

Yoram Gross

Title: *My Animated Life*

Author: Yoram Gross

Publisher: Brandl & Schlesinger

Place of Publication: Blackheath, NSW.

Year of Publication: 2011

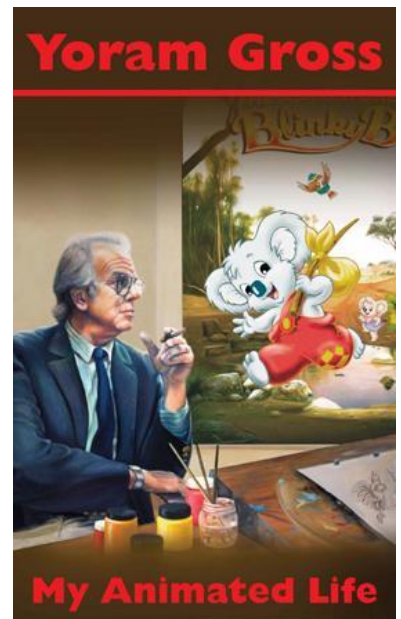
Location of Book: Monash University, Lamm Jewish Library, Sydney Jewish Museum, State Library of Victoria and most public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Poland: Krakow, Warsaw, Otwock; Germany: Berlin; Israel: Tel Aviv; Australia: Sydney.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative.

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: Krakow ghetto; in-hiding.



My Animated Life is the 227-page memoir of Polish-born survivor Yoram Gross, who escaped the Krakow ghetto in 1942 and went into hiding in Warsaw. After the war, he became an award-winning filmmaker. In 1968, he emigrated to Australia, where he created the iconic animated classics Blinky Bill and Dot and the Kangaroo.

Pages 1-30 provide a brief account of the author's childhood, followed by the German invasion and occupation of Krakow. Pages 31-57 describe the family's time as forced labourers in Krakow and subsequent internment in the ghetto. Pages 58-109 recount their escape and time in hiding in Warsaw using false papers. Pages 110-157 detail Yoram's move to an orphanage in Otwock, the Warsaw Uprising, and liberation by the Russian army in 1945. Pages 158-206 chronicle his return home and time as a smuggler. Pages 207-227 cover his filmmaking career in Poland and emigration to Israel and Australia.

Jerzy (Yoram) Gross was born 18 October 1926 in Krakow, Poland, the youngest child of Jakob and Sara Gross. His parents ran two large ceramic and crystal stores. He had a sister Klara and two brothers, Natan and Jozek. The family was assimilated and had many Christian friends.

When Yoram was twelve, Nazi Germany invaded Poland and his father fled to Lwów with his eldest brother Jozek. Krakow was soon occupied; German soldiers requisitioned the Gross home and antisemitic restrictions were instituted.

In March 1941, after being ordered to relocate to the ghetto, Yoram's mother fled Krakow with Natan and Klara to search for shelter outside the city, while Yoram was placed in hiding in the attic of a Catholic neighbour. She retrieved Yoram a few weeks later, bringing him under cover of night to a safehouse in the suburb of Wiczysta, just

beyond the city limits. The family lived there for several months during which Yoram worked in a tyre factory, then at the airfield in Grębałów.

By late 1941, Jews from the outskirts of Krakow were forced into the ghetto. In December, the ghetto was divided and rumours of pending liquidation circulated, prompting Yoram's mother to plan their escape. With the help of Polish friends, they obtained Aryan papers and, after bribing Polish guards, escaped to the home of a Christian friend. Unable to stay in the long-term and fearing recognition on the streets of Krakow, Yoram and Natan went into hiding with relatives in Warsaw.

Aided by a network of Christian friends, fellow Jews in hiding, and sympathetic strangers, Yoram and Natan survived living hand-to-mouth and moving frequently between hiding places. Their mother and sister followed later, but sheltered separately.

In 1943, the brothers lived in an apartment close to the Warsaw ghetto and from their balcony witnessed the uprising and the brutal execution of a Jewish escapee by a Polish officer. Following this incident, they were forced to find new shelter due to threats and extortion by their neighbours. The brothers soon ran out of money and began making handmade ceramics which they sold to small businesses around the city.

After making connections with the resistance movement *Zegota* through fellow Jews in hiding, Yoram was placed in an orphanage in Otwock where he resumed his education. This was arranged and funded by Irena Sendler, the renowned rescuer with whom Yoram later formed a lifelong friendship. In Otwock, he was recruited into the Grey Ranks, the Polish Scouting Association, a division of the Polish resistance movement, as a parcel runner.

In August 1944, as the Russian army advanced Polish partisans launched the Warsaw Uprising. In January 1945, following the liberation of Warsaw, Yoram fled to Lublin with other members of the Grey Ranks after learning that Russian forces were arresting Polish partisans. After visiting the recently liberated Majdanek concentration camp, the horrified group returned to Otwock where Yoram soon reunited with his siblings.

Upon learning that his mother had survived and returned to Kraków, Yoram made his way home. There, he discovered that his father had been murdered in Lwów by Ukrainian militiamen. His brother Józek had endured imprisonment in a Soviet labour camp before joining the Soviet Army.

Shortly after his return, Yoram disguised himself as a Polish army officer using his Grey Ranks uniform. Posing as a lieutenant, he smuggled family and friends from Soviet-occupied Poland to the American zone in Berlin – once impersonating an NKVD officer to free a friend from prison.

In Krakow, Yoram enrolled in musicology and in 1947 found work in the film industry. In 1950, he followed Natan to Israel and worked as a newsreel and documentary

cameraman before becoming an award-winning independent filmmaker. Fourteen years later, his mother and sister joined them in Tel Aviv.

After Yoram's experimental films received acclaim at the Melbourne International Film Festival, in 1968 he emigrated to Australia with his wife Sandra and their children, ultimately settling in Sydney. He became a leading figure in Australian animation, creating beloved works *Dot and the Kangaroo* and *Blinky Bill*. In 1995 he was awarded the Order of Australia for his contributions to the film industry.

My Animated Life is a captivating memoir of the author's wartime experiences, told through vivid (and often harrowing) vignettes and anecdotes. However, it is not a comprehensive biography and its timelines are at times unclear. Certain aspects, such as daily life in the Krakow ghetto and the author's postwar experiences in Israel and Australia receive limited attention. Translated from Polish by Marcel Weyland, the memoir was published by the independent Australian press Brandl & Schlesinger.