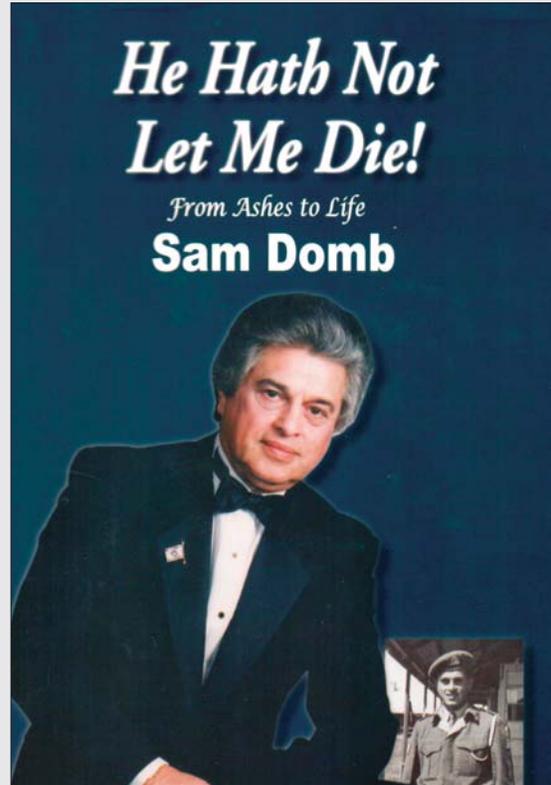


He Hath Not Let Me Die

From Ashes to Life

**Now You Can Read Excerpts From This Riveting Book
By Sam Domb In IMAGE Magazine. We have printed chapters 1, 2 and 3.
Here is chapter 4. If you've missed any of the chapters,
you can read them at imageusa.com**

He Hath Not Let Me Die



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Chapter 4

By Roundabout Paths

"And wayfarers went by roundabout paths"

Judges 5:6

The Pole's extra belongings were piled up in the barn's attic. We located a comfortable corner behind a piece of furniture. At last we had a hiding place inside a building.

"Let's take advantage of the opportunity and sleep a little," my friend whispered to me. "I understood from the Pole that a difficult day lies ahead. I don't know what will happen tomorrow, but I believe what he said. I hope he'll take us to a safe place and not hand us over to the Germans as your

father's friend did. He and his wife seem to be decent, sympathetic people."

We stretched out in the corner we had set up for ourselves. I do not know how long I slept. The sound of the Pole clearing his throat woke me. I found Michael sitting next to me.

"The Pole asked me to wake you. We're leaving in a little while," he said.

"Where to?" I asked.

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"I don't know. He said that he'll take us to a place where there are no Germans."

I rose to my feet and felt my whole body ache. The attic ceiling was low and we had to walk bent over.

"The Pole asked that we wait here until he calls us. He's concerned that someone might see us and inform the Germans. He wants to make sure that there is no one dangerous in the vicinity," explained Michael.

After a short time, we heard the sound of the Pole's footsteps and his heavy breathing. He held a cup of milk and two slices of bread. He served us the meal, asking us to share it between us. My friend gave me one slice and handed me the cup so that I could drink first. He suggested that I take a sip of milk and a bite of the bread. A sip and a bite. And so I did.



The Pole suddenly looked serious and he began to whisper his rescue plan to us. He cleared his throat again and said: "Listen, children. What I am about to do is extremely dangerous. If I fail, your fate and ours will be death. We must act carefully, wisely and shrewdly. You must cooperate with me. I checked the surrounding area and aside from several workers in a faraway field, there's no one here at the moment. There's a hay wagon outside. You must get down from the attic without anyone noticing you, climb onto the hay wagon and lie down in the middle. I'll cover you with additional bales of hay so that you won't be discovered. Lie there without moving or making a sound. You—watch over little Shalom and make sure that he doesn't cry or open his mouth."

The Pole took a deep breath and continued: "We have a long way ahead of us. I will take you to a spot from which you can cross the German lines and get to the town where, as far as I know, many Jews have gathered, after being expelled from the battle zone. My wife has prepared provisions for the way—half a loaf of bread and two baked potatoes. I will whistle if we encounter any Germans. If you hear me whistle, that means that Germans are in the area and you must be very careful and even hold your breath."

I was very moved by what the Pole said: he was prepared to risk his life in order to save ours. It's too bad that not all Poles are like him, I thought to myself. I thought of "Father's Pole," who had handed us over to the Germans, and of all the Poles in Pultusk who coveted our possessions during the deportation.

Our host descended from the attic and we awaited his signal. After a short time, we heard him call: "You can come down. Take the food with you and wait at the entrance to the barn for my instructions."

We descended carefully and quietly. His wife was below, holding a pair of used shoes and socks. She gave them to me and whispered: "Put them on—I hope they fit you. This is what I found in the storage room. You will need them on the way. The shoes are a bit too big for you, but I hope that together with the socks, they'll prove comfortable. Stay here until my husband calls you."

I thanked the woman warmly. I donned the socks and Michael helped me put on my "new" shoes.

The Pole approached the barn with a pitchfork in his hand and whispered: "We're ready to set off. The wagon is ready and the horse is harnessed."

"Take care of yourselves and have a safe journey," his wife added.

We said goodbye to the woman and followed her husband. He had hidden the horse and wagon behind the stable. The wagon was partly filled with hay. The farmer lay us down in the middle of the wagon and began to toss the rest of the hay on top of us. We heard the panting of his breath increase as the pile of

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hay rose. After a while, he declared: “I’m finished. I hope the piles of hay aren’t too heavy for you. Do you remember what I told you? If I whistle, it means that there are Germans in the area. Is everything okay? Let me know now. We won’t talk again until we reach our destination. Is that clear?”

“Yes, okay,” answered my friend, and gripped my hand tightly.

“We’re leaving,” said our host, and we heard the crack of the whip that urged the horse on its way. It was early morning. The noise of planes mingled with the sounds of the galloping and the repeated calls of the Pole spurring his horse on. The ride was extremely uncomfortable. The wagon bounced and tossed from side to side; it seemed we were traveling on an unpaved

next to me under the pile of hay, read my thoughts and caressed my palm softly as if to say, calm down, child, everything will be all right.

We heard the Germans speaking with the Pole. They stopped and walked toward the hay wagon. We held our breath as they circled the wagon and barked out some sentences in German.

The Pole mumbled something unclear. He got down from the wagon and the Germans began to inspect it, thrusting their bayoneted rifles into the hay. We lay in silence, but my heart pounded wildly. My friend’s handclasp gave me a sense of security and courage. I lay quietly, buried under the hay piles.

The Nazis sniffed around the wagon for what felt like an eternity. After they com-

“The Germans began to inspect the wagon, thrusting their bayoneted rifles into the hay. We lay in silence, but my heart pounded wildly.”

road. Every bounce brought with it a calming hand squeeze from my friend.

We continued to travel thus for a long time. The horse breathed more heavily and slowed its pace. Apparently we were in a mountainous region, and pulling the wagon had become harder. The cracks of the Pole’s whip and his cries to the horse brought us safely to the end of the uphill stretch. From there, the horse returned to an easy gallop. From afar we heard the familiar rumble of motorcycles. A squeeze from my friend, along with the Pole’s whistle, spelled out danger. Germans were near.

We lay motionless under the pile of hay and tried to hold our breath. The Pole’s whistling grew louder, as did the roar of the approaching motorcycles. The Pole stopped the horse. The motorcycles—two, from the sound of it—came to a halt near us. The blood froze in my veins. “That’s it,” I told myself. “We’re about to be discovered; this is the end of us.” I believed our fate to be sealed, and the image of the human slaughter in the forest clearing burst into my mind. I broke out in a cold sweat. Michael, lying

pleted their task, we heard the sound of the motorcycle engines starting up and, with a deafening roar, they took off in the opposite direction.

“We passed the German inspection successfully. Were either of you hurt by the bayonets?” asked our friend in concern.

“No,” we responded in unison.

“Very good!” said our escort with obvious satisfaction, adding: “We still have a long way ahead of us. Hold fast. Remember what we said at the start of our journey—you must not be discovered by the Germans!”

He climbed onto the wagon and the horse galloped onward. Michael and I quietly sighed in relief. The tension eased and this time the heart leaped in joy. But for how long...?

After traveling for two hours, the Pole stopped the wagon and alighted, explaining: “We have to let the horse rest and eat so that he’ll have strength to continue. The trip is taking longer because I’m trying to detour around villages and main roads to avoid detection.”

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To our surprise, through the sounds of the horse's breathing and chewing, we detected the trickling of flowing water. The wagon driver had apparently stopped near a stream to quench the horse's thirst. We lay quietly, waiting for him to finish his meal. My eyes closed and I fell into a deep sleep. The horse was not the only one who needed to rest; I did, too, after all I had been through. Again, I do not know how long I had been asleep when a powerful jolt awakened me.



"Sorry," came the voice of the Pole, "I had to cross the gully in order to skirt the village on the route. I hope you weren't hurt."

The horse pulled the wagon through the gully with his remaining strength and the wheels bounced from stone to stone, tossing us heavily from left to right.

"We'll be on the other side in just another few meters," the Pole reassured us. It seems he was an experienced wagon driver. He knew how to control the horse and was very familiar with the route.

"We are nearing our destination. We'll travel for about an hour along the length of the stream in the hopes of encountering no Germans on the way. We will look for a suitable place from which you can get to the village where the deported Jews seem to have gathered. Are you okay?" he added, with great concern.

"Yes," we responded together. We endured a bumpy, tension-filled hour of travel. The Pole diverted his route into a nearby forest. In a well-hidden spot in the depths of the woods, our friend told us to come out from under the pile of hay.

"I think this is the safest place to drop you off. I'll explain to you how and where to go. In the meantime, sip a bit of water and help me pick up the hay that fell as you got out of the wagon," said the Pole, giving us a water canteen to quench our thirst.

My friend warmly thanked our escort for his assistance and, together, we began to put the hay back into the wagon. The driver tied the horse to one of the trees, placed a bowl with some handfuls of barley in front of it and asked us to accompany him to the edge of the forest. Before we left, he gave us a bag of food his wife had prepared, with half a loaf of bread and two baked potatoes.

"Take care of the bag and of yourselves. Now follow me and I'll explain where to go," said our friend, starting to walk toward the periphery of the forest, with us at his heels. After a few minutes, we reached the edge of a thicket. Spread out before us was familiar scenery, similar to that I had known in Pultusk. Our escort lifted his eyes toward the horizon on the right, raised his hand and pointed to a building in the distance:

"Look over there, at the town in the right-hand corner—that's your destination, a town under Russian control. At the moment, we are in a German-occupied area. A stream separates the two sides. There is a small break in the fence opposite, and all you have to do is pass through the break, advance in the direction of the town and cross the stream. From the moment you cross it, you will be in a safe area under Russian rule. Go to your house of prayer in the town, and you'll surely find one of your relatives there, perhaps even your parents."

After a short pause, he added: "I'm leaving you now; I must return home and it's a long trip. It's best that you wait for the cover of darkness to walk toward the town. Be careful of the German patrol along the length of the stream. Walk with your eyes wide open and a great deal of caution. If you notice any suspicious movement in the area, hide in the thick shrubbery, there's plenty of it. When you reach the stream, continue along its length and I'm sure you'll find an easy spot to cross it. I wish you much success and all the best," concluded the Pole, embracing us warmly

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and then heading for his waiting horse in the forest.

Michael and I stood at the edge of the forest, watching the figure of our friend disappearing among the trees. Michael pulled me into the forest and said: “The Pole is right, we must hide here until evening and only then set out. Let’s look for a corner where we can eat and sleep. We have to gather our strength, because a difficult night awaits us.”

Jews. It was difficult for me to digest the horrible events of the past month, and I was only partially successful at banishing the visions of death that repeatedly came to mind at random moments. My yearnings for Mother and for my family intensified from one minute to the next. Luckily, my friend sensed my distress and always knew to inject a hopeful comment at such taxing moments.

“According to the Pole, there is a good

“With each passing day, I became increasingly aware that I was surrounded by Jew-haters. It stood out everywhere we went.”

I nodded my head in agreement and followed him. I could not understand how he could find his way so easily in the deep forest.

After a short while we found ourselves in a hollowed-out space surrounded by thick bushes, resembling the “living room” of a house—an ideal place to hide and rest. My friend suggested that we stop here. He gathered some of the many nearby soft branches and built a kind of mattress to rest on. We sat down on the bed of leaves he had arranged and opened the bag of food. Michael took a potato out of the bag and divided it in half. Afterwards, he tore off two chunks of bread and gave me one, saying: “Eat slowly. A little bread and a bite of potato.”

I obeyed him. The meal was tasty. We ate slowly. As I write these words, decades after those turbulent times, I think of these situations, now etched in my memory, and of my behavior then as a young boy. Those were indeed unfathomable and inexplicable experiences. For every hour that elapsed, I felt myself mature by a day; for every day, by a month; and for every month, by a year. We were abandoned as children in the forest at the height of war, in a region controlled by a cruel enemy who stopped at nothing, making no distinction between man or woman, soldier or civilian, elderly or newborn. Everyone faced the same fatal end, and particularly the

chance that we will find our families in the town over the border,” my friend interrupted my musings.

“I hope so. I miss Mother and Father and my sisters so much,” I answered sadly.

“I hope you’ll see them soon. The Pole said that many Jews expelled from Pultusk have gathered in the town. I’m convinced that your father wouldn’t leave without first establishing what had become of you,” he responded. The words uttered by my young, experienced friend calmed me down and instilled new hope in me.

With each passing day, I became increasingly aware that I was surrounded by Jew-haters. It stood out everywhere we went. The sole exception was the kind Pole, who had put his and his family’s lives at risk and smuggled us out. We had been lucky.

There were several hours left until nightfall. My companion said that we should do what our friend had suggested and take advantage of the time to rest. After our meal, I stretched out on the bed of leaves and fell into a deep sleep. **Read chapter 5 next month.** □

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