



Biography of Bella Ouziel

Bella Ouziel (nee Benuzio) was born on July 14th, 1925, in Salonika, Greece where she lived a comfortable life with her step-mother Riketa, father Avraham, and her three siblings Esther, Levi, and Sylvia. Life changed for Bella and her family when the German army invaded her home country of Greece in 1941. They had always lived comfortably around non-Jews, but neighbors and friends quickly turned their backs as the Jews of Salonika were forced into the Baron Hirsch Ghetto in April 1943, before being sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland on April 10th, 1943.

Upon arrival, Bella and her sister, Sylvia, were separated from everyone in her family. Only Bella and Sylvia survived the selection. They soon learned that their family had been murdered in the gas chamber. The sisters clung to one another for support; however, Sylvia refused to eat the meager camp food and died, leaving Bella to fend for herself. Miraculously, Bella found a way to continue through the unimaginable conditions in the camp thanks to fellow female prisoners also from Greece, who became the family she no longer had. Bella constantly said, "I'm gonna be alright, I'm gonna survive...I'm gonna go home." Bella and her friends, tired and extremely hungry, found small ways to resist including fasting in observance of Jewish holidays like Yom Kippur. This form of spiritual resistance was one way of ensuring the Nazis would not accomplish their goal of dehumanizing Bella and her friends.

Bella was transferred to the main camp of Auschwitz in the winter of 1944, where she was put to work sewing German uniforms. In January 1945, Bella and other prisoners were forced on a death march to Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp in Germany. Bergen-Belsen was liberated by the British on April 15, 1945. After the war, Bergen-Belsen became a displaced persons camp and this is where Bella met her husband, fellow Holocaust survivor, Sam. Returning to Salonika, Sam, Bella, and a group of other Jews from the area that survived, still faced discrimination from the local townspeople. When Bella returned to her family home, she found it inhabited by her former neighbors, who had moved in after Bella and her family were deported. Instead of leaving, Bella sued for the right to take back her family's home. After winning the case, Bella and regained the home, where she lived with Sam and other friends from the camp. Bella and Sam had three children; a daughter Sylvia, named after Bella's sister, and two sons Morris and Albert. They immigrated to the United States in 1951 and resided in Cincinnati, Ohio. Facing the challenge of starting a new life and learning a new language in a foreign country, Sam and Bella overcame these obstacles together.

Bella never spoke of her experiences until 2015 when The Holocaust & Humanity Center curated the exhibit, *Unlocking the Gates of Auschwitz: 70 Years Later*.