

## The Old Man and the Blessing by Ruth Chevion

My mother would say she was never really hungry in the war. She attributed this luck to a blessing she received from an old man in the ghetto.

Here is the background:

Lvov had two ghettos for Jews, a large urban ghetto, and a smaller rural ghetto. My mother's family was in the smaller ghetto. What my mother remembered most about life in this ghetto, was the starvation. People were starving and laying down in the street to die.

But my Grandmother Susha had work papers. With these work papers she was released from the ghetto every day to go to work in a factory sewing Nazi uniforms. She was essentially slave labor, but she made the best of it. Because outside the ghetto she was able to steal food.

I don't know if she did it coming or going. I have no details. But she would regularly bring back a few beets or potatoes, some noodles, some salt. These provisions she handed over to my mother, who having no work papers, took charge of making some sort of meals for the family.

Before long, people in the ghetto found out that my mother had food, and they started coming to the door. Mom would give out some soup. More people came. She didn't turn anyone away. Even if the soup was thin, she didn't turn people away.

When my mother talked about this, she would tear up and say that her mother never objected to what she was doing. I did not need an explanation. I understood. After all, her mother risked her life to get these meager provisions for her family. Obviously, the more my mother gave away, the less there was for the family to eat. It is easy to see why she was proud of her mother, and grateful to her, for letting her be generous and feed other people.

After a while, there were daily regulars, like a little soup kitchen, and my mother gave out a bowl of soup with something floating in it. When there was nothing to put in the soup, she picked some grass outside. This was the big benefit, my mother said, of having been in the rural ghetto rather than in the big city ghetto. "You could always pick some grass outside and eat that."

In addition to the soup, she gave everyone a cup of ersatz coffee. The coffee was mostly brownish water, Mom said, but sometimes she had some sugar to put in it. "It probably wasn't the food that saved them," my mother said. "I think just having something hot and being together, could make them last another day."

That's the background, so now I'm getting to my story:

There was one old man who came every day. He was Mom's favorite. She would reach her ladle down to the bottom of the pot for something solid to put in his soup. She always gave him something extra.

One day, the old man gave her a blessing. In Yiddish he said to her, "*Mahn kint di zolst nisht vissen fon keyn hinger.*" "My child may you never know hunger." I don't know exactly how he did it. Did he put his hands on the shoulders? I don't know. But she said it just like that, "he blessed me."

There came a day when the old man did not come any more.

Still, the blessing worked, and the memory of the old man is a blessing in itself.

I'm so proud of them. The way they held themselves uplifts my spirit.

In the next issue I'll tell you how the six remaining members of this family including my mother, escaped from this ghetto, and started the next stage of survival - passing on the Aryan side.



Here is a photo of my mother at age 93 standing at the stove in my kitchen in Hopkinton, making a soup.

P.S. My mother never stopped worrying about old people having enough food. Her favorite charity was Meals on Wheels.