Locations in Modern Poland

Bielsko-Biała (Bielsko): Sonya's birthplace (1921) in a German-speaking cultural enclave ("Little Vienna") near the Czech border. After her mother Frida died and her brother Karl ("Munziu") moved to Vienna to study theater, Marek (Meir) rented a room in the Guttmann apartment after meeting Sonya in a Zionist youth movement. On September 1, 1939, Sonya and Karl (Munziu) fled Bielsko on the last train east; Sonya's oldest brother, Izu, stayed behind and was killed by the Germans. Karl and his son Felix returned to visit Bielsko in the late 1980s (following a high school reunion in Salzburg), and Sonya and Marek returned on a heritage trip around 2002–2003.

Będzin: Marek's birthplace (1916) and childhood home in a large pre-war Jewish community. He grew up active in a Zionist youth movement and graduated from business school before moving to Bielsko. During the Holocaust, the Będzin Jewish community was ghettoized and deported to Auschwitz.

Olkusz: Located near Będzin in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region; pinned on the family map and tied to Marek's extended family roots prior to the 1942–1943 Nazi deportations.

Oświęcim (Auschwitz): The Nazi extermination camp where Marek's parents (Shlomo Hirsh and Bella Blumenfeld) and his sisters were murdered during the Holocaust. Preserved in the Drive folder is 1960s post-war correspondence between Meir in Jerusalem and Polish archives/authorities in Oświęcim.

Kraków: Visited by Sonya and Marek during their 2002–2003 return trip to Poland, including video footage recorded at the historic Remuh Synagogue and cemetery where Marek recounted his family's story.

Łódź: Pinned on the family map; associated with extended Blumenfeld family records and Poland's major pre-war textile center (the industry in which Marek trained and later worked in Israel).

Białystok: Located in northeastern Poland; after the German invasion in September 1939, Marek fled across the demarcation line to Soviet-occupied Białystok (and onward to Vilnius) before reuniting with Sonya in Lwów.

The San River (September 1939 German–Soviet Demarcation Line): Marked the border dividing German- and Soviet-occupied Poland. After fleeing Bielsko on foot, Sonya's father Leon nearly drowned while crossing the San River before Soviet soldiers pulled him out.

Pre-War Eastern Poland (Second Polish Republic — Now Western Ukraine)

Lwów (Lviv): Birthplace of Sonya's oldest brother Izu (1911). In September 1939, Sonya, Leon, and Marek reunited in Soviet-occupied Lwów. In 1940, Sonya hid Marek in their attic to evade Soviet arrests of Polish bachelors; when Soviet soldiers arrived at 2:00 AM to deport Sonya and Leon, Marek stepped forward as Sonya's fiancé and was deported with them to the Urals.

Żółkiew (Zhovkva): Birthplace of Sonya's father, Leon Guttmann ("Katz"), on May 26, 1881, in a poor shtetl from which he left at age 11 to work in restaurants.

Drohobych: Birthplace of Sonya's brother Karl ("Munziu") in 1913.

Brody: Birthplace of Sonya's mother, Frida Guttmann (1885), who grew up on a rural estate nearby.

Location based story

1. Pre-War Origins & Family Roots (Austro-Hungarian Empire & Poland)

Bielsko (Bielsko-Biała), Poland

Documented Family Significance: Sonya Guttmann was born in Bielsko in 1921 (a few years after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) into a culturally German-speaking Jewish family. Her mother, Frida, died there when Sonya was 16. Sonya and Marek met through a Zionist youth movement, and when Sonya's brother Karl(Munzio) left to study theater in Vienna, Marek (five years older) rented a spare room in the Guttmann family's modest apartment. On August 31, 1939, Sonya and Karl listened to Hitler's speech ordering the invasion of Poland on their ethnic-German neighbors' (the Guskys') radio and decided to flee the next morning.

Map Entry: Listed as Bielsko-Biała.

Będzin & Olkusz, Poland

Documented Family Significance: Marek (Meir) was born in Będzin in 1916. He grew up in a large Jewish community, became active in a Zionist youth movement, and later settled in

Bielsko. During the Holocaust, Marek's entire immediate family—his mother, father, and two sisters —were murdered by the Germans in Auschwitz.

Map Entries: Listed as Bedzin, Olkusz, and Auschwitz.

Historical Context (Yad Vashem): Będzin and neighboring Olkusz (in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region) had vibrant pre-war Jewish communities. Following the German occupation in September 1939, Jews in this region were subjected to forced labor, ghettoization, and mass deportations to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1942–1943.

Brody, Lviv, Drohobych & Zhovkva (Ukraine / Formerly Eastern Poland)

Documented Family Significance: These towns trace Sonya's parents' origins and her siblings' birthplaces prior to moving to Bielsko:

Her father, Leon Guttmann (born 1881), grew up in a poor shtetl in Junkiv (Zhovkva / Żółkiew).

Her mother, Frida (born 1885), was born on a rural estate near Brody.

Her oldest brother, Izu (Eju), was born in Lviv (Lwów) in 1911.

Her middle brother, Karl (Munzio), was born in Drohobych in 1913.

Map Entries: Listed as Drohobych, L'vivs'ka oblast, Ukraine, L'viv, L'vivs'ka oblast, Ukraine, Brody, L'vivska, Ukraine, Zolkiew, and Austro-Hungarian empire.

Vienna, Austria

Documented Family Significance: Sonya's brother Karl studied theater in Vienna before the war, which freed up the bedroom in Bielsko that Marek rented.

2. Outbreak of WWII & Flight Eastward (September 1939 – 1940)

The San River (German/Soviet Demarcation Line)

Documented Family Significance: Sonya, Karl, and their Uncle Isidore escaped Bielsko on the very last train heading east on September 1, 1939, enduring a week-long journey under German aerial bombardment. Sonya's father Leon and brother Izu initially stayed behind in Bielsko to settle affairs; the Germans captured and killed Izu. Leon then fled east on foot, nearly drowning while crossing the San River before being pulled out by two Soviet soldiers, losing his money, suitcase, and ID card, and briefly being jailed on suspicion of desertion before making his way to Lviv.

Map Entries: September 1939, German/USSR border, September 1939, eastern border, Second Polish Republic.

Lviv (Lwów), Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland

Documented Family Significance: Sonya arrived in bomb-damaged Lviv in September 1939, initially staying with her Aunt Emma (who survived a direct bomb strike on a grocery store) and then working under harsh conditions for her miserly Aunt Shliza before reuniting with her father Leon in a second-floor apartment with an attic. When rumors spread in 1940 that Soviet authorities were arresting and deporting Polish bachelors, Sonya invited Marek to hide in their attic. Hours later, Soviet soldiers arrived at 2:00 AM to deport Leon and Sonya; Marek stepped out of hiding, declared himself Sonya's fiancé, and insisted on being taken with them.

Map Entry: L'viv, L'vivs'ka oblast, Ukraine.

Białystok & Vilnius (Marek's Early Wartime Displacement)

Documented Family Significance: In his June 1999 interview, Marek recounted crossing to the Soviet side after the German invasion and spending time in Białystok and Vilnius before reuniting with Sonya in Lviv.

Map Entry: Bialystock is pinned on the map. (Note: Vilnius is documented in Marek's 1999 interview but is not pinned as a separate marker on the map.)

Historical Context (Yad Vashem): Under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (September 1939), eastern Poland—including Lviv and Białystok—was annexed by the USSR, while Vilnius was transferred to Lithuania until mid-1940. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees fled east into these cities to escape Nazi occupation.

3. Soviet Deportation & Forced Labor in the Urals (1940 – 1941)

The Ural Mountains / Near Chelyabinsk (Sverdlovsk / Chelyabinsk Oblast)

Documented Family Significance: Deported by cattle/freight train from Lviv for roughly a week, Sonya, Marek, and Leon were sent to a Soviet forced labor settlement ("Puzovok 45" / Northern Urals, mapped near Chelyabinsk). Sonya harvested wheat with a scythe and later felled massive trees with hand saws in winter temperatures dropping to -50^\circ\text{C}, rubbing Marek with snow to prevent frostbite. When Munzio arranged a potential release permit for Sonya alone, she refused to leave Marek behind; on May 10, 1941, while snow was still on the ground, Sonya and Marek got married at the camp commander's hut with two passing strangers as witnesses and a makeshift cake made from a week's saved bread, milk, and berries.

Map Entries: Chelyabinsk, Yekaterinburg, Sverdlovsk Oblast, and Volga River (along the rail route).

Historical Context (Yad Vashem): In 1940, Soviet authorities deported roughly 200,000–300,000 Polish citizens (predominantly Jewish refugees) to “special settlements” in the Soviet interior and Ural region. Despite brutal labor, starvation, and disease, these deportations inadvertently saved the vast majority of deportees from the Nazi extermination camps that engulfed Poland in 1941–1942.

4. Release & Survival in Soviet Central Asia (1941 – 1942)

Tashkent (and Samarkand / Jizzakh), Uzbekistan

Documented Family Significance: Following the 1941 Soviet amnesty for Polish citizens, Sonya, Marek, and Leon left the labor camp after receiving a telegram from Sonya’s brother Munzio in Tashkent. Finding the Tashkent train station overcrowded with starving refugees, they reunited with Munzio and shared a small courtyard apartment, surviving by selling pirogi out of a bag. When Marek and Munzio were arrested at a bazaar in a police sting while trying to sell a gold watch for food, Sonya tracked Marek to the jail, retrieved a note he left by the yard fence, and secured his release by bribing a guard with one of Marek’s silk shirts.

Map Entries: Tashkent, Samarkand, Jizzakh.

Krasnovodsk (Türkmenbaşy), Turkmenistan

Documented Family Significance: Seeking to leave the USSR, Marek used his pre-war business school diploma to convince Soviet officials that Poland would need him to rebuild its textile industry, securing travel papers for himself, Sonya, and Leon. When a Polish official erased Leon’s name from the train manifest to prevent the family from leaving, Munzio confronted the Soviet officer on the platform, allowing Leon to board and travel by train to the Caspian Sea port of Krasnovodsk.

Map Entry: Turkmenbashi (Krasnovodsk).

5. Evacuation via Iran, India, and Egypt (1942 – February 1943)

Bandar Anzali (Pahlavi) & Tehran, Iran

Documented Family Significance: Crossing the Caspian Sea by boat from Krasnovodsk to the Iranian port of Bandar Anzali (Pahlavi), Sonya arrived in Tehran. There, she joined the Yaldei Tehran (“Children of Tehran”) movement, working as a caregiver for a group of 10-year-old Polish Jewish orphans sleeping on schoolhouse floors. (Note: The Zoom presentation notes that Sonya, Marek, and Leon traveled together to Krasnovodsk and arrived in Israel in February 1943, though it focuses specifically on Sonya’s role escorting the Tehran Children.)

Map Entries: Bandar Anzali (Pahlavi), Tehran, and Boat route.

Historical Context (Yad Vashem): In 1942, over 1,000 Jewish refugee children and accompanying adults were evacuated from Soviet Central Asia to Tehran via Pahlavi, cared for by the Jewish Agency and the JDC while awaiting transit permits to Mandatory Palestine.

Karachi (British India / Modern-day Pakistan)

Documented Family Significance: Because Arab states refused overland transit visas through Iraq, the refugees sailed from the Persian Gulf to Karachi (roughly 3,000 km away), where they learned for certain they would be taken to Eretz Yisrael (Mandatory Palestine).

Map Entry: Karachi.

Suez Canal / Egypt

Documented Family Significance: From Karachi, their ship sailed across the Arabian Sea and Red Sea, passing through Egypt and the Suez Canal into Mandatory Palestine in February 1943.

Map Entry: Illustrated by the blue maritime route line passing through the Red Sea and Suez Canal.

6. Settlement in Mandatory Palestine / Israel (1943 Onward)

Haifa, Kibbutz Life, and Post-War Israel (Givatayim / Jerusalem)

Documented Family Significance: Arriving in Mandatory Palestine in February 1943, Sonya spent time adapting to life on a kibbutz. Marek (Meir) built a career in the textile industry. Later family references in the Zoom memorial place the family in Givatayim and Jerusalem, where Sonya lived until passing away at age 98 (shortly before March 2020).

Map Entry: Haifa.