

Story of Shimon, Mariem and Adi Birn

Adi Biran – Adi Biran was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1930. He was the only child of Shimon and Miriam Biran, who had both been born in 1900 in the town of Nowy Sącz, Poland. His father, originally named Friedhaber, later changed the family surname to Biran. Shimon left Poland at the age of sixteen and settled in Berlin a year later. He became a traveling salesman representing wineries from the Rhine region, selling their wines mainly throughout eastern Germany. Miriam arrived in Germany around 1928, joining her sister in the hope of building a new life and finding a husband. The couple established themselves comfortably in Berlin, spoke German at home, owned a car, and enjoyed a secure middle-class lifestyle. Miriam came from a large family of eleven siblings. Tragically, only two sisters survived the Holocaust. One, Molly Frisch, emigrated to the United States, while another moved to Germany and later immigrated to Palestine with her husband during the 1935 Maccabiah Games. Adi attended a Jewish kindergarten and later the Jewish School on Fasanenstraße while the family lived at 52 Mommsenstraße. His parents were traditionally observant, attending synagogue mainly during Jewish holidays, while also enjoying the vibrant cultural life of Berlin. They frequented cafés, his father enjoyed playing billiards, and the family often traveled in their automobile. The rise of the Nazi regime gradually destroyed this comfortable existence. In 1933, the family sold their home and all its contents, intending to immigrate to Palestine. However, because Shimon had been a member of the Betar movement, the British Mandatory authorities refused to grant them immigration certificates. Consequently, Adi and his mother spent about a year with relatives in Poland while his father remained in Germany to work and save money. By 1937, Shimon's business license had been revoked, and he desperately searched for a country willing to accept Jewish immigrants. He visited countless embassies and consulates but found every door closed. When the deportation of Polish Jews from Berlin began in 1938, friends warned him that he was about to be arrested. On the designated day, he deliberately spent the entire night traveling back and forth by public transportation between Berlin and Potsdam, ensuring he would not be found at home. The authorities indeed arrived, leaving an order requiring him to report to the police on the following day. Just before that deadline, Shimon managed to obtain Paraguayan visas after paying the Paraguayan ambassador. The visas also included transit through France and Uruguay. Refusing to board a German ship—a decision that would later prove remarkably wise—the family traveled by train to Marseille and from there boarded a French vessel named *El Sina*. They left Berlin only one day before Shimon was due to report to the police. The morning after Kristallnacht, Adi walked to school as usual, only to discover that both his school and the neighboring synagogue had been burned to the ground. Crowds, including members of the Hitler Youth, watched the destruction. As he wandered through Berlin's streets, he saw shattered shop windows and Jewish businesses that had already been looted. During the voyage to South America, the ship's captain announced devastating news: the Paraguayan visas had been declared invalid because they were forged, and entry into Paraguay would not be permitted. When the ship reached Montevideo, Uruguay, Adi's family and about fifteen other Jewish refugees were allowed to disembark and were temporarily housed in a hotel. Unable to pay, they soon had to leave and rent a single room in a modest apartment. The first years in Uruguay were extremely difficult. Shimon sold the neckties he had brought from Germany and later began manufacturing and selling similar ties locally. Miriam found employment in a sewing workshop. Adi, unable to understand Spanish, was enrolled in a Catholic school run by priests, from which he repeatedly ran away. His parents eventually realized that the school intended to convert him to Christianity and withdrew him. Learning Spanish became essential not only for school but also for everyday survival. Because both parents worked long hours, Adi spent a period of his childhood in a Jewish orphanage. For some time, the family maintained correspondence with relatives who had remained in Poland. Eventually the letters stopped. Only after the war did they learn that the entire Jewish community of their hometown had been murdered and buried together in a mass grave. Life gradually stabilized. His parents became fluent in Spanish while retaining their European accents and remained active members of the Jewish community. Adi, however, developed a more independent outlook. At the

age of thirteen, after a serious argument with his parents, he announced that he would no longer attend synagogue. As a teenager, Adi joined the Gordonia and Maccabi Hatzair youth movements. In preparation for immigration to Israel, he participated in approximately one year of agricultural training at the movement's farm in Argentina. Although he wished to volunteer and fight in Israel's War of Independence in 1948, Uruguayan law required parental permission for unmarried men under twenty to leave the country. His father refused, insisting that Adi first acquire a profession. Respecting his father's wishes, Adi studied textile technology in Argentina before completing his agricultural training. While studying in Buenos Aires, Adi met Felisa, known in Hebrew as Aliza, an Argentine-born young woman. They married in Uruguay shortly before immigrating to Israel, fulfilling his parents' wish that they begin their new life together as husband and wife. In 1952, Adi immigrated to Israel as part of a group of eight pioneers. They first trained at Kibbutz Ginegar and later moved to what is now Kfar Tikva. When most of the group decided to continue to Kibbutz Or HaNer, Adi chose a different path. Feeling that kibbutz life did not suit him, he and Aliza settled in Netanya, where he worked as an automobile mechanic. Later, the couple moved to Kibbutz Masada, where Adi worked as a teacher while living there as salaried residents. After approximately seven years, they relocated permanently to Shavei Zion. Adi and Aliza raised three children: Amos, their eldest son; their daughter, Neta; and their youngest son, Uzi. Shimon Biran died in Montevideo in 1964 at the age of sixty-four. During the family's years in Uruguay, Adi's younger brother, Elias, had been born on October 10, 1943—thirteen years after Adi. Adi Biran's life reflects the journey of many Jewish survivors of his generation: from a secure childhood in pre-war Germany, through persecution, exile, and uncertainty, to rebuilding a new life in Israel with determination, resilience, and hope.

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