

## LIFEstyle

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JENNY SWIGODA  
TIMES PHOTO

**Shoshana Garfinkel** talks about the difficulties she endured due to her lifelong battle with diabetes.

# Seeing is believing

**By Tom Waring**  
Times Staff Writer

**S**hoshana Garfinkel was one of the featured speakers at a recent World Diabetes Day observance — and for good reason.

Garfinkel, who was diagnosed with diabetes when she was 19 months old, spoke to a crowd at the Moore Eye Institute in Delaware County. She credits the institute's chairman, Dr. Leonard Ginsburg, with saving her sight after complications from diabetes left her nearly blind.

In her speech, she looked back to all the

years where she neglected her diabetes. She doesn't want anyone to experience the loss of eyesight or any other serious complications from the disease.

"I hope one person gets the message to take care of their diabetes," she said. "It's so important to see your doctors and listen to them."

Garfinkel, 33, is doing well today. She and her husband David have been married for seven and a half years. They live in Rhawnhurst with their children, 6-year-old Emma and 2-year-old Sarah.

A St. Louis native, her childhood was anything but normal.

► **After complications from diabetes left Shoshana Garfinkel nearly blind, her eyesight was resurrected thanks to retina surgeon Dr. Leonard Ginsburg.**

Every day, her parents would give the youngster two insulin shots, one before breakfast and the other before dinner. By age 7, young Shoshana was injecting herself in the thigh.

Birthday parties were never fun. She could not eat cake, ice cream or sweets.

As the years went on, Garfinkel became a junk food eater and stopped checking her blood-sugar levels.

"I stopped taking care of myself," she said.

That all changed when she became pregnant with Emma. Diabetics are at increased risk during pregnancy, and her high blood pressure did not help. But she began to follow a low-carbohydrate diet, make weekly visits to the doctors and increase her blood-sugar testing.

At three months of pregnancy, Dr. Ned Weiss, an endocrinologist, put her on an insulin pump.

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## BLIND

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However, Garfinkel began to develop serious vision problems.

"My eyes hemorrhaged," she said.

Garfinkel explained that she could see little more than shadows, smears and movement and that when she tried to move her eyes to clear the problem, the black gel-like substance would settle.

At the time, she worked at a psychiatrist's office in Fort Washington and did not want to lose the job. So she continued to drive to work and soon became a hazard. She recalls running a stop sign and apologizing to another motorist at the intersection.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I can't see. I shouldn't be on the road."

Garfinkel, who lives on Dorcas Street, had to quit her job because she could not see the computer screen. Doctors ordered her to rest in bed.

Fellow members of the Ahavas Torah synagogue helped out by delivering home-cooked dinners for the Garfinkels.

Her sight improved but not for long.

"My vision went black, and my blood pressure skyrocketed," she said.

The next day, Nov. 15, 2002, she had an emergency Caesarean section and delivered Emma six weeks early.

After the birth, her vision started to improve, but the bleeding returned, and she underwent laser treatments.

Ultimately, Ginsburg determined that surgery was necessary. The procedure was scheduled on her right eye for

Sept. 11, 2003, with the left eye surgery set for a week later. Ahavas Torah members and Chaya Herber, Garfinkel's mom, prayed intensely.

The surgery was so successful that, not only was Garfinkel able to see clearly out of her right eye, but her left eye was nearly 20-20 with glasses. The doctor, patient and office staff were all crying.

"It was a miracle," she said. "God was helping him do this surgery."

Ginsburg, a retina surgeon at Abington Memorial Hospital in addition to his duties at the Moore Eye Institute, acknowledges being a scientist, not a faith healer. Harvard-trained, he's a believer in diagnostic tests, medication and surgery.

Still, he can come up with only one explanation.

"Do I believe this was a miracle?" he asked. "I do. Shoshana Garfinkel has made me rethink everything about medicine. Shoshana Garfinkel has totally changed my life. It's more inspiring than any experience I've ever had."

A couple of months later, there was some bleeding in her left eye, but surgery corrected that.

"I haven't had a bleed since those surgeries," she said.

Doctors gave her approval to get pregnant again, and she delivered Sarah without complications.

Garfinkel, who attended high school in Denver and lived in New York for a time, is glad she landed in Philadelphia because of the excellent medical care provided by Ginsburg and Weiss.

Garfinkel is thankful to be able to drive, shop and see the details on the leaves of a tree. She is following doctors' orders by exercising and by eating a diet consisting of fruits, vegetables and salads.



JENNY SWIGODA / TIMES PHOTO

**When Shoshana Garfinkel** was pregnant with her first daughter, Emma, she lost her vision completely in both eyes. After surgery she can now see perfectly with the aid of corrective lenses.

Every few months, she has follow-up visits with Ginsburg and Weiss. They caution that, because of the diabetes, she might have to someday undergo cataract surgery at an earlier age than normal.

The doctors think she can have more children without any difficulties, but she has no plans to get pregnant again.

"I have two beautiful daughters," she said. "I'm so grateful every day to see these two girls." ●●

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