

Shimona Godorov Life Story (Badian-Sobol)

Born in Lwow, Poland on September 30th, 1940 or April 10th, 1940

I was born in Lwow, Poland (Galicia) on September 30th, 1940 or April 10th, 1940 (the discrepancy will be explained later). My parents were Menashe-Chaim (Munek) Badian and Janka Richter-Blumenthal. I was named Maria Badian (Mushka).

Galicia was under Soviet rule from 1939 and when it was occupied by the Germans in 1941, my parents moved to Drohobycz.

My early years were spent in the Lwow ghetto, Drohobycz ghetto, a work camp and finally in an underground bunker that was constructed by several Jewish families on the outskirts of Drohobycz and was watched by a Cossack named Iwan Bur. We stayed in this hideout for fourteen months until the city was liberated by the Soviets.

I was a young child and therefore do not have personal memories. What I do know, I was told by my mother, family members, acquaintances and a book written by Bernard Mayer who was in hiding with us when he was 15 years old.

Here are some facts:

I was with my mother only in the Lwow ghetto. My father had Arian papers and worked for the Germans. By doing so, he was able to save many Jews and also warn people about upcoming Aktions. On this particular day, there was no warning about an upcoming Aktion. The Germans raided the ghetto streets. My mother pushed me under a bed, and she herself was herded outside. While standing in line to be sent away, she was spotted by my father who pulled her away. And so, her and my lives were saved.

Mr. Yehuda (Lucien) Bronicki founder and owner of Ormat Technologies in Yavne told the following during my mother's funeral:

Yehuda's father, the late Tulek Backenrot (who changed his name to Bronicki after the war to commemorate the forest at the edge of town where many Jews were murdered including my father) was an owner of several factories, was a wealthy and respected man (even by the Germans) and was able to save many Jews. He convinced the Germans to establish a farm where Jews would work, grow and produce food for the Germans. The officer in charge, who received large payments "protected" the Jews who worked there and made sure they would not be sent away during Aktions.

Originally, this was a training camp (Camp "Meinitz") for Jews who wanted to learn farming prior to immigrating to Israel.

Our family: my mother, myself, my paternal grandmother, my aunt (my father's sister), her husband and their daughter Annula (Hana) were among those protected. My father was not with us. He was an expert in taking care of horses (because his father had a stable), worked for the gestapo and helped Backenrot save Jews. (A book written by the Drohobycz rabbi describes how my father came to tell him to warn Jews not to board the trains).

When a new commander arrived, he decided that the camp had no use and it was time to get rid of the Jews there. My grandmother, Basia Badian z"l, who was an expert cook made a goose roast (from geese that were grown on the farm) and convinced the Germans to have a meal first. While they were eating, my mother sneaked out of the camp, walked a few miles until she found the engineer Backenrot who immediately contacted my father.

I heard the rest of the story about three years ago from Yehuda Bronicki who heard it from his cousin MuneK Weintraub from Paris:

In the afternoon a gestapo marked truck drove into the camp. The driver, who was wearing a leather jacket, got out and started yelling at the German commander asking him who gave him the permission to get into a place that does not belong to him and asked him to leave the camp. Suddenly a little girl came forward and screamed "Daddy, daddy". Apparently it was me who recognized my father. I was immediately placed among the people. The German left the camp and my father loaded our family on the truck and we left. Mr. Weintraub said that the rest of the Jews were loaded into trucks and driven to concentration camps. This was very emotional for me as this is the first time I heard I had any contact with my father and I recognized him.

I seem to remember darkness and my uncle leaning over a water puddle. This memory coincides with a story told by my uncle: During one of our escapes, my cousin and I were very thirsty. He found a puddle and using his shoe he got some water and let us drink.

In May 1943 when I was two and half years old the Germans intensified the Aktions. As the danger grew my father z"l thought that the family should go into hiding. After some inquiries he found out from engineer Backenrot that a few Jewish families were hiding in a bunker that was constructed under the Schwartz family home at the edge of the city at 59 Boryslawska street.

He approached Iwan to get the Badian and Galica families into the bunker.

The families who were already there were not thrilled by the idea. They argued that there were many of us and having two young girls (2½ and 3½) would put everyone's life in danger as we might be noisy. However, money was in short supply and when they were promised we were quiet, they finally agreed to take us in.

The bunker that saved us all was like a grave – no fresh air, no daylight and no sunlight.

Originally the bunker was built for 15, but at the end there were 45 of us there. Whenever money was scarce, Iwan let more people in.

As mentioned before, the bunker was built under the Schwartz family home at the beginning of 1943. The family owned a candle factory. The gentile supervisor at the factory loved the family and urged them to sell the house to Iwan Bur and build a hiding place under it as “their life was in great danger”.

This was a brick house and was not very large – it had four rooms on one level and an attic. There were stairs in the back that led to the cellar. There was a large balcony in the front. The backyard had some fruit trees and a dried-out well. On the left there was a neighboring house. On the right there was a vacant lot and next to it another house.

The house had electricity, but no running water. The water was pumped out of a well and brought-in in buckets. There was a sewage line from the house to a field in the back and there was an outhouse.

Aharon Shapiro who was a bunker builder was approached by the first four families who decided to go into hiding. He agreed to build the bunker and enlisted the help of the young people of the families. He assured them that he can include a chimney for ventilation, sewage line and a restroom.

The entrance to the bunker measured 60x60 cm (about 24x24 inches) and was made of concrete covered by dirt and straw. In order to get in, one had to descend a metal ladder that led to a 1.5 meter (5 feet) tunnel. At the end of the tunnel was the actual bunker.

The bunker measured about 10x30 meters (about 30x100 feet). On one side there were bunks for sleeping. Whenever additional people joined the bunker inhabitants, new bunks were added on top of the existing ones. Across was a cooking stove and at the end was the ventilation chimney, restroom and a place to wash. The bunker was completed at the end of April 1943 and the initial 15 inhabitants moved-in.

My father z”l did not go into hiding with us in the bunker. He and the engineer Backenrot helped us and watched over us from the outside. One night, my mother dreamed that the Nazis killed my father. When she woke up she was crying and told us about the dream. That same day, we learnt that my father was shot by the Nazis. Someone betrayed him and told the Germans he was Jewish. He was taken to the forest and shot in the back. Mr. Backenrot was somehow able to get my father’s leather jacket and brought it to my mother. Inside the lining

she found a \$100 bill that definitely helped after the liberation. (The story about the jacket was told by MuneK Weintraub).

I found a “page of testimony” in Yad VaShem written by Mrs. Renata Fleisher describing my father’s murder. Colonel Bur from the gestapo invited him to come for a hunting outing. Mrs. Fleisher was a forced laborer at the gestapo and saw my father leave with the group, but he never returned. According to the gestapo he was killed by a stray bullet.

My mother, the strong, loving and relaxed woman who walked for miles to save her family was crushed. “There is no point in hiding and fighting. All of us will die anyway”. She lost her courage and that is how I remember her throughout the years. She became depressed, apathetic and scared. All that remained from the person whom she was before the holocaust, was just her kindness.

The bunker was cramped, stifling and we lived in constant fear. Whenever the searching Germans were close, we had to keep completely quiet and still. We lived in this bunker, under these conditions for 14 months.

I assume that the constant fear affected me. One of the survivors wrote in a book that I woke up one night scared and crying. Even today, sitting in a cellar or a darkened auditorium makes me feel uneasy, sleepy and get leg pains.

My uncle Ignac Galica could not forgive himself until the day he died for an incident that almost caused my death. The Nazis were searching for bunkers. They inserted long bayonets into the ground around homes in order to uncover wooden walls. After someone ratted about a possible bunker they arrived at Iwan’s home and we could hear their voices. The bunker fell silent. No one moved or uttered a sound. I was three years old at the time and started coughing. My uncle put his hand on my mouth and almost suffocated me. Luckily, the Germans gave up and left.

When the Soviet army liberated Drohobycz, Iwan escaped leaving us buried under-ground. He joined the Soviet army and at the end of the war returned to his wife and three children. He died in 1980. Some thought that he should have been given the “righteous among nations” distinction. Others were opposed as they felt he helped us for money and then abandoned us under-ground.

Not knowing what was happening outside, we stayed in the bunker for two days without food and unable to get out. We were too afraid to come out and the opening was covered by dirt. After two days it was decided that “whatever happens, happens”. Two of the men climbed the ladder and with much effort were able to push the metal door and climb out. Drohobycz was liberated by the Soviets.

After 14 months we were finally free. I remember sitting around a camp fire listening to soldiers singing in Russian. According to the book written by Bernard Mayer who was 15 years old when we were in hiding, my cousin and I were the only children who survived in Drohobycz.

Because we were Polish citizens prior to the war, we were allowed to return to Poland in 1946 since Drohobycz remained under Soviet rule.

The Galica family settled in Bytom and my mother and grandmother decided to settle in Wrocław where they opened a grocery store. My grandmother started searching for her son Filip Badian (my father's brother) who fought in the Russian army. I remember the day when he finally appeared wearing a uniform. It felt like finding a father. Apparently the store was not profitable and in 1947 we moved to Bytom with the Galica family.

My uncle was a dentist, my aunt helped him out and my mother and grandmother managed the household. The family treated the widow and her daughter wonderfully. I was seven years old and was hoping that my father will show-up one day just like uncle Filip did. The hope that my father will "appear" one day stayed with me for years (even when I was already married).

My cousin Hana (Anula) and I grew up as sisters. We went to the same school and were in the same class. We shared joy and tears. On the face of it I should have been happy living with the extended family, but the feeling of being orphaned, being supported, being an "attachment" and always a second lessened the happiness.

My mother's apathy, her silences, her acceptance of everything without standing her ground and without tears, increased my feeling of isolation and deepened the feeling of being orphaned, but also made me more independent and stronger.

Since the end of the war, we hid our Jewish identity. Publicly we celebrated the Christian holidays, and secretly we celebrated our Jewish holidays.

Isaac Sobbol z"l married my mother in 1950. He was easily "absorbed" into our family and I loved him dearly. He was the one who smiled at me, loved me and always showed it.

The family decided to immigrate to Israel. It was difficult to get immigration certificates. The first to immigrate were my grandmother Basia Badian and Isaac Sobbol. My mother had to marry uncle Filip z"l fictitiously and they immigrated as a married couple with a child. The Galica family immigrated after six months.

We left by train for Venice, Italy – my mother, uncle Filip, I and our little dog "Kubusz". I was not allowed to bring the dog on board the ship in Venice. My mother had to pay to return it to Poland and I boarded the ship crying bitterly.

The ship "Moledet" (Homeland) brought us to Israel and I still remember seeing the Haifa coastline from a distance. We spent the first night with relatives in Haifa and the next day we were taken to Sha'ar Ha-'aliyah ("The Gate of Aliyah") absorption camp where we stayed for two days until my stepfather took us to Jerusalem. At some point in time I took on my stepfather's last name and my first name was changed to Shimona after my grandfather who passed away before the holocaust.

Years passed and I met and married Zvika who is the best thing that happened to me. He gave me the love and understanding that I was lacking. I have three children and granddaughters. My stepfather never allowed me to tell my children that he was not their biological grandfather, concerned that they might not love him. Only when he passed away I told them the truth. Their reaction was not surprising. "He was the only grandfather we had. We suspected you are not telling us the whole truth and therefore we stopped asking".

When I was already a mother of three, my parents came to stay with us on Rosh Hashanah. On the second day of the holiday, my mother kissed me and said "Mazel Tov on your birthday". I was surprised and told her that my birthday would be in two weeks. Her answer surprised me even more: "I am not mistaken. You were born on the second day of Rosh Hashanah and September 30th is not your birthday. After the holocaust, your uncle went to get you a birth certificate and because he did not remember the exact date, he gave them an approximate date". The next day, my husband looked up when was Rosh Hashanah in 1940. It was on October 10th, 1940.

Two meetings throughout the years completed the details about hiding in the bunker.

Bernard Mayer, who was 15 when we were in hiding arrived in Israel in 1992 for a visit. After the war his family immigrated to the US. He found my cousin and me and it was an emotional meeting. He wrote a book about the period and the hiding place: "Entombed: My True Story: How Forty-five Jews Lived Underground and Survived the Holocaust".

Sixty years passed and one day my cousin visited the school of one of her grandchildren and told the story about the hiding place. A journalist who was present wrote an article about it. In Rehovot a woman read the article and thought it was exactly like the story her father told her. She and her sister obtained my cousin's phone number and it turns out that their father who immigrated to Brazil was one of the 15 year old boys in the bunker. When he came for a visit, we all met him and had a very emotional reunion. Since then, our family grew and we meet him every time he comes for a visit.