



Vera Visokos and Lidia Babienko Righteous Among the Nations

Vera Visokos was living with her sister Lidiya Babienko in Berezovka, in the district of Odessa (Berezivka, Odesa District). Both women were young mothers who were raising children alone because their husbands were fighting on the front.

In early 1942, in the middle of winter, a convoy of Jews (some from Bessarabia and some from central Romania) arrived in Berezovka. These Jews were thrown into the ruins of barracks and were barely guarded because they were all too weak to try to escape. One day, Visokos and Babienko visited the barracks. There, they came across two young girls and a boy that could not get up from the floor. The boy, who spoke a little Russian, asked Visokos and Babienko to rescue the two girls, nine-year-old Shifra and six-year-old Mina Barash, who were his sisters. Visokos and Babienko took pity on these suffering children and, despite the danger, Visokos took Shifra to her home and Babienko took Mina.

After being betrayed to the authorities, Visokos and Babienko were ordered to report to the local police. They arrived at the police station with money and gifts with which to bribe the policemen. Furthermore, to protect the Jewish siblings, Visokos and Babienko had them baptized that very night. The priest was bribed to write an earlier date on the baptismal certificates and their names were changed – Shifra became Yevdokiya Visokos and her sister became Nina Babienko. As the Jewish girls spoke no Russian, they refrained from going outside.

A long time passed before they were capable of retelling the harrowing story of the death march that they had made with their family – of which they were the only survivors – from Leova in Bessarabia to Berezovka, a distance of about 250 km.

In April 1944, the area was liberated and because of Visokos and Babienko's difficult economic situation, the Jewish girls were taken to an orphanage, where they retained the Ukrainian names that had saved them during the war.

On November 2, 1995, Yad Vashem recognized Vera Visokos and her sister, Lidiya Babienko, as Righteous Among the Nations.