

Edith Klein

EDITH KLEIN

Slovakia

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Family background

My paternal grandfather was Ignatz Klein. They used to call him Natzi, but, obviously, no one used that name after the 1930s. He had been in the Austro-Hungarian army, but I don't recall the years. He served in Komoron (Komarno) and built a bridge there. He was born in Rad. He was a farmer and lived in a small town, Kralovsky Chlmec. He supported his family working as a manual laborer and transporting goods. My paternal grandmother, Roszalia Klein, was born in Boj, Slovakia, which was in Austro-Hungary at the time. Grandmother Roszalia was deaf. She had three children: my father, Maximilian, Miklos and a third child, whose name I cannot remember. She died in Auschwitz in 1944.

My mother was Gisela Boczani. She was born in 1902 in Zdana, in eastern Slovakia. My mother's mother was Fani Berger, a housewife. My mother was one of seven brothers and sisters. My mother and Uncle Alexandar worked together because their father died young. He worked in the forests, hauling wood. It was very difficult to make ends meet.

My mother died in a concentration camp in 1944. She was 42. My uncle Alexandar was taken to a Hungarian labor brigade. They all perished in the Holocaust.

Growing up

I was born on June 18, 1929, in Rad, where there were six Jewish families. I had two brothers: Arnold was born in 1931, and Pavel was born in 1934.

I started to go to school in 1934 in Kosice. It was really hard at first because I didn't know any Slovak, but I was a good student and worked hard. In Kosice, I lived with my mother's mother, who kept a strictly kosher home. In 1938, the Hungarians arrived, and as a Jew I was not allowed to go to school. I was sorry I couldn't continue. I loved to study. I went back



to our village and went to school there. I completed eight years.

During the War

At first, we had to wear yellow stars. My father was militarized in 1938 and was in the labor brigades, at the time of the Munich crises. After Munich, he was demobilized and came home. They took him into the Hungarian army in a labor brigade. We never saw him again. We know that he was taken by the Hungarian army to the eastern front, and that he survived this, and then was taken to a concentration camp in Hungary. We were told he died of typhus.

We had a horse, and my mother had a wagon. To make a living, she did a little work by doing errands for people. It was so hard on her.

The deportation was in April 1944, and it was carried out by the Hungarian police, not the Germans. Everyone from my town was taken to Sátgoraljújhely, and from there we were deported. I was with my father's mother, who was deaf, my mother and my two little brothers.

We were all standing in a line, all five of us. It was Mengele who stood there and told me to go to one side. He sent my mother to the other side. She waved to me and I waved to her; I asked if I could be with her, but they said no. They took us away and I asked someone where they were taking my mother. They pointed and said, "She's going up that chimney." Arnold was only 13 years old and Pavel was just 10. They were also killed.

I was 15, and they put me to work. My number is A12561. I was in the B camp, and pretty soon, I was in bad health. The girls in my barracks told me to hide from the Germans, because if they caught me, they would have sent me straight to the gas. So I would keep walking around in the back and avoided any contact with them when they looked us over. My friends also shielded me and kept me hidden.

I was transported to Leipzig, and I was there from October 1944 until April 1945. Then, just before liberation, we were marched into the yard and, with no preparations, we were marched away. We walked for 16 days, and the only way we got food was begging from people along the way. One of the German soldiers saw me begging and he hit me so hard I thought it would kill me. We finally arrived in Terezin, and they cleaned us there. They gave us a little to eat as well. I had terrible health problems by then - dysentery. On May 9, the camp was liberated by the Soviet soldiers. Soon after, those of us from Slovakia were told to report to an office. We were put in wagons, and I went to Bratislava. I was given an ID and 500 crowns. The only document I have about myself is this Auschwitz tattoo. Nothing else. On the train back east, Soviet soldiers approached me and I was so frightened. But they left me alone. I went to Rad, but there was a woman

living in our house. I can't talk about it.

After the War

Adolf Klein, a cousin, came to find me, and then with my friend Erzi, we lived together in Pavelovo. While we were there, Adolf's brother Vilhelm came to me and said, "I have been going around and looking over the girls and I think you're the best one." I said, "But we're related." I thought that second cousins once removed couldn't marry or have children. But Vilhelm laughed and said no.

I had a cousin in the United States. In 1948, I wanted to go there. I took my passport and, with three friends, I went to Prague. I had my relative's affidavit. But it didn't matter - the Americans wouldn't give me a visa. Of my three friends, all went to Israel, and one did eventually get to the U.S.

About my husband - well, I was just so happy that I survived and that I was alive. I wanted to care for someone and I wanted someone to care for me. I had this simple wedding dress - we had no money. But my sister-in-law did come all the way from America. We were married on February 15, 1948, in Kralovsky Chlmec. There was still a small community there, and I recall that the rabbi's name was Katz.

My husband served in the military of Czechoslovak army in 1947. We went to live in Pavelovo. We stayed there until 1971. I worked as an agricultural technician for the state.

We earned a living from our own land: corn, wheat, vegetables, and we had cows. Altogether we had seven hectares of land, and we spent all our spare time working the land. We had a man who worked for us. The farm was collectivized in 1957, but Vilhelm managed to get them to leave us a garden, which we continued to work.

I have two boys. Arnold was born in 1950 and Pavel - or Paul as he's called now - was born in 1953. Both of my sons had a brit milah and bar mitzvah. They married before they left the country. Both of my boys had Jewish weddings and married under a chuppah, but this was not done publicly. It was done in secret. They met their future wives in the Jewish youth club. Both emigrated to America. Arnold is a vice president in a private firm, and has two children. His wife's name is Helen Moskowitz. Pavel married Mira Haimovitch, and they also have two children.

Arnold calls himself Andy now. He left Czechoslovakia in 1984. He went through Yugoslavia, and then over to Italy. I knew he was going to do it. I didn't encourage him, but I didn't keep him, or his brother, back. Andy did have a great job here; he was the vice chairman of a very big firm.

Vilhelm, my husband, always went to synagogue. Our family was Orthodox; all the families were Orthodox in the small villages.

I am very sensitive and I am prone to tears when I think about my life. But I'm very happy that Andy calls me three times every week. And I have to tell you that my grandson will marry soon. Did you just ask me if he will marry Jewish? Of course Jewish!