

He Hath Not Let Me Die
From Ashes to Life

**Now You Can Read Excerpts From This Riveting Book
By Sam Domb In IMAGE Magazine. We have printed
chapters 1 and 2. Here is chapter 3.**

He Hath Not Let Me Die

Chapter 3

The Angel

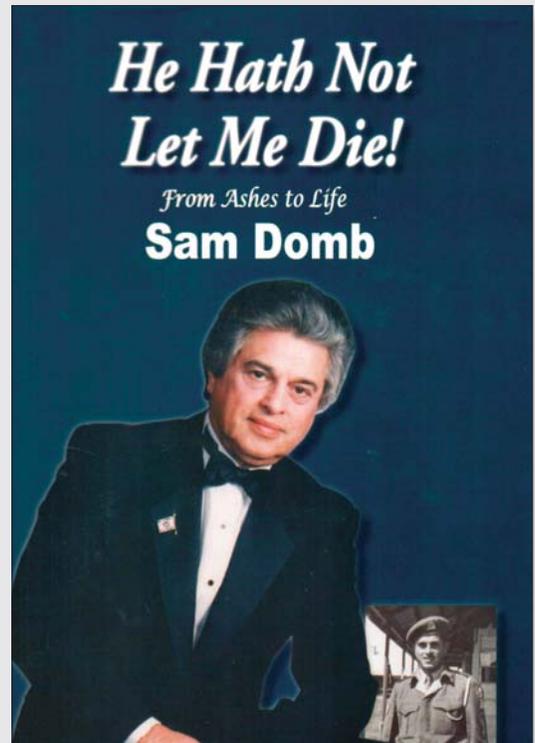
“For he will order his angels to guard you wherever you go.”

Psalms 91:11

Father carried me in his arms and strode through the fields in the dark that led to the Pole’s house. On the way he tried to reassure me, explaining that the Pole was his good friend and would watch over me. In the meantime, he and my sisters would search for a safe place to live. Father promised to come and get me as soon as matters were straightened out. The few garments I wore were not sufficient to keep me warm in the chill of the night. My legs were frozen stiff and I was barefoot, as the Germans had not given my mother time to put shoes on my feet. The path was filled with potholes and Father stumbled every few steps, and I too with him. The silent night and freezing cold were of no help in forgetting the shocking sights of the day, least of all that of my mother, murdered and left behind. I burst out crying again.

Father hugged me and whispered: “Calm down, child, everything will be okay; behave like a big boy and be strong. My friend will watch over you. In the meantime, I’ll search for a new place to live; and I promise to come and get you. Don’t worry.”

Father’s voice cracked, tears choked him and he was deeply pained. German planes flew above and from all around came



sounds of explosions. Father resumed walking and increased his pace.

The Pole’s house was isolated and stood at the edge of plowed fields. Apparently, this was an agricultural area where various crops were grown. After hours of strenuous walking at night, through mud and furrowed fields, we arrived at the Pole’s house. Father knocked on the door. The Pole, a tall man with a roundish face, dressed in work clothes, peered through the crack in the door and then opened it. They exchanged a few words and Father handed me over to him, though not before hugging and kissing me. In a voice choked with tears, he whispered into my ears: “Don’t be afraid, child, he will watch over you. I’ll return for you very soon. Be strong and act like a big boy.”

Father embraced me again and disappeared into the darkness. The Pole took me to a shed in his yard and told me that I

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would spend the night there. The door of the shed was open and I went inside. The Pole directed me to a staircase that led to a cellar where potatoes were stored, left me there and returned to his house.

I walked hesitantly to the corner of the cellar. There were other Jews there who had apparently also found haven with the Pole. Among those hiding was a young boy whom I estimated to be five or six years older than me. His face was visible in the dim light that penetrated the shed. He gestured to me, and in a calm voice invited me to sit next to him. I walked confidently over to him and did not hesitate to sit down there, as if we were old friends. He did not ask my name, just put his arm around my shoulders and said: "Come closer, don't be afraid."

For some reason I felt safe. I tried to keep myself from crying, to control myself and not exhibit any signs of distress. The cold seeped in through my bare feet and caused my body to tremble. My new friend hugged me, brought a bit of straw and a rag he found there and covered my feet. To this day I do not know his real name and what happened to him. For ease of reference, I'll refer to him here as Michael. In any case, it seemed to me that the two of us were the only children in the cellar.

I tried to fall asleep, but do not recall if I succeeded. We sat this way, wordless in the darkness, that entire night. At first light, we heard from afar the noise of motorcycles and other vehicles approaching the Pole's house. It was a group of armed Germans. Through a crack in the shed, we saw Father's Polish friend speak with them and point to the shed in which we were hiding. Michael, who had apparently developed a special survivor's instinct, heard what was transpiring and whispered in my ears: "The Pole is giving us up to the Germans."

I clung to him. He hugged me and grasped my hand tightly. "It looks like they're about to take us away," he mumbled.

"Where to?" I asked. Before he managed to respond, we heard the screech of car wheels in front of the shed. Armed German soldiers jumped out and surrounded it. The Jews hiding there panicked and sounds of crying were audible. I did not cry, but was

afraid. Now I discovered that other children were there, together with their parents.

The horrible images of Pultusk resurfaced. Shouts of "*Juden raus! Juden raus!*" (Jews out! Jews out) came from all sides.

The armed Germans burst into the shed. Roaring and poking us with bayonets, they seized everyone who had taken refuge and loaded all of us like animals onto a truck parked at the entrance. The military truck was too high for me to climb onto. One of the Nazi soldiers grabbed me by the waist and threw me into the truck as if I were an object, not a human being. I suffered a painful blow to my body. Michael came over to me and pulled me to his side. The Germans combed every corner of the shed and threatened to kill all of us if they found anyone who had not surrendered himself to them.



"I hope you weren't injured," I heard my friend whisper in my ears.

"My knees hurt a bit," I answered.

"Where are they taking us?" sobbed a woman standing next to me, holding her little daughter by the hand. The German soldier shouted at her, silencing all of us.

The Germans demanded that we crowd together and stay close to each other. At the order of the officer in charge, the convoy of vehicles started moving to another house in the area, not far from that of the Pole, where they also searched for hidden Jews. Dozens more Jews were loaded onto our truck, among them men, women with babies and some elderly people. We traveled like this for several hours, transported like animals in trucks. The scene repeated itself at each and every stop along the way: searching for Jews and loading them onto the trucks.

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The convoy was surrounded by jeeps with machine guns. The cruel armed guards did not hesitate to shoot and kill anyone who violated an order. After traveling a distance of several kilometers, the convoy stopped at the edge of a forest bordering an expansive corn field. The Germans commanded us to get off the trucks and form a line.

Surrounded by a guard of armed Nazis, we marched into the forest. Our blood froze from fear and cold, but on we went. Michael was in front of me and his hand did not let go of mine. When he thought I was about to fall, he pulled me toward him and steadied me. The shouts of the Germans in the forest mingled with the sounds of crying and the wails of the marchers. I wanted to ask my friend where they were taking us, but my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth and I did not have the strength to move my lips. The Germans urged us on, poking us with their bayonets and hitting us with the butts of their rifles.

After about an hour of walking, we reached a clearing in the forest. The officer at the head gave a signal and the line of marchers was ordered to stop. Two jeeps with machine guns were positioned in one corner. The Germans arranged us in groups of ten. Michael and I were in the second group. The Nazis commanded the first ten to line up in the center of the clearing, dozens of meters in front of the jeeps. Suddenly, the German officer gave an order and the machine guns began to reap their harvest of death. Those shot at crumpled and dropped like felled trees, while their comrades screamed and howled. The cries tore through the forest. Those left knew that their turn would come.

I stood with my friend in the second group, ready to be slaughtered. I was shocked by the scene. The blood froze in my veins.

A mere thirty meters separated me from death. The German yelled at us to move forward to the shooting area. The wails of the women and cries of the children were heart-rending. While preparing to move, I felt a strong tug on my arm, accompanied by a whisper:

"Run after me quickly!" Michael forcefully pulled me out of the line that was forming the next group and broke into flight in the direction of the forest's edge, the corn fields. He



did not let go of me for even a moment. With his cleverness and agility, my friend managed to exploit the murderers' momentary delay while they stilled the Jews and positioned the jeeps at a better angle for shooting.

My friend ran, with me following, straight into the long, twisted rows of corn, far from the eyes of the Germans. I clung to him as to a magnet; the strength of our connection was amazing. I could not understand from where Michael drew such powerful strength. His palm gripped mine as if we were born attached. I was in a panic and an inner voice propelled me forward: "Run, lad, run!"

One of the German soldiers had noticed our escape. He chased us and tried to locate us, but the corn stalks were sufficiently tall to conceal us fully. The German fired several rounds at us. The bullets passed over our heads. My friend made me lie down among the corn stalks, bent over me and hid me with his body. For a moment it seemed as if Michael was sent to me as an angel from heaven in order to watch over me.

Eventually, the firing stopped and we saw the German retreating back into the forest. That day I began to believe in angels.

We were lucky that the corn stalks were taller than we were and afforded a safe hiding place from our pursuers. This was a very large corn field; most of its crop had been picked but not harvested, apparently due to the events of the war. Michael seized hold of my hand again and continued to run endlessly. Suddenly, he switched directions and went into the heart of the corn fields, to the forest's other edge.

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While still running, we heard machine gun fire from the direction of the forest clearing. We understood that another group had been shot to death by the bloodthirsty Nazis. The barrages were accompanied by cries and heart-wrenching wails and, at the same time, a measured shout of men and women burst from the background:

"Shma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad!" ("Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our G-d, the Lord is One!")

Once again, we heard a barrage of machine gun fire, followed by another. The shooting stopped eventually. From then on

survivor's instinct, with the assistance of my young friend—like a wild beast abandoned to its fate by its parents. Slowly, the realization that crying and wailing were of no value began to penetrate my awareness, and I realized that I would have to constantly seek means of survival, and to persevere.

With a sure hand, "my angel" led me to a hiding place at the other end of the forest, near the corn fields. Here we hid, in the shade of the trees of the thick grove. I lay down on my back and excruciating pains began to shoot through the soles of my feet. I looked at them; they were red with blood.

"The exhaustion and the events of the terror-filled days took their toll. I felt as if I was at the edge of an abyss. The horrors I had experienced were too unbearable. I lay down and fell into a deep sleep."

we only heard the sound of voices repeating the *Shma* prayer, voices which rose and were swallowed by the darkened skies. I wondered about the meaning of these heart-breaking words that accompanied the persecuted Jews to their deaths.

The human slaughter was now completed. I felt as if my legs were moving while I remained glued in place. My bare feet began to bleed. I tried to slow my pace, but Michael persisted in running forward, pulling me after him into the rows of corn stalks without letting go of my hand. Sharp as razors, the branches sliced through our skin, tearing it to shreds. Our clothes were ripped into pieces, as if in mourning for our world that had been destroyed. My friend stopped for a moment, looked back and saw from afar that the convoy of German vehicles was leaving the area. Michael sat down on the ground, took a deep breath and announced:

"We are saved!"

He sat down next to me, his face lit up like that of an angel. He hardly spoke. His firm grip on my hand infused me with a feeling of security.

"We are saved," he repeated, and did not let go of my hand.

Here, sitting on the ground in the midst of corn fields, I, the boy Shalom son of Avraham Domb, began for the first time to develop a

While running in the corn fields and in the forest, I had apparently stepped on objects and thorns that broke through the skin of my feet. Only now did I begin to feel the pain that spread through my bleeding soles. Strangely enough, I did not cry and was not frightened, for "the angel" was watching over me.

The exhaustion and the events of the terror-filled days took their toll. I felt as if I was at the edge of an abyss. The horrors I had experienced were too unbearable. I lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

I do not know how long I slept. When I opened my eyes, I saw Michael sitting next to me, his hand in mine. I tried to get up, but sharp pains radiated throughout my body. The hunger, thirst and pains did not ease up.

"You slept soundly," noted Michael. "It seems that you had many dreams. What is your name?" he asked for the first time.

"Shalom Domb," I responded and looked upward toward the tops of the surrounding trees. It was twilight, several minutes before sunset.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"In the forest, far from the Germans. Have no fear. I am with you and watching over you," he reassured me.

"I'm hungry," I said. "I want a drink."

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“Me too,” answered my friend, and gave me a big hug.

We sat huddled together in the forest for several long minutes, looking at the growing darkness enveloping us. Suddenly, Michael perked up his ears and whispered:

“I hear the sound of automobiles.”

He stood up and lifted his head, strained his eagle eye and called: “Germans!”

The frantic run resumed, this time into the depths of the forest. To nowhere and to the unknown. Like a big boy, I rose to my feet. It was as if the pain had disappeared. I did as I was told by my older brother. I trusted him implicitly: he knew where he was taking me. To nowhere, but far from the accursed Germans who were chasing Jews like animals after their prey. We ran in the forest for hours. Darkness blanketed the area. We paused to catch our breath. Our ears finally caught the sound of trickling water.

“Water, do you hear? Water! We’ve reached the river,” Michael whispered to me.

“Yes,” I answered. My eyes lit up and my heart beat in joy, as if I was about to receive a long-anticipated gift.

I walked behind Michael in the direction of the flowing water. His hand was still in mine. It seemed as if our hands were glued to each other with some mysterious substance. This hand did not leave mine from the moment we met in the Pole’s shed. Feeling our way in the dark, we reached the river bank and excitedly fell upon the water.

We drank and drank without stopping. This was the first time water had entered my mouth since we had been expelled from our home in Pultusk.

We lay down on the river bank, apparently a tributary of the Narew, and looked up at the sky. My friend drew a little water with the palms of his hands and washed my bleeding feet. Sharp stabs pierced my feet. I gathered my courage and did not utter one groan of pain.

Strange sounds haunt the forest at night. Jackals howl, frogs croak, birds of the night call out to each other. I do not know how long we remained in the forest, but I became immune to the fear. I stopped being frightened. Only the thought of my father and sisters brought me back to the bloody visions in the public park near the bridge and to the image of my mother wallowing in her own

blood. The brutal scene of rows of Jews being mowed down by the murderous Nazis’ machine guns also kept coming back to me over and over. The sounds of *Shma Yisrael* repeatedly reverberated in my ears. When such thoughts arose, I tried to distract myself by focusing on my immediate surroundings—the flowing water, nesting birds, the tall trees enveloped in fog and humidity.

The night sounds were interrupted by the thunder of explosions and shooting heard

“The wounds on my hands, feet and every exposed part of my body may have healed, but the deep wound in my heart still bleeds.”

from afar, from the other side of the river. We walked in the dark along the river bank until we reached the bridge. Michael said that it was best for us to stop and look for a place to sleep under the bridge. Once again, his strong instinct did not disappoint. He led me to a narrow area between the bridge’s pillars. We found refuge for the night in a corner that provided a feeling of having a kind of roof over us. We lay down on a pile of leaves we had gathered and tried to fall asleep to the sound of the flowing water. The bridge seemed deserted. No one crossed it at such hours of the night. Here we slept for a few hours—hungry, but at least not thirsty.

The bridge did not remain empty for long. We awoke to an increasingly loud noise, a familiar one that I had already heard in Pultusk: the sound of tank tracks on the move.

“German tanks,” murmured my friend in a weak voice.

“I know,” I answered.

A terrifying sight unfolded before us. With an ear-splitting din, the iron monsters crossed the bridge one by one and advanced toward the road that wound along the length of the river. Covering our ears, we lay in our hiding place under the bridge, but kept our eyes peeled on what was transpiring.

Several hours of nerve-wracking tension passed. The convoy of vehicles continued to stream along the bridge, in parallel with the flowing water beneath them. Above our heads were tanks and trucks packed

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with soldiers, jeeps carrying machine guns, vehicles towing artillery and a company of SS soldiers on foot. The German officer at the head of the company stopped directly over our heads. From our position we were able to see his face and uniform clearly. He directed the traffic with muffled shouts. Two officers standing next to him gazed out toward the river, filling their lungs with fresh air. Again we clung to each other, afraid of being discovered by the Germans. A jeep with several antennas attached to it came to a halt on the bridge. The officers got into it and disappeared. Once again, that same silence of the forest and the sound of flowing water enveloped the area in unexplained mystery. The bridge was again deserted and we lay under it, starving and frozen, with the thought gnawing at my brain: “Now what, where to?”

“I think the Germans are gone. We’re lucky, they didn’t find us,” murmured the boy.

“Where were they going?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” replied my friend and continued: “It’s about to rain. I can smell the drops.”

“Tell me,” I asked, “why are the Germans chasing and murdering us? What did we do to them?”

My question hung in the air and dissolved into the rain that began to fall. He muttered something unintelligible and finally stated: “Because we’re Jews!”

I asked nothing further, just mentioned that I was hungry. My friend said he was also hungry and would try to “think of something.”

It was noontime. The cloudy sky peeked out between the treetops. The sun was entirely hidden and rain began to wash over the whole area. We sat silently under the bridge and looked out at the streaming water. My friend looked pensive and suddenly called out:

“I have a plan!”

Looking at the flowing water, he explained: “When the Germans brought us by truck from house to house, gathering Jews who had hidden among the Poles, we passed a lone farm, the home of a Pole who was my father’s friend and business partner. I visited the house many times and know the family well. Now that the Germans have collected all the Jews who had been in hiding, perhaps he’ll agree to host us and we will

find food and refuge there. I heard from my father that the Germans threatened to kill any Pole caught hiding Jews, so we’ll have to be careful that they don’t see us entering his house. Do what I tell you and stick to me the whole time.” Thus Michael summed up his “rescue plan,” giving me the warm embrace of a loving brother.

“Thanks to Michael, my life was given to me as a gift. A miracle had happened to me. An angel had descended from the sky and watched over me. Maybe Mother sent him from that place?”

“Okay,” I agreed obediently.

Thanks to Michael, my life was given to me as a gift. A miracle had happened to me. An angel had descended from the sky and watched over me. Maybe Mother sent him “from that place”?

Even now, more than fifty years after these events, I cannot find the words to properly express my feelings and describe the traumatic experiences of those days. I have tried to convey the intensity of the word “fear,” but it is impossible. I have perused dictionaries in various languages, searching for a sentence or phrase that could portray what I felt during those moments of terror—but to no avail. Many years later, I still have the sensation of living inside a hazy bubble, unable to pinpoint the events I experienced on an exact timetable. The images float up from an indefinable reservoir inside me. I don’t know how to explain this. It is possible that everything got mixed up in the imagination of a little boy who experienced unfathomable horrors and a terrible reality, resulting in an uncontrollable mix of emotions. The wounds on my hands, feet and every exposed part of my body may have healed, but the deep wound in my heart still bleeds today and will apparently never heal. **Read the rest of chapter 3 next month.** □

For more information or to purchase the book, call Renee at (646) 871-0111 or email dombbookoffer@gmail.com. □