

“Matzaball Abrams, the Evacuee”

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The Abrams family knew the hurricane was coming! Way back in August, Mr. and Mrs. Abrams, 11-year-old Billy, and 13-year-old Debra, had all loaded up their SUV within an inch of the roof. Each one took a small suitcase and each of the kids grabbed their favorite discman, Playstation, and movies for the car.

Oh, and the parents took a box of important papers for insurance, and the Abram's family tree tracing them all the way back to Germany in 1840. And Mrs. Abrams made sure to take some irreplaceable old pictures, their videos of the kids, and the Bible she carried at their wedding. She also loaded another box, in which she was almost certain she had their family Chanukah Menorah.

And, of course, in a small corner of the back seat on his favorite blankets, surrounded by some of his favorite toys, and a big bag of his dietetic dog food, sat Matzah Ball Abrams.

One look at this sweet-faced dachshund, short and squat, and you just knew he never missed a meal. But, you also knew two other things:

1. Here was the happiest dog you'd ever see.
2. And, number two, here was the "boss" of the house.

They pulled out of their driveway in the uneasy dark of 4:00 a.m. on the morning before the hurricane was expected and, as they joined the thousands of other evacuees on the super-clogged highway heading for Mrs. Abrams's sister's house in Birmingham, Alabama, they had no idea it would be five weeks before they would next see their home, nor could they imagine how it would have changed.

The hurricane had proven far worse than anyone ever thought. The Abrams kids went through so much that we have experienced (would you know?):

- New schools to attend with weird schedules!
- Sharing rooms with relatives!
- Doing without many of our favorite things!
- Strange streets and none of our friends to play with!
- Parents short-tempered and wondering what to do, where to work, and when or if to go back.

When they returned, Debra was the first one to go into their once-flooded home. "Ooh, everything is black with mold and the furniture is ruined!" she said.

Billy surveyed the house and concluded, "Dad and Mom are right. We can't fix this. It will all have to be cleaned out and begun again."

Matzah Ball Abrams couldn't keep from sneezing. He had walked inside and noticed an earthy, mushroom smell throughout his house and it prompted five sneezes in a row. Debra picked him up, comforted her long-nosed friend, and reassured him, "Don't worry Matzah Ball. It'll be okay. While they rebuild our house, we'll live in another one

right in front. It's called a FEMA trailer and it will be all new and clean. It's going to be our Abrams Family Adventure."

Before too long, but much longer than necessary, the necessary official inspectors came – the city, state, national, and international inspectors came to the Abrams's trailer home and finally issued permits to hook up the electricity and the water and plumbing, and even a telephone – cable television, too.

By now, it was almost Chanukah time. "Has anyone uncovered the Chanukah Menorah?" Mrs. Abrams asked. Matzah Ball looked up with an empty glance. He had done well to keep track of his own favorite squeeze toys.

Debra and Billy chimed in together, "We've told you a hundred times, Mom. It's not here. It must have been accidentally left and was ruined in the hurricane."

"Oh my," cried Mrs. Abrams, as Mr. Abrams comforted her. "That Menorah belonged to my grandmother, Esther Goldenson, who brought it with her from Europe when she came to America."

With that, Mrs. Abrams began to cry. So did Debra and Billy Abrams, seeing how upset their mother was over losing the Chanukah Menorah on top of everything else they had lost in the hurricane.

This was just the last straw. Everyone had been so brave, but the Abrams were so tired and, it had been such a worry and struggle since the hurricane first arrived, and, well, they had never imagined living (even for a while) in a FEMA trailer! Mazah Ball Abrams tried to run under the couch in the trailer house, only there was no space. He found a table and ran under that. He wouldn't come out. He was so upset hearing the others cry, and he, too, wondered what this trailer was all about. Where was his bed to be? Suddenly, there was a knock at the door of the trailer.

"Who could that be?" Mr. Abrams asked.

"We're from your Temple!" a helpful, friendly voice called out. "We've brought you a whole bag of Chanukah gifts to make you more comfortable. May we come in?"

Two members of their Temple came in, and so did the Rabbi, the Cantor, and the President. In their hands were bags containing Shabbat candles, a Kiddush cup, a new Mezzuzah for their trailer door, and a brand new Chanukah Menorah!

Of course, it wasn't as beautiful as Grandmother Esther's Menorah, but it was theirs – a new one provided by the love and caring of their Temple members and people of their Jewish community! It meant the world to Mrs. Abrams.

Such thoughtfulness  
Such kindness

Such generosity  
Such love  
Such beauty  
Such Jewish caring for one another in tough times

Now, all the Abrams knew, it was going to be all right – even living in a trailer. Sooner or later, their house would be rebuilt or they would find another one, and their lives would return to near normal. It was going to be different, but it was going to be okay, too!

As long as they had one another, their school friends, and Temple, all would be well.

“Come, let’s light the Menorah,” the children urged. “Let’s try it out.” And so, they did. They lit the candles, which shone so lovely, and sang the blessings. There, beside the Rabbi, the Cantor, Temple leaders, the Abrams, and Matzah Ball stood together and sang, “Rock of Ages, Let Our Song.”

“Okay,” said Debra, “Who has the bag of chocolate gelt?”

With that, Matzah Ball ran from the room trying to make his getaway, the gold-foiled coins clenched in his chocolate-loving jaws! “Get Matzah Ball!” Billy called. “Chocolates’ not good for dogs, but it’s good for me!”

Amen

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