A Conversation in the Deli

By Esther Toporek Finder

“What kind of kid was Grandpa?” my daughter asked my uncle one day while we were having lunch in a deli in Florida. Something about the way he answered “A#1” made her suspicious so she asked “what kind of kid were you?”

And so began a most memorable conversation. My daughter was on vacation from high school and we had come for a visit. We were in a booth in the deli, my daughter sitting to my right and my dad and uncle across the table from us. The two grandpas, both grey haired Auschwitz-Birkenau survivors, were hard of hearing and kept yelling into each other’s ears asking “What did she say?”

So my dad was a good kid. He was helpful to his parents and didn’t get into trouble. That is the story I always heard and here was my uncle confirming it. I think the worst thing my dad ever did was cut school to go fishing.

But what about my uncle? He was another story: he was often up to mischief and my grandparents had their hands full with him. My grandparents were Orthodox Jews whose families had lived for generations in the small town of Lask, Poland.

We didn’t get a lot of information but we got this anecdote: my uncle took a piece of kielbasa to Hebrew school. “Oh, good,” I said, “he brought *chazzer* to *cheder*.”

(*Chazzer* is the Yiddish word for pig and *cheder* is the word for the Hebrew school.) This reduced my daughter to laughter which had the older gents asking each other “what did she say?”

Apparently it took a village to raise children before the Holocaust. Anyone who saw my uncle with a piece of kielbasa could smack him upside the head and tell his parents.

We all watched my young daughter laugh for a few moments and then my dad added a cherry on top by telling us his parents’ reaction: “Lots of *naches* (pride) for the whole family!”