

How did I learn about the Holocaust from my grandmother, Rachel (Ella):

5 percent from stories.

95 percent from silence.

There was one story — one of the only ones she told.

She was 15 years old, walking down the street in Czechoslovakia, in broad daylight, when she was attacked by a group of Nazi young men.

In that moment, she understood she was alone.

No one would come to defend her.

So she fought them with the only thing she had — the sharp tip of her umbrella.

She told us she managed to scare them away.

What she didn't tell us

was that they threw her into a frozen river,  
and she almost died trying to get out.

My grandmother grew up a proud Czech citizen.

When antisemitism began to rise, that sense of belonging started to crack.

But standing there alone, fighting for her life and dignity with an umbrella —  
that was the moment she understood.

When she came home, she told her parents:

“I am not staying here. This is not my home. I am going to the Land of Israel.”

At first, they refused.

So she refused to go to school,  
and worked in the garden to prepare her delicate hands for agricultural work.

After a year, they gave in.

At 16, my grandmother left her family and came to the Land of Israel — alone.

She moved from a large house to a tent.

From ice-skating on frozen lakes  
to working under the hot sun.  
She missed her family,  
but she was happy.  
She had found a home.  
That is what she told us.  
But this is where she went quiet.

Her parents and four of her siblings were murdered in the Holocaust.  
One sister went through hell in Auschwitz and survived.  
She didn't speak about the guilt.  
Survivor's guilt.  
But I could always feel it, even when I couldn't name it.

I absorbed both — the stories and the silence.  
I will never have to stand alone like she did.  
I have a home.

For the first time in 2,000 years, the Jewish people have a home.  
And there is something else I carry —  
something we Israelis carry, even if unspoken.

I stand here, in peaceful New Zealand,  
and like my grandmother, I carry the pain, the loss, and the memory of my people — then,  
and now.  
And like her, I also carry hope — for now, and for the future.