



Albert Bourla

[Albert Bourla. (Jan. 29, 2021) My Family's Story: Why We Remember. LinkedIn. Reproduced for educational purposes only. Fair Use relied upon. Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/my-familys-story-why-we-remember-albert-bourla>]

[Note: 19th century photos are generally much higher quality resolution than today. This photo has evidently been doctored and scanned poorly, intentionally. Note that Bourla did not name his other relatives, not even his grandparents. The blackened eye sockets are laughable.]



My maternal grandfather and grandmother with six of their children. Sara, my mother, is the baby in the center of the photograph. Above her stands her sister, my aunt, who helped save her life.

My Family's Story: Why We Remember

...

**Albert Bourla**

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Pfizer

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This week, as we do every year, we commemorated International Holocaust Remembrance Day so that the stories of the victims and survivors are never forgotten. Yesterday, I was deeply honored to join the Sephardic Heritage International in DC 's Annual Congressional Holocaust Commemoration to share my family's story in connection with the Holocaust.

You can watch me deliver my remarks or read them below.



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Pfizer Chairman & CEO Albert Bourla Speaks at III Congressional Holocaust...

SEPHARDIC HERITAGE INTERNATIONAL DC

III CONGRESSIONAL HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATION

THURS, JANUARY 28, 1:30-2:45PM EST (VIA ZOOM)

DR. ALBERT BOURLA
CHAIRMAN & CEO
PFIZER
Special Guest

Dr. Bourla tells his Greek Sephardic family's moving story of Holocaust survival for the first time publicly.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MOIS & SARA BOURLA
OF BLESSED MEMORY

Watch on YouTube

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Remembrance. It's this word, perhaps more than any other, that inspired me to share my parents' story. That's because I recognize how fortunate I am that my parents shared their stories with me and the rest of our family.

<https://youtu.be/J0xvah1Sp7c>

Many Holocaust survivors never spoke to their children of the horrors they endured because it was too painful. But we talked about it a great deal in my family. Growing up in Thessaloniki, Greece, we would get together with our cousins on the weekends, and my parents, aunts and uncles would often share their stories.

They did this because they wanted us to remember. To remember all the lives that were lost. To remember what can happen when the virus of evil is allowed to spread unchecked. But, most important, to remember the value of a human life.

You see, when my parents spoke of the Holocaust, they never spoke of anger or revenge. They didn't teach us to hate those who did this to our family and friends.



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So, in that spirit, I'm here to share the story of Mois and Sara Bourla, my beloved parents.

Our ancestors had fled Spain in the late 15th century, after King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issued the Alhambra Decree, which mandated that all Spanish Jews either convert to Catholicism or be expelled from the country. They eventually settled in the Ottoman Thessaloniki, which later became part of Greece following its liberation from the Ottoman Empire in 1912.

Before Hitler began his march through Europe, there was a thriving Sephardic Jewish community in Thessaloniki. So much so that it was known as "La Madre de Israel" or "The Mother of Israel." Within a week of the occupation, however, the Germans had arrested the Jewish leadership, evicted hundreds of Jewish families and confiscated their apartments. And it took them less than three years to accomplish their goal of exterminating the community. When the Germans invaded Greece, there were approximately 50,000 Jews living in the city. By the end of the war, only 2,000 had survived.

Lucky for me, both of my parents were among the 2,000.

My father's family, like so many others, had been forced from their home and taken to a crowded house within one of the Jewish ghettos. It was a house they had to share with several other Jewish families. They could circulate in and out of the ghetto, as long as they were wearing the yellow star.

But one day in March 1943, the ghetto was surrounded by occupation forces, and the exit was blocked. My father, Mois, and his brother, Into, were outside when this



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because his wife and his two other children were home. Later that day, my grandfather, Abraham Bourla, his wife, Rachel, his daughter, Graciela, and his younger son, David, were taken to a camp outside the train station. From there they left for Auschwitz-Birkenau. Mois and Into never saw them again.



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time was helping Jews escape the persecution of the Nazis. They lived there until the end of the war – all the while having to pretend that they were not Jews, that they were not Mois and Into – but rather Manolis and Vasilis.

When the German occupation ended, they went back to Thessaloniki and found that all their property and belongings had been stolen or sold. With nothing to their name, they started from scratch, becoming partners in a successful liquor business that they ran together until they both retired.

My mom's story also was one of having to hide in her own land, of narrowly escaping the horrors of Auschwitz, and of family bonds that sustained her spirit and, quite literally, saved her life.

Like my father's family, my mom's family was relocated to a house within the ghetto. My mother was the youngest girl of seven children. Her older sister had converted to Christianity to marry a Christian man she had fallen in love with before the war, and she and her husband were living in another city where no one knew that she had previously been a Jew. At that time mixed weddings were not accepted by society, and my grandfather wouldn't talk to his eldest daughter because of this.

But when it became clear that the family was going to head to Poland, where the Germans had promised a new life in a Jewish settlement, my grandfather asked his eldest daughter to come and see him. In this last meeting they ever had, he asked her to take her youngest sister – my mom – with her.

There my mom would be safe because no one knew that she or her sister were of Jewish heritage. The rest of the family went by train straight to Auschwitz-Birkenau.



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day out of fear of being recognized and turned over to the Germans. But she was still a teenager, and every so often, she would venture outside. Unfortunately, during one of those walks, she was spotted and arrested.

She was sent to a local prison. It was not good news. It was well known that every day around noon, some of the prisoners would be loaded on a truck to be transferred to another location where the next dawn they would be executed. Knowing this, her brother-in-law, my dearest Christian uncle, Kostas Dimadis, approached Max Merten, a known war criminal who was in charge of the Nazi occupation forces in the city.

He paid Merten a ransom in exchange for his promise that my mom would not be executed. But her sister, my aunt, didn't trust the Germans. So, she would go to the prison every day at noon to watch as they loaded the truck that would transfer the prisoners to the execution site. And one day she saw what she had been afraid of: my mom being put on the truck.

She ran home and told her husband who immediately called Merten. He reminded him of their agreement and tried to shame him for not keeping his word. Merten said he would look into it and then abruptly hung up the phone.

That night was the longest in my aunt and uncle's life because they knew the next morning, my mom would likely be executed. The next day – on the other side of town – my mom was lined up against a wall with other prisoners. And moments before she would have been executed, a soldier on a BMW motorcycle arrived and handed some papers to the man in charge of the firing squad.

They removed from the line my mom and another woman. As they rode away, my mom could hear the machine gun fire slaughtering those that were left behind. It's a sound



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Two or three days later, she was released from prison. And just a few weeks after that, the Germans left Greece.





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Fast forward eight years and my parents were introduced by their families in a typical-for-the-time matchmaking. They liked each other and agreed to marry. They had two children – me and my sister, Seli.

My father had two dreams for me. He wanted me to become a scientist and was hoping I would marry a nice Jewish girl. I am happy to say that he lived long enough to see both dreams come true. Unfortunately, he died before our children were born, but my mom did live long enough to see them, which was the greatest of blessings.

So, that is the story of Mois and Sara Bourla. It's a story that had a great impact on my life and my view of the world, and it is a story that, for the first time today, I share publicly.

However, when I received the invitation to speak at this event – at this moment in time when racism and hatred are tearing at the fabric of our great nation – I felt it was the right time to share the story of two simple people who loved, and were loved by, their family and friends. Two people who stared down hatred and built a life filled with love and joy. Two people whose names are known by very few, but whose story has now been shared with the members of the United States Congress – the world's greatest and most just legislative body. And that makes their son very proud.

This brings me back to **remembrance**. As time marches on and today's event shrinks in our rearview mirrors, I wouldn't expect you to remember my parents' names, but I



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story is never repeated.

Thank you again for the invitation to speak today. And thank you for **remembering**.

Stay safe and stay well.

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Thank you for sharing your family history! Faith and courage do inspire us to be resilient and purposeful living when experienced and told. May we always be aware of the blessings of freedom as well as its costs 🙏. Thank you also for your dedication to cure COVID worldwide.

Like Reply



Dolores Mullen4mo ...

A beautiful and inspirational remembrance.

Like Reply



Loshni Bassadien8mo ...

🙏🙏🙏🙏 that is all that is needed. Love ❤️

Like Reply



Jerry Harper9mo ...

Awesomely inspirational from a lesson well learned! I remember seeing many Memorials erected throughout Germany commemorating this sad event of human history! 🙏🙏🌟❤️

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