

Manya Karp Einesman Stone

By Victor Stone

I made a promise to my mom that I would tell her story.

Mania Stone or Mania Stone's story is a story of survival, of strength and of astonishing endurance to overcome the great troubles of life: War, hunger, disease.

For me mom was not just a survivor, but a heroic survivor. She survived despite all the odds that were set against her. Hers was an epic life, well lived.

She was brave and always moved forward, And that was her lesson to me.

Be brave move forward. Whenever I think of her that will be what comes to my mind.

Mania Einesmen was born and raised in a sleepy shetetel called Rosvatow, in prewar Poland, not far from the border of the former Soviet Union. It was a peaceful place with large extended families, where everyone knew everyone.

Hers was a family of merchants. There was Aunty Mamela, a property owner who also owned a grocery store. There was Aunty Mencha, another SOUCHTA, businesswoman who had a grocery store, a place where mom would hangout and work. There was her mother Sprintza, a pious and humble woman, a single mother raising 2 children in a very traditional home. There was her younger brother Avigidor, who I was named after. And cousins Hershel and Itzekel, who mom always thought of as her younger brothers,

Theirs was a close loving family whose daily life revolved around work and traditions.

Mom was about 15 yrs. old, on the day their orderly shetetel life was abruptly ended, by the catastrophic events emanating far from the center of their small peaceful village.

That was the day the Russian soldiers marched in, and the Jews of this sleepy little village were fatefully granted a lifeline, an escape from Hitler's death camps, from retribution of his Gestapo.

The extended family including the aunts, uncles and cousins took their places in the cattle cars heading into the safe and frozen wastelands of Siberia. Their arduous journey took them to a place called Soyma, located on a river in Northern Siberia.

There waiting for them was a life of hunger, hardship and horrific cold. They were greeted by the large tracts of forest and some barren wooden framed structures, in which they were to make their new home. Everyone in the family pitched in to survive, chopping wood in the forest, carrying it upriver in their flimsy boat, to be traded for a meagre substance.

It was there on that Siberian River, that Mom lost her beloved Uncle Yakov, after he had fallen off their flimsy boat and drown. The young not very strong woman tried to rescue him, but she could not succeed. She was traumatized and forever wounded by this calamity. The family rallied together all that much more, to endure the added pain.

The war was winding down and the family headed to Jambul in Southern Kazakhstan. Here there were met by heat and a Typhoid epidemic. They survived this too! And they put their business acumen to work, selling boots and dyed fabrics in the market, so that they could again survive and stay intact as a family.

But tragedy reared its head again. The war had finally ended and the family was headed back to Poland, when Mom's young brother Avigidor, lost his way among the mass of people boarding the train. He was never to be seen alive again. The family was devastated.

When they got back to Poland, they were unable to return to their shetetel. They were told it was too dangerous, so they stayed nearby in Lodz.

Fortunately providence intervened yet again and the family was smuggled out of communist

Poland and into free Berlin, where they stayed for about a year in a camp organized by The Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

It was 1946, and Mania was 24 years old. There was contagious idealism permeating the Jewish Diaspora. It was about the dream and the soon to be reality of a Jewish homeland. Mom was torn between leaving the family she loved and the hope of helping make the dream come true.

But the die was cast: Mania was a strikingly beautiful woman and my father, who also lived in the camp was smitten. He took his savings and invested it in an amazing dress - that would seal their fate. They were married in Berlin that year.

The following year they were among the lucky ones. There was family in Canada and they were invited to join them. Because mom was in the last trimester of her first pregnancy she was to fly to Canada, while the rest of the family traveled by boat. She was very excited to go to places like London and Paris - by airplane. She always liked to say almost wistfully. "I was in London and Paris."

A new life awaited them in Canada. It was another difficult transition - now from the Old World to a New World. New language, different customs - She was a Greena, in a land of Hegas.

She was brave and again moved forward.

Mary Stone was starting a new family, going to school to learn English, becoming part of a new postwar Jewish community. She had found joy in the small details of life. Mom and Dad enjoyed playing cards with their many new friends, who like them were the new immigrants in the Land of Plenty. Playing cards for them became the central focus of their social life and family trips to Detroit Lakes with their children and friends became a summer ritual.

Mom was always a devoted daughter. When Sprintza moved out of our home to move in the Moshe Zakinim, to be with her sister Mameala, Mom assigned us each the duties of visitation so that Baba wouldn't feel lonely. My brothers and I were to go there to be with Baba, doing our homework at her table, or take Sprintzala for a short walk into the garden - or even down Magnus Ave. And when there were problems for Sprintza at the home, Mom would phone Itzekel for a sympathetic ear to listen to.

Twenty years ago, became another pivotal moment in her life. It was then that she was told by the doctors of the Mayo Clinic that her demise was imminent. Her liver had failed her and she was not 'their' ideal candidate for a transplant. She was considered too old for such complicated surgery. Her response to that was "Doctor, No one lives forever, not even you." She was defiant and ever so brave and she moved forward.

Providence once again intervened at this critical moment of her life. My brother Aaron recommended a trip to Pittsburgh, where the first liver transplants were conducted a number of years earlier. And as it happened Mom's close friend's son worked there on a surgical transplant team under the renowned liver transplant surgeon pioneer Dr. Starzl. Mom was again to survive the odds that were stacked against her.

Her family rallied around her. We visited her, offered her moral support and love, and stayed in Pittsburgh with her. This is where I learned to make boiled tongue, according to her recipe, which was to boil the heck out of the tongue and then peel it back. Seemed like a good idea at the time,

when I brought some of the boiled delicacy back to the hospital. She looked aghast when I served it to her, "What did you do to it?" She exclaimed. Then she put a piece in her mouth and pretended to savour it. I remember looking at her and thinking, that it was definitely worth both the effort and humiliation of knowing I was never going to measure up to her idea of being a decent cook - just to see her smile and see her face light up while I was cutting up the tongue for her.

Health problems were ongoing over the years. Next she had colon cancer. I remember being in the hospital and mom was in a dark mood chastising one of the nurses for not following through on

something. There was this lady, from Manhattan sitting across the hall, with her ailing father. She happened to be a high powered executive of a famous cosmetic company. The lady had been talking to mom earlier.

Later the woman came up to me and said in a serious voice, "You're mother is a real spitfire!" I shook my head and pronounced, "Yes she is." The lady paused to reflect and then declared, "I like that." Mary Stone may have looked sweet, tiny and frail. But she was a tough nut to crack. She called things as she saw them but the people who met her, including the nurses on that ward were all genuinely fond of her.

Mom followed current events, watched news programs, read newspapers. She had strong opinions on politics, no one not the politicians on TV, her sons, nor her close friends, would escape, her tell it as it is scrutiny. But she genuinely was honest and caring and expected people to be the same with her.

Coming from a shetetel in rural backwaters of Poland, all cities were 'groise'. When she found herself in New York, LA or Tokyo "So big." she would say "It a 'genheim'." Even Winnipeg, she'd always lament, it's gotten too big. And I think to myself, you can take the girl out of the shetetel, but you can never take the shetetel out of the girl. I was thinking, wasn't that grand that even after 60 yrs., mom never ever lost the feeling of where she came from.

This year mom was diagnosed with lung cancer. When the doctor came in and told her about the diagnosis, mom stoically replied "Doctor, no one lives forever. I'm just a guest here. She was brave and moved forward. Her focus was to remain alive and continue with the business of living. She never mentioned the cancer to me - she knew what the odds were, but mom was always in survival mode. This time was no different for her. She was brave and moved forward.

Over the last 7 or so yrs. there were always full time caregivers living at Mom's, first taking care of Dad and then of her. There was always a rough patch at the beginning with each new girl. Each time she felt that she needed to reassert herself in her home, but she always came around and showed interest, concern and affection for the women that took care of her. She took on the role of mother figure, and they gave her back love and kindness. Thank you - Mary Fay, Eden, Chit and Linda. You were all a blessing in her life.

When I look back at old pictures of her, I've noticed there was always a sparkle in her eyes and a heart warming smile on her face, one that I know came from the depths of her being. She had experienced the joys as well as the deep sorrows of life.

She left us with memories and lessons well learned. Our mother was a model to me and my brothers. Mom had a full life. She was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother and great grandmother. And like mom said, "Nobody gets to live forever, we're only guests." She was brave and taught us how to move forward. G-d bless her memory and her beautiful soul.