

Katarina Mullerova

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Slovakia

My name is Katarína Mullerová. I was born in 1949 in Galanta, Czechoslovakia, which today is in Slovakia. I am a teacher.

My father, Julius Muller, and my mother, Sarlota Reichenbergerova, come from Samorín.

My father was born on February 15, 1908, in Dolne Saliby, which was in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. His family was Orthodox, and their rabbi was Rabbi Buchsbaum. My paternal great-grandfather was born in a village called Vaja vata. My father's father, Natan Muller, died in 1915 in World War I. My father grew up with his mother, Charlota Grunvaldová; her married name was Mullerová. She was known as a very energetic woman, ambitious, with a very strong personality. She lived with her sister, Berta, who was not married.

My father was a farmer. In 1930s, he married Aranka Strikerova, from Nové Zámky. They had four children: Róbert, Tomáš, Ivan and a daughter, Marika. Unfortunately, none of the children or his wife returned from the camps. My father returned alone. His only happiness was that he met my mother. They married on May 1, 1946. They lived together until 1957 when he died of cancer, when I was 7 and my sister was 5. My sister's name is Zuzana Mullerová-Wisterová. She lives in Bratislava and has a daughter, Vierka. Our family is very small.

My mother was born in Samorín in 1923. Samorín had a famous Orthodox community. My mother's family was very religious, but also very progressive. My grandmother was familiar with famous composers and their arias. My mother learned to sing all of them from her. Operas, operettas - it was progressive for that period. They also read quite a lot. My mother was from a very poor family, but they put emphasis on education and culture.

My mother had two brothers, Ladislav and Simon. Ladislav died on the Russian front in 1941, while he was in a forced labor brigade. Simon, who was with him in a work camp, survived the war and returned in May 1945. Simon left Slovakia for Israel in December 1945. He remained in Israel until 1960, when he left for America. Simon now lives in Castro Valley, near San Francisco, California. Uncle Simon has a son, Joel.

My father had one brother, who left for Palestine in 1938, and from Palestine to England, where he joined the Foreign Legion. His name was Rudolf, but he changed it to Benton when he arrived in the United Kingdom. He died in London in 1974. His wife is alive, as is their daughter, Katy Peters. She lives in London and works as director of a Jewish school.

My mother's parents and my father's mother died in Auschwitz. I think there was not one family in Galanta in which children born after the war had grandparents. That is the biggest handicap - when a child does not know his grandparents and cannot find the support, the knowledge, the family stories. I was very happy that my mother lived to see her granddaughter, Vierka. My mother was very proud of her and loved her very much.

When my father died, the community in Galanta was very supportive. People knew each other very well and also helped each other. I have especially fond memories of the Katz family. Editnéni Katz, Aunt Edith, was from Zitno ostrov. My mother came from the same place; that's why they were so close. And there were two other women who also came from Zitni ostrov. They were Mrs. Kramerová (née Goldbergerová) and Mrs. Schultzová, from Tomášov. They were very supportive and friendly, until, one after the other, they died.

My mother had family buried in Mliecno, near Samorín. There is an Orthodox cemetery in the town, but nobody visits it any more. The cemetery still exists, but since 1949, nobody has been buried there.

We have a few cousins in Israel. Feri Grunvald lives in Kiryat Tivone; he has wonderful memories of Galanta. He left in 1949. Everyone traveling to Israel speaks about Galanta as a changed town. He has memories from before the war and immediately after the war. He's afraid of coming back for a week or two. He clearly admitted that he is afraid of the disappointment that would meet him here. There is no synagogue, no yeshiva, no traces left - apart from the cemetery - to connect him to the town. This used to be one of the biggest Orthodox communities, with famous yeshivot, and there are people living in America or Israel who were students here.