, gymnast, contortionist and baking demo instructor... and Bracha has a learning disability. Join me in learning about Bracha's ambition and courage in the face of her challenges.

**Hi, Bracha! This is so exciting for me! It's like a two-in-one kinda story. Why don't you tell me a little about yourself, then your business, then your school life?**

Hi! Sure! My name is Bracha Rosenthal. I am 15 years old. I enjoy dancing, gymnastics,

baking, art, ice skating... basically anything that doesn't have to do with school.

**Hmmm... I'm sure a lot of Twirl readers can relate to the "anything besides school" part.**

Yeah, probably.

**Okay, now let's talk business. Tell me about Yummy Blessings.**

As I mentioned, I like to bake. When I was 10 years old, a very close friend's mother had a baby and I wanted to send something really nice for the *kiddush*. I decided to send chocolate pretzels that I made together with my 8-year-old sister. At the *kiddush*, everyone was asking my friend's mother where she got the chocolate pretzels from. She told



everyone that we had made them. After Shabbos, she called my mother and told her what amazing feedback she had gotten about the pretzels and that we must start selling them. We couldn't believe it! Then Chanukah came, so we made adorable Chanukah packages for our teachers, and a very short time after that we got our first two orders!

## **Wait, wait, wait - back up! you were 8 and 10 years old when you started??!**

Yup!

## **That's... wow!**

Once we were getting orders regularly, my mother opened a corporation (to make the whole process legal) and got us covered by insurance.

## **And they were fine with allowing a 10-year-old to own a corporation?**

Well, we were under our mother's name in the beginning. We are working to switch it over to my name now that I'm 15, but my sister is only 12 so it's complicated.

## **Okay, back to the pretzels.**

Okay, so we started to add flavors to the pretzels. We had strawberry shortcake pretzels, caramel, birthday cake flavor, and many more.

## **How many flavors do you have now?**

We can basically make anything. Any flavor you want.

## **Yum.**

After about a year of doing just pretzels, we started to expand and do chocolate logs, chocolate lollies, cake pops, and other miniatures. At that point we were also able to get a *hashgachah* on our products. That was really important for us to be able to sell our products wholesale (to stores, party planners, etc.).

## **How did you choose the name Yummy Blessings?**

Well, "Yummy" 'cause it's yummy, and "Blessings" 'cause my name is Bracha.

## **How appropriate! Okay, Bracha, now tell me about the rest of your story. What was going on in school at the same time you were churning out all these goodies?**

(Bracha takes a deep breath. This is the first time she is going public with this part of the story.) I always struggled with learning.

*Bracha's mother interjects:* She was an adorable, bubbly baby with a vocabulary way above her level, but even when she was a toddler, we could tell she had a learning deficit. There were things that were hard for her to grasp that other kids her age were able to, like animal sounds.

*Back to Bracha:* When I was younger, it didn't matter as much, because I was developing in all other areas the same as my peers,

but once I started school... well, that's when it started to matter. A lot. I attended a regular ed school, but was put into a self-contained class, which is like a special-ed class within a regular school. We were a mix of girls with all types of challenges, but none the same as mine. My teachers didn't have the tools to address my learning issues, and that left my needs totally unmet. I felt very, very alone in what I was going through.

My class was pretty small, only eight girls, and I couldn't connect with any of my classmates because our challenges were so different. The girls liked me, but I didn't fit in with them. I became very closed and basically retreated into myself. I didn't share anything about my learning difficulties with anyone. I thought it was something to be embarrassed of. I had some friends from the other classes in my grade, which helped for the few times that the classes were together. During class, though, I was very alone. I tried inviting those girls over to my house, but when they came, they would always start talking about school, and I would be left out of the conversation... again!

I was also bullied for quite a few years by a classmate, which, in a class of only eight girls, is obviously much more extreme.

## **Ouch! Which would you say was worse, the learning issues or the bullying and social isolation?**

Um... it's hard to choose. They were both pretty awful, but I think the social aspect was worse. I probably would've managed if I had a friend who could understand me. I was absolutely miserable all day, every day! I eventually figured out by myself which learning methods worked for me.

## **Figured it out? How?**

Through trial and error. I learned to be very in touch with myself, so I was able to, but because it took so long, a lot of time was wasted and there were years that I barely learned anything! When I was in sixth grade, a girl joined our class. She had the same first name as I did, and similar struggles. We became best friends instantly. We were inseparable that entire year! I finally had someone in my class on my level who understood me, who could relate to me, and who cared about me. We had such a great year together! After sixth grade, though, her parents decided the school was not a good match for her and she switched out. I was totally crushed! After years of being miserable in school, I thought I would finally be done with it, but now I was back to a horrible, lonely, boring, and unstimulating environment.

## **Wow! That sounds really hard. How did you cope?**

It was really hard! I definitely had days where I came home crying from frustration. I almost wanted to give up!

## **But you didn't.**

I didn't. I have to give a big, huge shout-out to my parents. My mother taught me that I had to believe in myself. She refused to let me think I was a failure just because I couldn't do well at school and because other people wanted me to believe I was. I knew that I was a Jewish princess and I had value!



I decided to shift focus. I was good at so many things! So what if school wasn't one of them! I spent all my free time doing things that I was good at.

### **Like baking delicious treats.**

Yeah, like baking, and all the other things I mentioned earlier. I also was doing baking demos for day camps, and then during corona, on videos for people stuck at home. I love teaching. I even did a demo at the Gateways Pesach program.

### **Okay, we'll talk about the Gateways thing in a minute. Did you just say you love teaching?**

Yes! I know it sounds crazy, but I do! I love connecting to people and giving of myself. I prefer to teach kids that are younger than me, because I feel they are less judgmental and more accepting.

### **Do you get stage fright when you do a public workshop or demo?**

No, not at all.

### **Your confidence is incredible!**

Thank you!

### **Okay, now back to Gateways. You did a program at Gateways?! Next thing you'll tell me that you served the president!**

That would be amazing! But yeah, I called the organizers of Gateways and told them what I do and asked if I could do a demo on Chol Hamo'ed. They said yes! It was a little complicated cuz everything had to be *kosher l'Pesach*, so I couldn't use any of my regular recipes, but I really enjoyed the challenge!

### **Amazing! So back at school you were trudging through every day, and then as soon as you got home, the real fun started.**

I guess you could say that. I was also working hard at schoolwork, trying to succeed. I was told that if I worked really, really hard and got passing grades, I'd be able to be in a regular class for high school. I wanted that very badly, so I was working very, very hard on that.

### **What happened when you applied to high school?**

Humph. About that... Well, in the end, my school decided that I wasn't up to par, and they thought I shouldn't go to a regular ed high school.

### **What?! So what happened?**

My parents took matters into their own hands. *Baruch Hashem*, I got into an amazing high school! I am so happy there! It's amazing how much things changed from the miserable elementary school days to now, how happy I am in my high school! My teachers have so much respect for me and for all of their students, and the students respond so well to that! Once I was able to feel that respect, I gained *self-respect*! I am able to be much more open with my friends about my learning difficulties because I know they aren't judging me for it.

Now I go to P3 classes for three subjects. I can't say I love it, but I'm not embarrassed about it. I also found that being more open with my friends opens up opportunities for them to help me with my struggles.

### **Wow! And your parents sound like the strongest, most supportive parents a girl could wish for!**

They are!

### **What can you tell girls that might be experiencing similar challenges to what you went through?**

First of all, I can say, use your challenges as a learning experience. I really grew a lot from my struggles! I learned how to be a great friend to others and how to be kind and sensitive to others. I also became very good at sensing when someone needs help, and I will drop everything and run to help someone in need.

### **Kind of like doing for others what you wish someone would've done for you?**

Yes, definitely! I also want to tell anyone who's struggling in school not to give up on yourself. Don't let school define who you are. You are so much more! Marks are just marks, and nothing will happen if you fail a test. Find other talents and pursue them!

To everyone else out there, I know it's hard not to judge people, but it's so painful to be judged. Be nice to people. You never know what's going on in their life. Give everyone a chance. You never know who might make an amazing friend!

### **Bracha's mother, what message can you give to teens out there with learning difficulties?**

I agree with Bracha on all those messages. Don't give up, be kind to others, don't judge. I would also add to trust yourself; you know yourself best. And you are your own best advocate! Don't let people convince you that you are not worthy. Everyone can achieve greatness! Believe in yourself. Trust yourself. You can accomplish great things! 🍌

