



# Riva Barenboim

## Jewish Holocaust Survivor

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I, Riva Barenboim, was born on August 23, 1933, the same year that Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany. My father was Isaac Yulitsky, and he was born into a large Jewish family, all girls except for him. My grandparents died when I was young. It was a time of social unrest in Romania. There were strikes and high unemployment. In several cases, the Romanian government treated people violently. It was not good. At this time, there were over 700,000 Jews in Russia. That would soon change.

My mother Bella had two sisters. The man she was dating married another girl, so she went to live in Paris for a year. She graduated from a Russian school where she received an excellent education. She spoke French and Russian fluently, loved literature and was a good mathematician. Here's a funny story about how she met my dad. His sister in America invited him to come live with her. He could bring a wife with him, so my mom agreed to fake a marriage with him so she could go, too. When they met, it was love at first sight. They married for real and settled in the city of Balti in Romania. My father had a job which could support a family, so Mom, who was 30 and considered old for childbirth at that time, had my sister Inna, then me.

My father was carried away by revolutionary ideas and participated in underground work against the government. Once, when the police were chasing him, he fell into the river and broke his arm, leaving him disabled for life. When someone who worked with the underground came to our apartment, he spent the night with us. We kept some literature he left, which was dangerous. The Romanians would send people into apartments and check for insects. If they found bugs, they dragged beds outside. They came once, but when they saw the snow-white beds, they immediately left. My mother was frightened, since underground leaflets were hidden in her sofa.

My maternal grandmother, Dvoira, lived with her middle daughter when her husband died. I didn't know her, but I do remember her. She was 82 years old when she was killed by Moldovan's who came to rob the house. It's not been easy for people in Eastern Europe.

In 1940 the Nazis invaded and bombings began. Some thought it was an earthquake, but when they saw that the city was on fire, they realized that it was something even more terrible. At 11 o'clock an announcement on the radio indicated that a war had begun with Germany. Bombs dropped every day, and we hid in the cellar. Our parents decided that we should leave the city and go to the village. Dad had a cart with a horse, so he took us to a village near Balti, where we stayed for several days. Early in the morning, Mom went to a neighbor to buy milk, and the neighbor told her that the Nazis were in a nearby village. It was scary.

In June of 1941 Romanian authorities staged a pogrom (violence) against the Jewish population. Romanian police officials shot hundreds of Jews near police headquarters. Hundreds more were killed on the streets or in their homes. In all, at least 4,000 Jews were murdered during

the pogrom. Thousands more were arrested, packed into freight cars, and deported by train to concentration camps. Many died on the train from starvation or dehydration. Supported by the German SS, the Romanian army and police massacred thousands of Jews, systematically shooting the Jewish residents of Kishinev in July 1941. Survivors of the massacres, about 11,000 people, were sent to a ghetto and forced to labor under harsh conditions. In October, those left alive were deported to concentration camps and ghettos. Again, many died of exposure, starvation or disease during the deportations. Romanian authorities established Jewish ghettos and two concentration camps, where thousands of Jews were held captive. In December 1941, Romanian troops, together with Ukrainian auxiliaries, massacred almost all the Jews; shootings continued for more than a week. A local woman asked our mother, "Why aren't you leaving? How will we watch a German hang your beautiful girls?"

She was right. It was dangerous. Our mother woke us one day, and we quickly headed to the city on foot. We thought the Red Army would drive the Germans away, but it was ending differently. The road to the city went near the barracks which were burning, and our soldiers had already retreated. We met our dad and arrived in a city on the banks of the Dniester River. The military took our cart and horse, and we spent the night at the house of a peasant woman. In the morning we crossed the river on the ferry. We walked to the train station nearby and sat on the platform. It was a very hot, miserable day, and the coal dust flew from the engine making our eyes sore.

Nazi planes were bombing around us, so we jumped off the train quickly and ran into a field where we laid on the ground. If there was tall grass, we hid in it. When the bombing ended, we trudged back to the train. It seemed like we traveled for ten days or two weeks. One day, my mother said that we were far from home and it would be safe to stop. We were taken in carts to another district, where all the displaced people who were evacuated slept. They gave us a room with two beds, a table and one stool. A couple of pots, buckets, spoons and plates appeared later.

Teachers were needed at the school where we were located, since all male teachers and the principal had gone to war. The principal's wife, a geography teacher, became principal and hired my mom to be a math teacher. On September first, my sister Inna and I went back to school. Inna started the 4th grade, and I started 1st grade, a new normal, since our mom was working at this school. For three years, I did not have any warm clothes. During the second year, mom was given a pair of boots. It was very difficult to be a refugee.

The permanent residents in this town were rich and had cows, sheep, chickens and geese. They sheared and spun wool, but didn't know how to knit. So, Mom made sweaters for them and taught us girls how to knit the sleeves while she knitted the rest of the sweaters. We were rewarded with milk, so we never starved, but there was always a feeling of hunger. I often dreamed at night that when we got home I would spread butter and jam on my bread. I wanted to play with other children and have my childhood back. Thankfully, we survived. When the war ended, we were able to return to Romania. Eventually, I married and had a family of my own. Unbelievably, my son and grandson are in the middle of danger in the war in Ukraine right now. When will it end?

*"Once I really am in power, my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews." \* -Adolf Hitler*

\*Hitler's words in 1922, according to Major Josef Hell, a German journalist in the 20s and 30s