

By Rabbi Reuven Witkes, as told to Rische Deitsch

# Legacy

Following the wedding of Miriam Moss to Yossi Raskin, my wife Sorele and I were invited to the Manhattan sheva brochos, because our son was then engaged (now he is B"H married) to Miriam's sister.

It was an intimate sheva brochos. Everyone there was part of the immediate family, or very closely related, except for one couple in their mid-70s, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar and Adelaide

Heller. We wondered who they were and why they were invited. We didn't have long to wonder.

During the meal, the kallah's father, our mechutan Mr. Meir Moss, announced that there was a guest he wanted to introduce; one with a compelling story to tell. Mr. Oscar Heller stood up and, in a strong European accent, began to speak:



Dachau Gate Entrance reads "Work Makes Free"

*In October 1944, at the age of 13, after five months in Auschwitz, I was transferred to Dachau, where I was assigned to Camp #4 located near the Bavarian town of Lomitsberg. For some reason, perhaps because I was the only young boy in the entire camp, I found favor with the SS officer in charge of food supplies and services for both prisoners and guards in camp #4, and so I was assigned to the kitchen. My job*

*was to stand at the kitchen gate all day and to shout "Achtung!" when this SS officer entered for his periodic inspection of the kitchen. Upon hearing my shout, all prisoner staff in the kitchen were to stand at attention until the officer announced "Weiter machen!" ("Carry on!") at which time everyone resumed working. I was lucky since he liked my sharp boyish voice and always gave me a satisfied look when*

he heard me shout "Achtung!" to announce his arrival.

Being on the kitchen staff meant that I had access to food. This was a lifesaving privilege not only for me but for others. I was constantly besieged by prisoners begging for any scraps of food I could get for them. I took what I could and was able to help keep many, many people alive. Many of these people survived only because of this kitchen job that I was lucky to get, and some still live in Williamsburg today.

One middle aged prisoner approached me calling me Kicsi, meaning "small one" in Hungarian, which was my nickname in camp. He told me that he was Shmuel Farbenblum, a barrack chief in the camp, and his 15 year old son Zvi, who was in the infirmary barrack, had just survived typhus fever but was now starving to death. He told me that I must give him a pot of heavy soup every day to keep his son alive. A POT! I begged him to leave me alone. I told him that I was handing out stolen food left and right and if I took any more I would be caught and punished severely. Mr. Farbenblum did not accept my answer. He waited until I finished work for the day, then grabbed me by my jacket and pulled me to the barrack where his son was lying, telling me on the way, "Just see my son - you must see my son!"

We entered the barrack where his son was lying on a heap of straw. He had a long body, with no flesh, only skin and bones. He was very weak and sick; he could not even open his eyes.

I was just past my 14th birthday and one can appreciate that I had not yet developed a father-son feeling. I asked Mr. Farbenblum, "You are a barrack chief. Why don't you do what other barrack chiefs do - take off part of the food ration of each person in your barrack and with that, feed your son?"

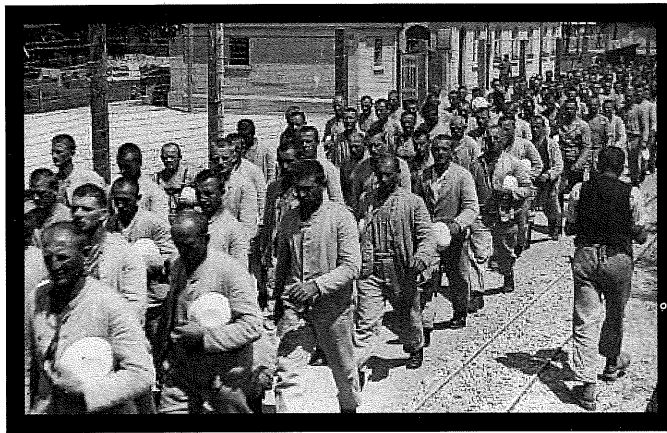
Mr. Farbenblum replied that he could not and would not do that - to steal from prisoners even a tiny bit of the food that was allotted to them, an amount that barely succeeded in keeping only some of them alive!

"Not even to save your own son?" I asked.

"Not even for that," he replied firmly.

Whereas, if I stole food from the kitchen, it would not decrease the portions of the prisoners.

I was so moved by Shmuel Farbenblum's refusal to take food from the mouths of starving prisoners that I told him to pick up a pot of soup and other food every day. And so he did.



Men on line for soup in Dachau



Barracks in the camps.

I never went back to the barrack to visit the sick boy. Within a couple of months, the Americans arrived and camp #4 was evacuated. I was transferred to the main camp in Dachau while Zvi, who was not ambulatory, and his father, were evacuated to another camp. We lost touch with each other.

Two years after liberation, in the spring of 1947, I was in the yeshiva in Kasho, Czechoslovakia. One Friday afternoon, as I was walking down the street where the yeshiva was located, a narrow cobblestone street in the Jewish section of Kasho, I noticed on the other side of

the street a middle aged man and a young handsome fellow, walking together and looking at me. Suddenly we all stopped and stared at each other. They quickly crossed the street, and the older man asked me, "Young fellow, were you in Dachau during the war? Were you in camp #4?"

"Yes," I replied to both questions. At that point Mr. Farbenblum fell on me, embracing and kissing me, pointing to his son Zvi, all the while saying, "This is my son, you kept him alive."

I was then 16 years old - but this encounter left an indelible mark in my memory, so strong was Mr. Farbenblum's emotion.

I visited the Farbenblums. Mr. Farbenblum was then in the yarn and needle business. He prepared a large package of his merchandise for me to take to Hungary, as I was returning there shortly for my sister's wedding and there was a shortage of these supplies in Hungary.

Shortly afterward, I left for New York with a student visa

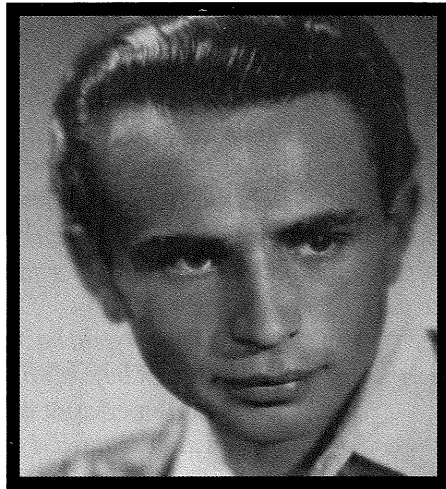
to study in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas. The Farbenblums went to Israel, and we again lost contact.

For the next few years, my life was occupied with getting an education, getting married, raising a family and earning a living. I blotted out my Holocaust experiences from my conscious mind and concentrated on what I had to do. However, as our children married and left home, and especially after I retired in 1999, my thoughts and reflections became active again and my experience with the Farbenblums was very clear in my memory. I wanted to know what had happened to them.

After making many inquiries, I heard that the father, Shmuel a"h, had passed away in the mid 1970s, and that his son Zvi had left Israel and settled in Australia, but whoever I asked did not know of any Farbenblum living in Australia.

My daughter lives in Englewood, New Jersey. This past winter a neighbor of my daughter asked her to provide accommodations for the weekend for a cousin from Sydney, Australia, who had come for the Bar Mitzvah of the neighbor's son.

We were talking on the phone, and when my daughter told me about her guest, I said, "Australia? Ask him if he knows Farbenblum!" (I always said this when I heard the word Australia.)



Sam Moss (Zvi) as a young man after the war

To humor me, my daughter asked Mr. Shimon Farkash, the guest from Sydney, Australia, if he perhaps knew of a person that her father had been looking for, for the past 60 years, someone by the name of Zvi Farbenblum.

It didn't take a second for Mr. Farkash to answer: "He is my neighbor in Sydney. We daven together in shul every Shabbos--but you will never find him under the name of Zvi Farbenblum, as his name now is Moss - Sam Moss."



Shmuel Farbenblum in mid-1970s

I quickly discovered that Zvi, or rather Sam Moss, was not only alive, but married, with two sons, Steven

and Meir, two daughters-in-law, Carol and Devorah, and grandchildren who were getting married! My daughter gave my phone number to Mr. Farkash and asked him to give it to Sam Moss, on his return to Sydney.

Within a week I got a phone call from Sydney - "Is this Oscar Heller?" "Yes." "This is Sam Moss. You saved my life in Dachau. I will soon be in New York for my granddaughter Miriam's wedding, and I would love to see you again."

Both our families were a little concerned for us; two men in their late 70s who had not met in so long. They hoped the excitement would not be too much for us! We survived the reunion and here we are.

L-R: Adelaide Heller, Oscar Heller, Sam Moss, Agi Moss, Reunited at last!



There was not a dry eye in the house as Sam Moss and Oscar Heller embraced, then posed for a picture together with their wives. (below on facing page)



Mr. and Mrs. Oscar and Adelaide Heller

One month later, our own son Moishe married Chana Moss, Miriam's younger sister. At the sheva brochos, our mechutan Meir told how his father's life had been saved by Oscar Heller, and how his grandfather, Shmuel Farbenblum a"h, had not been willing to take a crumb from a starving Jew, even to save his own son's life. Rabbi Yisrael Deren, shliach in Stamford, Connecticut, was present at the wedding. He was visiting his close friend, Meir's brother Steven, who used to live in Connecticut. When Rabbi Deren heard the story at sheva brochos, he stood up and said with great emotion, "I have something to add to this story..."

*Many years ago, on Hoshana Rabba, I took Steven and Carol Moss to the Rebbe to take lekach.*

*I introduced Carol to the Rebbe, and said that she is a descendant of the Alter Rebbe (her maiden name is Shneur). The Rebbe turned to Steven and said, "You should be like your grandfather." I, foolishly thinking that the Rebbe had not heard me, repeated, "Carol is the descendant of the Alter Rebbe." The Rebbe looked at Carol and said, "You should follow what he wrote in his Shulchan Aruch," but the Rebbe turned to Steven again and repeat-*

*ed, "You should be like your grandfather..."*

*I didn't know what the Rebbe meant and neither did Steven.*

*A moment ago, when I heard the story of how Steven's grandfather behaved in Dachau, it became clear to me why the Rebbe had directed his praise to Steven's grandfather.*

Shmuel Farbenblum a"h -- a principled man who would not take bread out of a starving Jew's mouth to save his own flesh and blood-- had a son, Sam Moss (Zvi), who gave him two grandsons, the brothers Meir Moss (our mechutan) and Steven Moss. Without even knowing what the Rebbe said, all three of these distinguished Baalei Tzedokoh and Baalei Chesed have followed the Rebbe's directive to be like their ancestor, having mesiras nefesh to give to others and to help others, all their lives. May Hashem give them the good health and strength necessary to continue to do so until the coming of Moshiach.

When I talked with him about writing this article, Mr. Oscar Heller said to me, "Perhaps Sam Moss owes me some gratitude for keeping him alive, but I owe his father a"h even more gratitude for giving me the zchus of preserving a life." ♣

B.H.

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