

Ossie and the Bracelet By Ruth Chevion

Dear Reader, I want to tell you about my mother's older brother. His name was Oswald, but everyone called him Ossie. I want to tell you about something he did in February of 1943. He gave my mother a gift of a bracelet. Ossie was 23 years old at the time. My mother was 18.

My mother had been hiding in the Tatra mountains for several weeks before this incident with the bracelet. She had had a brush with Gestapo in Zakopane, and she had gone into hiding. She resurfaced in Krakow a few weeks later with a new false name, a new rented place to sleep, and a new job in a post office. Grim as the situation was, and Krakow itself is a pretty grim grey city, the new situation enabled her occasionally to see her mother Susha and her brother Ossie. My mother had not seen them since the ghetto, so this aspect of the new situation was a huge improvement for her. I cannot overstate the attachment my mother felt to her mother and to her older brother.

Mom's mother Susha and Mom's brother Ossie had gone to Krakow upon escaping from the ghetto. They had broken the cardinal rule that Jews should not be seen together, let alone live together as family. They were renting sleeping accommodations in the same house together. The problem was that Ossie could not pass for Polish on his own. He was handsome, but not at all in a Polish sort of way, and he spoke very little Polish. Due to family history that I will spare you, dear reader, he had moved to Poland only recently. Before that he had lived in Vienna and spoken only German.

My mother meantime, also jumped right in and broke the rules. Are we surprised? Almost everything my mother did during the war was contrary to received wisdom in some respect. So once in Krakow, it was not surprising that she would go every day to where her mother worked as a maid, just trying to have a few minutes with her mother. Meeting up with Ossie was more difficult. He worked as a nightwatchman.

Then one day, my mother accosted Ossie on the street on his way back from work. He was delighted to see her. He reached into his pocket and brought out a gift he had been keeping for her.

Es ist ein Armband, Hertie, für dich. (It's a bracelet, Hertie, for you.)

Es ist aber so schön, Ossie. Wo hast du es gefunden? (It's so beautiful Ossie. Where did you find it?)

Auf der Strabe," he said. Ich habe es auf der Strabe gefunden. (On the street. I found it on the street.)

Danke vielmals Ossie. Ich werde es für immer halten. (Thank you so much Ossie, I'll keep it forever).

And yes indeed, she kept it forever. I still have it. You must squint to see it as a bracelet, as it has no clasp, and it can't go around even the smallest wrist. It's just a mangled piece of metal really.

I have to ponder, dear reader, to whom I can leave this treasure that was worth as much to Ossie and Hertie as any jewel from Tiffany's. I won't donate it to a Holocaust museum for people to feel sad. Because it's not sad. It's one of the luminous moments. It's in my collection of Holocaust moments that say "Always remember." Always remember what the Holocaust teaches us about what it means to be human.

I'm thinking to leave the bracelet to Ela, my dear eighteen-year-old Israeli cousin, because she has two brothers who love her, and she loves them. She will understand what it means.



My Uncle Ossie



Ossie's Bracelet

Hevra Kadisha of Central New Hampshire

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