

BRONIA ROSLAWOWSKI



“I was not afraid of the Germans. I am strong like iron.”

When Bronia Kibel of Turek, Poland, was a little girl on the streetcar, she would ask strangers, “What language do you speak?” When her older, weaker sister was to be deported to the camps, 14-year old Bronia insisted on taking her place.

Bronia survived five camps and a death march. She doesn't live in the past but she will never forget it.

She remembers the brick house in Turek where she and her four siblings had no time to be bored. At 3 p.m., after public school, the family had dinner. Then they were off to Hebrew school. In the evening, they studied. A talented violinist, Bronia practiced until the day she lost her temper and, to her mother's horror, broke the instrument.

Bronia preferred to ride her bike, make dolls, invent plays, plant sweet peas and radishes in her family's 1½-acre garden, and, when it snowed, ride a sleigh pulled by her Russian husky.

Bronia's parents, Tzvi Eliezer Kibel and Bluma Bajrach, worked together in a business that prospered, thanks to a winning lottery ticket. They hired Jewish girls from the country to help with the children. In the summer, Bronia enjoyed spending time on the maids' families' farms. The Kibels got along well with their non-Jewish neighbors. They spoke Russian, Polish, German and some French. They never believed the Holocaust would happen.

Bronia has no pictures of her mother and cannot remember her face. But she remembers her kindness. How she prepared the braided bread called challah, soup and meat for needy families. How she insisted on cleanliness. How she never spanked the children when they misbehaved but “talked till we were blue in the face.” Which is just how Bronia raised her daughters: Beverly, Alice, and Judy. Pregnant but adamant they not be born in Germany, she signed a paper releasing the boat that took her to America from responsibility for her health.

Fewer than a dozen Jews from Turek survived the Holocaust. Bronia told her American liberators, “You are my father, my mother, my brother, my sister.”

Living in Missouri – home of President Harry S. Truman – suited her just fine. She borrowed \$450 from the Jewish Family and Children Services to train as a nurse. She married Mendel Roslawowski and raised his son, Walter. She cared for other people's children in her home and, in 1962, she and Mendel opened the M & M Bakery at 31st Street and Woodland Avenue. For her children, she found substitute grandparents. She invited her neighbors at 45th and Main streets to play cards, Bingo and Monopoly, and enjoy the beef and barley soup she concocted from a “bunch of bones.”

Bronia wants the world to know what happened. She was one of the first area survivors to speak out about the Holocaust – but without bitterness. “You cannot condemn a nation,” she says. “I pity the Germans, that they had such poor psychology. I don't hate. What will it give me? I'd be a miserable, bitter person.”



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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