

A Story that could have been True

When I had time, I always went to see my great-grandmother, whom I called babkara . I had a great relationship with her. Every time I came to her, she made me warm tea and told her stories from when she was still young. She no longer lived in the village due to her health problems, but I didn't mind visiting her in the nursing home. Grandma was blind and as long as my grandfather was alive, they were able to take care of each other. But since he left us a year ago, grandma went to a nursing home because she couldn't take care of herself. She was already 91 years old, but she was still cheerful and always told me that she felt young.

I got off at the bus stop and walked from there to my grandmother's home. She was already waiting for me at the door, as if she felt that I was close. I came to her and hugged her tightly. I was her only great-granddaughter and almost no one else visited her. My mother still worked hard and I didn't have a father. But sometimes mom found time and went to see grandma. But certainly not as often as I do.

"Sofia, my darling. How are you?" Grandma asked me in a sweet voice. I felt great love and tenderness in her voice.

"I'm fine, grandma. I'm glad I could come." Grandma touched my face.

"I see that you are cheerful as always. Come in, we don't want you to freeze." She took me inside where it was pleasantly warm. I greeted a few people I knew there and went with my grandmother to the rest room, which seemed to be reserved for us. No one has ever been there. I led the grandmother to her usual chair. We settled down and poured ourselves some dandelion tea.

"How is Sofia's mother?" asked the grandmother. I looked at my grandmother and my smile dropped a little. She always asked about her. She must have missed her a lot. After all, it was her daughter.

"He works a lot. Sometimes it doesn't even seem like he's home. I don't have time to talk to her normally. But I understand her, she has to work so that we have something to live on."

"It must be difficult for you. But sometimes you just have to wait and what you didn't have can sometimes come back to you later. Maybe one day mom won't work so hard and will have time for you." Grandma always hoped for better times. Probably because she also survived the Holocaust. I admired her for that.

„It's alright. Do you have a story from your life for me? I always like your stories."

"Oh, my dear, I already told you everything," she looked at me sadly. Then she seemed to be thinking and I saw that she thought of something. "I have memories from my childhood. But they are not very pleasant. I don't know if you'll like what you hear."

"You mean how did you survive the holocaust? She didn't want to talk about it before. You won't mind?"

"Even terrible things in life happen, little girl. But if I was talking about very unpleasant things, tell me and I'll stop talking about it."

"Okay," I nodded. I was all tense. I have always been interested in history. I had the feeling that grandma hadn't talked about it in a long time. It was probably a difficult topic for her, but she wanted to tell me about it.

"In 1939, when I was only six years old, my parents and I hid from the Nazis wherever we could. The war was raging outside and people were being gassed because of their nationality. Parents protected us body and soul. They tried to keep us all alive. We were five siblings. I had an older brother Samuel, an older sister Sara, then there was me with my twin Jakub and the youngest sister Gita . Gita was only two years old at the time." Grandma paused. She was probably thinking of her siblings. "As I said, it was very difficult for the parents. We hid wherever we could. But once, when we were hiding with some gentleman, I think he was a priest, he called us the Nazis who were taking people to concentration camps. They pulled us out of our beds in the middle of the night and pointed guns at us. Gita cried a lot then, and they told my mother that if she didn't quiet down, they would shoot her." Grandma took a breath and put the empty cup on the table.

"What happened next?" I asked her in a quieter voice. I had this feeling that something bad had happened, but I still wanted to hear it.

"They took us out. All. Mom was completely exhausted and dad was trying to talk them out of it. Older siblings reassured us that everything would be fine. And when they wanted to separate my parents from us, my mother refused to give them Gita. She held her tight and Gita cried. Finally, when mom gave in to them, she decided to give Gita to Sára instead. Let's take care of her, but when she went to give her to Sara, it angered the Germans and they shot both of them." Grandma wiped a tear from her cheek. I put my hand on hers to let her know that I'm listening and I know how she feels. "It's okay, sweetheart... We didn't even realize what had happened and they took us away in wagons. My brother and father were put in one car, and Karol and Sára were put in the other car. I haven't seen them since they took us away. Since then, I only had my brother and my father. They took us to Auschwitz. There was an even worse terror than we experienced before. They made us wear such gray overalls, but they sent my father elsewhere. He didn't want to leave us, but they dragged him away like an animal. I watched where they took him. They took him to a room and then he waited in line behind the other Jews who were there. Finally he went into some room and never came back. I was small then, but when I was older I found out that it was a gas chamber. All this time, my brother and I were constantly together. They put us with other children, with whom we carried some coal and other things.

Jakub and I were nine years old, and then the Nazis came to us and took us to some doctor, who asked us all sorts of things. We both had blond hair and blue eyes, but because we were Jews, they didn't let us out of that camp. I heard they wanted to leave the dominant race of blond people with blue eyes. We are, but they were not lucky. The doctor asked us if we were twins, how old we were and things like that. They mostly revolved around genetics and our nationality. We didn't know if we should be afraid of anything, so we told him everything. If we didn't tell him, they would have shot us." Grandma was silent, and I was in tears. I guessed why she and her brother were taken to the so-called doctor. They wanted them for trials. The teacher told us this in history. I was now a sophomore in high school, but I still didn't know much about World War II.

"The doctor checked us and then made us lie on such an iron table. I didn't realize then what we were going to do. He made all kinds of experiments on us. He observed our DNA and why we are twins. We became his experiments. Sometimes he also examined the eyelids and pupils.

I have never experienced such pain as I did then. I also went blind because of it. Because he was doing experiments on my eyes. The brother could not tolerate it. After that, when the doctor ran off somewhere for a while, I wanted to tell him to be strong, that together we can do it. But I didn't get any answer from him. I cried terribly. I sensed that he was dead. They kept doing experiments on me, I didn't have the strength anymore. I already thought that I too would pass away from the world. But then some people came who ended it all. They came to save us. They said that the war was over and that we had nothing to fear. They took me to a real doctor who treated me and for the first time in all these years I felt the love of an adult. They put me in a girls' orphanage, from which I was adopted by loving parents. I was lucky, but I never saw my brother and sister again. I woke up at night with nightmares and crying. I grieved and it took me years to get over it. But in the end I lived a pretty normal life even though I was blind. My adoptive parents provided me with a school, and I met your poor grandfather in college." Finally, grandma smiled, which I was glad for, but tears were streaming from my eyes. It was something terrible and cruel. I couldn't believe that someone could allow such a thing. I got up from the couch and ran to hug her.

"I'm glad to have you," I told her. I hugged her tightly. I saw how pleased she was. Later we changed the subject and when I left her I thought about what she was telling me about. I realized how lucky I am that I don't experience anything like that. And then I felt gratitude for my life.

This is also how a true story of a Holocaust survivor can look like. The fate of the Jewish people who lived here with us were different. The children who survived carried the trauma of the concentration camps with them all their lives, which was deeply engraved in their souls. Night after night they returned to the places where they spent part of their childhood. Even when I go to school, I walk around a place that is unknown to me. After some time, I learned that it is a Jewish suburbium , which was preserved after the Jewish community living in Bardejov. There is a synagogue, a mikveh , a school and a memorial. Even in this place, which breathes time and memories, young people, families, and old people were concentrated. People were murdered, buildings decayed over time.

But little by little, a small group of people in the city began to implement activities in this area. The buildings began to take on a new look, they began to be restored, repaired, and today various events are held in them, which draw attention to the past, they are cut out. They show how far hatred and the feeling of power and superiority can lead. Once again, hatred, various hoaxes and misinformation are spreading among people . Evil, which has already shown its strength, takes root again. It is important to talk about the Holocaust, its causes and consequences, and in this very place that was a witness to it.

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