

ELUL 7 By Saralee Rosenberg

My small part in leaving a gift for future generations is best shared by the retelling of this true story.

In March, 2004, my sister, Mira Temkin, and I accompanied our then 78-year-old father, Harold Hymen, to the historic Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust in London. We had flown there from Sarasota, Florida, Chicago and Dix Hills to retrieve one of the few remaining Torah Scrolls that had survived the Nazi's desecration of Jewish life in the Czech Republic.

Our father was chosen as the courier by his synagogue as he had spent many years raising money for this important undertaking. His fervent hope was to have on permanent loan a safe place to showcase a battered, blood-stained Torah Scroll so that future generations could bear witness to what was intended as the extermination of the Jews. But his years-long efforts to raise money turned out to be the easy part.

Though this 12-pound symbol of might with its fine wooden rollers had survived Hitler, there was a real possibility it would not survive its final journey to Tampa International due to Southwest Airline's size restrictions.

Imagine the scene. We had helped hand-carry this sacred Scroll from Heathrow to JFK. Now we were at the check-in counter at Long Island's Islip airport getting a boarding card for my father who would be flying alone for this last leg of the trip. To our great dismay, the gate agent informed us that he could not take the Torah on board due to the small overhead bin space. It would have to go as checked baggage.

As a proud, strong World War II veteran our father did not scare easily, but was now near tears. If he parted with the Torah, he would be in violation of his promise to never let it leave his sight. What if it got lost or stolen? Sold on Ebay? He would never forgive himself if he returned empty handed.

We were contemplating driving him back to Florida when an angel appeared. We just didn't know it at the time as she was a young woman with long blonde hair, a warm smile and a Southwest uniform. Munching a bag of chips, she happened to be coming off her break as a baggage handler and overheard us pleading with the gate agent. She learned that the item was an important religious object and whispered something to her co-worker. Though it would be bending the rules, and she wasn't exactly sure what a Torah was, she offered to personally place it into the cargo hold of the plane.

Decision time. Did we start the long drive to Florida or entrust a sympathetic stranger to carry out her promise? Finally, our wise father said, "The Jews who perished never lost faith in G-d and we can't either." We then watched this woman carry the Torah Scroll away and prayed. Please, please, please let her keep her word.

Hours later, our father was standing at the baggage claim carousel with a friend who had offered to drive him home from the Tampa airport. He was feeling ill with worry as suitcases and golf clubs circled, but there was no sign of the most important checked bag of his life. Then, it occurred to him that with all the craziness, he had never been given a claim check or gotten the name of the Southwest employee who helped us. If the Torah hadn't made the flight, what proof did he have when he went to the baggage claim office?

Meanwhile the carousel looped around and around until finally, he spotted a large cardboard crate. A crate about the size of the Torah Scroll. Yet it was hard to identify the contents because whatever was inside was covered in bubble wrap, duct tape and a large red velvet cloth, perhaps a leftover Christmas decoration. Talk about miracles. Thanks to the generous spirit of a young woman who was both sympathetic and clever, the Scroll was kept safe in a container she constructed by hand.



Our father died in 2012, but as he hoped, this remnant of the Jewish faith lives on. It is now displayed with prominence at his beloved synagogue, Temple Beth Shalom in Sarasota, where congregants and visitors can discuss its storied journey and the everlasting lessons within.

We are still uncertain of its past, but we are confident of its bright future.

Our one regret was that we never learned the name of the Southwest angel who appeared at the moment we were bereft of hope... unless it turned out that her name was less important than understanding the role she played.

Good souls walk among us every day. We just need to let them in.

Saralee and Lee Rosenberg joined TBT in 1997 and have had the extreme pleasure of having their two daughters bat mitzvahed there. Their three children, Zack, Alexandra and Taryn, all graduated Hebrew High and were married by Rabbi Moskowitz. Email: saralee42@gmail.com