

# Baronita Adam



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Baronita Adam is a member of the Roma community. Through a project with the Roma Support Group, she has spoken about the prejudice she has faced in her lifetime, and shared her mother's memories of being targeted by the Nazis and imprisoned in a concentration camp.



'My mother's parents and her sister died in the concentration camp. Some were shot, tortured. She was lucky to escape when the war finished.'

Baronita was born on 7 February 1959. She lived with her mother Crucita (*pronounced Kruchitza*), father Iosif (*pronounced Yosiph*), and siblings in Cetatea Veche, a small village in Romania.

Roma people were historically known as 'Gypsies' and faced discrimination because of their different way of life. Years before Baronita was born, her mother Crucita was persecuted by the Nazis because she was Roma. When Baronita was old enough, her mother told her about these experiences, stories which she has now shared as part of the Roma Support Group Oral History Project.

## Crucita's experience of Nazi persecution

Before World War Two, anti-Roma discrimination was widespread in Romania. In 1941, Romania supported Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union and joined The Axis Alliance, supporting Nazi Germany. Within days, violent attacks broke out and thousands of Roma people were murdered, alongside many Jews. Following the invasion of the Soviet Union, Romania regained land that had been seized from them and acquired new territories. Romanian authorities set up a military administration in a new region, Transnistria, and with German support they established ghettos and concentration camps. Many Roma and Jewish people were sent there.

Crucita told Baronita that at this time, her community was attacked by Romanian troops. Along with her family, she was lined up to be taken as a prisoner. Seeing that, further up the line, the soldiers were harassing young women and dragging some of them into the forest, Crucita and her sister attempted to escape and hide. They slipped out of the line and ran, finding a large pipe nearby. Several people hid in the pipe but Crucita said she was afraid, and hesitated. The pipe began to roll but her toes were trapped underneath, and three of them were cut off. As she was bleeding badly and unable to run, the soldiers caught them, and they were taken away to a camp. Baronita does not know for certain which concentration camp her mother was taken to, but it is likely to be one in Transnistria.



Baronita's mother, Crucita

'My mother saw with her own eyes, she saw people dying in front of her, dying from thirst, hunger and they were making them slaves.'

Crucita told Baronita that in the camp, people were subjected to hard labour, and tortured and shot by the guards. Crucita's parents and sister were murdered there, and she remained in the camp until it was liberated.

## After Nazi persecution

The persecution of Roma people did not end after the War. Survivors like Crucita left the camps injured, in poor health and without family, and they continued to face discrimination and beatings. Crucita heard about Cetatea Veche - a community of Roma people living in safety. She met Iosif and they started a family there, and in 1959, Baronita was born.

The village of Cetatea Veche was near a forest and had no running water or electricity. It was built as a community where Roma people could live in peace, away from the prejudice they faced in cities. The family was very poor, with several children having to share the same bed. The women walked a long way to fetch fresh water from a river in the woods.

Their community continued to face prejudice outside of the village. They were easily identified by the fact they mostly spoke the Roma language, Romanes. If they ever went into the cities they would be chased out of shops, verbally abused and were sometimes victims of violence. Baronita remembers: 'When we were going to buy some meat, Police officers stepped on our feet and pushed us out of the queue. Many times we left with empty bags.'

Baronita's father Iosif had been to school as a child in Hungary, and was the most educated person in the village. He educated the Roma children, and worked as the village doctor and dentist. Because of his colouring, people often assumed he was Greek, so he could go into nearby towns and cities more easily than other members of the community for food and supplies.

In 1970, life changed for the family when the authorities found out that Iosif was practising medicine without a licence. He was arrested and sent to prison for eight years, leaving Crucita to look after the children alone. People from the community who had been helped by Iosif brought food and supported the family. While Iosif was in prison he was badly mistreated, and he eventually came home in poor health. Six months later, he died. Baronita was 19 years old.

## Baronita's life today

From December 1989, when a revolution led to the collapse of Communism in Romania, Roma people were increasingly the target of racially-motivated violence and discrimination. As a result, many Roma people migrated West. Baronita had a long and difficult journey through Europe to the UK.

Today, Roma communities still face discrimination across Europe and in the UK, but Baronita and her family have done well here. She has children and grandchildren, and she feels that they are having an easier life than she or her mother did – with less discrimination, a better education and more opportunities.

'We found a different civilisation and a chance to know something better in this world. We sent our children to school here. We were given a chance to learn this language so we could be more respected and could respect other people, and so we settled here. But still, what we have suffered and what we have been through is very hard to forget.'

This story is produced in partnership with the Roma Support Group's Oral History Project. Learn more about Roma culture and history at [www.romasupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk).

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