

*We honor and remember those who perished.*

*But what about those who survived?*

January 27<sup>th</sup> is International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Ceremonies worldwide will honor the 6 million men, women and children who were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. Today there are hundreds of thousands of elderly Holocaust Survivors who suffered unimaginable horrors during the war and are now in dire need of food, medicine, heat, and shelter. These are the people you're helping by donating to The Survivor Mitzvah Project. They are the last remaining relatives of those who perished. **We can truly honor the 6 million by caring for their family members.**

We have included two donation envelopes in this newsletter. After reading, please pass along this newsletter with a donation envelope to someone you believe would be honored to join this urgent humanitarian effort to bring emergency aid to the last survivors of the Holocaust.

Survivor Isaac Grigorievich shares his story: **"More than 70 years have passed since the end of the most terrifying and bloody war ever, the war against Nazism. Now we have a new generation that knows about the war only from**

**stories. But some don't believe survivors' stories about the horrors of war. There are even some silly youngsters who would like to see war for themselves, just out of curiosity. I must admit that many years ago, at age ten, I was one of them. ("What is it like – war?") But my burning curiosity disappeared as soon as I witnessed war and experienced it first-hand. Now, like the majority of those who survived, I want to make sure it never happens again. May its horrors never be repeated. May those who never saw it, never see it. And may our experiences serve as a lesson. This is why I am writing my story of survival.**

In November 1941, Romanian paramilitary units forced our family, along with thousands of others, to march to the Bogdanovka concentration camp located on the Southern Bug River in Transnistria. **Many of those who marched, including my parents, my two sisters and my little brother were murdered there: tortured, burned alive, and shot. I was ten years old.**

In Bogdanovka camp we were forced into a barn with many pigpens. Each pigpen was only five feet long. Our entire family was put into one pen. There were far too many people, so the barn was overcrowded. When people died, some pens emptied out but did not stay empty for long. As new people were marched to camp, the empty pens were filled again.

It was Autumn and getting colder and colder. To stay warm, we closed the barn doors, but it didn't help much since the windows had no glass. Rotting hay was our bed. We slept in our clothes, covering ourselves with all the rags we could find. Washing took place outside, although we had no soap or detergent. People relieved themselves outside, too. Actually, washing and relieving ourselves outside was only possible for those who were still strong enough to

walk. Everyone else – and there were many – washed and relieved themselves in the same place they lived and slept: inside the barn.

*Above: Isaac at left with sister Betya (born in 1927, burned alive in the Bogdanovka camp in 1941, (along with youngest brother Shmilik), sisters Riva, (killed by Romanian soldiers) and Nechama (who went to Russia in 1940 and survived.) Older brother Abram, not pictured, (born in 1914) was killed at the Front in 1945. Oldest sister Anna (born 1912) left for Palestine before the war.*



**There was nothing to eat, no place to buy food, and no hope of finding any. No one fed us, and no one even discussed it.** Mother discovered a hole in the fence, crawled through and went to Bogdanovka village. She came back with a piece of bread and several boiled potatoes – how delicious they tasted. Mother crawled through that hole and went to the village every day, working for local people, mostly washing their clothes, in exchange for food. Sometimes she took my sister Riva with her. With every trip, they risked losing their lives. But they continued to take this risk because they had no other choice. We were always hungry and suffered from malnutrition. I decided to find some food on my own. I found a sharp piece of metal and found a spot in the fence where I was able to crawl underneath.

That's how I began leaving our fenced area and going to the cabbage garden. I had noticed this garden on our way to Bogdanovka, near the road where we'd been forced to march. The garden was empty. It looked like it had been harvested long ago. I saw only a few stems standing in the field. There wasn't even a single leaf to be seen. Using my piece of metal, I dug around a stem and pulled out a rather long cabbage stalk, which I then peeled. That gave me a good edible piece. Later, after the soil and stems froze, it became harder to find this kind of food, but I kept going there anyway. Father, Betya and Shmilik were so starved that their tissues began to break down. Father refused to eat. He gave all his food to the children. In addition to the food that Mother and Riva brought us, I also ate the cabbage stalks. That probably explains why I was able to stand on my feet more firmly than the others.

**We lived under unimaginable unsanitary conditions, coping with fleas, starvation, and the freezing cold. People were dying.** The bodies were loaded onto carts, taken away from the camp area, and thrown into a ravine. Soon we had a new problem: No one had enough strength to move the dead bodies from the pens, so people dragged the bodies to the center of the barn. Corpses were left inside for days, and we had to step over them.

I saw a woman go to an officer, fall on her knees, and beg him to shoot her. He kicked her and answered, "You'll die on your own!" As it turned out, this was a common method of destroying the Jewish people. The Romanian general, Ion Antonescu, devised this method of killing Jews in Bessarabia and Transnistria. Romanian soldiers and guards came up with the most creative and vicious methods of torture and slaughter ever seen.

**One day as we were lying in our pen, trying to warm up by snuggling close together, the barn caught fire.** Mother, Riva and I quickly moved our belongings to a nearby barn. We also helped Betya and Shmilik move. Finally, we came to help Father, who could no longer walk on his own. He was extremely weak from eating almost nothing for days, giving his share of food to the children. And now he lay there, refusing to leave the barn. We begged him, but to no avail. An old man from a nearby pen crawled in next to him. (Honestly, it was hard to tell if this man was young or old. All the men were unshaven and starving.) He lay down next to Father. They opened their prayer books and began to read together, with their weakened voices. The fire was edging closer and closer to our pen. The smoke made it harder and harder to breathe. We begged Mother to take Father out, but he refused. The smoke hurt our eyes. Mother grabbed me and Riva and pulled us out of the pen. We stood at a safe distance, shedding bitter tears as the fire burned the barn and the people inside. These were the people who couldn't walk – our father among them.



We found an empty pigpen and settled into our new "home". Betya and Shmilik were too weak to walk or even sit, so we helped them lay down and carefully covered them. That's how weak they were. They were just skin and bones.

Days grew shorter, and darkness arrived earlier. There was no light in the barn. We lay next to each other in the following order: Mother, Shmilik, Riva, Betya and I. The hay smelled rotten. That smell, mixed with the odor from the pig pens, made it difficult to breathe. There were many nights we didn't sleep at all. We just lay there waiting for the morning light, impatient to go out in search of food.

**During that first night without Father, knowing how he had been burned alive in the barn, we had a new reason for being unable to sleep.**

*[At left, Riva, before the war]* In December, Mother brought us some news that revived our hopes of survival. A woman told her that Jews were living freely in Odessa. If this really was true, we would try moving to Odessa.

The next day Mother went to work by herself. As it grew dark, my sister began to worry, because Mother should have been home by then. We waited a while longer, and then my sister went out to search for her. It was late when Riva finally came back alone, without Mother. She told us that she found our mother beaten to death by a Romanian guard's rifle stock. Riva began to cry. The rest of us cried, too.



None of us could sleep that night. It was especially hard to calm Shmilik, because Mother had always slept next to him so he could nestle in the warmth of her body. Just last week I was remembering all this. When Father died, even though it was extremely difficult, we still had Mother with us. Now we were left utterly alone.

After this tragic news, my sister asked me to step outside. Riva said the Romanians were planning to kill everyone by the end of the year. She said she was planning to run away– the only way to survive. She then added, “If you want to come with me, get ready and dress well. We’ll leave at night. But don’t let anyone know.”

“What about Betya and Shmilik? Shouldn’t they know?” “No, they should not! They can’t walk with us. We’ll leave them extra food, and in a few days, we’ll come back for them. We have no other choice. You have to understand this.”

Riva went to the village to finish a job that would pay her well. I went back to our pen and began to prepare for our escape. By evening, when Riva came back from work, I was ready. She brought a whole loaf of rye bread and some boiled potatoes. She then went outside and motioned for me to follow her.



Shmilik, my little brother, *[pictured at right before the war]* watched my preparations earlier in the day and realized that I was going to leave. **He stretched out his arms, which looked more like sticks, and held onto me, begging me not to abandon him. He promised that he would walk without our help and wouldn’t be a nuisance. “Take me with you,” he pleaded.** Despite my heroic effort not to cry, burning tears poured from my eyes. I was afraid I would lose control and wail so loudly that everyone in the barn would hear me. I could not let that happen; I had to conceal our plan.

I promised Shmilik we would come back soon to take him and Betya. All this time, Betya just lay on the hay with no expression on her face. She was completely drained. I tore Shmilik from my body to free myself from his arms. He fell on the hay next to Betya and was left lying in that festering pigpen. I turned my head to avoid his pleading and hopeless gaze, then dried my tears and ran to catch up with my sister.

**As I walked next to Riva, I couldn’t stop blaming myself for being so heartless toward my beloved little brother.** Then I reminded myself, “We’ll come back soon to take them out of the barn. We’ll definitely come back and save them.” I blamed myself for pushing my frail brother away, making him fall to the ground. Then I began to justify my actions: “It’s not true that I pushed him down. I only tore him off my body, and he fell because he wasn’t strong enough to stand up.” Later my self-justifying thoughts were replaced by a voice like a drumbeat in my head, “No, I did not push him! No,

I did not push him! No, I did not push him!” But then I could see his fragile, stick-like arms hugging my neck. He didn’t want to let me go. He didn’t want to be separated from us.

**I said to my sister, “Let’s go back and take Betya and Shmilik with us.” “It’s impossible! They can’t walk, and we won’t be able to carry them. If we take them, we’ll all die.** This way, we might meet some Partisans, who could help us save them. But even if we don’t meet any Partisans, we’ll get to Odessa. And if we find out that it’s safe to live there, we’ll come back for Betya and Shmilik.”

I wasn’t convinced by Riva’s reasoning and she didn’t seem sure of her own words, either. But I understood that we had no choice. **Our only choice was between death and a slight hope of survival. My sister chose the second option: hope.**

*This was only the beginning of Isaak’s fight for life, but he survived the Holocaust. His sister Riva was killed by Nazis soon after their escape. Betya and Shmilik died too. They were burned alive in the camp, along with all the other sick and disabled inmates. The rest of the people were taken to pits and shot.*

*Isaak lived in hiding until liberation. He was captured by Romanian police numerous times, but each time, he managed to evade death. On the day of liberation from Nazi occupation, he was living in the village of Handrabury, where the Barbul family gave him shelter and hid him from the Nazi police. After the war, he adopted their surname.*

**“It’s not hard to imagine what liberation meant for me. Liberation meant crossing the stark line between life and death.** Before liberation, I fought for my life in the occupied territory, where death awaited me at every corner and followed me every minute. I suppose the source of my fight for life was the basic survival instinct present in every living organism. After all, the fight for life never ends.

After liberation, I was confronted with different aspects of life. The constant threat of death was gone, but I had no idea how to conduct my life under normal conditions. For that, the survival instinct is not enough. Parents usually guide a young

person’s future, but I had no one to guide me, and no one to care for me.”

*Isaac is just one of the thousands of survivors you have helped with your donations. These are people who still bear the scars of the Holocaust – multiple health issues due to starvation, beatings, and gunshot wounds. Many are haunted by the memories of the loved ones they could not save.*

*This year, in honor of those who perished, let us join together to tell more people about those who survived – the remaining Holocaust survivors and their incredible need at this point in their lives.*

*The more donors we have, the more survivors we can help.*

***Your Kindness and Compassion bring care, friendship and hope!***

*Pictured at left: Isaac, his wife Liana and their children. Moldova /1970s.*



Please make checks payable to “The Survivor Mitzvah Project”

### **The Survivor Mitzvah Project**

2658 Griffith Park Blvd. #299

Los Angeles, CA 90039

**100% of all donations go directly into the hands of Holocaust Survivors in need.**

**\*\$150 supports a survivor for one month • \$1800 supports a survivor for one year.**

***Donations in any amount save lives.***

*The Survivor Mitzvah Project is a 501c3 non-profit public charity.*

*All donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.*

**[www.survivormitzvah.org](http://www.survivormitzvah.org)**