



“Nisse Nissim

RABBI NISSAN MANGEL



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Rabbi Mangel holding
his great-grandchild
in his arms.

Photo: Yisroel Teitelbaum @jewish.giant

“Nissei



Nissan Mangel
as a child.

MAMA WASN'T HOME

It was early Friday morning in April of 1944 when I heard violent knocking on the door. My sister and I were still in our beds and my father was *davening*. (Ever since the Nazis had occupied our hometown of Košice, then a part of Hungary, it was too dangerous for him to walk to shul and he went only on Shabbos.)

My father went to open the door in his *tallis* and *tefillin*. Seven SS and Gestapo men marched into our home. They had a list with all of our names. They found my father, my sister, and me,

but not my mother.

“Where is Mrs. Mangel?” one officer barked.

“She went to the marketplace to shop for Shabbos,” my father answered.

On weekdays, my mother went shopping later in the day. But the *Shulchan Aruch* says we should honor Shabbos by doing everything earlier and in a more beautiful way. So on Fridays my mother left for the market at 6:00 a.m. Her *hidur mitzvah* saved us that day.

The officer ordered my sister to get up, get dressed, and go fetch my mother. I jumped up and said, “I want to go with my sister.”

The officer pushed me back into my bed. I burst into tears, as ten-year-old children do. “I want to go with my sister! Let me go with her!”

My father said, “Please, they are very close. Let him go with her.”

Begrudgingly, the officer agreed.

We left to find our mother. By now it was around 8:00 a.m. and the market was teeming with people. We searched near the fish, meat, fruit, and vegetable stalls, but we couldn't find her anywhere. We turned back to go home. Along the way, we found our mother holding two baskets of food.

We ran up to her and said, “Mama, the SS came to take us!”

In 1944, everyone knew what that meant.

My mother began trembling with fear. She said, “Quick, let's run home!”

“Mama, what's the hurry?” I asked. “You are out. Sister is out. I am out. Maybe Tatte will also somehow escape. Why should we return to them?”

“Nissan, you said there are seven officers in the house. How can Tatte possibly escape?” my mother replied.

I insisted, “Maybe, just maybe, he did.”

My mother, a true *eishes chayil*, did not listen to me. Her words still ring in my ears today: “If Tatte goes to Auschwitz, I want to go with him.”

I had an idea. “Let's go to Ivanka. She'll help us find out what happened to Tatte.” Ivanka was the daughter of the janitor in our building. The janitor

Nissim!

was the Shabbos *goy* and was fond of our family thanks to my mother's homemade *kugel* and chicken soup.

We walked to the local tavern where Ivanka worked.

"What are you doing here?" she asked. My mother asked her to please go to our apartment and find out where my father was. Ivanka pointed to the crowd of early-morning drinkers and said, "If I leave now, before giving these men their drinks, they will start a riot. Let me serve them and then I will go."

We waited for a half hour and then she was ready to go. We watched her walk along the block, and as she reached the corner, our father appeared. I jumped out of the tavern and cried, "Tatte! How did you escape the SS?"

My father said, "Nissan, now is not a time to talk. Let's run."

We ran.

The Nazis evacuated and murdered Jews systematically—if they were evacuating one suburb on Monday and a different suburb on Tuesday, they would not take someone from the wrong suburb, even if that person was a Jew. So we went to the home of my cousins who lived in a different area of Košice. We knew we would be safe there for a few more days.

When we arrived, my father explained how he had escaped our apartment. "The Nazis wanted me to move our table from the dining room to the foyer so they could take it for themselves. I tried to move it, but it was too heavy. They started to beat me. I said, 'You can kill me, but I still won't be able to move it. Help me!' They refused. I said, 'Let me go outside and find someone who can help me move it.' Miraculously, they agreed. I went outside and fled. That's when I bumped into you."

I've wanted to interview Rabbi Mangel for a long time. I contacted his relatives, I asked mutual friends, but none were able to get a yes. Finally, I decided to write a letter directly to Rabbi Mangel and drop it through his mail slot. The very next day he called me and agreed to share his story with the *N'shei Chabad Newsletter*.

When we met, I asked Rabbi Mangel why he had agreed now after all of my previous attempts. He responded, "Because you started your letter with, 'I was a student of yours 50 years ago in Bais Rivkah.' Once a student, always a student. I try to do whatever I can for my students."

I listened in awe as Rabbi Mangel recounted miracles and memories from his childhood during the Holocaust. Keeping the *N'shei* audience in mind, he centered his narrative around his beloved mother, whose wisdom and bravery saved him from the clutches of death more than once. Despite the dark nature of the topic, Rabbi Mangel's voice was full of light. His sentences were punctuated frequently with the jubilant phrase: "*Nissei nissim!*" (Miracles of miracles!)

In his words, "*Chazal* tell us that if someone dreams about a person with the letter *nun* in his name—miracles will happen. If someone dreams about a person with two *nuns* in his name—double miracles will happen. My name is Nissan, with two *nuns*, and Hashem made *nissei nissim*."

May we all merit to experience revealed miracles.

-Rishe Deitsch

This interview was transcribed and edited by Musia Kaplan.



Rabbi Nissan Mangel at the interview.



Mrs. Raizel Mangel (L) with Rishe Deitsch.

Photos: Chaya Lipskier

SMUGGLED ACROSS THE BORDER

We knew we had to escape Hungary. My family was well off, but we didn't have a penny on us. My father asked my cousin to go back to our apartment and try to obtain the cash he had hidden in a secret vault behind the wallpaper. (As I mentioned, the Nazis were not evacuating her neighborhood yet and would not take her if they found her.)

But when my cousin entered the apartment, the SS officers were still there.

"What are you doing here?" they asked her.

"I came to visit my aunt and uncle," she answered.

"Your aunt and uncle are not here," they said. "They escaped! But if you see them, tell them that nobody escapes the SS. If they come back in an hour they'll be fine. If not, they'll be shot on the spot when we find them."

My cousin returned with these good tidings from the SS and no money.

So my mother called her two brothers who lived in Kurima, Slovakia. By 1942, Slovakia was almost completely *Judenrein*—only elite Jews were allowed to stay. My uncles were wealthy and had been given special

exemptions. When they heard from my mother, they hired smugglers to bring us across the border.

The first smuggler came to us on Thursday with clothing that would disguise us as farmers and peasants. He would return on Sunday for our departure. But over the next 48 hours, word spread of our planned escape. Neighbors began knocking on the door. "Please, take my baby. Take my sister. Take my grandmother. In Auschwitz, they have no chance to survive!"

My father was a man of pure *chessed*. He couldn't turn anyone away. We went from a group of four to a group of 16. When the smuggler returned on Sunday, he was shocked. "What is this, a caravan? I am taking four!"

My father said, "We will pay extra for each one. We must take them."

"But it's impossible!"

My father insisted, "We must."

My father promised more and more money until the smuggler agreed. But a large group walking out of Košice would look suspicious, so we divided ourselves into three smaller groups. We staggered our departures from the house and planned to meet up at a meadow on the outskirts of the city. From there we would travel through the mountains to the border together.

I was in a group with my mother, my sister, and the smuggler. On our way, a group of SS stopped us. They asked, "We hear the Jews are being smuggled out of Košice somewhere nearby, do you know how they do it?" I felt my heart beating wildly and blood rushing into my face. I turned away so they wouldn't see the fear in my eyes.

The smuggler shrugged nonchalantly. "No idea. But if we find out, we'll be sure to let you know."

They let us keep walking.

Eventually, we reached the meadow and met the two other groups. But my father's group was not there. We waited a half hour. An hour. Two hours. The smuggler began getting anxious. "How long can we stay here without arousing suspicion? The SS are circling nearby," he told my mother. "Let me bring you to the border and then I'll go back to look for your husband."

"I will not budge without my husband," my brave mother said.

"So where can I find him?"

My mother suggested he go back to the house we came from. Perhaps my father had gotten lost along the way and returned there.

The smuggler left and arrived a short time later with my father's group. They had left after us and seen the same



Photos: Yisroel Teitelbaum @jewish.giant

Auschwitz

group of SS that we had. But while the smuggler was a skilled liar, my father was afraid to be confronted and so he and his group turned around.

We finally made it to the border of Slovakia. The original plan was to be there at 2:00 p.m., when another smuggler would meet us to bring us through the forest and into Slovakia. But by now it was around 6:00 p.m., and the second smuggler was not there.

The first smuggler said, "My job was just to bring you to the border. I don't know my way around this region. You must go ahead yourself."

My father said, "Please, you know more than we do. For every person you take across we will pay you another \$1,000." He agreed.

We wandered through the rough terrain in the dark. In the distance, we thought we saw two figures walking. When we ducked down to hide, they did too. We realized these must be our people, so we approached them. They were the second smugglers who were supposed to take us to Slovakia.

"You don't know what miracles happened to you!" they told us. "We were here at 2:00 p.m. and the SS were waiting. If you would have been there on time, we would all be dead by now. They took us to their headquarters and beat us but we didn't confess that we were smugglers, so they finally let us go."

If not for my mother's insistence that we wait for my father, we would have walked right into the Nazis' trap.

We kept walking through the night until we reached a farm at around 3:00 a.m. The smugglers hid us in the attic of the farm, behind heavy bales of hay. I fell into a fitful sleep but woke up a few hours later to a commotion. Through a crack in the wall, we saw the SS arrive. They were searching for escaping Jews. We heard them search through the house and then they reached the attic.

The guards were so close, we could hear their heavy breathing. (I myself could not breathe at all.) They began to move the bales of hay but stopped short of the last few that we were hiding behind. The footsteps receded. We were saved again.

SURVIVING THE SELECTION

We eventually reached my uncles in Kurima, where we hid for several months; then we spent three months in hiding in Bratislava, until we were captured. They rounded up all the Jews and crammed us into cattle cars. There was room for 40 people in each car, but they squeezed in 100 of us, along with the valises we each carried. In the day-and-a-half journey to Poland, they did not stop once to allow us to relieve ourselves. The stench was suffocating. By the time the doors finally opened in Auschwitz, two women were dead.

As soon as we stepped off the tracks, we were herded into lines. I held my mother's hand and my sister held

Once again, my mother squeezed my hand tightly. "Nissan, I won't give you away," she promised me silently.

my father's hand. Then the *Sonderkommandos* (Special Unit Commanders) came to take away our valises. The *Sonderkommandos* were Jewish prisoners forced to perform the grisly task of mass killing their fellow Jews. They collected our belongings, shepherded the unfortunate ones into gas chambers, burned their corpses in the crematoria, and scattered the ashes. Most *Sonderkommandos* were killed after about three months. Unable to handle their terrible job, which they were forced to do, many killed themselves rather than push Jewish children into gas chambers.

The *Sonderkommando* who approached us was clearly a *frum Yid*. When he saw me, a tiny pipsqueak, holding my mother's hand, he told my mother: "Give the child away to an elderly person who will anyway be taken to the gas chamber, and save yourself."

I felt my mother squeeze my hand even tighter. It



seemed like she was silently telling me, “My dear child, don’t be afraid. I won’t give you away.”

The *Sonderkommando* left but returned a few minutes later to urge my mother again. He said, “*L’maan Hashem*, why should you give up your life? It won’t save your child.”

Again, my mother squeezed my hand to reassure me.

The man came back one more time. He pretended he was still looking for valises.

“Let me tell you a story that happened last night,” he said.

“A young mother came to the Selection. She was clutching her baby to her chest. The Nazis send all mothers with babies straight to the gas chambers. But because they are sadists and barbarians, they take the babies out of their mother’s arms in the gas chamber. This mother would not let go of her child. So the Nazis forced the baby out of her arms, undressed him, and then tied his legs with two ropes to two trucks. The trucks began to drive in opposite directions, butchering the baby in front of his mother’s eyes.”

The *Sonderkommando* concluded, “If you don’t want the same fate, do as I say.”

Once again, my mother squeezed my hand tightly. “Nissan, I won’t give you away,” she promised me silently. And she didn’t.

“Hitler, Mengele, you wanted to kill me! Now I am alive and you perished.”

Soon it was time for us to stand before the infamous Dr. Mengele, the *Malach Hamaves* in human form. Men and women were divided, so I stood behind my father. My father hoped to angle his body in a way that Dr. Mengele might not notice me. But he did.

He was sitting behind a table, legs crossed, smoking a cigar, and gesturing with his thumb to the right or the left. Right meant life. Left meant death.

He asked me, “How old are you?”

“I’m 17,” I said. I was ten at the time, and with my height and demeanor, I wasn’t fooling anyone.

For reasons beyond me, Dr. Mengele responded, “I know you aren’t. But go with your father to the right.”

‘EXPERIMENT ON MONKEYS, NOT ME’

Our rations in Auschwitz consisted of a small, thin piece of bread for the whole day. And the Nazis wouldn’t give it to us when it was fresh. They waited until it got moldy and then gave it to us. Later, I realized that maybe that was a hidden gift; we were eating organic antibiotic. The starvation we experienced was so overpowering that at one point I found myself digging through the snow and the mud, and finding and eating... an earthworm.

Auschwitz was divided into many subcamps: Lager A, B, C... My father and I were immediately separated. I developed scarlet fever so I was sent to Lager F, where there was a small hospital for people whose conditions could be treated in a day or two. Anyone who was sick for longer than that was killed.

Lager F was also the home to a colony of dwarves—some of them had beards and *peyos*. There were also hundreds of twins. By 1944, Germany had lost some ten million men on the battlefield. Hitler was worried that when the war was over there wouldn’t be enough men to repopulate Germany. So he asked Dr. Mengele to research the genetics of multiples. In the name of “research,” Dr. Mengele practiced the cruelest and most sadistic experiments on human beings.

While I was lying on my cot in the hospital, Dr. Mengele walked in with a group of doctors. He looked around and saw a child. I was not a dwarf. I was not a twin. What was I doing there? He ordered me to come



Rabbi Mangel in the barracks of Auschwitz, showing his great-grandchildren the numbers on his arm.

forward and lie down on a stretcher.

I listened as he coldly described to the other doctors what he would do to me. “I will insert a drug into the vein that travels from his heart to his brain. If I find the vein, he’ll be paralyzed for life. If I can’t find the vein and the syringe enters his bloodstream, he’ll be dead in an hour or so.”

I jumped out of the stretcher and began to holler. *“Experiment on monkeys but not on me! Experiment on monkeys but not on me!”*

Dr. Mengele was like a demigod in Auschwitz. The biggest commanders didn’t dare defy him. His face turned white as a sheet as I continued to scream. The other doctors looked at each other uncomfortably. I ran back to my cot and hid under the covers, waiting for the shot to come.

It never did.

‘DO YOU KNOW MRS. MANGEL?’

There was a Jewish doctor from Prague in Lager F who had special permission to travel to different subcamps to inspect patients. I asked him to look for my father and he told me my father was in Lager D. The

kind doctor gave me toilet paper and a pen and he said he would deliver a letter from me to my father. I wrote: “Tatte, don’t give up. Soon we will be released.”

My father sent me notes in return with more words of encouragement. This back-and-forth continued for a few weeks, but then stopped suddenly. The doctor said he could not find my father. I investigated and found out that my father had been deported to Germany.

I became obsessed with finding my mother and sister. I managed to acquire a job carrying supplies to the women’s camp—which was the only way to get across the barbed wire fences without being electrocuted. When I walked into the women’s camp, it was deserted. Everybody was working. I went from barrack to barrack searching, until I reached one barrack with several Jewish women inside. They were cooks for the SS. When they saw me they all jumped on me and embraced me. “My Yankele, my Chayale,” they cried. In me they each saw the missing face of their own beloved child.

The women gave me a big loaf of bread—the most precious commodity in Auschwitz. I asked them, “Do you know Mrs. Mangel?”

“No, but I think there’s a Trudy Mangel in the last



Rabbi Mangel
davening in
a shul near
Auschwitz.

later to be shot. When the SS saw my frail frame, they sent me to the left. But I was not ready to die. When nobody was paying attention, I dashed into the other line. Unfortunately, I landed in a group of captured Ukrainian soldiers who were even more antisemitic than the Germans. They called out to the guards that I had escaped and joined their line.

The SS beat me with their rifles and sent me back to the other line. A few minutes later, I switched lines again. This time, nobody noticed.

THE DEATH MARCH

In the beginning, we trudged along. We put snow in our mouths for sustenance. But quickly people began to collapse, and corpses piled on the side of the road. Anybody who staggered to the side or stopped to rest was shot on the spot.

My left leg was in excruciating pain. I was wearing ill-fitting leather boots that bore at my ankle until all the skin and muscle were scraped away. I could literally see my bone. Every step I took caused the heavy leather to scratch on my bone and I would see stars.

I was ready to give up. I knew suicide was a terrible sin, but if I stepped to the side and was shot, would that be considered suicide? I decided it would not.

At the moment that I made the firm decision to step out of the line and get shot, a vision materialized in my mind. It was a picture of my mother, her face radiant with joy. She was bringing out the Friday night meal on a silver platter. We always had a lot of guests on Shabbos. We would sing *zemiros*, tell stories, and dine on my mother's delicious food. This image gave me *chizuk*. I kept walking through the pain.

A few hours later, my strength was gone. I could not bear it any longer. Again, I made the conscious decision to end it all. Again, a thought flashed through my mind. This time it was a story my father had told us one Friday night:

"A *chossid* once traveled to Mezhibuzh to spend Shabbos with the holy Baal Shem Tov. On Thursday night he received an urgent message from his wife. She had gone into early labor and needed him home immediately. The *chossid* was afraid to travel at night, because the forest between his town and Mezhibuzh was filled with thieves and murderers. He went to the Baal Shem Tov in the middle of the night and said, 'Rebbe, my wife needs me to come home, but I am afraid to go alone.'

"The Baal Shem Tov responded, 'A Yid never goes alone.'"

barrack of this camp," one woman replied. My sister's name was Gertrude, or Trudy! So I ran to the last barrack. There I found my sister, but she was not my sister. I did not recognize the skeleton before me, with no flesh, no hair, no smile. She had to tell me many *simanim*, the names of our parents and more, until I finally believed it was her.

"Where's Mama?" I asked her.

"Mama was sent to Germany," she replied.

So both our parents were gone.

Previously, Trudy had stood outside for roll call from 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. as usual. But the wooden shoes she was wearing could not protect her feet from the harsh Polish winter. Her toes froze, then turned black. She simply could not go to work. So she had returned to the barrack to await her fate.

I gave Trudy the loaf of bread. "Next week I will come again and bring you salami," I promised her. But the next week never came. A few days later, as the Soviet army encroached on Nazi territory, the few thousand surviving Jews in Poland were forced to join a death march to Germany.

There was one final selection. Anybody who didn't look strong enough for the march was left in Auschwitz,

Until that moment, I thought of myself as a little child, all alone. But now I remembered that I was not alone. I continued to march and kept repeating this mantra in my head: *I am not alone. Hashem is holding me. I am not alone...*

After two or three more days, even this mantra could not carry me any longer. The pain shooting from my ankle put my entire left side out of commission. I physically could not walk. Just as I made the decision to stumble to the side, a young man came right next to me and began to speak.

On the death march, nobody made conversation. Each person dedicated all of his energy to survival. One step forward, another step, and another.

But this man decided to chat. He told me he came from Košice, my hometown. I told him, “Listen, I’m so glad you came to me. I’m about to get shot. Promise me you will go back to Košice and tell my parents what happened to me.”

He said, “No, no! Don’t do it. I’ll help you.”

“How can you help me?”

“Put your arm on my shoulder and I’ll carry you.”

So I put my left hand on his shoulder and began to hop in the snow.

We kept on like this for a few more days. But with no food or drink, I ran out of energy even to hop while leaning on him. I said, “That’s it. Let me go.”

At that moment, an SS officer walked over to me. He started talking to me in German, asking me where I come from and about my father. After a few minutes, I told him, “I can’t talk anymore. I can’t continue. Please, when I step to the side, you shoot me.”

“No! Don’t give up,” he said.

“But I can’t do it anymore!”

The SS officer reached into his belt and pulled out a canteen. He handed it to me and I gulped down the hot, sweet, black coffee. I felt the warmth travel into every vein and artery of my body and give me strength. It revived me, like *techias hameisim*. The officer disappeared, and I continued hopping while leaning on my friend.

Two hours later, he reappeared by my side. He handed me his canteen again and I again gulped it down.

From then on, every two hours he found me again and gave me fuel, literally, to keep going.

Rabbi Mangel revealing his tattoo from Auschwitz, in Auschwitz.

We reached a particularly high mountain. The icy wind was slapping our ears. I told the SS man, “I am freezing.” So he took off his wool cap and put it over my head, covering my ears. He went bareheaded.

The next time he came to me there was no coffee left in his canteen. “I can’t continue,” I said. “Just shoot me.”

He said, “Don’t give up now. I assure you, you will survive this war, you will go home, and you will see your family.”

I said, “But I can’t!”

He said, “We are six kilometers away from a German town. I promise I will go into the first house I see and get you coffee.”

“But I simply can’t hop anymore!”

So the officer said, “I will carry you.”

My left hand was already on the shoulder of my friend. Now my right hand went on the shoulder of the SS officer. Together they *shlepped* me the last six kilometers.

True to his word, at the sight of the first German home, the SS officer went in and filled his canteen with hot black coffee. It wasn’t sweet, but I gulped it down. Then he asked me to give back his cap, which I did. I never saw him again.

I sometimes think that the SS officer was Eliyahu Hanavi sent from Heaven to save me. But if he truly was a Nazi, it is no less of a *nes*. These barbarians were the most evil people to ever walk the planet—for them to kill a Jew was easier than for me to kill a mosquito. Yet Hashem changed the nature of this brute, so that he somehow found in his heart a morsel of pity for a wretched Jewish child.



LIBERATION

When the American soldiers finally arrived in Germany, they said to me, “Come with us back to New York. We’ll put you in a school. We’ll give you clothes. You won’t find anybody at home.” But I wanted to go home. I wanted to find my parents. I was all of eleven years old.

I reached Košice on a Thursday night. I was too afraid to enter my former home. What if nobody was there? I had survived Auschwitz, but I didn’t think I would survive finding out that I was really, truly all alone in the world.

So I spent the night at a hotel set up for returning survivors. In the morning, I went back to our home. But I was still too afraid to go inside. I paced up and down on the sidewalk hoping to see someone walk out. Then I saw our janitor, Ivanka’s father. I told him who I was and asked, “Who is at home?”

“Your aunt and uncle are there,” he responded, “and your sister.”

With a heart full of relief, I walked up and knocked on the door. I was wearing a red beret from the French Army, a German SS jacket, and too-large trousers. When my aunt opened the door, she called to my uncle, “Ahron, take a look! A gypsy is here!”

I cried, “Aunt and Uncle, you call me a gypsy?!” I took off my beret and they recognized me. We embraced and cried.

Rabbi Nissan and Mrs. Raizel Mangel holding signs to bring home our hostages on their trip to Auschwitz.

Trudy was in a hospital in Košice. They had amputated her frostbitten toes. A few days after I had seen her, the Nazis put all the remaining Jews in her lager in a barrack, doused it with gasoline, and set it on fire. In the nick of time, the Red Army arrived, put out the fire, and rescued the people from inside.

Two weeks after I arrived home, we received a telegram from Prague. A message from my mother! *Baruch Hashem*, she was alive. It took some time for her to travel to us because all the bridges had been bombed. Finally, the door to our apartment opened. It was Mama. When I laid eyes on her I felt an overwhelming emotion that was beyond words or tears. We just stared and stared at each other. After several long minutes, the tears came. I ran into her arms, and we cried together.

Later, we found out what had happened to Tatte. My father was part of a group of four close friends. They stuck together through every evacuation and selection. As they heard the allies' bombing get closer, they decided they would not move again. They dug a hole under their barrack and covered the entrance with straw so it would not be noticed.

One of his friends was a *Poishish Yid* who may have had asthma. He had trouble breathing under the ground, so he left the hole. What he saw scared him. All the Jews left in the camp had been shot. Only SS were left. So he returned to the hole. But his breathing issue intensified, and he decided to leave again. My father begged him, "Come back. In just a few hours, we will be free."

"Laizer, don't leave me. Laizer, *oif vemmen lozstu mich?*" he said. So my father climbed out of the hole with him. As he stepped out, his friends held his foot and tried to stop him. "Laizer, don't commit suicide!"

My father, an *ish chessed*, said, "He needs me." Those were his last words. He was shot by the Nazis, hours before liberation.

Although I only knew my father for ten years, I have continued learning from him for the rest of my life.

FROM MISNAGID TO CHOSSID

After the war, we had each other, but no material belongings. Our house had been ransacked. The

box of money behind the wallpaper was gone. The many diamonds and jewelry that my father had given my mother as gifts after every business trip were gone. My mother was industrious and managed to start a new textile business from scratch. I learned in *cheder* and my sister went to Bais Yaakov.

In 1948, the Communists took over Košice, which was now a part of Czechoslovakia. My mother was afraid it would become like Russia, where practicing *Yiddishkeit* was forbidden. In order to save our souls, she said goodbye to us again. England had opened its borders to Jewish orphans from the war. She bought us forged papers that said we were orphans and sent us to England to study in Jewish schools. Eventually, I ended up in Canada for yeshiva and my sister and mother moved to Eretz Yisroel.

I studied in Tomchei Temimim of Montreal. But I was a *misnagid*. I came from a *chassidische* family but in England I went to a *misnagdishe* yeshiva where they poisoned my mind against *Chassidus*. I told the *rosh yeshivah* in Montreal that I had two conditions: 1) Don't force me to learn *Chassidus*, and 2) I need my own private room. I didn't want to stay in the dormitory with other *bachurim* who would indoctrinate me.

The *hanhalah* must have asked the Rebbe for advice because they gave me my crazy conditions. I spent a year like that. One Friday night, it was hot in my apartment. I did not have a fan, let alone an air conditioner, and I could not bear to stay indoors. So I began to walk and ended up at the yeshiva. The whole place was empty, everyone was already sleeping, except for one Yid, Reb Moshe Elye Gerlitzky, who was swaying over a *sefer*.

"Nissan, come here. I want to show you something," he said. I could see the *sefer* he was reading was the *Tanya*. I would have refused if he was anyone else. But Reb Moshe Elye was so warm, so welcoming, that I couldn't say no. He read aloud from the *Tanya*, "If the Aibershter would grant us real eyes to see, the *gashmius* of the world wouldn't be seen at all. Everything would be *ruchmius*."

I had learned a lot of *Gemara* and Rambam, but I had never heard of this idea. I became curious. After that day, the Aibershter opened my eyes to *Chassidus*. The rest, as they say, is history.



Rabbi Nissan and Mrs. Raizel Mangel in Auschwitz.



Rabbi Mangel puts *tefillin* on a Jew he met in Auschwitz.

Rabbi Nissan and Mrs. Raizel Mangel with nearly 100 of their descendants in Auschwitz.





Rabbi Mangel holding the sign which is the first thing you see when you walk into his house. It says: *Hodu laShem ki tov ki l'olam chasdo.*

MY ULTIMATE VICTORY

On my 90th birthday, I returned to Auschwitz to thank Hashem. I stood on the same train tracks that I had arrived on by cattle car as a ten-year-old boy. This time, I had my wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren by my side. This was not a death march, but a victory march with almost 100 of my descendants.

On an earlier visit to Auschwitz, I had taken a nail and carved into the wooden barrack wall: “Hitler, Mengele, you wanted to kill me! Now I am alive and you perished.” I said the same thing to them now, surrounded by my dear descendants.

I have several talents—composing music was never one of them. But as I was contemplating the Aibershter’s goodness, kindness, and the *nissim* he did for me, I burst into song: “*Hodu laShem ki tov ki l’olam chasdo. Ich dank Dir, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, far di chassadim voss Du tust tzu mir.*”

“Praise Hashem, for He is good, His mercy endures forever. I thank You, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, for the kindness that You did for me.” ❄

