

*Your favorite serial,
now an audiobook.*



**BONUS
EPISODES**
Behind the
scenes content
for every chapter,
with Inshic Lasker.



| FAMILY FIRST FEATURE |

SHOW STOPPER



By Dobby Baum as told to Rivka Streicher | NOVEMBER 11, 2025

**I put my life on public view to help launch my singing
career — and paid a price for it**



As Told to Rivka Streicher by Dobby Baum

"I know all about you."

It's spring 2024 and I'm in the supermarket, shopping with my kids, trying to maneuver down the aisles. My kids are picking treats off the shelf, trying to hide them among the apples and cereal already in the cart. I try for firmness, but they're tired and cranky after a long day at school.

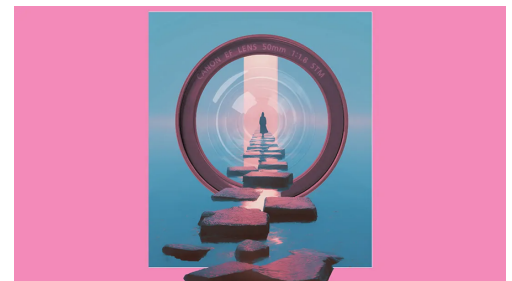
RELATED CONTENT



| SARAH PARDES |

SECRET OF THE CAVES

For centuries the sacred caverns beneath Mearas Hamachpeilah were off-limits. These few found a way in



| BARBARA BENSOUSSAN |

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF ME

Nomi Levy circled the globe until she found her people, her calling, and herself

Suddenly, someone else's cart almost careens into us. The woman fixes her gaze on the three of us, then reaches over to pinch my daughter on the cheek. "I know you," she says, calling her by name.

My daughter gives her a hard look. "Ma, do you know her?" she asks.

"Oh, but I know your mother," the woman says turning to me. "You're Dobby, you're a singer. You have a son, you have a daughter. I know you all..."

I smile tightly. My kids are unnerved. It's far from the first time. It's happened before, in different locations with different people. Those same words, "I know you, I know all about you..." It feels exposing, almost creepy, to have people "know" us. And when it's my children who are recognized and exulted over, there's a sense that this borders on dangerous.

How did we get here — to people being overexcited and garrulous and intrusive, not just about me and my work, but about my kids?

Insta-land

As a child, I was drawn to music, singing, and performing. But my passion didn't become a profession until I finished seminary. That's when I started directing choirs for school productions, composing songs, and giving voice and piano lessons.

In my community in England, people knew me, so I got jobs simply through word-of-mouth. But when I married my husband and moved to Brooklyn, I wasn't an anomaly anymore. I was in a ginormous city filled with from female talent.

How would I find work? How would people find out about me? I had to start from scratch. This was 2017 and social media seemed the way to go. "Get an Insta page," people advised me. "It's like a portfolio. You can showcase your work and people will find you easily."

I hopped on board without giving it much thought. During those first months in New York, I landed a summer job as a music director in a talent camp. I figured I'd put up videos from the talent camp and get my work out there so more opportunities could come my way.



| LORI HOLZMAN SCHWARTZ |

BABIES, BOTTLES, AND A BRAND-NEW BEGINNING AT 40+

For women who waited decades, motherhood came late and hard-won



| FAMILY FIRST WRITERS |

THE NAMES WE CARRIED

For two years, we carried the hostages in our hearts, minds, tefillos — and waited for their return

| RACHEL ATKINS |

WHEN CONSEQUENCES COUNT

Why punishment alone rarely teaches lasting lessons — and the practical approach that helps children truly learn from their mistakes

I was naive as to how social media worked. How did people amass followers — how did they get their work in front of people? I educated myself by looking at other people's pages, from gourmet chefs to home organizers.

I realized quickly that work content alone wouldn't cut it. There had to be more to lure people in and keep them with you. The easiest way to accomplish that was to make your page a fun and flashy place. Give people what they want. Cute kids, gorgeous getaways, fashion, and food — all sorts of eye candy that gives them a vicarious experience.

You also had to get personal. To attract followers, I learned, you must be "open" and show your work persona along with other sides of yourself — who you are as a mom, a family person, a homemaker.

The first thing I put on my page was promotional work content. But I also uploaded pictures of trips, scenery, nature, fun locations. I put clips of my young kids saying adorable comments. At the end of each day, I'd look through my camera reel and put up the best stuff — us in a restaurant, the kids shrieking with laughter at a theme park.

It was all part of the strategy of growing a following which would, in turn, bring career opportunities. And it was working. People were getting to know me. I was getting clients for piano and voice lessons. I was getting gigs and performing at events.

See, I told myself, *this is the way*. In two years, I'd gotten my name out, had a lot of business, and I'd started the Brooklyn Girls' Choir — a high-level, professional choir complete with concerts and our very own album.

For years, as I showed my face to the online world, I learned so much — too much — about it in return. Sometimes it took looking at other people's pages to realize how distasteful social media could be. I saw people who showed their kids having a meltdown, with some silly caption: *Crisis, my kid doesn't want to wear her yellow dress*. That poor girl had her tantrum displayed for the world to see, all for her mom's agenda, to show real "raw" footage that would captivate followers.

| BASHIE LISKER |

REPLY AT YOUR OWN RISK

How hackers crack, swipe, and scam — and how to stay one step ahead of them

+ SEE ALL

Nuh-uh, I thought, *I'd never do that*. And I did have my boundaries. I never showed those ubiquitous couple pictures. In fact, I never put a picture of my husband out there. And I would never post anything that showed my kids in a negative light.

But I understood the pressure these posters felt to post eye-catching things day after day. It's embarrassing to admit, but I felt an obsessive need to check for "likes" and to see how many followers I had compared to other Instagrammers. What started as a means to an end... had become an end in itself.

Being on the inside, I saw how counterfeit social media could be. Everything is carefully curated, even displays of "vulnerability" and "openness." The tantrum example I mentioned earlier — that would only be about a dress but not about something that really mattered to the person. "Cute chutzpah" was okay to post, but not the kind that really cuts.

There were certain things that were almost "cool" to talk about. There was a covert prestige in going to therapy, so someone might say something like, "I just came out of a therapy session and I'm a bit emotional right now," as a preamble to talking about their product. But that same person would never show their kitchen in a less-than-pristine state, nor show up on camera on a "bad hair day."

Viewers see the glam: the beautifully set Shabbos table, the elaborate parties, the flawless makeup, the public-perfect persona. However much a viewer knows it's not real — that it can't be natural and organic, that these pictures are carefully shot and often fixed-up — still... there's this unrealistic view you form of the person.

When followers are bombarded by images of perfection, it can make them feel "less than;" that's when they start bashing others to make themselves feel better — and who better to bash than the person posting the perfect images? This psychological defense mechanism, I learned, can turn strangers into the cruelest of critics. They will outright reproach and shame you without batting an eye.

I lived with it. *It's par for the course*, I told myself. *This is just part of having a public persona in the performing world.*

But was it?

Rising Up, Spiraling down

It was through the lowest points that I came to understand in the most experiential way how deceptive life in the public eye could be. It took a medical scare for me to take a step back and find peace away from the constant online limelight.

In 2019, I saw my ob-gyn for a routine checkup in advanced pregnancy. She was worried about my vitals — my heart rate was too high — and rushed me to the hospital. I got admitted to the maternity ward and while waiting for the doctor, I started feeling dizzy. My vision began to blur. “I’m not feeling good,” I told a passing nurse, and then I blacked out.

When I came to, there was an oxygen mask on my face and a team of medical personnel surrounding my bed. “This might be preeclampsia,” the doctor told me. “But we’re not sure. With a heart rate like that, we need to call in a cardiologist to run some tests.”

I was terrified. After testing, CT scans, many EKGs, and additional bloodwork, it appeared that I was fine. But I still felt like I couldn’t breathe. For three days, they continued to check for physical symptoms, without coming up with answers. I begged to be released: “You still haven’t found anything... can I please go home? Being in the hospital is making me anxious.”

They didn’t let me go, but they did pivot directions. “You know what,” they said, “Let’s bring in a psychiatrist.” I was prescribed an antianxiety tranquilizer and within 30 minutes of taking it, my vitals returned to normal range.

The psychiatrist gave his diagnosis: perinatal panic attack disorder. Because I had no mental health history, he was none too concerned. “It seems to be biological, associated with the fluctuating pregnancy hormones,” he reassured me. “It’ll likely go away when the baby comes.”

My daughter was born, and the panic attacks receded. *Close call*, I thought. Still, I’d sometimes think back to that terrifying week before her birth and shudder. I hadn’t really known anything about panic before that, nor how debilitating it could be. *It’s all over*, I’d reassure myself. *There’s nothing to be scared of*. Little did I know.

Ten months later, I stopped nursing, and that biological, hormonal change set things off again. That week, I had an off-the-charts panic attack. Muscle memory told me that it wasn't a heart attack, that I wasn't dying. But it felt like I was. I was lightheaded, nauseous, almost passing out by the time Hatzolah came. They took me to the emergency room, where I got the same tranquilizer as before. I went home afterwards, utterly drained. But my misery didn't end.

For the next two consecutive nights, I had full-blown panic attacks. The third night was a reprieve, but then I started getting panic attacks in the middle of the day. I never knew when one would hit.

It was terrifying and exhausting. I couldn't keep living this way. "The quick-fix tranquilizer is addictive and can only be used as a short-term measure," I was told by my primary care doctor. "You need a proper psychiatric treatment plan."

A what? Mental health was a foreign concept to me. I'd grown up as the youngest of a large family — my parents had been raised by Holocaust survivors — and there was zero exposure to therapy in our home. Besides, I thought this was a biological or hormonal issue.

It was right at that time, when my world was already upside down, that Covid hit. All of a sudden, the medical world went into crisis mode. How was I going to find help now?

I was lost inside myself. I didn't tell anyone about my diagnosis or what I was dealing with. How could I? The shame of it was excruciating, especially since I was a "public figure." I also didn't think anyone could understand what I was going through.

So it was my husband and I alone against the demon. We had no idea where to turn. I went through a long process of trying to find a suitable doctor, but I was searching at a time when most were turning to telehealth, which isn't great for a first-timer. Despite being super proactive, I kept hitting dead ends.

The Dobby Show

Then came another blow. Just after Pesach, my beloved grandmother passed away. Since childhood, she'd been my greatest advocate and cheerleader. Whenever I visited her, she'd ask to hear my new

compositions; she was always pushing me to develop my musical talents. Despite the state that I was in, I wanted to do something in her memory.

That spark of inspiration infused me with energy. It was also, in many ways, my default reaction: The way I'd dealt with hard stuff in the past was by brushing it away and getting on, having fun, finding my high energy again. A part of me thought that if I could only distract myself enough with talent and positivity, maybe things would be fine.

I launched the Dobby Show in honor of my grandmother during the height of Covid, when people were stuck at home and desperate for entertainment. Different people joined me each night — a comedian, a chef, a *baalas teshuvah* with a compelling story — and the show quickly gained popularity. Thousands of people were logging in on a nightly basis. People loved it, the camaraderie, joining together at a time like this, singing together from all over the world. Things were on the rise with the Dobby Show, but it was really just that — a show.

When the screen went dark and the high was over, I'd feel jittery again. I thought I could "outshine" what was going on, but I clearly couldn't. Nighttime was the worst, when the anxiety of having a panic attack would inevitably bring on another panic attack. Shabbos, with zero distractions, felt grueling.

Still, I pushed myself to keep performing. Spring turned to summer and I was still smiling big on screen, with several shows a week, as well as performing in outdoor venues around the country. When I wasn't busy with work, I was busy searching for a doctor who could help me. For Succos of 2020, I did a major virtual concert. Over 2,000 households bought tickets for the show. I came on, looking my best, performing for all the world, while behind the curtain, I still didn't have the right care or treatment.

Finally (finally!), I found a good psychiatrist who changed my treatment plan, and a therapist who taught me to identify and manage my panic triggers. I gradually started to feel better, but it didn't take long to notice that the medication was causing me significant weight gain.

By this point, I'd stopped the talk shows because the world was slowly going back to normal. Instead of feeling disappointment that I didn't have a distracting outlet, I felt relief: Now I didn't have to show my face anymore. The weight gain had gotten so bad that I didn't even want to look in the mirror. But of course I couldn't stop my medication; I was finally beginning to feel better.

A big part of my inner work was acceptance — accepting that underneath my “singer” persona, I was a human being with limitations; accepting that mental health was part of my life and that I'd have to make accommodations; accepting that I couldn't “do it all,” which is why I closed down the Brooklyn Girls' Choir.

Although I was starting to feel better, I was still gaining weight. In one year, I put on 100 pounds. One of the hardest things was that people weren't afraid to point that out to me. Walking on the streets of Brooklyn one day, someone muttered, “You fat Jewish woman.” While running in the park, someone pointed and said, “Look at that fat lady running.” Didn't they see I was trying to exercise? But it wasn't only “them.” In a frum shoe store, I was told, “Don't try on our shoes — you'll stretch them.”

Succos was rolling around again and the success of the year before buoyed me to do another huge concert, despite my weight gain. *Could I really perform like this?* Overcoming my nerves, I went ahead. *You can do this*, I told myself. And I did!

People had a great time, singing their hearts out together on Chol Hamoed. But some of the comments I got afterward on social media made me want to cry. “You're too fat to be on stage,” someone said outright.

The irony was that the year prior, when I was ungrounded, I looked slimmer and better on the outside, the picture of a rising star. Now that I was feeling good inside, I was big and bloated on the outside.

All of it was bringing me to my knees.

Going Inward

It took me a long time to process and pull apart what I'd been through — from the rise to singing stardom to my mental health story to my rapid weight gain in the public eye. There were so many

questions churning through my mind, but the one that kept resurfacing was: Who am I... *really*?

For so long, I'd judged myself based on my "views" and "listens"; how my fans and society perceived me externally. But who was I separate from all of that?

As a professional, I judged myself on my output. But now that I was no longer doing the Dobby Show and the Brooklyn Girls' Choir, who was I? And what about my panic attacks? Did they define me? What about my appearance? Was I beautiful only if society deemed me beautiful? Could I still think of myself as pretty with that much extra weight?

What I discovered in therapy was how much society's judgment was also inside of me — both regarding mental health and body image. I had to learn to redefine what it meant to be healthy, lovable, and beautiful.

I was exploring who I was in every sense: as a professional, a frum woman, a wife, a mother, a daughter — and as a Jew. I'd taken my frum lifestyle at face value, but what did it *really* mean to me? What could I do to make Shabbos my own? What would it look like if I had a deep relationship with Hashem and actually placed my trust in Him?

To enhance my Shabbos, I started baking challah each week and taking in Shabbos early. This mitzvah, once distant, now feels like mine. It even inspired my husband to write the "Challah Song" for my recent album.

For years, I'd done things that didn't fully sit right with me in the name of parnassah. But now that I was starting to listen to my inner voice — and trust it — I had questions. *If I truly believe parnassah is from Hashem, Who sends business in a way that's right for each person, then maybe I don't have to do all this open sharing online?* I knew how much harm it was causing — the anxiety, the addiction, the pressure of it — and I was finally in a place where I could honestly assess its impact on my life. I didn't make any big decisions; I just sat with these questions for a while.

It took a while to put my thoughts into action, but then one afternoon, I was out with my kids and another person accosted them, as if they were mini celebrities. *Enough is enough!* I decided. I wasn't going to show their faces online anymore. They didn't need or want this undue attention, and they weren't old enough to really give their consent, so even just showing cute pictures of family trips was "using" them.

I didn't stop there. It took a lot of courage, but I closed my public Instagram page and went totally private on Insta, meaning that my videos and images couldn't be googled or shared, and I could carefully vet who joined my private page, which by then I'd committed to being work-related only. I felt so good about the boundaries I had created. I didn't think I could commit to "all or nothing" — total *perishah* —but I wanted to use social media in a contained, healthier way.

I cannot describe the relief I felt after going private. It freed me from constantly checking and comparing the stats. I'm not going to say that it didn't come with new challenges — for example, I no longer had the perks of a public business page on Instagram. But I trusted that Hashem could send *parnassah* in a way that was good for me.

The next frontier was my YouTube channel. Years back, my husband and I had spoken with Rabbi Falk *a"h* about *kol ishah*, and his *psak* was that since recorded singing means the voice is essentially modified, then if it's only audio, it's okay as long as it has the *kol ishah* disclaimer. That *psak* was about putting my audio music on streaming platforms.

As for music videos though, even though they're recorded (which means modified) as well, the fact that I could be seen singing and performing is more problematic, disclaimer notwithstanding, Rav Falk told me, adding that I should call him again if I decided to put out music videos. When I produced my first video, though, it was after Rav Falk's *petirah*; I received a *heter* from local rabbanim to produce it. At the time, I knew it was a gray area, but I went with it, and that was where my success was. Those videos went viral — they pumped my numbers and did promotional work for me.

But after I went private on Instagram, I knew those videos were next. My YouTube channel had 14 gorgeous videos with hundreds of thousands of views. I'd sweated and toiled for them; I'd watched them

climb and grow for years. And my parnassah was in them. Could I really close the channel?

I closed my eyes and did it.

On Lag B'omer of 2025, I released a new music video, "Ashira Vaazamra" (composed by R' Chezkie Weisz), for the first time without YouTube. It was a big adjustment: Since I only put my videos on kosher music platforms, where they can't be viewed without membership (such as 24Six and Toveedo), I naturally have less publicity now. And without YouTube, I couldn't see my views climb instantly, so there wasn't that heady rush and buzzing adrenaline. But what I did have was my calm. This was the right way to release a music video — for me.

Just recently, I've also stopped sharing singing videos with my face showing on my Instagram page — even with a private page. And as I reopen my girls' choir (this time in Monsey), I'll be doing so without a YouTube channel, and without showing the girls' faces anywhere online.

When I give live concerts now, I share the stories behind my songs with honesty, sharing my struggles, including with mental health (*Give Us Strength*) and body image (*Beautiful*). If I can help other women feel less alone in their struggles, if I can bring Hashem into the moment and let us all feel His presence, sing and dance for Him, and spread joy together — then I am where I'm meant to be.

After concerts, women come up to share their stories — what they're facing, and the *chizuk* they find in my music. "Not a week goes by that I bake challah without listening to your song," one woman shared. Another said: "You've helped me see myself as beautiful."

For those moments, despite — and maybe because of — my struggles and the painstaking growth that followed, I feel it's all been worthwhile.

(Originally featured in Family First, Issue 968)

SIGN UP TO OUR NEWSLETTERS

Email Address

SIGN UP NOW



ABOUT
SUBSCRIPTION
ADVERTISE
HELP CENTER
CONTACT
LOGIN

