

Surviving the Nightmare: Bronia Brandman's Story

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Bronia Brandman was born in 1931 in Jaworzno, Poland. She had five brothers and sisters. Bronia's mom and dad were named Israel and Ida Rabin. Her older brother and sisters were Mila, Mendek, and Lulek. Her two little sisters were Rutka and Marcia (Scarr, 2024). Before the war started, they lived a pretty normal life. Her dad had a hardware store. The kids went to school and played together like any family (Scarr, 2024).

When World War II began, everything changed very quickly (Henao, 2020). Bronia was only eight years old when the Nazis invaded Poland (Henao, 2020). At first, it was confusing for her because she was so young. Soon, the changes became very serious and scary. Jewish families were treated unfairly. They had to follow strict rules, and they were no longer safe in their own homes (Henao, 2020).

After some time, Bronia, her mother, and most of her siblings went to a nearby town called Sosnowiec. Her brother Mendek stayed behind with their father for a while (Scarr, 2024). Something terrifying happened. In the middle of the night, they heard loud banging on doors. People were shouting cruel things about Jewish families. Everyone was scared. Bronia and her family had to run out of their house while still wearing their nightgowns. They did not have time to pack their things (Thaler & Brandman, 2018).

The men from the families were taken away. Many Jewish people were killed in horrible and cruel ways (Henao, 2020). Bronia's father was taken to the basement of the hardware store they owned. Mendek had to watch as men forced his father to face the wall with his hands up. They were planning to shoot him. Instead, they beat and kicked him. Bronia's father survived that night, but the fear and pain stayed with the family (Thaler & Brandman, 2018).

In March 1942, another terrible order was given by the Nazis. The oldest child in each family had to report for deportation. Mendek made a brave decision. He volunteered to go instead of his sister Mila, who was the oldest. He was sent to a labor camp called Blechhammer. Life in labor camps was very hard. Prisoners had to work long hours with little food and rest (Scarr, 2024).

A few months later, in August, Bronia's parents and her brother Lulek were taken to Auschwitz (Scarr, 2024). Auschwitz was a concentration and extermination camp where many Jewish people were killed (Auschwitz, 2021). After they were taken there, Bronia never saw her parents or her brother again (Scarr, 2024). She was still just a child, but she had to grow up very fast.

After this loss, Bronia and her sisters tried to survive on their own. They ran away to another town and tried to hide. For a few months, they stayed there. The Nazis eventually found them. Bronia and her sisters were forced to move into a ghetto. Ghettos were crowded areas where Jewish families. There was not enough food, space, or safety (Henao, 2020). People were always afraid of what would happen next.

In August 1943, Bronia and her three sisters were deported to Auschwitz in crowded train cars. When she was 12 years old (Thaler & Brandman, 2018). No one knew exactly what would happen when they arrived (Auschwitz, 2021).

When they got to Auschwitz, the train doors were suddenly opened, and guards were yelling at everyone to get out. The guards made everyone stand in lines. This was called a “selection,” where they chose who would live and who would die (Auschwitz, 2021). At first, Bronia was put in the wrong line with her two other sisters, the one who was going to the gas chambers. At that last moment, she moved to stand next to Mila. That small choice saved her life. Later, Bronia understood how close she was to dying that day (Thaler & Brandman, 2018).

Bronia and Mila had to stay in the camp after that. The girls had to sleep in tiny, crowded housing areas. The beds were hard wooden boards. Sometimes more than one person had to squeeze into the same spot. They barely got any food, Bronia and Mila also had to work for many hours, and the guards were very mean to them (Thaler & Brandman, 2018).

Soon after arriving, Mila became very sick with typhus, which is a disease spread by poor living conditions (Auschwitz, 2021). Being sick in Auschwitz often meant death. Bronia thought she had lost almost her entire family (Thaler & Brandman, 2018).

The Holocaust was a time when about six million Jewish people were murdered by the Nazis and their helpers. People were killed in gas chambers, by mass shootings, through cruel medical experiments, starvation, and hard labor (Henao, 2020). It was one of the darkest times in history for Jewish people

Bronia remained in Auschwitz for about two years. In January 1945, the Nazis forced prisoners to go on a death march. Bronia survived the march and was sent to another camp in Germany called Neustadt-Glewe (Thaler & Brandman, 2018).

Finally, in May 1945, the camp was liberated by American and Russian soldiers. The war in Europe was ending. Bronia was finally free. She had survived years of suffering, hunger, fear, and loss (Thaler & Brandman, 2018).

After the war, Bronia was reunited with her brother Mendek, one of many young men who had been taken to labor camps; he was the only one who survived from his group (Scarr, 2024). In her family, only two survived—Bronia and Mendek. (Scarr, 2024).

Bronia was 15 years old when she and Mendek immigrated to America, but it gave them hope for a better future (Henao, 2020). Bronia later became a public school teacher. She built a new life for herself, even though she carried painful memories from her childhood (Henao, 2020).

For many years, she did not speak openly about what she had experienced. However, after she retired, she began sharing her story. She said that one reason she survived was because she wanted to live long enough to tell the world what had happened. She wanted people to remember her family and the millions of others who were killed (Henao, 2020).

Bronia still has the faded tattoo on her arm with the number 52643. That number was used to identify her in Auschwitz. It is hard to see now, but it is still there. It was a permanent reminder of what the Nazis did and of the courage it took to survive (Henao, 2020).

In the end, Bronia Brandman's story is very sad, but it is also a story of bravery and hope. She survived even when she had lost so much. Bronia strived to survive and start a new life. She wanted to share her story so people would always remember what happened. (Brandman & Bierman, 2010). Her life shows us why it is important to learn about history and to stand up to hate and unfairness.

Learning about the Holocaust through Bronia Brandman's story made it feel much more real to me. Before this, I only knew it as something that happened a long time ago. But reading about Bronia made me see that it happened to real people. She was just a regular girl who had a family and a normal life before the war started.

I felt really sad when I learned how much she lost. I can't imagine being without my parents or my brothers and sisters. It made me think about how lucky I am to have my family and feel safe. Bronia was so young, but she had to be very strong. Even when things were scary and hard, she kept going.

Her story showed me how important it is to be kind and to stand up for people who are treated unfairly. It also showed me that when things get hard in life, a little perseverance goes a long way. You shouldn't give up. It reminded me why we should never forget what happened. I'm glad I got to learn about her life.

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