

# How My Father Rescued His Sister from Deportation to Auschwitz

by Ruth Chevion

In my sense of it, dear reader, the most critical incident for the Fessel family, my father's family, during the war, was the rescue of my Dad's younger sister Chava (**Ha**-va). One day in the Tarnów ghetto she was caught in a massive Gestapo *Aktion*. The Germans were filling a train to Auschwitz.

Had Chava been taken that day, it's safe to say that Miriam would not have made it. And without Miriam, Elchanan would not have made it. Without Elchanan's shrewd planning, it is unlikely that Alex and my father would have made it. This is all nearly certain. You will see in other stories how their survival depended on each other. But Chava was key in another way too.

I would not dare say Chava was the favorite in the family. These were traditional people who would not accept such talk, but it's fair to say everyone loved Chava. Five years younger than my dad, and the only girl, they called her "the little one." But it wasn't just birth order. There was something special about her - that smile, those blue eyes, the red hair, the intelligence and sweetness together, and especially her voice - the bell-like timbre of her voice, like a violin in a way, soothing and tremulous at the same time.

On the day of the *Aktion*, Chava was apart from the rest of the family. She had a job inside the ghetto. Miriam, Pelek and Alex all worked outside the ghetto in the tar paper factory that had belonged to the Fessel family but was taken over by the Germans.

Suddenly, a friend came running into the factory to say that there was a "selection" going on in the ghetto and Chava was standing in line. That the Germans were loading a train.

They already knew the drill. A huge deportation of thousands of Jews from Tarnów had taken place before. Everyone in the ghetto would be lined up in front of the *Kommissar*. They would step up one by one. The old, the exhausted, and the children would be waved to the right. Those who had papers saying they were "necessary workers" would be waved to the left.

Upon hearing that Chava was in a selection line, Grandmother Miriam panicked. Chava did not have "necessary worker" papers. Miriam started to run toward the ghetto to try to rescue Chava. But Pelek held her back. "I promise," he swore to his mother, "I will get her out."

What Pelek did first was to mockup some "necessary worker" papers for her. I don't know exactly how he did this. According to Chava he cut a photo of her out of a family group photo and stuck it into some papers.

I am sure you are with me here, dear reader, in being amazed that my father didn't run straight into the ghetto to get her out, but worked at a desk instead, to physically cut and paste paper, but that was actually the key to the rescue.

With the new fake "necessary worker" papers in hand, Dad ran as fast as he could into the ghetto, but Chava was not there. She had already been selected to the train.

Dad was able to locate her on the march toward the train. He grabbed her hand and pulled her out of the crowd.

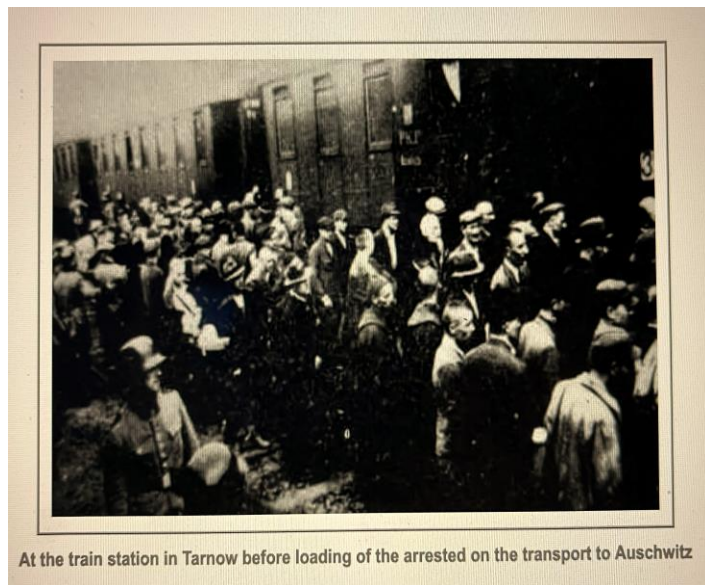
Together they ran. They ran through side streets and gardens and alleyways of the city of Tarnów, staying away from main streets. They ran maze-like through the city. At one especially dangerous point my father pulled Chava up over a high wall. They ran all the way back to the ghetto, managing to get back into the ghetto without being seen by a guard.

By now it was late afternoon. The selection process was not yet over. Chava slipped into a place at the very end of the line. This time, when it was her turn to step up to the table, she showed her "necessary worker" papers and she was sent to the left.

If you are doing a double take my friends, trust your eyes. Pelek rescued Chava not by getting her out of the ghetto, but by sneaking her back in.

The city of Tarnow started out with about 30,000 Jews. It took three big deportations to clear the city of Jews. This one, out of which Chava was rescued, was the second deportation. The Fessel family escaped from the ghetto before the third one.

But let me say dear reader, there is one point in this story that bothered me for many years - how was my Dad able to pull Chava off the march without a guard shooting the two of them? I'll get into that next month. I had to ask Chava about it. I'd like to tell you what she said. I'll get into that next month.



At the train station in Tarnow before loading of the arrested on the transport to Auschwitz