

# “My Name Is Riva”

by Moussia Schtroks  
with Riva Raskin

# Preface

Several years ago, my aunt, Moussia Schtroks, realizing how little her children and grandchildren knew about their roots and ancestry decided to record as much as she was able to.

After numerous interviews with (her sister) my mother she recorded it and made it available to everyone in the family. On this occasion of our daughter's wedding we are sharing it with our guests. Tonight's bride, Bluma Draiza, is named after both my grandmothers. Her first name, Bluma, is taken from my maternal grandmother.

I previously distributed this story at another family Simcha. It was then titled "Our Legacy". I have since restructured it and renamed it - focusing on the story's heroine - "My Name Is Riva."

Around two years ago my mother was interviewed by the Kfar Chabad Weekly magazine. This same story was summarized in a ten page article that appeared in the Succos issue of that year. The story we present to you tonight is the original uncut version with much more detail. Although this story is not publication quality it is definitely worth reading.

Benny and Tila Raskin  
2nd Tamuz 5764

## Part One

My sister Riva and I were born in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) in the early thirties. We were the two youngest out of four children. We had an older brother Yitzchok ה"ע and a sister Soroh Relka ה"ע.

I would like to start by describing my father's personality and his high standard of *Avodas Hashem*. This is a task well beyond my capability but I will try to do my best.

In the book "Lubavitch Vechayoleho" (Lubavitch and its soldiers), the description of Father reads "He was known for his service of *Hashem* through lengthy prayer and for his utter dedication and self sacrifice in matters pertaining to the *Frierdike Rebbe* ע"ג"

I will expand on these quotations by relating several episodes later on. Right now, I would like to describe his attitude towards *chinuch*. His approach concerning his children's education can best show the kind of person he was and what mattered most to him. Well, the most important thing in my father's life, was his goal to raise his children as *yirey shomaim*. His desire to that end was so great that it was like a flame, all consuming. His children's *chinuch* had to be the best and he gave it his constant thought and attention.

This does not mean, of course, that he sent them to school. There were no Jewish schools in Russia in those days. It simply means that he taught them himself, guided them, supervised them and devoted himself completely so that their upbringing was a hundred percent *al taharas hakodesh*. Anything that was remotely associated with a slight doubt of an *issur* he thoroughly distanced himself from and made sure his family did too. Anything to do with secularity he vehemently despised.

All the above will be clarified in the various episodes, which I shall *I.Y.H.* attempt to recount. Let me say a few words about his tremendous attachment and belief in his *Rebbe* ג"ע. Rather than describe it with my own words, let me tell you what an old *chossid*, who knew him so well, said about him "If the *Rebbe* would tell Yeshaya to go through the wall, he surely would comply immediately. A hole would for sure, appear in the wall for him to go through." This was the extent of his absolute faith in the *Rebbe* ג"ע.

Now, just a few words about my mother ע"ה. She was an *ishes chayil*, in the true sense of the word, upholding all my father's principles.

I will relate in later episodes the kind of person she was. You will be able to judge for yourselves that her greatness was just as exceptional, in a her own sort of quiet way. To me, she was certainly very special and that "specialness" has never worn off. I loved her completely the way children do and never, never stopped missing her. I remember distinctly feeling smug in my awareness of being luckier than other children, because they did not have a mother like mine, who looked so dear and beloved.

Unfortunately, this state of affairs did not last too long, as told farther on. May the merit of our parents ע"ה, protect us all, זכותם יגון עלינו.

We lived in a one and a half room apartment on Nyevskey Prospect. The kitchen was shared by four neighbours, each one having her own work table. Our neighbours, although Jewish, were not religious and they did not help make our life any easier, to say the least. On *Pesach*, all the cooking had to be done in the apartment proper, as it was not possible to keep *Pesach* in a shared kitchen.

Our furniture, as far as I can remember, consisted of a table, four ugly backless chairs and a box-like chest that served as seat, bed and storage space. I presume we had some beds, certainly not enough to have one each. In those days it was common practice, for children to share beds. I believe we also had a large cupboard (closet).

Three of the four chairs were standard size, however, one of them was much smaller, so I called it “my chair”. I didn’t just use it for sitting. I also talked to it, danced with it, kissed it, hugged it and generally spent many happy hours in its company. I had no toys to speak of, but ה”ב I was blessed with imagination and a happy disposition and don’t remember suffering from boredom despite my lack of objects of entertainment.

The following episodes were recounted by Riva. My own memories are few and far between and usually of a trivial nature. I am however, still recording them as they mean quite a lot to me and I like to share them with my children.

Our standard of living was well below the poverty line.

It was impossible in Soviet Russia, in those days, to earn a reasonable living and be a law abiding citizen at the same time. The official wages for most jobs, were below subsistence level. So, you had to bend the law to earn a bit on the side in order to survive. Yet, if you were caught G-d forbid, the consequences were dire. The people who did the catching, of course, were even more corrupt. It was a corrupt society, through and through and cheating was a way of life.

It was a very difficult state of affairs for someone who wanted to be honest and truthful. Although the above mentioned conditions were bad enough, for a religious Jew, it was, of course, much harder since there was the additional problem of the observance of *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*.

There was a system by which factories gave out work to do at home and a certain amount had to be produced each week, regardless of which days of the week the work was accomplished. This system was convenient for religious Jews as it meant they did not need to work on *Shabbos* . It was, of course, very poorly paid and the work was not always available.

Our father ה"י, did work with such a system, at least for a while. There was, in those days, a certain kind of knitting machine that was used to manufacture the fabric for all kinds of knitwear. We had such a machine in our home and our father ה"י, brought work home, whenever some was available.

As a little girl, Riva remembers thoughtfully watching Father ה"י working away at his machine and the cloth growing in size. This sight troubled her a great deal. She thought, "Of course Hashem is everywhere and that also means He's in the machine and in the cloth coming out at the bottom. What happens then? Isn't it too squashy for Him?" She didn't dare ask this question of anyone, though and she kept it to myself.

My father's work as I described above was, I believe, just a sideline. His primary job was a mechanic. He specialised in the repair and maintenance of the previously mentioned machines. Although he was good at his job, the wages he earned were barely enough to feed us for half the month. He absolutely refused to do anything illegal to bring in extra money, as everyone else would do. Besides being an absolutely honest person, who wouldn't cheat in any way, not even the corrupt government.

His main concern was, that if he was caught doing something against the law, he would, G-d forbid, be sent to Siberia. It wasn't himself he was worried about so much but rather, what would happen to his children's *yiddishkeit* when

he wasn't around? No way could he run the risk of bringing about a situation that would threaten the children's upbringing. So, we had to make do with one meal per day only, consisting of black bread, thinly spread with butter or jam, (never both together) and some sweet tea. Even for this kind of bare subsistence, there was not enough money. Father was required to borrow money to survive till the end of the month.

My mother ה"ע, had an opportunity to sew shirts at home, which would supplement our tiny income. The work however, was illegal and for that reason my father ה"ע would not allow her do it, since being caught meant Siberia. Father "ע ה expressed himself in the following way "Let our children eat only black bread and water, but they should be *ehrlicher yidden*.

My mother ה"ע was forced to respond, "But even bread, there is none." "Besides", continued Mother, "the risk of being caught is exclusively mine in this case, and not yours. If G-d forbid I'm caught, you will still be with our children and ensure their *yiddish* future, G-d willing. For my part, I'd sooner risk imprisonment, than watch my children starve, G-d forbid."

At this point, Father ה"ע was forced to give in and Mother ה"ע brought in sewing to do at home. She worked very hard at her sewing and our standard of living rose. We were now able to eat twice daily instead of just once.

I always had a very carefree nature and being also very young, I was quite unaware of all this drama. I did sense that the atmosphere was strained occasionally and that worried me and gave me a stomach ache. For the majority of the time though, I was happy and enjoyed life.

I remember one particular occasion when all the food at home consisted of one smallish round loaf of black bread and nothing else. The loaf was cut into four portions and each child

received one piece. Our parents ה"ע had none. I noticed this fact, fleetingly thought how good they were to let us have it all and then didn't give this matter another thought.

When I became older, the memory of this incident made me feel quite ashamed of myself. However, at the time, I wasn't too worried. I really never understood the seriousness of our hardship.

All this was before the war.

Soon there came times, which rudely aroused me from my blissful childhood ignorance. For the moment though, I want to continue to describe our way of life in the "good old days" before the war.

Let me tell you about our education. In the free world today, the world of my grandchildren שיחיו children go first to kindergarten, then school and sem or *yeshiva* as the case may be. All religious institutions *Boruch Hashem* provide a good *kosher chinuch*. In Soviet Russia however, the *kosher chinuch* had to be provided at home (or a friend's home) and all in the strictest of secrecy, as the study of *Torah* was prohibited in Russia.

My brother Yitzchok ה"ע learned at home with someone coming in to teach him, or he went to someone else's house. We girls, learned at home with Father ה"ע. We learned to read from a *Siddur* at a very early age. Riva remembers learning *Aleph Bais* from a *Tanya*.

Once, on *Chanukah* there was a family gathering at Isaac Karasik's home. All the Leningrad cousins came. Lipa Shapiro was having a conversation with little Riva, "How are you?", he asked. "What a big girl you are! Do you learn anything yet?", he continued.



“Yes,” she replied promptly.

“You do? What do you learn?”, he asked again.

“I learn *Tanya*,” she replied innocently. The cousins exchanged glances. One of them muttered, “With Uncle Yeshaya, I wouldn’t be surprised!”

Riva could not understand the reason for their surprise. When she returned home, she asked Yitzchok ה"ע who responded with an outburst of laughter, “You don’t learn *Tanya*, you just learn *Aleph Bais*.”

Some years ago, someone told me, (I don’t remember who it was) that when Riva was a little girl, someone asked her playfully, “Are you a boy or a girl?”

“Neither,” was her reply, “I’m *Atzilus*.”

Well, a little girl who starts her education when very young, from a *Tanya*, then perhaps it is not surprising that the word *Atzilus* is part of her vocabulary.

As soon as we children could read somewhat, we started off by saying *Brochos* from a *siddur* in the morning. A small piece at first, then adding on some more as our fluency improved.

As mentioned earlier, Father ה"ע *davened* several hours daily and with real concentration. The way our sages organised the *siddur* is that our *teffilos* are arranged like a ladder. Each part of the *davenning* acts like a stepping stone, to raise us higher to get to the next level. Eventually, we come to *Shemoneh Essrey*, the highest part of our *davenning*. When we say *Shemoneh Essrey*, we stand before *Hashem* and we are talking directly to Him.

When Father ה"ע had to say *Shemoneh Essrey*, he insisted that the children stand too, throughout the entire *Shemoneh Essrey*, however long it took. The children may have been too young to *daven* yet themselves, but not too young to be made aware of *Hashem's* presence during *Shemoneh Essrey*, and to acknowledge it by standing.

As soon as the children's reading was good enough, they had to say the daily *yom Tehillim* every day. This was a must and no excuses or tears could get them out of it.

On *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* at the table, Father would tell us stories of *tzaddikim*, later pointing out what lesson we could learn from them. Turning to each child in turn, he would say, "Will you remember this and how to act in a similar situation?"

I personally, only vaguely remember the stories of *tzaddikim*, (without the *Mussar Haskel* at the end). Maybe this is the reason why I always loved stories of *tzaddikim* and when possible, used to enjoy telling them to my children and grandchildren in England, when they were younger.

I also remember the special *Shabbos* atmosphere at the table, which, for many years, affected me in more ways than one.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout my teens, when I lived with *Bobbe Mania* [Dubrawsky] there was no father figure. I got to love *Bobbe Mania* very much, but she was a widow and I was especially aware on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* of the absence of a father figure.

Occasionally, it used to happen that I entered someone's home, just at the time when the family sat around the table with the father making *kiddush* or just singing *chassidische* songs. The picture touched me very much and I would get this prickling sensation behind my eyes, which came as I would withhold my tears from appearing. Other times my eyes would actually fill with tears, as distant memories of a real home and a complete family, flooded into my brain. This kind of reaction to a complete *Shabbos* table, with a *chassidische* man at its head, was with me for many years.

One *Shabbos* afternoon, Riva, when very young, was standing in the street watching the world go by. A little girl with a ball, invited her to join in her game. Riva agreed without hesitation, but soon heard her father's voice calling her to come in. She did so and was met with severe reproach "Don't you know that you are not allowed to carry on *Shabbos*?"

"Yes," replied Riva, "but I was not carrying, I was just playing ball."

"It makes no difference," Father persisted, "playing ball constitutes carrying."

"I didn't know," the little girl defended herself.

Father was unrelenting, "When in doubt, ask!" Then he smacked her to make sure the lesson sank in. It did. Father ה"י didn't often smack and never without a very good reason. It served its purpose, she would always remember that keeping *Shabbos* is of the utmost importance.

On another occasion, she would have welcomed smacks but got none, only words, which hurt much, much more.

This happened in the heat of midsummer and we were in the park. The two older girls wore long sleeves and rather thick stockings (there were no thin ones available). I was still younger than three, so I was allowed to wear short socks. Riva was rather envious of my socks and oppressed by the heat, so

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I thank *Hashem* for His *chassodim* and for blessing me with my own family. My dream was fulfilled *Boruch Hashem* and there came a time when it was my husband and my children who sat round the *Shabbos* table and the tears behind my eyes were those of gratitude to *Hashem* for the *zechus* of survival, to continue the golden chain. I must admit, though, I did not remember to be grateful on each occasion. More often than not, I was too busy - trying to get the children stay seated at the table, serve the meal, extricate the toddler from his or her latest mischief and attending to the new book if need be - to remember to appreciate my good fortune.

she pulled down her stockings and rolled them down to her ankles, to resemble socks.

Soon after, Father ה"ע came to fetch us and caught her red handed. He was extremely upset. All the way home he talked to Riva at length about this matter "How could you, a daughter of mine, act in this manner? How many times have I told you that a *yiddishe* girl cannot copy non Jewish girls and their mode of dress. A Jew's life is so different! *Hashem* gave us so many *mitzvos*! So how could a Jewish girl possibly resemble, non Jewish children? A Jewish little girl has *mitzvos*, so she must look different."

There was acute pain in Father's voice and his words penetrated deep into her very *neshomo*. Would she have been smacked, the effect would have been much less lasting. However, spoken to in that heartfelt manner, she was filled with remorse and not only did she never do it again but many years later, made sure that her daughters too, had their legs covered from age three, in accordance with the *Shulchan Aruch*.

Because of the prohibition of *pessel* (possessing an image) we were not allowed to have dolls unless something was done to their face to change their resemblance to a person. (There was no money for such luxuries anyway.) Riva, when little, was longing for a doll and nagged Mother a great deal, until Mother ה"ע had an idea. She took a pillow slip, shaped it somewhat into the form of a doll and drew a face on top. She then wrapped it into some piece of cloth representing a baby shawl and presented her delighted little girl with a doll.

Later on, Father ה"ע came home. He looked at the improvised doll and decided it was too realistic. Too much *chsash* of *pessel*. Some discussion between parents ensued with Mother ה"ע pointing out that the face was not three dimensional. The end of the matter was, however, that the face

had to be washed off and only then was Riva allowed to play with her doll.

If there is some doubt of a prohibition, in whatever it may be, it must be avoided. There is no compromise, where *Yiddishkeit* is concerned. It can be very difficult but does not the הוה עז כנמר, קל כנשר רץ כצבי, וגבור say, “שלחן ערוך, “כארי, לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים”. “Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer and strong as a lion to do the will of your Father who is in heaven!”

I too longed for dolls to play with. Sometimes, when we went to the park, I used to watch little girls with dolls and I used to be filled with wonder. What joy it must be, to have a real beautiful doll like that! I believe I accepted that this kind of enjoyment was unavailable and I didn't have any sleepless nights over it. Besides, I did have some substitutes.

Riva was excellent at sewing from a very early age and she started experimenting in making little soft dolls for me. To make the arms and legs more realistic she used to insert little sticks in them, which was fine, but then the arms seemed very stiff and unyielding. So, for the next doll she made a break in the middle of the stick, enabling that way, the arms to bend in the middle, in the place of the elbow. I thought this was a brilliant idea. It was not like having real dolls, but dolls they were nevertheless, and everyone admired her skills.

Now, to return to my father ע"ה. Reading some episodes about his uncompromising ways, one can get the impression of a very strict and possibly hard man. But that was not the case at all. He was only unbending with regard to *Yiddishkeit*. The observance of *mitzvos* had to be carried out meticulously, for the *mitzvos* are the King's command. But he was also an extremely caring father, who was absolutely devoted to his family. No, I'm not wording it correctly. Because he was such a very caring father, that was exactly the

reason why he expected such a high standard of *yiras shomayim* from his family.

Let me tell you another little story, which, I believe, will show a little, the deep love he had for his children. But before that, let me acquaint you, how the problem of *shaatness* was dealt with, in our home. I don't need to tell you how severe the prohibition of *shaatness* is. Nowadays, we take our things to the *shaatness* laboratory, but in Russia, there was no such commodity. Jumpers (sweaters), socks, scarves and such, were fairly easy to examine at home, but coats were much more difficult and needed more expert attention. So, unless a coat was made by a reliable tailor or under supervision, it could not be worn. Instead, one could wear cotton coats, padded with cotton wool. Riva had such a coat.

Unfortunately, due to its old age, it was torn beyond repair. It looked quite ghastly, because the cotton wool filling was protruding in many places. For some time, Riva was quite unaware of its unattractive appearance, until one day, she caught a glimpse of her reflection in a shop window. (By this, you will gather, that our home was not exactly a "mirror palace". There was just one small cracked mirror, too high on the wall, for a little girl to see herself in.)

Anyway, she must have been in a bending position by that shop window and just managed to see the reflection of her coat in the window and thought she was seeing a shaggy animal of some kind. That illusion was short-lived as she realised, horror of horrors, that the "shaggy animal" was indeed herself. Shocked, she raced home, pulled off the offending garment and flung it on the floor.

"I'm never wearing that thing again!" she declared, and she didn't.

So now, she had no coat to go out in. Soroh ה"י, had quite a nice coat, made from mother's old jacket. Riva wanted that coat, but it was Soroh's, so she wore it only when Soroh didn't need to go out. Inevitably, there came a time when they both needed to go out at the same time. This was on a special occasion, our cousin's *Bar Mitzvah*. Riva however, had no coat to wear? She absolutely refused to wear her old monstrosity of a coat and the atmosphere at home was getting overheated.

In the middle, Father ה"י walked in. He wanted to know what all the excitement was about. After being told he sides with Riva.

"Yes," he says, "she is right, she cannot go out with that coat".

This does not solve the problem, but Father has an idea. Instead of wearing a coat, let Riva wear two thick jumpers.

Riva refuses again, "Everyone will laugh at me, because everyone else is wearing a coat."

Father, again, saved the situation, "Look, everyone knows that it is a father's duty to provide for his family and to make sure that his little girl has a coat for the winter." "I," continued Father, "will walk, holding your hand all the way, and everyone will see and realise that I am your father and that I am the one who's fault it is that you have no coat. Therefore, everyone will laugh at me and not at you."

Riva accepted this reasoning and happily they all set off for the *Bar Mitzvah*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Telling this story about a coat, cannot help reminding me of my own coat.

When we lived in the old apartment, our *Shabbos cholent* used to be on a "kerosene", a paraffin appliance which served as a kind of slow cooker. The *cholent* had to be covered with something thick for extra warmth and it

The Russian winters were very severe. In order to keep one's feet warm, everyone wore "valinkes" a kind of felt boot. The felt was manufactured out of all kinds of wool remnants and that being the case, my father ה"ע felt that there was a strong suspicion of *shaatnez*, since other bits of fabric, including linen, might easily have got mixed in, so we were not allowed to wear them.<sup>3</sup>

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was my coat, which was assigned for this purpose. One *Shabbos*, my coat caught fire. I won't go into details of this incident, but the fact was that I was left without a coat.

Eventually, my mother ה"ע made me a coat herself, with the help of a dressmaker. It wasn't an easy task and she put a lot of effort into it and I enjoyed the attention which I got through it. For some reason the coat didn't have a collar, I don't remember why though, maybe there was not enough material. I don't think I minded too much, I could sense the love which went into making that coat and it kept me warm. That sensing of love and feeling all aglow, I can remember it still. I have so few, memories, but they are so meaningful! So many of my childhood years were full of longing for something which was no longer there (I'm referring to my later childhood, of course). Now, I'm back to longing again, longing of a different nature "ב ה. The objects of my longing are just some distance away. I thank *Hashem* for all His *chassodim* and may our children be blessed with *kol tuv*, but family closeness seems to elude me a lot of the time and it aches.

<sup>3</sup> When being told about it, one grand-daughter asked, "Surely, it is absolutely essential to protect the children's feet from the bitter cold and that should be the first consideration?" Yes, there is no disputing the need to protect the children's feet. However, *mesiras nefesh*, means, among other things, to go without for the sake of *Yiddishkeit*. There are other ways to keep feet warm, like more than one pair of thick woollen socks or even wrapping one's feet in newspaper..... I'm sure you've never heard of keeping feet warm with newspapers. No, I don't actually remember from home, that newspapers were used for that purpose, but when I was much older and in Austria, it happened that my feet were very swollen from long exposure in the cold. My regular footwear wouldn't fit, so, my feet were carefully wrapped in newspapers and then placed in some old shoes some three sizes too big.

What I'm trying to say is that keeping strict principles can be perceived as excessive and "deviating from the 'norm'", but then, who defines what the



Father ה"ע never missed an opportunity to teach us something worthwhile, a lesson to remember. He stood by the window once, and pointed out to the children that he saw, "Here is a nice Jewish boy going to school. He is going to school and you are not. You might ask, why? Well, it's a Soviet School, teaching Soviet values which are against *Yiddishkeit*. The temptations and pitfalls are innumerable. This little boy we see through the window might be strong enough to withstand all this, but are you? In such situations as this one, the *Yetzer Hora* is quick enough to present a strong argument about the value of following someone else's example, like this little boy's. The fact is, though, are you strong enough? The *Yetzer Hora* will convince you that you are, only to trap you later, G-d forbid."

One may ask "How can you bring up children, without them going to school?" Well, let me throw some light on the subject of Russian schools and you will see for yourselves why not going to school was by far the greatest advantage for *Yiddishe* children.

First and foremost, there was the question of *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. There was school on *Shabbos* in Russian schools and if you stayed away on *Shabbos* regularly, they made endless trouble for you and used every means at their disposal,

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"norm" is? Is it the person with *mesiras nefesh* or the person who merely follows everyone else? I'll leave it to my readers to decide.

At this point I would like to address my dear grandchildren שיחי. Please children, stop long enough to take inventory of all your clothes and possessions and thank *Hashem* for everything you have with a full heart. Also, of course, thank your parents and appreciate their love and attention. May you provide them all with real *Yiddishe Chassidische nachas*.

Since writing this, I attended a *shaatnes shiur* and learned a number of interesting things on the subject. One of them was the fact that in the past, particularly in Eastern Europe, remnants of wool, were often mixed together with other fabrics, particularly with linen, and used for all kinds of garments. So, Father ה"ע, as you can see, was justified with his suspicions.

to convince the children to disobey their parents and to attend school on *Shabbos*, G-d forbid. Indeed, their arguments were so convincing and their brainwashing so persistent, that children had to be very special, to be able to withstand it. As to the parents, they were pressured and harassed continuously. What's more, they were threatened, that their children will be taken away from them, G-d forbid, unless they were to conform and send their children to school on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. There is a very good book by A. Chazan entitled "Deep in the Russian night" which deals with this subject at length.

Besides *Shabbos*, the influence of a Communist school on a nice Jewish child was extremely damaging. Children were brainwashed to believe in false values with very eloquent language. More so, children were persuaded to spy on their parents and denounce their so called "crimes" to the authorities, crimes like keeping *Yiddishkeit*. No wonder, Father ה"ע didn't let his children go to school.

I must add quickly, though, that this in fact, involved a lot of *mesiras nefesh* as I'll explain why, in the following pages ה"א.

In Soviet Russia, at that time, school started at age eight. It was, of course, compulsory. Parents who failed to send their children to school, were considered enemies of the state, since they deprived their children of their Communist Education. If one were to be discovered as not sending their children to school, they could expect a heavy prison sentence or possibly be exiled to Siberia. Father ה"ע, knowing full well the spiritual pitfalls of Soviet Education, kept his children at home, despite the danger involved. We lived in an apartment surrounded by neighbours, so suspicion had to be avoided at all costs.

I might as well mention here, that denouncing one's neighbour to the NKVD (the secret police) was very common

practice in Soviet Russia. First of all, everyone was pressured to inform on everyone else, but also, informers got privileges from the government. So you see, neighbours seeing children of school age, home all day, was asking for trouble, to say the least. As toilets were shared, the neighbours were well aware who was home during the day. A plan had to be devised to avert suspicion.

First Father ה"ע bought two school satchels. He really needed three but they were too expensive. Every school morning, before 9 a.m. the older three children left the house. Yitzchok ה"ע, went to someone else's house to learn and the two older girls to the house of Isaac Karasik. At one o'clock they came home. (School was till one for the morning shift and other children went to school in the afternoon shift.) To the neighbours, it looked like the children attended school, when in fact, they did not.

One day however, a bombshell fell, starting with the visit of Aunt Brocha. A little more family history is hereby required. My mother ה"ע, was the oldest of a large family. Their home was in a small *shtetl* called "Borzha", in the Ukraine. My *zeide* Yitzchok ה"ע, left this world at a very young age, leaving *Bobbe* with a large family of young children to rear on her own. I personally never met my *Bobbe*, a fact which grieved me a great deal. They lived very far away from us and communication was very difficult.

To raise *ehrllicher yidden* in Soviet Russia was the hardest thing in the world. With not having official religious education plus all the negative influences imaginable, which were unavoidable at all times, starting with school. But when you are a woman alone, being both father and mother to your children, how can you manage to provide them with their spiritual needs, when just the struggle to survive is more than one can cope with?

So, the two older girls, my mother ה"ע and her sister Fruma ה"ע, stayed *frum*, but unfortunately, the rest of the children did not. I really know hardly anything else about my mother's family except that there was a brother who was a writer.<sup>4</sup>

The youngest child in my mother's family was Brocha and she is the one who came to visit us in Leningrad. Having been brought up with Soviet Education values, our lifestyle was completely beyond her. She did not even begin to understand the things that mattered to us most. What affected her more than anything else, however, was the fact that the children didn't go to school. When she asked Mother for the reason, Mother ה"ע didn't feel inclined to entering a discussion and answered simply "Because my husband does not let."

No more was said on the subject but a week later, after her departure, Mother ה"ע received a letter from her sister. In the letter, Brocha wrote how much she pitied her, because her children didn't go to school. After much thought, she writes, she decided she must do her a "favour" and help her send her children to school. So, she adds, she went to the NKVD and informed them about her brother-in-law, who insisted on keeping his children at home.

This letter, caused a great panic and alarm. Father ה"ע thought quickly and devised a plan of action. First he bought a large post (mail) box for our personal mail, so that the neighbours should not see when the inevitable official looking summons will arrive. Next he enrolled the older three children into school, each one, into a different school. I, myself, was not yet of school age.

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<sup>4</sup> In my teens, if I ever was successful at writing an essay, which happened occasionally, I used to fancy myself as having some of my uncle's gift.

The reason for the different schools was that when they were absent on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, it would not be obvious that they were all doing it together deliberately, but rather, it looked like they were sick.

As the children were about to start school, Father ה"ע, told them all, to ask to be excused very frequently. They did not understand the reason for it, but they did as they were told. Next, he impressed upon them, that on no account were they to deny their Judaism, not even under threat of being shot, G-d forbid.

Then there was another matter. The Russian national anthem, contained a particular phrase, which conveyed the most blatant denial of *Hashem*, G-d forbid. The custom was, to sing this anthem daily in school and when that particular phrase was sung, everyone would rise to their feet, as a mark of reverence to that philosophy. Father ה"ע forbade his children to sing the anthem and to rise for the above mentioned phrase. Instead of singing they could move their lips, pretending to sing, and as for not rising to their feet when everyone else did, they would rise earlier or remain standing throughout the singing, so that it would not be that they were rising specially to honour the denial of *Hashem*, G-d forbid.

The children, of course, complied with all Father's wishes.

Meanwhile, the dreaded summons for Father to appear before the NKVD arrived. On the day of his appointment with the מלאכי חבלה (NKVD or more literally "destroying angels"), the children stayed home and everyone was saying *Tehilim* and crying, begging *Hashem* for Father's safe return.

When Father was questioned by the NKVD he told them the following tale "I have a very weak bladder and unfortunately my children have inherited my condition. It

means they have to run to the bathroom at very frequent intervals. Because of all this, the children have always refused to go to school, being very embarrassed to reveal their weakness in front of other children. Knowing full well what they were talking about, since I have the same problem, I sympathised with them and let them have their own way. Recently though, I realised how they are growing up not knowing anything, so I put my foot down and said ‘Enough is enough!’ I made them all go to school and now they attend regularly.”

My father’s explanation went down very well ה”ב and he was released. When he returned home, he was met with great relief and joy. This was truly a *Yeshua*.

The children continued going to school but stayed home for *Shabbos*, of course. The day off at school, was every sixth day, instead of once a week. This means that each time, it was a different day of the week. So, occasionally, *Shabbos* would be the day off and that was a help. Still, whenever another day of the week was the “day off” which was the majority of the time, it meant that they took off *Shabbos* too. The next day they all came to school with some limb bandaged and a note explaining why they missed *Shabbos* because of ill-health.

For a while this worked, but then the schools started insisting that a note from a parent was not enough, they had to bring a doctor’s certificate. On top of all this, *Pessach* was approaching and Father ה”ג was at his wits end how to find an excuse, for his children to stay home for the entire eight days of *Pessach*.

One morning, Riva woke up and Yitzchok ה”ד noticed that her right cheek was quite swollen. Later, Mother noticed that her right arm and leg were also swollen. Something was obviously wrong. Mother took her to the clinic and they said they suspected inflammation of the kidneys. They took her

specimen for testing to get a more accurate diagnosis. Of course, Riva's illness was very upsetting and worrying, but it did have a practical side to it. Father ה"ג, forever resourceful could see a way to keep his children home from school at least during *Pessach*.

He organised things as follows. First, he called for a private doctor to come to the house. The doctor also suspected inflammation of the kidneys and took Riva's specimen and sent it off to the lab. The results came back positive. It was inflammation of the kidney and among other things, a long stay in bed was required. The doctor wrote out a certificate that Riva can not attend school due to illness.

The next day, Father ה"ג, arranged for a second private doctor to visit. He told Riva to tell the doctor that her name was Soroh. She, of course, complied. So, the second doctor duly wrote out a certificate for school absence, in Soroh's name.

On the third day, yet a third doctor came. This time, it was a bit more tricky. After the doctor examined his patient, Father ה"ג, gave him a generous tip on top of his fees and whispered something into the doctor's ear, as a result of which, although the doctor could clearly see a female patient, he made out the necessary certificate in the name of Yitzchok.

Now all three school age children had certificates exempting them from school for a considerably long time. That took care of not having to go to school during *Pesach* and a long time afterwards.

Not only that, but twice more, doctors were called, so that certificates could be issued for other *frum* children.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I want to add a footnote to my personal memories of this whole affair. I was too young at that time, to understand all the drama that took place. What impressed me, was the doctor's attire, namely his bowler hat and briefcase. The general public wore "Russian Caps". A bowler hat was worn

*Pesach* came and went and all the children were staying at home, thanks to the exemption certificates. Nevertheless, this was no time for relaxing. When children are absent from school for any length of time, the school teachers or even the headmaster (principal) are bound to pay a visit or delegate someone else to do so, to ensure there is no foul play. You will have gathered by now that education in Communist Russia, was taken most seriously and the students very carefully monitored, no absenteeism was tolerated and even a sick child had to be checked on. For this reason, our home had to be arranged in such a way that if and when a caller would appear on our doorstep, the game should not be given away. In order to best explain how this situation was tackled by my parents ״ו ן, I am drawing, below, a plan of our apartment, which I hope, will enable me to point out the various details of their complicated but clever scheme.

As mentioned earlier, we occupied a large square room and a small adjoining one. Both rooms had their own separate doors to the lobby. In addition, the large room also had a door at the back leading to the corridor. In the middle of the large room stood a large cupboard (closet) sideways, partially dividing the large room into two sections. This way, our apartment looked like a three roomed home or nearly so. In

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exclusively by the “*Inteligencia*” - high class intellectuals. It was probably the first time that I’d seen anyone dressed in that manner. My imagination went riot. I drew pictures of doctors with hats and briefcases again and again, each time improving on my previous effort. I would show off my “art” to anyone who would care to look and was thus occupied for days on end, oblivious to everyone else’s preoccupation.

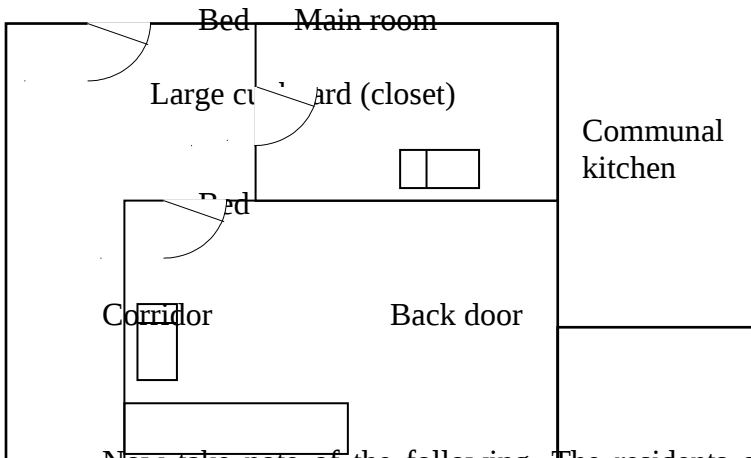
When I wasn’t drawing, I was reading. I used to borrow the older children’s school text books and read them. I cannot remember how I learned to read, probably taught myself, even though I could barely speak the language, since, at home we only spoke *Yiddish*. I didn’t understand what I was reading but persisted just the same and occasionally tried to learn poems by heart.



each of the so called rooms, was placed a bed for one of the older three children. Now please study the plan and then continue reading.

Apartment  
Entrance

Corridor      Bed      small  
   bedroom



Now take note of the following. The residents of the apartment building did not have their own bell at the entrance of the building. Instead, each resident would respond to a specific number of rings. Family "A" would respond to one ring, family "B" to two etc. Our code, so to speak, was three rings, which meant that every time the entrance bell rang three times it meant that the caller was for us. We would not know who the caller was, it may have been someone from any of the three schools to which the children attended. It may have also be a mistake altogether. Someone may have just pressed the

bell once too many, or once too few. We were unable, however, to afford to take chances with so much at stake.

Now imagine, the entrance bell rings three times and all the children are home supposedly sick. If it is someone from Riva's school, no problem. She is unfortunately confined to a bed in the small bedroom. It has its own door so the caller need not see two more school age children at home, during school hours.

But if someone comes from Yitzchok's ה"ט or Soroh's ה"ט school and finds them up and about at home during school hours that's a very dangerous situation indeed and who knows what untold trouble this could cause, G-d forbid. So, the solution was that each time the bell sounded three times Soroh and Yitzchok ה"ט, also had to jump into bed and pretend to be ill. You will notice, in the plan, that each of the three older children's beds was placed in such a way as its proximity did not afford a view to the other bed and its occupant. So Riva's visitor was shown into her room through its own door, Soroh's visitor, at the back of the room behind the cupboard, was shown in through the back door and Yitzchok's visitor in the front of the room was shown in through the front entrance. The visitor saw the child he or she wished to check on duly in bed and a certificate was produced to testify that the said child was indeed not well enough to attend school.

I do hope I explained the situation well enough to be understood. Can you imagine, though, the immense pressure of having to jump into bed at every door bell ring? What's more, they could never go out for fear of the neighbours noticing them away from school during school hours and informing on them.

As the weather became warmer and spring was giving way to summer, being cooped up at home became absolutely unbearable. What we needed was an apartment without

neighbours and we needed it quick. I don't want to go into details about the difficulties of finding such an apartment, as it would be too complicated to explain the system which was prevalent then. To cut a long story short, after a lot of effort, Father ה"ע, succeeded in getting one.

The Motzkin Family had grown up children, thus, they did not experience the school problems and living among neighbours was not an issue. Our apartment, consisting of two rooms, was better than theirs and more spacious. This was a great advantage to them. What they had though was a one room apartment and no neighbours, which was what we were after. So, we exchanged apartments to our mutual advantage.

True, our now "new" apartment was much inferior to the old apartment, it was much smaller, damp and generally in bad condition. We did however, have no more neighbours and we children stayed home and did not go to school. For myself, I only have good memories of our "new home". I often think that *Hashem* has mixed in a special kind of delicate rose coloured "paint" into my memories of "home". The hard times, I remember, but faintly, yet the pleasant experiences are the ones which keep surfacing and I thank *Hashem* for this precious gift. (All this, of course, applies only to my pre-war memories.) So, this damp and ugly one roomed apartment was our new home and I just loved it.

As explained earlier, the reason for our moving was, in order not to have neighbours who would report to the authorities, that we children are not going to school. For myself, I enjoyed life in the new apartment for a different reason. I didn't like our old neighbours generally, but in particular, a teenage boy called "Grisha". He continuously used to frighten me by making funny faces at me every time our paths happened to meet. Seeing the "convenience" was a shared one, I had occasion to run into him pretty often and was really very scared of him. He was the shadow of my life. Now,

in our new apartment, no Grisha and no other unpleasant neighbours. I was happy with my lot.

Another attraction in our new apartment was a large gas stove, as opposed to a paraffin contraption, which served as a cooker in the old place. I used to think the gas stove was the peak of modernity.

Let me tell you a happy little story which I remember, regarding the gas stove.

One Friday afternoon, my mother ה"ע had made the dough for the *Challos* and when it has risen sufficiently and she was busily getting ready to bake, the gas supply was suddenly cut off and did not come on again till fairly near to candle lighting time. Now, my mother ה"ע thought quickly. There just wasn't enough time left to bake the *Challos* in the conventional way, she had to find a quicker way out. She half filled a saucepan with oil, (oil was then cheap and plentiful) then cutting pieces of dough, she deep fried them the way one does with doughnuts.

I do not remember what the rest of the family thought about having "doughnuts" instead of *Challos* for *Shabbos* but I, was quite delighted. This was really a treat for me. Oh, not just that, but what a clever mummy I had. Because of a shortage, she managed to produce something even better than the intended article.

Life was full of small joys for me, it seems.

Father ה"ע disliked one particular thing in the new apartment and that was the radio. It was wired right into the wall and therefore he was not allowed to remove it, since it was government property. He was, however, very tempted to do so, declaring "If only I could uproot it, wires and all!"

To him, this radio represented secularity, which had no right to be in our *Yiddishe Chassidische* home and he absolutely detested its unwelcome presence.

Now, let me go back to Riva and her state of health.

As a matter of fact, her health continued to give my parents great concern. She was on a salt free diet, but it didn't seem to work. Well, in truth, the diet was ineffective for a very good reason. As Riva was required to stay on a salt free diet she would crave after salty foods. So, choosing a time when no one was around, she would creep out of bed and help herself to whatever sharp and salty foods she could lay her hands on, like pickles, herring and the like. This invariably resulted in the swelling of her cheek and in general worsening her condition. No one realised the reason for her health deterioration. She herself was too young to understand the harm she was causing herself by this seemingly innocent activity.

One day, she remembers, lying in bed, with a table fairly near her bed. At the table sat Father ה"י, writing with great concentration. As he finished writing he turned to her and said "You see my child, I've just written a letter to the *Rebbe* (the *Frierdiker Rebbe* ז"ל) about the state of your health, asking him for a *brocho* for your speedy recovery. I cannot post (mail) the letter in the normal manner, so here is a *Sefer* of the *Rebbe*, I'm putting it between these pages and I trust in *Hashem* that the message will be transmitted to him and a *brocho* forthcoming, please G-d, in due course."

Riva was overwhelmed by a number of different emotions. First, she never realised before, the depth of her father's feeling for her and his great concern for her health. Next, she felt deep remorse for cheating on the diet and thus causing him so much pain. She was also greatly puzzled by it all. What is going to happen? Will the *Rebbe* come and take the letter or will the *Sefer* with the letter in it fly to the *Rebbe*,

or what? One thing was sure, she was not going to cheat on her diet again, ever. True to her resolve, she never did.

A few days later, Father came home in extremely high spirits. Excitedly, he told the family of an encounter with another *chassid*, whom he knew many years ago. The said *chassid*, asked Father, why he was looking so downcast and worried. In reply, Father ה"ע, told him about his little girl's worrying state of health. The *chassid* made a helpful suggestion. In (Russian) Georgia, grew a certain kind of rose, whose young unopened, rosebuds were crushed and used for medicinal purposes. They were known to be good for a number of ailments and the *chassid* knew for a fact, that they were used also for kidney trouble. He gave Father the address from where they could be obtained by post (mail).

Father ה"ע, lost no time in ordering the precious rosebuds and after a certain time, a parcel duly arrived containing the rosebuds. The rosebuds had to be brewn, very much like tea, and given to the patient to drink. It worked, thank G-d, within a comparatively short time. Riva was cured.

The letter to the *Rebbe* brought about the desired result, namely, the *Rebbe's brocho*. Father's trust in *Hashem* and his *Rebbe* were duly rewarded.

I sincerely hope, that by recording all the above stories of our father ה"ע, I have managed to present the nature of his character and the extent of his *mesiras nefesh* for *Yiddishkeit*.

There is still one little story, which I didn't manage to fit in before. It's a story we can all learn from and it deals with the *chinuch* of children.

A certain lady, well known to our family, lived on the outskirts of Leningrad. One day, she invited our oldest sister Soroh ה"ע to spend a few days with her for a little holiday. Of

course, permission had to be obtained first and they decided to approach Father together. Surprisingly, Father ה"ע, allowed her to go. Overjoyed, the woman remarked to Soroh quietly, on the side, "We're going to have a lovely time together, pay a few visits to the cinema, etc. and...." She didn't get any further.

"Sorry, I've changed my mind, she cannot stay with you." Father was polite but firm.

The woman tried to save the situation, "I didn't really mean it, I was just joking. Anyway, you've made me see that you're against it, so I'll comply with your wishes and we will not go to the cinema. You can trust me not to involve your daughter in anything against your approval."

It was to no avail. Father wouldn't agree. Just the thought of her first intentions was reason enough not to let his child stay with her. She obviously was not a fit companion for his daughter. The *neshomos* of *yiddishe kinderlech*, are so pure and that purity has to be preserved and not allowed to be contaminated, G-d forbid, through undesirable entertainment or even the slightest doubt of such and even from people who pursue such pastimes.

This then, is the *chinuch* which Father ה"ע provided for us and which was strong enough to see us through the tragedies of the war years and any other hardships which life presented us with. Thank G-d, we were eventually united with our relatives and I'm sure, in our parents' ה"ע *zechus*, we were privileged to continue the golden chain of *Yiddishkeit* and pass it on to the next generations. I'm equally sure, that it is the high standard of Father's *chinuch* which enabled us to cope with the various challenges to *Yiddishkeit* during the war years, as will be told in Part Two.

Now, while still on the subject of birthdays, the last little story of part one is my own sixth birthday, which I remember with much pleasure. It is also the only birthday that I remember at all, of my early childhood. No, I did not have a birthday party. (Who could think of parties in those difficult years?) But I do remember feeling happy. I remember a table and Father ה"ע standing near it. He must have just finished *davenning* for I vaguely remember his *Teffilin*. Father ה"ע looked up, saw me there and his face lit up. Beaming, he announced joyfully that it was my sixth birthday. Just that, but it was enough. I felt my father was pleased with me and I was all aglow. My cup was full!

## **Part Two** **The War Years**

On the twenty second of June 1941, at 4 p.m. war broke out in Russia. Whereas food was never plentiful before the war and one invariably had to queue (stand in line) for everything, now with the start of war, rations came into force immediately. To begin with, each person could obtain only 250 grams (6 ounces) of black bread on his rations and a small amount of groceries.

Among the groceries, were also some *treifa* products. Father ה"ע, tried to have the *treifa* articles changed for rice or other grains. The *treifa* meat products were actually worth more on the market than the grain and some people made a business out of these kind of exchanges. One young man, who found it profitable to engage in this sort of business, took our *treifa* products from us with the promise of bringing us some rice in exchange, the next day. The days went by and the young man did not turn up.

A week later, more *treifa* products were allocated to each person. Our friend showed up again, full of apologies, he'll take our *treifa* stuff now and tomorrow, he will bring us



some exchange food for two weeks. He was believed and given the *treifa* food also on this second occasion. I'm afraid we saw no more of him, he never returned to us, nor did he forward any food to us for our exchange, it's obvious we were tricked.

Before recounting the events which followed, I want to go back a little, right to the very beginning of the war. When Father ה"ע turned forty five years old, he lost no time in going to the war office to obtain a "white ticket". The "white ticket" was an exemption certificate from the army, which used to be issued at age forty five. The day after he got this coveted paper, Stalin proclaimed the new decree that "white tickets" were to be issued at age fifty. Since Father ה"ע was already in possession of this ticket, the new decree did not affect him.

People were fleeing Leningrad in large numbers. However, only men who possessed a "white ticket" were allowed to leave Leningrad. This was to ensure that the men were available if they were called up into the army. Many of the men who did not have a "white ticket" fled anyway but under disguise. It was a very risky undertaking. Father ה"ע was helping many people in their evacuation endeavours, but what about himself? He for one, was free to leave undisguised, why did he not leave Leningrad?

To answer this question, let's look back at the pre-war years.

I hope I described to the best of my ability, the great lengths to which Father ה"ע went, in order not to have to send his children to school and be contaminated, G-d forbid, by the falsehoods of Communist propaganda. Also for the short time they did go to school, how he kept control over them and over their *Yiddishkeit*. Now, if they left Leningrad, who knows what lay in store for them? How will they be able to keep *Shabbos*, *Kashrus* etc.? As regards to staying away from school on *Shabbos*, it is more feasible in a large city like Leningrad than

in a small place, where everyone knows everyone else's business.

Evacuation was spiritually too risky, so we stayed in Leningrad.

The Germans surrounded Leningrad and bombed it relentlessly. One day, they let loose incendiary bombs on the food stores and they went up in flames.

Famine reigned supreme. The bread rations went down drastically, to 125 grams (3 ounces) per person, per day. Winter set in very severe. No food, no heating, only bombs were in abundance. The streets were strewn with corpses. It was devastation at its peak.

In the book "In the Shadow of the Kremlin", Reb Boruch Shiffrin ה"ע, describes the situation in Leningrad during the blockade, much better than I ever can.

Father ה"ע fell sick.

Let me introduce you to two new words, "Makucha" and "Duranda". When making oil from sunflower seeds, they are pressed to the limit, to extract every bit of its oil and then you are left with a very hard substance, which, before the war, used to be fed to the cattle.

Well, that hard substance is called Makucha. Some were made from seeds inclusive of their shells and those were very hard and rough indeed. Some were from just the seeds themselves and those were of a better and finer quality. The softer, finer ones, were called Duranda, and the coarser ones Makucha.

Once the famine set in, makucha and duranda became part of our diet, mainly the harsh and hard makucha. These so

called foods did terrible things to one's stomach and were very constipating. Father ה"ע, was particularly affected by them and I well remember his loud groans of pain.

Another feature and ordeal of daily life was the queuing up for one's daily bread ration in subzero freezing temperatures. You had to start queuing at 6 a.m.

If you were negligent enough to go to the shops nearer to opening time, the chances were that you'd be left without bread that day, meaning without a lifeline. The shops did not stock enough bread to meet everyone's rations, it was a matter of "first come first served", unless you were unfortunate enough to be pushed away, G-d forbid. Our two older girls took it in turn to queue up for our daily rations.

There was a lot of thievery about, famine certainly does not bring out the best in human nature. Some people devised a kind of thin rod, which they skilfully plunged into people's shopping baskets, hooked it into the bread and then stealthily transferred it into their own baskets. One Friday our Shabbos bread disappeared in that manner, just two tiny pieces were left and we used those for *Lechem Mishnah*. Someone donated to us a very nice piece of duranda for which we were very grateful.

Father ה"ע became weaker, he was now confined to bed and was often delirious. *Yud Tes Kislev* came, father's last in this world.

I heard the following story from Reb Peretz Beresin שיחי' the father of Reshe Chayne. Reb Peretz and his father and a couple more Chassidim decided to spend *Yud Tes Kislev* with our father ה"ע, having heard that he was sick. One of them managed to obtain a small bottle of *mashkeh*, another one got hold of some herring and even some latkes and they made their way to our apartment. They found our home dark and bare and

absolutely literally freezing. Father ה"ע was in bed, delirious and oblivious to his surroundings.

They went out again to try and obtain some heating material. After a great deal of effort, they found, in a warehouse, an old wooden door. Despite the risk involved, (they could have received a severe prison sentence for this) they laboriously *shlepped* it to their destination, converted it into firewood and proceeded to heat our home. The room becoming a bit warmer, they approached our father ה"ע and calling him by his name, announced, "Today is *Yud Tes Kislev*".

The *Yud Tes Kislev* call penetrated his consciousness and he woke up. Not just that, but he actually managed to sit up and take part in the *farbrengen*, which lasted for a lengthy period. Thus, just over three days before departing this world and being mortally ill, the fire of *Chassidus* within him overcame even the shadow of the *Malach Hamoves*. *Yud Tes Kislev* is *Chag Hageulah* and we know that each *Yom Tov* had its own spiritual *kochos* which are revealed on that particular day.<sup>6</sup>

That *Yud Tes Kislev* was celebrated at a time when people were collapsing from starvation, yet a *farbrengen* had to be arranged and celebrated despite the tragic circumstances because the spiritual revelations of *Yud Tes Kislev* had to be

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<sup>6</sup> As I'm writing this, I'm reminded of a talk given by Rabbi Gordon on *Rosh Chodesh Kislev* 5754. I would like to quote just one point:

It says in connection with *Purim*, הַיָּמִים הֵם נִזְכָּרִים וְנֶעֱשִׂים "Those days are remembered and done." What does this mean? One explanation given is, that by the fact that these days are remembered, celebrated and rejoiced on, through all that, וְנֶעֱשִׂים, - they will be done. Blessings and spiritual revelations will be manifested on that day. The words נִזְכָּרִים וְנֶעֱשִׂים were said with reference to *Purim*, but it applies to every *Yom Tov*. Rabbi Gordon said it with reference to *Rosh Chodesh Kislev*, and I cannot help feeling that we could apply it to the *Yud Tes Kislev* about which I have just written.

brought down to revive the flagging spirits. So, the *chassidim* came to our home to *farbreng*.

Before the war, we had many *farbrengens* at home and they came again, to renew and re-stoke the *chassidische* flame. Just the sound of the words *Yud Tes Kislev* was enough to arouse my father from his delirium and enabled him to take part in the *farbreng*. *Yud Tes Kislev, Chag Hageulah*, the festival of redemption.

Shortly after *Yud Tes Kislev*, Father ה"ע was "redeemed" from his suffering. Only *Hashem* knows why he had to leave this world at such premature age. We are not supposed to ask why. *Hashem's* ways are beyond our intellect. Our job is to follow in Father's footsteps and transmit the values he taught us, to our offspring, in short, to keep his teachings alive.

זכותו יגון עלינו May his merit protect us.

Shortly before leaving us, Father ה"ע told our mother ע ה", that in the event of more *treifa* products being given out on our rations, we should indeed partake of it because of *Pikuach Nefesh* (danger of losing life). I cannot imagine, what it must have cost him to give such instructions.

I'm not sure, if in the end, there were more of the above mentioned products available or not, I have a feeling that none were given out again.

On the 23rd of *Kislev*, Father's suffering ended. His pure *neshomo* was reunited with his Maker. Riva was first on the scene. She woke up in the middle of the night and noticed Father ה"ע, lying on his bed looking very strange, so she woke up Mother ה"ע, to come and see. Mother was crouching by the bed, begging Father *mechilah* (forgiveness) and Riva could not understand. What did it all mean?

She woke up the older children, “Something is wrong with Daddy, but I don’t know what.” Soon the room was full of weeping. “We no longer have a father.” Riva couldn’t understand it.

Yitzchok ה”ע was very weak and bedridden. Now, he wanted to get up and asked Riva to help him. She brought him *negel vasser* and tried very hard to help him up but his arms and legs would not obey, he just could not lift them.

Mother ה”ע came over crying, “We no longer have a father.”

Father’s face was now covered. Still, Riva couldn’t take it in. “He is here in the room, how could we not have him?”

The next day, it was Soroh’s turn to stand in the line for the daily bread rations. She was not feeling well, but nevertheless, she went. While queuing up patiently, her mind was completely overtaken by our tragic loss and she did not notice her hand loosening its grip on the coupons she was holding and dropping them on the ground. Only when it was her turn to produce them in the shop, did she realise what happened. It was then already too late. Some sharp eyed shopper had picked them up and quickly disappeared. Heartbroken and sobbing uncontrollably, Soroh returned home.

“Because of me, no one will have what to eat,” she cried bitterly.

Mother ה”ע tried her best to comfort and reassure her that it was not her fault. “*Hashem* willed it that way,” she insisted repeatedly, no way could Soroh be held responsible. This was something from *Hashem*.

Our cousin Chana ה”ע, came over and brought a little rice in a cup, to provide some sustenance for our breadless

family. The rice was cooked and made into a watery thin soup, each portion having just a few odd ricicles floating in white liquid. Oh, but how this was appreciated. I think it was Yitzchok ה"ע who exclaimed: "Today we're having a feast *k'yad hamelech!*"

The next day, Chana ה"ע came with a little "kissell", a kind of fruit soup without fruit, it's like pink liquid custard. Of course, not a morsel of bread was there in the house. On the third day, Chana ה"ע never came, she had nothing left to bring. It was our Aunty Fruma ה"ע who came on the third day. She used to live on the outskirts of Leningrad and came as soon as she heard our tragic news. She had great difficulty getting to us, but made it just the same.

When she heard about the loss of the coupons, she immediately insisted that mother send the girls to the office responsible for the issue of coupons, to declare our loss and hopefully obtain new ones.

At that time, Soroh ה"ע was already feeling very ill, the famine had taken its toll. The heartbreak over the loss of the coupons, no doubt also affected her condition for the worse. As a result she was in very poor shape. When Aunty Fruma was persuading Mother ה"ע to send her to the office, Mother did not want Soroh to go, as this would imply that she was responsible for the current situation, which, she was sure, she was not. So Mother said, "Leave the girls in peace, it is quite pointless to subject them to the hardship of going to the office when it is not very likely that they will be believed. I've heard of many cases of people losing coupons, but never of them getting replacements."



Bluma Shapiro ע"ה with children (left to right)  
Yitzchok ע"ה, Riva שתחי' and Soroh ע"ה.





Riva 'שתחי' with Reb Zalman Shimon and Rebetzin Tziva Dvorkin ע"ה.



Rebetzin Tziva Dvorkin ע"ה with Riva's sons (left to right) Yeruchim, Benny, Levi Yitzchok, Shaya and Mendel.

Aunty Fruma started shouting, “Bluma, the children have not had any bread for three days! Today is only the thirteenth of December, what will you do till next month?”

Mother’s reply was cool and calm, “*Boruch Hashem*, we still have water in the tap.”

Indeed, many families were not fortunate enough to have running water, because the water in their pipes froze and they had to trudge some distance, in the snow, to obtain their daily water requirements. Our father ה"ע, before taking ill, instructed us to always keep the tap running during this freezing weather or else the water will freeze.

You must understand that despite the severity of the winter, our home was absolutely unheated. Thanks to our father’s foresight, we did indeed, have running water. Our mother ה"ע, who in better times, was willing to risk imprisonment, so that her children should have better nourishment (see Part One) now, when there was not a morsel of bread or any other food in the house, or likely to be for some time, had it in her to say “*Boruch Hashem*” with confidence, for having running water.

This “*Boruch Hashem*” made a very profound and lasting impression on Riva. All through the various hardships and deprivations of future years, this exalted “*Boruch Hashem*” gave her strength and encouragement to overcome all the problems and difficulties which life had presented her with. Still today, the power of this “*Boruch Hashem*” is just as effective as it was all those years ago and its message just as clear, “Always remember to thank Hashem with all your heart, for what you have and what you are.”

To go back to Aunty Fruma, she was not prepared to give up and let the family perish, G-d forbid, without bread. She took Soroh on the side and told her quietly, “Of course,

losing the rations was not your fault, but if you agreed to go to the office to try and get coupon replacements, it would show the family that you care and are trying your best for them. The goodwill it will create is worth the effort.”

This approach worked and Soroh ה”ע agreed to go. Three of us went, Aunty Fruma, Soroh and myself. Aunty Fruma and Soroh were very swollen from starvation while I, probably presented the child touch, namely a little girl with no bread whatsoever, is surely a subject for pity. *Boruch Hashem* it worked, we were actually believed and were issued new coupons. For those of us for whom it was *bashert* (destined) to survive, this was a lifeline, while the others, *Hashem* chose to take unto Him.

After our father ה”ע departed this world, our Yitzchok ה”ע was already making plans for all of us to leave Leningrad and flee to some safer place in order to survive. Mother ה”ע had to stop him gently, “First let’s try to leave our beds, before we try to leave the city.”

As it was, Yitzchok ה”ע was already bedridden and Mother ה”ע could only walk very slowly, step by painful step, only around the room. Soon she stopped walking altogether and kept to her bed. Then, she stopped eating.

Again, our cousin Chana ה”ע, who herself was starving, came to help us out. She was a widow with two handicapped children, but despite her own troubles, she found time and strength (her very last strength) to visit us daily and do whatever was essential for trying to preserve life.

Yitzchok ה”ע needed to be taken to the hospital and Chana ה”ע took him on a sleigh, pulling him herself all the way in the freezing temperature and hampered by the snow. A week later, she did the same for Soroh, again in the same manner.

One day, Tzivvia [Dvorkin] ה"ע, Chana's sister, came over with very sad news. She and Chana were having a whispered debate, whether they should tell Mother, that Yitzchok had passed away. Rightly, they decided against it. Anyway, by that time, Mother ה"ע could no longer hear.

It was the 11th of *Teves*. Riva was lying on a folding bed, alongside Mother's bed, watching her. She saw and heard our mother ה"ע, exhaling her last breath.

At this point, I want to describe my own memories, even though they are not very clear.

I have a faint recollection of a bed, alongside Mother's bed and I know that Mother too, has left us. On that second bed, Riva is lying and sobbing and I am lying behind her. In my fuzzy memory, it seems to me, like Soroh ה"ע, is also on the bed crying, but that is not possible, for she was already in hospital at the time. I do remember more than one person crying and presume it was Auntie Fruma ה"ע.

I remember thinking, "They are crying and I am not, why?" I felt guilty but I could not cry. How could I when I could not accept the magnitude of our misfortune. In my mind, a mother and children belonged together, I could not envisage life for a little girl without a mother, it was just unthinkable, so something within me would not accept the reality of that situation. Even though I was generally aware that death is seemingly a rather final thing, at the same time, I could not accept the fact of not having a mother again.

The longing for *Moshiach*, was very prevalent in our home as Father ה"ע, continuously talked about him and awaited him daily. I knew, of course, that *Moshiach's* arrival will be followed by *Techiyas Hamaisim*. This thought now gave me strength. I clutched onto that knowledge, with the

despair of a drowning person clutching onto anything, even a straw. I decided that Mother was leaving us but temporarily, this must be it, how else can life go on without a mother.<sup>7</sup>

After mother's passing, the room became very silent and gloomy. The sense of loss and grief were quite overwhelming and unbearable. Just to lighten the atmosphere a little, Riva put on the radio. A merry tune announced the new year, 1942.

It jarred her nerves and she switched it off angrily.

The next day, it was Riva's and my turn to go to the hospital. Chana came again to take us. Auntie Fruma ה"ע made us a hot soup out of makucha, to strengthen us for the journey. With the two of us in the sleigh, Chana ה"ע had no strength to pull us. She asked Riva to get out and walk in order to lighten her burden. Riva did so, but her feet wouldn't listen to her, she had no strength to walk.

Back she sat on the sleigh and Chana started pulling again, with her very last strength. She walked very, very slowly, step by step and didn't reach the hospital till nightfall.

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<sup>7</sup> A couple of years ago, Nochum שיחי' and Tzippy [ה"ע] with their young children, spent *Pessach* with us. During the course of their stay, Tzippy was telling me about her cousin's children שיחיו. Moshe Shagalow שיחי' was married to Tzippy's cousin and a very special cousin she was. She passed away, leaving several young orphans behind. At the time of Tzippy telling me about it, the oldest child, a girl, was about eight years old. She was telling me how that girl is davenning and really waiting for *Moshiach's* arrival and *Techiyas Hamaisim*, so they can all be reunited with their mother ה"ע.

In fact, this little girl, reacted very strongly, when a classmate expressed herself in a way which threw doubts on *Moshiach's* imminent arrival.

I was very touched by this tale and felt I could identify with Tzippy's cousin, remembering my own experience which I have just described.

They refused to admit us, telling us to come back in the morning.

Next to the hospital was a *shul*. In the shul courtyard, there were bodies stacked up, men on one side and women on the other. I don't suppose there was much danger of decay. The freezing temperature saw to that. But also because of the freezing temperature, there were no means of bringing those bodies to burial as yet. There were problems with obtaining transport and I believe they were left in the courtyard till the spring and the thaw began.

As we entered the courtyard and were confronted by this spectacle. Riva noticed Mother's body lying there with the others, not yet covered by snow. She screamed and wanted to go to her but Chana ה"ע, held her back and told her she mustn't look. Riva tried to see if she could find Father's body, but she couldn't.

Chana took us into the shul to spend the night there. The men made us comfortable by bedding us down on a large box, which was the best spot available. The rest of the men just lay down on the floor for the night. That night, two of the congregants passed away.

In the morning Chana ה"ע came back to take us to the hospital. We were admitted this time and this was the last time we saw our cousin Chana ה"ע.

In the hospital, we were bathed and put to bed.

When Riva was in bed, at last, the nurse asked her if she was comfortable and she replied that she was. The nurse then left her. Above her, there seemed to her, there was some kind of a light. She felt like she was falling deeper, deeper, down, down. Meanwhile, she heard a voice calling "Riva!"

Riva thought, “This must be a *malach* calling me to go to Father,” and she rejoiced at the prospect.

“I’m coming!” she thought, but what was happening, in fact, is that she was semi-conscious and in danger of completely passing out, G-d forbid.

The voice called a second time, “Riva!”

Riva thought, “That’s funny, the *malach* should know it’s me, a *malach* knows everything.”

Then she heard the voice for the third time, “Riva, why don’t you answer me?”

This time, she recognised the voice as Soroh’s. By Soroh’s persistent calling, she brought Riva back to a conscious state again and probably saved her life.

Soroh ה”ע, was happy to have Riva near her and told Riva off for not answering her straight away. They talked to each other for some time. The first thing Soroh wanted to know, was about Mother ה”ע. Riva had to tell her the truth. Then Riva asked her about Yitzchok ה”ע and Soroh told her that he had passed away too.

Meanwhile, the nurse came round and placed something soft and flat on my bedside table. “What is it?” Riva asked Soroh.

“Why, it’s bread,” Soroh replied.

Having been raised on black bread only, which looked very different, Riva didn’t recognise a white slice when she saw one. She was quite amazed. “Bread? Is it, is it ALL for me?”

“Of course it’s all for you,” replied Soroh.

“May I eat it?” Riva asked unbelievably.

“Of course you may eat it, if you are able to,” Soroh added.

Riva made *Hamotzee* and ate her slice of bread. New strength surged into her body. Her life was saved. Riva then asked Soroh, “What did you mean, when you said I can eat the bread if I am able to?”

Soroh thereupon explained, that she could no longer eat. Riva started shouting at her that she must eat. Mother הַ”ע stopped eating and she died.

“You must eat,” Riva insisted. But Soroh merely repeated again that she could no longer eat.

Their beds were at some distance from each other and Soroh wanted to be able to see Riva so she asked her to sit up for a while. Riva wanted to sit up but just could not manage. She was too weak. Soroh said, “Maybe Musshike can sit up for me to see her and we called her to sit up.

“I can’t,” came my reply.

Then Riva had an idea, “Why don’t you sit up Soroh, for us to see you?”

Soroh laughed, “I for sure can’t.”

So there we were, stuck to our beds. We must have slept a bit, but later that night, Riva awoke, to hear Soroh calling her, “Riva, please call the nurse for me.”



Riva did as she asked, but when the nurse came to Soroh, she gave the appearance of sleeping, so the nurse went away again.

Shortly after, Soroh called again, asking Riva to call the nurse. Again Riva shouted for the nurse and again Soroh did not respond to the nurse and appeared asleep. The nurse became angry with Riva for disturbing her for nothing and threatened to throw her out onto the snow if she did it again. Riva became very frightened, and wondered what to do if Soroh will call again. But Soroh did not call again.

Towards dawn, Riva woke up to see Soroh's bed, surrounded by white coated doctors and nurses. The main doctor asked the night nurse if there was any change in Soroh's condition during the night or if she had asked for anything or complained about anything? The nurse replied that nothing unusual had happened that night. Then the doctor said that things had to be done fast, before the children awoke. The doctors then left and the nurse remained. She wrapped Soroh ץ ן" in a sheet and carried her away.

Then Riva understood. She was envious of Soroh, for she had gone to rejoin our father ן"ץ.

Riva then decided that it would be her turn next and she looked forward to it. The next world seemed a much better place, and it beckoned to her appealingly."

I too remember Soroh ן"ץ waking up and calling to Riva to call the nurse. I was rather shocked by the sound of her voice. It was a terrible sound, not at all like her usual voice. It had crossed my mind that the end might be near, but I quickly dismissed the thought.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I would like to draw my reader's attention to a certain point. War and famine, such as described above, is not something that brings out the best in people. On the contrary, seemingly warm and close family relationships,

At some later date, during a bombing raid, some shrapnel fell into our ward. Although no one was actually hurt at that particular time, it was decided that because this particular ward was situated in a more exposed area than the other wards, it was much too dangerous and the children had to be moved to other wards. On the day that our moving took place, the last three beds to be moved were that of a boy called

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often do not withstand the ache of acute hunger and it often can be a case of first come, first grab. I vaguely remember hearing such kinds of horror stories of people's animalistic behaviour in Leningrad during that time. I'm not, G-d forbid, trying to run anyone down, I'm merely stating facts about human nature to emphasise a point further on.

We also find in *Aichah*, that during the second *Churbon*, that previously compassionate mothers actually consumed their offspring. (I believe this actually refers to one particular mother, but still it proves my point.)

Now let's look back at the pages I've just written. First, take our sister Soroh ע"ה. She went to stand in line for the daily bread, the day after our father ע"ה, passed away. She wasn't feeling well, but she still went. Despite the bitter cold and the many hours it took to get it. When, a few days later, Auntie Fruma ע"ה talked to her about going to the office to try and obtain new coupons, she was already feeling very weak, but she still went. Now, *tevadlenah lechaim* Riva 'שתח' in hospital, seeing a white slice of bread in front of her asks, "Is it all for me? Can I eat it?" I'm sure there must be many more such examples, but I'm just not aware of all the details.

This, I believe, is the result of real *chassidish chinuch*. *Ahavas Yisroel* to the point of *mesiras nefesh* for another *yid*, this is what Father ע"ה inculcated into his children. Despite the horrendous circumstances, their *yiddische eidelkeit* did not depart. Also, while on the subject, let's remember our cousin Chana ע"ה. The way she was there in our most urgent hours of need and did her very utmost for us. In fact, she probably gave her life in order to save ours. This is *mesiras nefesh* of the highest kind.

I find these thoughts very humbling.

May it be Hashem's will, that Moshiach should reveal himself in the very near future ובלע המות לנצח. There will be no more death. היקיצו וירננו. תחית המתים and there will be שוכני עפר.

Mendel B, whom we knew quite well, Riva's bed and then, mine.

Thus, the three of us became neighbours. That was the first chance I had to talk to my sister for some time and I asked her about Soroh ה"ע. She confirmed my suspicions that she was no longer in the world of the living and then she also told me about Yitzchok ה"ע.

The food rations, in the hospital, were slightly higher than for the public at large. Slowly, our health improved. However, Riva never really realised that she was out of danger. Having suffered so much loss as well as witnessing death quite frequently in the hospital, death seemed an accepted occurrence. She had no way of knowing she was actually out of danger. She had severe frostbite on her feet and actually lost one of her toes. One day as a doctor was examining her foot he remarked that she will not be able to wear sandals when she recovered. She found that remark very strange. That was her first inkling of a recovery and a future.

In the hospital, there was a Jewish lady doctor. She was not religious, but she had a very warm *yiddishe* heart. We were two *yiddishe* little girls all alone in the world and she took us to her heart. Riva's foot took a long time in healing and she gave it her best attention. Her main concern was, that the two of us should not be separated and lost to each other forever, G-d forbid. Yet there was very great danger of it being the case.

While Riva was bedridden because of her bad foot, I, on the other hand, had recovered sufficiently to have regained my energy back. I chatted incessantly, played and jumped. Surrounded by sick children, I attracted attention. Children who recovered and had no homes were taken to an orphanage in Leningrad and later on evacuated to a safer place. Healthwise, I was ready to leave. The doctor tried to keep me longer, by assuring her superiors that Riva's foot was

improving rapidly and soon she'll be fit to be discharged, therefore there was no need to separate us.

Meanwhile, she impressed upon Riva the necessity to influence me to curb my exuberance, and to pretend to be more unwell. I'm sure she tried, but I was too oblivious to what was at stake. Not understanding the gravity of the situation, I could only quiet down for a few minutes and then, all admonishes forgotten, I was off again. All this presented the doctor with a great problem. By keeping a healthy child in the ward, she was keeping a sick child out of it. The situation was so critical that a bed for a child meant a lifeline, no bed, no life. Yet the doctor tried to keep me in order not to separate us, fearing that once we were separated, I, being so young, might be lost, G-d forbid.

One morning, this doctor decided that it was time Riva should be more mobile. Every morning, a nurse carried her to the middle of the ward where there was a table at which the doctor examined the patients. That particular morning the doctor told Riva to try and make her own way to the table.

Riva started off towards the table, by hopping on her good leg. She tired very quickly, sat down to rest for a while, then proceeded on her way again. Nearing the table, she was tiring again. The doctor watching her progress, quickly brought a chair forward, so Riva can sit down to rest as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, Riva, not anticipating the doctor's movement, chose that very moment to give one more hop forward. The foot and chair collided forcefully and Riva fell on the floor by the impact, her foot bleeding profusely.

While the doctor was bending over Riva to pick her up, she exclaimed in anguish, "What have I done!"

The meaning of that exclamation was not lost on Riva. She understood very well. No longer can the doctor pretend

that Riva's foot is mending quickly and she will soon be ready to be discharged. This meant, that now, I will be taken to an orphanage on my own, and we will be separated. That night, Riva lay in bed, mentally reviewing the latest situation: "*Nu Tatte*, what now? Where is your *Gam Zu L'Tova*? It's not enough that there are only the two of us left? Now we are going to be separated. What good can possibly come of that?" But then another thought overcame the earlier sad reflections, "Wait a minute, maybe some good will come out of all this after all."

How right she was! Although our deliverance only came two and a half years later, the events of the next few days set things in motion and played a major part in our eventual reunion with our relatives.

The next morning, Riva and I said goodbye to each other and a nurse took me to the orphanage.

This was the darkness before the "dawn". She took me to the orphanage to which the hospital usually sent their patients, but that orphanage was under quarantine as there was an infectious illness in that home. This meant no admission.

The nurse took me to another orphanage. That orphanage wanted my ration book before accepting me but the nurse did not have it, so she took me to yet a third orphanage. That home, too, was under quarantine, so she brought me back to the hospital, with the intention to try again the next day.

Meanwhile, while I was away, a new patient was admitted to the hospital. That patient was diagnosed as suffering from an infectious disease and as a result, our hospital was placed under quarantine for a period of three weeks. As no one could be discharged during that period, I was safe for that duration. Meanwhile, Riva's foot was improving daily and the situation looked more hopeful.

Summer had come and we were allowed to play in the courtyard. Riva was sitting on the steps and watching the world go by through the grate.

She saw a man passing by, attired in a very strange manner. Despite the hot weather, he was wearing a coat with the collar pulled up and his head down. A second man, dressed in a similar manner, went by, a few minutes later, to be followed by yet a third man. It seemed crazy at first, but also strangely familiar. It rang a bell in her memory, and then she knew.

She remembered how these men were *yidden* with beards. To have a beard in Communist Russia demanded continuous *mesiras nefesh* for it attracted the attention of the NKVD. These *chassidim* wore coats so they could pull up their collars, in an attempt not to show their beards, especially going to and from shul, which had to be done in great secrecy.

Riva remembered it all how, she had seen this sight before, when living at home. Home, however, was a long ago. Now she realised that day being *Shabbos*, these *chassidim* were on their way to *shul*.

She had an idea, why not stop one of them and ask them of news of our relatives. At that moment, someone she knew passed by, Reb Mendel Golumbevitz ה"ע and also his daughter Pessia פשת' . The Golumbevitz family were neighbours of our cousin Chana ה"ע and we used to be on very friendly terms with them.

Hurriedly, Riva hopped over to the gate. She frantically called Pessia and started talking to her. But Pessia did not recognise her. Riva's head, (as everyone else's in hospital) was completely shaven and no doubt, the months of famine and suffering, played a part in her changed appearance.

However, there was another reason why Pessia did not recognise her. While our hospital was still under quarantine, our cousin Tzivia ה"ט (the *Rebbetzin* of the late Rabbi Z. S. Dvorkin), came to visit us in hospital, shortly before her evacuation. She brought with her a parcel of food for us.

She was not admitted into the hospital, because of the quarantine. She asked about the two Shapiro children, referring to Riva and I. The nurse checked the register and informed her that the two Shapiro children had deceased (referring to Yitzchok and Soroh). She was very upset, and in her agitation, she left the hospital forgetting about the food parcel, and leaving it behind. On the following day, a another nurse found the parcel. It was addressed to us, so she gave it to Riva. I must say I remember that food parcel quite well. It was greatly appreciated. Nevertheless, Tzivia ה"ט was made to believe that we were no more, G-d forbid, and that was the news she gave over to our other relatives.

Pessia knew all our family news, thus she too did not believe us to be alive anymore. That fact was another reason for her not recognising us. Riva went to great pains to describe our background and names, saying our father ה"ט was Shaya Shapiro.

“Was he Shaya Karalevitcher?” asked Pessia.

Only then did Pessia realise who she was speaking to. In Russia, in those days, people were called by their city of origin. This custom was no doubt adopted for safety reasons. If G-d forbid, one was questioned by the NKVD if you didn't know a person's surname, you stood less chance of giving him away.

Anyway, our father ה"ט was called “Karalevitcher” because he originated from Karalevitch.

Pessia, at last realising who Riva was, asked, “Are you the daughter of Shaya Karalevitcher?”

Riva answered that she was and we sat down to talk.

Pessia told us about the latest family news. A great number of our relatives, mostly the younger and the more able bodied, left Leningrad. A number of relatives, however, stayed and unfortunately, none of them survived. Chana ה"י with her two children passed away. Aunty Fruma and her husband Yitzchok passed away too.

Also my favourite uncle, Uncle Gavriel, passed away, as well as his wife Aunty Hinda.

May they all beseech *Hashem* on our behalf, for the *Geulah*.

Pessia had the addresses of our relatives who had left Leningrad, so the next day, she came again and brought Riva the addresses, the passport to our personal redemption. Someone else came the next day, Reb Boruch Shifrin ה"י.

Reb Boruch Shifrin asked Riva if she knew who she was. “Of course,” she retorted promptly, “I am Riva Shapiro.”

“That much I know,” Boruch Shifrin said quietly, “but do you know who you really are? Do you remember your father? What do you think your father would say, if he saw you now?”

Riva thought long and hard. Of course she remembered Father ה"י and what he stood for. She looked at herself, wearing pyjamas and her hair cropped off. Whereas at home she couldn't even speak Russian, she now barely coped with Boruch Shifrin's spoken *Yiddish*. By contrast, her Russian was now very fluent. She didn't exactly present a very Jewish picture. A horrifying thought flashed through her mind, “What



would Father say if he saw her now, why, he might leave this world all over again just at the sight of her.”

She could not answer him.

Boruch Shifrin told us he was leaving Leningrad the following week and suggested that he take us with him. Riva agreed to his plan.

However, the next day, he came again, this time with a different suggestion. As his wife only agreed to take one of us with them, Riva could go with him, while I would go with a different member of *Anash* who agreed to take me along. The prospect of us separating was certainly painful, but having just been reminded of what Father ה"ע expected of us and realising there might not be another opportunity to leave our non Jewish surroundings, Riva felt there was no option but to agree.

Meanwhile, the Jewish lady doctor appeared on the scene. She wanted to know who this bearded man was and what he was doing here. Riva told her he was father's friend and that next week she would leave Leningrad with him, while I would leave with someone else. The doctor was absolutely horrified. After all the effort she put in, to keep us together, she was not going to give in now. Resolutely she went to see the hospital superior. After which she obtained what she wanted. There was now a new rule in force regarding children leaving only with close relatives. No way will they allow us to leave with Boruch Shifrin.

Next day, Boruch Shifrin came yet again. Now that he could not take us out, he made Riva promise to establish contact with our relatives by writing to them, thus ensuring that we do not get lost *chas vesholom*.

When we were discharged from the hospital, we were taken to an orphanage. Soon after our arrival there, Riva caught

a cold and became ill. Having witnessed so much death in her young life, her thoughts were never too far away from that subject. She feared that she might not recover *chas vesholom* and felt she must take certain precautions.

Mindful of the fact that the addresses given to her by Pessia G. were our only means of ever reaching our relatives and resuming a Jewish life, she now wanted to double check their safety. Since she was ill, she presumed it wiser to entrust them into my keeping for the time being.

Boruch Hashem she did become better after a while. When she felt stronger, she asked me to fetch the addresses, as she now felt well enough to resume responsibility. However, when I went to fetch these precious papers from under my mattress, there was only one of them left, the address of our cousin Izik in Samarkand. The others had disappeared. This was a great shock.

Realising how easy it would be to lose this last address, Riva decided to change its keeping place. In Russia, in those days, it was very common for children to wear a little pocket shaped cloth bag on a string, over one's shoulder, to keep small things in, like hankies (handkerchiefs) and the like. A bag like this would be just the thing to keep the address in, but neither of us had one. So she sent me to the laundry room to ask if maybe they had such a bag for us. Also, Riva felt the cold in her head (for the sake of hygiene, all the children's' hair was shaved off ) so she asked if possibly she could have some hat to keep warm.

The staff in the laundry room obliged her with a hat, but instead of a little bag, they supplied us with a satchel. From that day on, our cousin's address lived in the satchel and when the hat was no longer needed, it too, went into the satchel.

Leningrad was surrounded by Germans and the only route of escape was by the Neva, a large lake. The orphanage was due to be evacuated to a safer place. At last the departure day arrived and all of us, as well as the inmates of another orphanage boarded a ship and left Leningrad behind us. The passage was quite dangerous, due to frequent bombing but *Boruch Hashem* our crossing was uneventful and we safely reached our destination.

Eventually we reached a small village called “Urshell” not too far from Moscow. (Four hours by train.) We arrived at our new orphanage and proceeded to settle in. All the children were told to deposit their belongings in a large room, which, they were told, would be locked for safety, while they settled into their dormitories. Later on they could reclaim their belongings. So Riva had no choice but to put her satchel into that room, along with everyone else’s luggage.

Once she was settled in, she made several attempts to get the satchel back, but the room was locked and no one seemed to know where the key was. Meanwhile, three days had gone by and a registrar arrived from Moscow to register the new arrivals. A long line formed outside his office, patiently waiting for their turn to be registered.

Riva was standing in that line, quietly grappling with a heavy problem. Soon it will be her turn to give her name to the registrar. If she will call herself Riva Shapiro, she will be as good as announcing to all present that she was Jewish, an open invitation for both verbal and physical abuse. There will be blows and kicks aplenty, not to mention the taunts and derision. She was very familiar with all that from past experience. What if, however, she were just to change one letter in her name and say her name was Rita or Rima, then, no one would be any the wiser, they wouldn’t realise that she was Jewish and she would be left in peace. But was she allowed to do it?

A stream of memories from the past swept over her. Not so long ago we had parents, a home, a family life. How well she recalled her occasional visits to the park. Often, it would come about that a girl her age would ask her to join in her game. She very much wanted to do so, but as soon as she was asked her name and answered “Riva”, all she got were loud jeers of “Zshidovka” (Jewess) with some kicks for good measure. Then she would run home and unburden her woes to her parents.

One day, she hit on a solution to her problem. Next time someone in the park asks her name, she will say Rita or Rima, just changing one letter of her name, surely there could be no harm in that. Still, she did need Soroh’s co-operation for that. It just would not do if she called herself Rita and then Soroh came over and unwittingly called her Riva. She would then be called a liar and persecuted even more than usual. Soroh ה”ע however, refused point blank, to co-operate. She said in no uncertain terms, that she was not allowed to do that and if she persisted, then Soroh felt duty bound to inform Father about it.

“Surely Father won’t mind that I just change one letter of my name,” Riva protested weakly.

But Soroh was very firm, “If you ask Father and he allows it, fine, but if not, I’m not going along with you.”

Riva decided to ask Father. When Father *davenned* or learned, no one was allowed to disturb him. Since he *davenned* at great length, one sometimes had to wait a while to get an opportunity to talk to him. Undeterred, she waited patiently one day, till at last she saw him put away his *Tefillin* and then she presented her request.

Father ה”ע listened attentively to what she had to say then launched into a lengthy explanation of the importance of a

Jewish name and about Rivka *Imeinu* and her greatness, and how fortunate she was to share a name with one of our Matriarchs. Riva listened to what Father ה"י said, but could see no relevance in all this, to her own situation. All she wanted was to play in the park and not to be attacked and..... what did this unknown lady have to do with all that?

“But all I want,” she persisted, “is to change one letter in my name, that’s all.”

Father responded to this by telling her that she was named after *Rebbetzin* Rivka and if that name was good enough for the *Rebbetzin*, it was certainly good enough for her. This was final and she had to accept it.

She now remembered another occasion when the government was conducting a census. Each household was visited by government officials who proceeded to interview each member of the family, including young children. One of the questions asked was if one believed in G-d. Are you a believer? This was a big *nissoyon* for the Jewish population. Since the Soviet regime did not recognise religion, being a believer was anti-Soviet.

When they came to our house, not only did Father ה"י make sure to say he was a believer, but instructed his children to do the same. Riva was then very young. When the official asked her if she was a believer, Father did not take any chances. Before Riva even managed to open her mouth to reply, Father got in first with a firm “Yes”, and of course, Riva also said “Yes”.

This was a dangerous thing to do. Father could have been arrested for teaching his child religion. As it was, the official was extremely angry for his interference, thus depriving his child of free choice.

“There was no denying it,” Riva thought. Her memories certainly dictated to her not to change her name, not even by one letter, but still, the situation was different now, here she was alone, with no parents to protect her, how can she cope on her own with all the ill-treatment she will get on admitting her real name?

Riva’s thoughts were rudely interrupted by a kick in the back. She was so absorbed in her reflections, she hadn’t noticed that she was next in line to give her name. While she was still wavering about what to say, like a video, she saw her father talking to her saying, “If it is good enough for *Rebbetzin* Rivka to have that name, it is good enough for you.”

That vision was her answer, and she proceeded to give her name, “My name is Riva Shapiro.”

A ripple of mocking laughter swept through the waiting line behind her. “Zshidovka!” A fierce kick in her back sent her sprawling on the floor. She was in great pain, unable to get up. In agony, she was lying there, watching her tormentors. No one volunteered to help her. There were members of staff about, but they pretended not to notice. She was amazed at their cruelty. Thoughtfully she surveys the line of children. Surely they have all suffered. Some of them have bloated stomachs from starvation, by contrast, yet others, are haggard and skinny to the extreme, like skeletons. Yet they haven’t got a trace of compassion for someone else’s ordeal.

“How different we Jews are. Jews always help each other in every way they can. What am I, a Jewish *Chassidische* girl doing in their midst?”

Riva reached a firm decision, “She will do her utmost, to get us both out of this place. She will not rest, until she reaches her goal and we are both reunited with our relatives and the Jewish people.”

The first thing to do, was to write to our cousin in Samarkand and let him know of our whereabouts and to beg him to get us out of here, without delay. His address was in her satchel, still locked in that big room.

Resolutely, she redoubled her efforts to get the key to that room. The lady in charge said she did not have the key and sent her to the cook. The cook was incredulous, why should she have the key, it was not her department. She suggested another member of staff who might have it, but no, she did not have it either. There was just one more possibility, to go to the director himself.

The director was a drunkard with a foul temper and a heavy hand. He was greatly feared. Determinedly, Riva approached him, explained her problem and asked him if she could possibly have the key. He told her to go to the lady in charge.

When Riva explained that she'd already been to her but without success, he replied: "Tell her that 'I' sent you."

The "I" of the director did the trick and she duly got the key, at last. However, when she opened the door to the large room, she was shocked out of her wits. The room was bare. Empty. No luggage, no satchel, just a heap of rubbish in the middle of the room and nothing else.

She shuddered violently, then felt a cold sweat all the way down her back. She pinned all her hopes on the address in her satchel, to get us out of this awful place and now it wasn't there.

But she could not give up hope altogether, didn't Father ה"ג, tell here countless times that *Hashem* is kind and everything He does is for the good. What we have to do is pray to Him. Yes, she must pray. She suddenly remembered the

story of the *Tzaddik* who prayed to *Hashem* and a golden leg came down from above, for him to use.

“But I don’t want a golden leg,” she thought, “all I want is the piece of paper which has our cousin’s address on it.”

Of course, there were no prayer books, but she did remember some verses of *Tehillim* by heart, since when at home, *Tehillim* was recited daily. Here again, however, was another problem. Her hands were not “clean”. The water came from a well in the middle of the courtyard, but drawing water from the well was work, and the staff didn’t want to bother over much. So water was scarce.

They supplied the kitchen with drinking water and cooking water, the main necessities, but for washing one’s hands after being excused, that was an unavailable luxury. Once a fortnight was bath day, but besides that, there were no other means of washing.

Riva decided only to recite such verses that did not have *Hashem*’s name in them. She closed her eyes and prayed with great concentration, convinced that salvation was at hand.

She finished praying and opened her eyes. She looked around her, all over, expecting to see the coveted address, but the room looked exactly the same as before. Nothing. She waited, looked around again, scrutinising every inch of the room, but again, nothing.

Reluctantly, confused, she started to make her exit, but kept her back to the door all the while she was retreating, for she was still hoping against hope to find the address. She reached the door, backed out through the opening and then, stopped. Her eye caught on something on the pile of rubbish. She noticed a crumpled piece of ribbon, but wait, it looked



very familiar. Quickly, she went over and pulled the ribbon out. Oh, she held her breath. She knew what this was, this was the ribbon from her old hat which she was given in Leningrad and which she kept in her satchel.

Her heart was pounding with excitement. She now understood what had taken place. The staff had appropriated all the luggage worth having for themselves. They must have taken the satchel and the hat, but tipped out the satchel of any unwanted articles onto the floor, before taking it.

That was why this piece of ribbon was here, it must have torn off from the hat. Now the piece of paper with the address didn't look like anything important to others, so it stands to reason they tipped it out onto the rubbish pile. This was certainly a thought worth pursuing. Patiently, she sat down on the floor and started combing through the rubbish, slowly, methodically, piece by piece.

### יגעת ומצאת תאמין

After an hour's hard work, her labour was rewarded. Triumphantly, she left the room, the priceless piece of paper clutched in her hand.

*Boruch Hashem!*

Now that our cousin's address was safe again in Riva's possession, she decided she must write to him immediately, inform him of our whereabouts and ask him to take us out of here as soon as he possibly can.

Of course, in order to write, you need a pen or pencil and some paper. She had neither. She remembered however, that she saw some white wrapping paper, on a girl's bed, in another dormitory. She made her way there and yes, the piece

of paper was still there on the bed. The room was empty. Longingly, she stood there, gazing at the paper.

It was obvious, the girl did not need this paper, since she left it lying there for quite some time. Should she then just take it and walk away? No. That would be stealing. She knew the girl well, if she asked her for the paper, she would never give it to her, she was too mean. Unless, of course, she gave her something in exchange. But what? She had absolutely no possessions whatsoever, even the clothes she was in were not her own. What can she possibly do?

Just as she was standing there, engrossed in her thoughts, the girl in question walked in. “And what are you doing here?” she asked accusingly.

Ignoring her tone, Riva replied innocently, “Oh, here you are, it’s you I actually came to see. You see, you have this paper on your bed doing nothing, so I thought maybe you will let me have it.”

The girl was incredulous, “Are you crazy? Do you really think I will give you something of mine, to you, a Zshidovka?”

“Oh, I didn’t mean it for free,” put in Riva quickly, “I meant in exchange for something else.”

As she was saying these words, Riva didn’t really know what she could possibly give her, but then a thought flashed through her mind. She could give her, her dinner slice of bread in exchange for the paper. This was a good offer and the girl agreed to their transaction. After receiving her bread, the paper will be hers. Riva managed successfully, to smuggle out her bread from the dining room, and at last the paper was hers.

Now, she remembered that she knew a girl who had a small pencil stub. Being hungry from her breadless dinner, she took a chance and offered the second girl only half of her supper bread slice for the use of the pencil stub. The girl agreed and after receiving her piece of bread, she let Riva use the pencil, watching her like a hawk, while Riva was writing her letter. This done, Riva asked an older girl to write the address for her, for fear of doing it wrong herself.

The “pencil girl” was following her like a shadow, not trusting her with her precious possession. As soon as the address was written, she snatched the pencil away and ran off. Next Riva went to the post office to inquire about the price of a stamp, wondering how many more breadless meals would she have to endure before the letter was sent off. But she was in luck. The post mistress was nice to her and suggested she send the letter stampless. What it will mean is, that the people on the receiving side will have to pay for it double. Riva agreed to send it that way and having accomplished her important task, settled back to await a reply.

The post mistress told Riva that her letter will take around three weeks to reach its destination, but in fact it took weeks longer. For this reason, it was three months before a reply was received.

By then we had started school and getting paper was no longer such a problem. So, Riva wrote more letters to Samarkand, refusing to give up hope, despite the fact that she had no idea why there was no reply to even her very first letter.

At long last, her faith in Hashem’s salvation was justified and she received a letter from Samarkand, from Pessia Karasik, Izik’s wife.

Her letter was far from cheerful. She was describing the latest happenings in her life, the hardship, and a list of the

recent deceased in our family in Samarkand. Not a word did she mention about taking us out of the orphanage.

The fact of the matter was, that Riva's letter caused quite a stir among our relatives. Due to certain confusing circumstances (described earlier on) they believed that there were no survivors in our family, so when they learned of the two of us, were *Boruch Hashem* alive, they were of course overjoyed.

However, the first years of *Anash* in Samarkand were devastating. There was no money and no food. Many lost their lives through starvation ר"ל. Bobbe<sup>9</sup> Mania ע"ה, lost her husband and two daughters in that manner, while she herself and her son Yehoshua (היישקע) survived by a miracle.

It was during these disastrous times that Riva's letter reached our relatives. There was, of course, no question of taking us out of the home at a time like that. It was necessary to wait till the situation improved. Pessia did not want to discourage Riva by telling her openly that they couldn't send for us now, she assumed that mentioning the tragic losses in our family, the implication will be clear enough and Riva will understand.

But Riva did not understand, she was busy surviving in a ghastly world. She was so preoccupied with her troubles, that she failed to notice the message implied in the letter. Indeed, she could not understand why the letter did not mention the subject of our removal from the home, but still, the fact that contact was established with our relatives, considerably brightened our lives.

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<sup>9</sup> I was eventually adopted by Mrs Mania Dubrawsky ע"ה while Riva was adopted by Rav Zalman Shimon and Tzivia Dvorkin. ע"ה. To our children we affectionately addressed them as Bobbe Mania and Bobbe Tzivia.

After that, many more letters were exchanged and in each letter Riva wrote, she did not fail to repeat her request to get us out from the orphanage.

Time passed and the situation in Samarkand started improving and our relatives could turn their minds to plan our removal from the home.

One day, the long awaited letter arrived. They were ready to send for us.

But certain things had to be arranged first. In order to reach us, one had to travel through Moscow, but one could not enter Moscow with a permit. Riva had to get a permit from the orphanage and send it to Samarkand and only then, could someone be delegated to fetch us.

The orphanage secretary was called Vera Aronova (the daughter of Aaron), obviously Jewish. Unfortunately, she was of a sour disposition and unpopular with the children.

The children nicknamed her Vera Varonova, meaning daughter of a crow. When she was angry and was screaming at someone, the children used to say to me, "Listen to your relative crowing."

Riva however, was full of optimism and hope, when she went to see her in her office. "Didn't Father ה"ע tell us enough times, that all Jews were like one and should love each other. Surely, for that reason, the secretary will oblige her with the permit. True, she was never friendly before, but that was probably due to the fact that she didn't want to be seen favouring a fellow Jew, in case she is accused of bias. In this case though," thought Riva, "she will be pleased to help."

She was in for a shock. The secretary refused to give her a permit under the following pretext, "Your cousin, no

doubt, is a ‘speculant’ (engages in illegal business). I’m sure, he has no intention of coming to get you. What he is after, is a way of getting a permit to go to Moscow, for the sake of his illegal business deals. For such activities,” continued the secretary, “I cannot issue a permit.”

Riva assured her, that this could not be the case. She knew her cousin very well, he was very honest, always had an honest job and never engaged in business at all. He cared for us very much and genuinely wanted to bring us to his home.

But Riva’s words fell on deaf ears. Vera absolutely refused to give a permit. At one point, in response to something that Riva said, she started answering, “Ya k”, stumbling on the letter “K” (as she had a stammer).

Riva thought she was about to say “Ya klianius”, meaning “I swear”.

Riva thought quickly, “She wants to swear that she will not give me the permit and if I hear her doing it, I won’t be allowed to pressure her for it, in case I make her break an oath.” Very quickly, Riva put her fingers in her ears and ran out of the office.

However, she wasn’t giving up either. Every single day, Riva made her way to the office, pestering the secretary again and again, wearing down her resistance.

It worked. One day, when Riva made her appearance yet again, the secretary informed her that she had just posted (mailed) the permit to her cousin. Riva wasn’t actually sure whether to believe her or not, but the only way open to her now, was to wait and see.

She waited and yes, a letter arrived from Samarkand that the permit had arrived and a certain gentleman was

travelling to Moscow and was to fetch us on his way back. What could have been better? Our suffering was really nearing its end! But time passed and no one came.

Eventually, another letter arrived, with sad tidings. The *chossid* who was supposed to fetch us, after completing his business in Moscow, had lost the permit. They now have someone else willing to make the long trip to fetch us, but they need another permit.

This news hit Riva like a rock. All the hard work she put into obtaining the permit was all in vain. The excuse the secretary used for withholding the permit for such a long time, will now appear justified. She will now say she was right all along and will refuse point blank, to issue another permit.

Riva felt suicidal. No, this is not figurative speech, I mean it literally.

First, she contemplated throwing herself down from the roof. It was a one story building and there was a lot of snow drifts. She reflected that she would not succeed, under the circumstances, to do the job properly. All she'd manage, would be to injure herself *chas vesholom* and no one would try and help her, only make fun of her, she did it because she is a "Zshidovka".

Next, she thought of jumping down into the well, but there again, there was so much ice about, she probably would not succeed at that attempt either.

Then she thought of me, her younger sister. What would become of me if she *chas vesholom* took her own life? She remembered long ago, when in the park, in Leningrad, she wanted to change her name slightly and Soroh ה"ע would not let her. At that time Soroh said, "I'm the oldest, so I'm responsible for what happens to you."

Now Riva was the oldest, so she was responsible for what happens to me. She decided it was her duty to carry on. But she needed an infusion of strength to be able to do so. The answer was prayer. She must daven to *Hashem* and He will give her strength. She still remembered some small *teffilos* by heart. But how can she daven without washing *negel vasser*? Could she possibly say *Hashem*'s name with impure hands?

In desperation, she went to the kitchen and asked the maid for the use of the bucket, planning to draw water from the well by herself and thus make *negel vasser*. The maid was a peasant *shikse* and half her conversation consisted of swear words (foul language). Would it have been any other girl asking for a bucket, she would have certainly refused for fear of having it stolen. Indeed, the children were often caught stealing. But Riva had a reputation for honesty. Thanks to that reputation, the maid let her have the bucket on condition she does not let it out of her hands. Riva promised.

Before asking for the bucket, Riva gave as an excuse, her need to fill the water facilities by the toilets. The water facilities were indeed there and in working order, but they were always empty, because the staff didn't bother to fill them. Now that Riva said she needed to fill them, she had to keep her word. With great difficulty she drew a bucket of water and emptied it in the appropriate place. No sooner had she done that, then all the children who were around started using the water until there was none left for Riva. She drew a second bucket, with the same results.

The trouble was that she did not dare let go of the bucket to wash her hands, or it would have for sure been snatched away. Then, her life would not have been worth living. She had to guard the bucket for dear life. She also had to wash *negel vasser*. She drew a third bucket of water and despite the freezing temperature, washed *negel vasser* directly from the bucket onto the ground by the well, drying her hands



on her coat. Once she returned her bucket to the kitchen, she was free to *daven*.

She did so with great relief and with a lot of feeling. She said everything she could possibly remember from home and felt greatly encouraged.

A couple more times she repeated this performance, usually at a time when depression and despair threatened to overcome her, but each time the *davening* gave her new strength.

Still there was no way out for her predicament. How was she to obtain another permit to send to Samarkand? She went to the woods, found a clearing and sat down on a sawn off tree stump to think things out.

She was remembering how Father ה"ע always impressed upon us not to deny our Judaism, not even under threat of death. She did that with great fortitude and suffered untold misery as a result. When a boy asked her, "Are you a Zshidovka?" She wasn't allowed to deny it. So she said "Yes". "Ha, ha," the boy thought it was fun, giving her a vicious kick in the stomach. Another boy liked this sport and also asked the same question. Riva again responded "Yes," and got another kick. This kind of torment was repeated many times.

In the morning there was school, so things were better. The afternoons were torture at first, but then she discovered the laundry room where she offered to help as a competent seamstress. The staff were glad to have her help with the interminable piles of mending. Riva, in return, enjoyed a peaceful afternoon in the warmth of the laundry room. But for the evenings there was no escape. The *shkotzim* were at their worst, in the evenings and used her Judaism as their entertainment. She used to escape into a dark corner of the

corridor near the toilets and try and be invisible by pressing herself against the wall.

Riva was now sitting in the forest, reliving her miserable existence and trying to find a solution.

She could picture Father ה"י telling her that *Hashem* was very kind and if one wanted something truthfully, *mit an emes*, then He helped. She asked herself, "Do I really want to get out of this place, really and truly?" Of course she did, without any shadow of a doubt.

So why did *Hashem* not help her?

Now what would happen if she gave up now, and stopped trying so hard. She'd stop saying that she was Jewish and stop being beaten for it and we'd just both let things slide and accept the *goyishe* way of life. That would not do! She felt quite sure, if she did that, she'd never forgive herself. What's more, once she'd adopt this attitude, she would not be able to make a come back at a later date. No, she had to find a way out of here.

She was seeing a picture of Father again. How careful was she really to keep up the principles she was taught at home? For instance, let's take *Shabbos*. She remembered the great intensity with which Father ה"י impressed upon us the importance of keeping *Shabbos*. Could she say that she really had tried to keep *Shabbos*? Of course, this was bound up with numerous hurdles and difficulties, but did she try? She had to admit that she hadn't tried hard enough.

I have to explain here, how difficult it was even to remember when *Shabbos* was, let alone keep it.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> As I have explained in Part One, the day off from school was after five days. Since there were no calendars in the school or orphanage and the day off changed from week to week, the children never even knew what day of

But now, Riva was conscious of a new awareness. Father ה"ע said, "If you really and truly want to achieve something and ask for *Hashem's* help, you will get it." These words now took on new meaning. Truly wanting didn't mean desiring badly what you want, it means wanting it enough to do something about it. She was now quite clear what she had to do.

First, she must find out which day of the week it was and keep a careful count of the days, so as to know when it was *Shabbos*. Just remembering was also valuable. "Remember the day of *Shabbos*." Next, she must avoid *chillul Shabbos* to the best of her ability. She had no way of keeping the positive *mitzvos* of *Shabbos*, like candle lighting and *kiddush*, but she could try and not carry her case to school on *Shabbos* and when in school, she should not write. She could bandage her finger or hand or arm and pretend they hurt her, just like in the olden days in Leningrad. That would get her exempted from writing. Then she also decided to influence me to do the same.

Once she'll do all the above, she will really prove to *Hashem* that she really wants us to get out of the orphanage, for she will be doing *Hashem's* will, this is what Father ה"ע must have meant by "*mit an emes*". For sure, after she does her part, *Hashem* will have no choice, but to do His part and help us.

She also decided to go back to the school secretary and again try her utmost to convince her to issue a new permit.

True to her promise to herself, Riva kept to all the resolutions.

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the week it was. One merely counted the days till the next day off, whereas there was no apparent purpose in knowing which day of the week it was, and no one seemed aware of it. Things being this way, it was very hard to know when *Shabbos* was.

The secretary didn't want to listen to her at first, but Riva persisted to visit her every couple of days (but not on *Shabbos*) until eventually, through sheer exasperation, the secretary gave in and wrote the permit. Overjoyed, Riva lost no time in sending it to Samarkand.

On its receipt, all our relatives, I believe, clubbed together and hired a very dear lady called Rivka Moyeseyevna ר"ב, to travel out to collect us from the orphanage. Her instructions were clear. If she has any business to attend in Moscow, she should see to it after collecting us.

One winter's day, we left the orphanage behind us for good and travelled to Moscow. From there we took the train to Tashkent. Samarkand was going to be the next stop. After many days of travel, we reached Tashkent on Friday. We had cousins living in Tashkent so we stayed there for *Shabbos*. We spent Friday night with one of the Shapiros and *Shabbos* day with the other.

It was some three years since we last had a *Shabbos* and it was very strange. For some reason Riva could not feel inspired by the *Shabbos* experience and felt very unsure of herself, doubting the whole wisdom of coming all this way and what it will mean for us.

Straight after *Shabbos*, we left for Samarkand. On arrival, we went first to Isaac's house. He welcomed us very warmly and invited us to have a meal. "Come and wash," he said. Riva washed, started making the *brocha* "*Al netilas yodoyim*", but got stuck halfway through.

Very quickly, Isaac picked up a *siddur*, found the place and placed it before Riva's eyes. The sight of a *siddur*, of holy writing, completely overwhelmed her. She was yearning for this for so long and now here it was, in front of her. She burst into a flood of tears. They were running down her cheeks

unchecked, washing away some of the pain, which was part of her existence for so long. At last she now knew, that she had come home!

This is the story of our personal *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, for we were indeed surrounded by *Tumas Mitzrayim*. By *Hashem's* kindness and in the merit of our parents ה"ע, we were redeemed.

One of the three qualities, for which the yidden were meritorious to be redeemed from *mitzrayim*, was their not having changed their *yiddishe* names. For Riva, not to have to change her name, required tremendous *mesiras nefesh*. Our father's complete dedication to our chinuch, provided her with the means of withstanding this great *nisoyon* as well as all the others. Her fortitude in remaining steadfast and not giving way to our undesirable environment resulted in our redemption.

May *Hashem* speed up the ultimate redemption, by the revelation of *Moshiach Tzidkainu* very speedily, now.

Amen!