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SIXTY-FIVE YEARS AND FOUR GENERATIONS

Dr. Yitzchok Levine
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Sixty-five years is a long time. Indeed, it was not until about 1947 that a person born in that year could expect to live to at least age 65. So when one encounters a couple who have been married for sixty-five years, it is certainly worth noting.

Olga and Alexander Spiegel will, God willing, celebrate their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary on March 24. The Spiegels are at the same time an ordinary and an extraordinary couple. Let me explain.

Mr. and Mrs. Spiegel are Holocaust survivors who lost their parents during World War II. Mrs. Spiegel, who was forced by the Nazis to work in a munitions factory, lost all of her siblings save for one brother, Menachem, who survived the war but was killed by Arabs in *Eretz Yisrael* in 1948 shortly before the State of Israel became a reality. He was part of a convoy that was ambushed by Arabs as it attempted to penetrate the Arab blockade of Jerusalem. Menachem Wald's picture and a plaque describing his efforts can be found in the library of Yeshivat Har Etzion.

Mr. Spiegel was for two years part of a Hungarian forced labor group. After this he disguised himself as a gentile and in that manner survived the war. He proudly relates how he put on *tefillin* daily and always wore *tzitzis* (albeit wrapped around his waist when he was forced to hide the fact that he was a Jew). In addition to his parents, Mr. Spiegel lost a sister, her husband and a nephew. Fortunately for him, all but one of his brothers survived.

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In 1946 these two individuals, whose lives had been shattered, had the courage to marry and begin life anew. (Make no mistake - after what they had been through, it did take courage to start a new life.) In 1947 they arrived in the United States with their nine-month-old daughter, Blima, who is my wife.

As was the case with so many refugees from war-torn Europe, they arrived here with almost nothing. Thankfully, they had a relative who owned a large estate in Irvington, N.Y., who invited them to live on his estate. Other relatives who had survived the Holocaust resided there as

well. The Spiegels were blessed with the arrival of a son in 1948.

When Blima reached the age of 5, the Spiegels moved to Brooklyn. They were committed to giving her a proper Jewish education and this was the place where she could get it. While living in Brooklyn, the Spiegels became the proud parents of two more daughters.

It was not easy to remain an observant Jew, even in Brooklyn, during the 1950s. Mr. Spiegel told me he once went for an interview and was offered a job at a salary of \$165 a week, a substantial sum at the time. When he told the person interviewing him that he would not work on Shabbos or *Yom Tov*, the offer was withdrawn. He ended with a job that paid only \$100 a week. When he told me this story, there was no regret in his voice. On the contrary, he conveyed what had happened with pride.

Olga and Alexander Spiegel created a home that is a proud monument to the religious values of their parents. Indeed, Mr. Spiegel is what I term an "old time Jew," that is, he does whatever he saw in his parents' home. Mrs. Spiegel is his *azer k'negdo* in all of his efforts. All of this was done without fanfare; it was both ordinary and yet extraordinary given what they had been through and the sacrifices they made once they arrived here.

Their efforts, through years of good and not so good, have, *b'li ayin harah*, been rewarded. They have lived to see not just wonderful children and grandchildren, but also great-grandchildren. The extended Spiegel family represents four generations of committed

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Jews.

What a wonderful legacy to celebrate on their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary.

Mazal Tov. Mazal Tov.

Dr. Yitzchok Levine writes the "Glimpses Into American Jewish History" feature which appears the first week of each month.

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