

Pikuach Nefesh – Saving Lives BIG TIME
(As Humbly Told by Elisheva, The Hero of Our Story)
by Danny Siegel

Let me tell you about my family.

There's my Abba, Aminadav, who must be somebody important because we keep getting invited to come over to Miriam's and Aaron's, who are two of the most important elders of our people. My Eema is Ruthie, a very gentle and kind woman, though most people don't know it because she does her good things so quietly. And then there are the four kids: my big brother, Nachshon, who's six years older than I, and in between, Yirmiyahu ("Yir" for short), Batsheva ("Shev"), and then me, the youngest. I'm Elisheva (or just plain "Eli").

Since I've decided to tell you the Story of Myself, you should know that this is really about me and my big brother, Nachshon. Ever since I can remember, he's always taken care of me and watched out for me. These were hard times in Egypt for us Jews, but even though we had such a hard life, kids will still be kids — having fun, getting into trouble, and ignoring most of the things that worry grown-ups so much. And picking on certain kids who are a bit different from everyone else. Now, I don't think I'm particularly cute — and certainly not adorable — but I'm not so chunky or funny-looking that other kids should be calling me names like "geek" or "nerd" or "doofus." But they quickly learned not to do this when my big brother Nachshon was around. If they did, he would always step in and get the others to back off.

And even though it's usually your parents who tell you stories or sing to you at night to help you go to sleep, as long as I can remember, it was my brother Nachshon who put me to bed, telling me the most fantastic, wonderful tales and sometimes singing—even though his voice was a little raspy, and sometimes he was off-key—fun songs and funny songs and lullabies, which helped me drop off into *very* sweet dreams.

Nachshon's 14 now, and I'm eight. For the past year, he's had to go out like all the adults and slave away because of Pharaoh's horrible laws. And still, even with all that hard work and coming home bone-weary, he would always find time to play with me. Since his work was making bricks from clay and straw, he managed to make little bricks for me so I could build anything I wanted.* He played with me for hours, no matter how exhausted he was. Who could wish for a better big brother than Nachshon? Now, you should know that you wouldn't particularly pick Nachshon out of a crowd. Although he's beginning to grow tall, and even though he has gorgeous blue eyes and thick, dark black hair, he's not all that special to look at. But he is *so* special to me. Even though he's so young, he's already a mensch.

As I said, life was pretty difficult because of the terrible Pharaoh. That's how my early childhood was lived — until suddenly things began to change. One day, Miriam's and Aaron's brother — much to our surprise — showed up after running away for a few years. (He had a price on his head for killing an Egyptian taskmaster. The Egyptians were after him and wanted to throw him in prison, or, worse, kill him.) But here he was now, out of the blue, telling Pharaoh that God wanted him to tell Pharaoh to let us all go and be free of his slavery. All kinds of crazy things happened once Moses started to give God's message to him: the Nile turned blood-red, frogs by the millions began hopping around everywhere that the Egyptians were (but not in *our* homes), storms, hail, darkness for days (though not in *our* homes), scary things, ten of them in all.

Finally, Pharaoh had had enough. Moses told us to get ready — that we were going to finally leave Egypt.

We could hardly believe it. After so many years as slaves, we were going to be free! One night, after a strange meal of lamb and some *very* sharp vegetable that stung your mouth, we got up and left.

Just like that.

Thousands and thousands of us.

Out into the desert.

*A historical note: This is the true origin of Legos.

We walked and walked. (At first we ran because we didn't really believe the Egyptians were going to let us go "just like that," but when we got a long way over the border, we slowed down.) After a while, I got very tired, and, you guessed it! Nachshon picked me up and carried me for miles and miles...until we got to this *big* stretch of water, with no bridges or ferries or anything like that. And worse: Pharaoh and his Egyptians finally woke up to the fact that we were gone, and they were plenty sorry he let us go. So right behind us and gaining on us was this huge army of screaming soldiers and neighing, snorting horses and incredibly noisy chariots. It was terrifying.

They were behind us, and in front of us was this water – I mean, it was *right* in front of me and, Nachshon, because he had carried me to the very front of all those crowds of people, only putting me down when he got to the water's edge.

It was scary, *very* scary.

I figured that maybe if somebody stepped into the water, it really would open up a nice, dry pathway for us all to escape, just like God told Moses would happen. So I did the only thing *I* knew how to do. I just looked up at Nachshon and said, "You can do it."

And not five seconds later, he plunged right in. Instantly, the waters parted, and all of us were saved. And when the Egyptians raced in behind us, after we'd safely reached the other shore, the waters crashed down on their heads, and they all drowned. And it was all because of Nachshon—and maybe because of me, too. I knew he could do it!

Not too long after this amazing day, Nachshon had dinner with Moses, Miriam, and Aaron in their tent. He must have told them how I had encouraged him to take that bold plunge into the sea. I guess Aaron must have been listening *very* carefully to what Nachshon was saying, and he must have kept thinking about it. Because several years later, Aaron bumped into me near my tent and blurted out, "Ooooh, Elisheva, ever since I heard Nachshon's story, I've been thinking about you."

Now you should know that even though Aaron was Big and Famous as the High Priest of all our people, he was very shy with women. But that day, he plucked up his courage and said to me, "I would like to spend the rest of my life with you as your husband. I admire you so much. I'm sure it will be an easy step from there to loving you."

And of course, I thought this was a fine idea, not because Aaron looked so dazzling in the outfit he wore when he was dressed up to do all those rituals in the Tabernacle — though I have to admit he did look awfully splendid in those special clothes. No, I agreed immediately because I knew that Aaron was a good man, or as we say nowadays, a real mensch.

So I said, "Yes."

And that's the true Story of Myself—and my big brother Nachshon. That's how a little eight-year-old girl, barely mentioned in the storybooks, made Jewish History Big Time.