



Blessed be Everyone who Blesses you, Israel!

By Brigitte B. Nussbächer

A true story of friendship from World War II and a timeless mission ...

... about a special woman, who saved the lives of her Jewish friends. While German officers kissed the hand of the lady of the house in the salon of the house, down in the cellar her Jewish friends were waiting for her to come and take care of them. After the war, the Jews saved their friend from deportation to Siberia.

A Timeless Mission



It is a beautiful building with the inscription FOZ in the center of Jerusalem. And it is an absolute gem in terms of its contents: The Friends of Zion Museum (at 20 Yosef Rivlin St., Jerusalem), tells the impressive stories of extraordinary women and men who saw it as their mission to be a blessing to Jews and to Israel. They were even willing to risk their lives to save lives as they contributed to the miracle of Israel.

But this mission did not and does not apply only to historical figures, and it is not bound to a specific time.

It is timeless, applies to all of us - and it carries a wonderful promise. "Blessed be everyone who blesses you (people of Israel)" (Gen. 12:3; Gen. 27:29).

But it is especially true for times when Jews and Israel are harassed, attacked and persecuted.

The Story of my Family During the Second World War

At the time of the Second World War, Romania was initially one of Germany's allies. Ion Antonescu, the then Prime Minister and Marshal of Romania, established a military dictatorship from 1940. He also entered into a military alliance with Hitler, from which he expected material and personnel support in building up the Romanian army. As a consequence, Hitler sent a German military mission to Romania, which led to the stationing of many German military personnel in Transylvania (which had been part of Romania since 1918). Antonescu's policies were also marked by radical anti-Semitism, and during his reign hundreds of thousands of Romanian Jews fell victim to the Holocaust through massacres and in labour camps.





My grandmother belonged to the influential family of the former mayor of Kronstadt (Brasov, city in Transylvania. Author's note): Dr. Carl Ernst Schnell. Due to their factories and wealth the family had not only political but also economic influence. My grandmother's house in Castle-Street had always been a social meeting place and centre. It remained so even during the period of stationing of the German troops. Since Transylvania had belonged to the Habsburg monarchy for centuries (and was only annexed to Romania after the end of World War I), my grandparents were both born as Austrian citizens in Transylvania and had studied in Austria and Germany. German officers stationed in Kronstadt (Brasov) were happy to meet German culture and speak German in my grandparent's house.

The Secret



What the German military did not know, was, that my grandmother had Jewish friends and that she was not ready to give up this friendship. When she realized how threatening the persecution of the Jews was becoming even in her environment and what fate awaited Jews, she acted.

In a great hurry, (because every day of delay could mean the deportation of her friends) she build a secret room in the cellar of her house. It was closed off with a door hidden by a shelf. Then, piece by piece, she brought in small-scale furniture, folding beds, mattresses, blankets, dishes, clothes and everything else necessary. Fortunately, in the big house it was not noticed. When everything was ready, she brought her friends there.

Somehow, she had managed to do all this in such a way, that no one but she knew about it. From then on she took care of the Jewish family in secret. What fears accompanied her in this, I do not know - she never spoke about it. Of course she was aware of the danger she was putting herself and her whole family in. But it seemed natural to her, to be there for her Jewish friends, even if - and more so because - they were being persecuted and were in danger.

Thus, she led a double life. Outwardly, a lady of society, mother of small children and hostess to many - and in secret, someone who used her strength and creativity to protect her friends.

While in the salon of the house German officers kissed the hand of the lady of the house and praised in the guest book her wonderful hospitality, during which they "forgot the war business", down in the cellar her Jewish friends were waiting for her to come to them - as she did every night - and provide them with food, news, reading material and all necessities.

Although - or perhaps because - there was a regular flow of German military personnel in and out of the house, no one suspected anything. Even the fact that more food was consumed was not noticed among the numerous guests. The Jewish family was not discovered - and survived!

What a blessing! But this is only the first part of the story...



The Great Turning Point

In 1944 everything changed. The defeat of the German Empire became apparent and on August 23, the Romanian King Michael ended the military dictatorship of Ion Antonescu and the military alliance with the German Empire through a coup d'état. Romania changed fronts in the middle of the war, and fought on the side of the Allies from then on. The Soviet army marched in. With the fall of Antonescu, the systematic persecution of the Jews also ended.

Despite the change of front, in the fall of 1944 Stalin demanded "reparations" from Romania for the reconstruction of the Soviet Union. As compensation for the former alliance with Germany, Romania had to deliver 100,000 "voluntary" workers. The focus was particularly on members of the German minority in Transylvania.

Starting in January 1945, Germans capable of work (men between 16 and 45 and women between 18 and 30 years of age) were "taken out" by the Russian and Romanian military and deported in cattle cars for forced labor. The entrances to the villages were closed off by the military and the police, telephone, telegraph and railroad traffic was interrupted. Mixed Romanian-Soviet patrols went from house to house with prepared lists for the collection. Mostly this happened at night. Within an hour, the people selected were supposed to get ready to leave - without knowing where they were going or how long they would be gone. Only one piece of luggage was allowed. No consideration was given to those left behind during the collection, even if they were children who were left parentless.

My grandparents were both part of the German minority. My grandfather was still at the front at that time, my grandmother was 28 years old with her three small children (6, 2 and just over 1 years old) in Kronstadt. Every night meant fear, every day was just a reprieve. And then, one night the military was at her door and she too had to pack her suitcase. But she was also doing something else at the same time: she sent her Hungarian maid to those Jewish friends, who had been living in freedom again since Romania's change of sides.

Within a very short time one of her Jewish friend appeared. He spoke to the Romanian and Russian military men and told them, how my grandmother had saved his family's life and how she had taken care of them for years. What words he found to convince them, only he knows. But he managed to get my grandmother checked off the list - without actually being deported. Although she and her family lost all their possessions in the expropriations carried out by the Romanian communists in the following years and were forced to live in a tiny backyard apartment, they themselves remained unharmed. Their three children did not have to grow up parentless. What a blessing! "Blessed be everyone who blesses you (people of Israel)".

The Jewish family emigrated to Israel shortly thereafter and direct contact between them broke off. But there was a blessing that continued to work. In the years of shortage that followed in Romania, meat was available only to special circles, for example, members of the Communist Party. Another special group that also received allocations of meat were the survivors of the Jewish community in Kronstadt (Brasov). And these friends regularly provided my grandmother (as long as she lived in Romania) with beef with which she prepared and invited her children and grandchildren to a monthly meal. But the real hosts were her Jewish friends. This is how I grew up, and this is how we experienced the truth of the verse "I will bless those who bless Israel" in a very practical way.

I am well aware that there are other stories where the blessing was not so immediately seen. But I am convinced that God gave his blessing in these cases as well - even if it became recognizable only later...



The Legacy

Decades have passed since then. My grandmother never visited Israel and never again met the friends she saved, and yet she too contributed a tiny piece of the puzzle to the miracle that has taken place in Israel over the last 100 years.

When I walk through the streets of Israel today and see the expressive faces of the Israelis, the children playing, the determined young people and the expressive features of the elderly, my heart warms. Zechariah 8:5: *"There shall sit again in the squares of Jerusalem old men and old women, each with his staff in his hand before old age, and the squares of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing there"* has come true.

My grandmother made the contribution she could - leaving a legacy for me as well. I want to continue the line of blessing and, like her, be a blessing to Israel!

Today, too, the situation in and of Israel is explosive. The hatred of Jews, the Anti-Semitism have not disappeared - on the contrary. Today it is not only directed against the people, but also against the state of Israel: in regular condemnations of Israel by international forums as well as in regular attacks on Israel's territory. The horrific terrorist attacks that cruelly destroy the lives of children, fathers and young women, month after month, seem to have become frighteningly routine to many.

Especially now, at this time, it is so important to set a counterpoint. Everyone can make a contribution. And it is still true: Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed.

This has been experienced by the men and women whose stories are described in the "Friends of Zion" Museum. Their life testimony is an inspiration, (just as my grandmother's story is to me), to follow in their footsteps and to follow their example.

God's calling to bless the people of Israel remains - the question is, whether we are willing to say "Hineni" (Here I am!) to it!



Brigitte B. Nussbächer is carrying on her grandmother's legacy. Together with her husband, Harald Bottesch, she regularly visits Israel. Her current focus is on supporting families affected by the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023: Widows and orphans, traumatized people, evacuees. More information on this can be found in her travel diary "[Facets of Restoration](#)", in which she reports on her last journey to Israel in April 2025. On her website <https://www.arc-to-israel.org/en> she regularly provides information on current topics from Israel.

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