



Oral History Project

Interview with Irene Csillag

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Early Life

- Irene Csillag was born in 1925 in Satu Mare, Romania
- Her father was Hungarian and her mother was Romanian
- She also lived with her sister Olga
- Satu Mare had a very large Jewish community
- When her father passed away in 1939, Irene left school and became a dressmaker
- In 1940, Satu Mare became part of Hungary
- Irene had been living a good life, but when the Germans occupied Hungary in 1944, everything changed



Irene with Olga, her mother, and her father



Map of Romania – 1933

<http://www.ushmm.org/lcmedia/map/lc/image/rom19010.gif>

German Occupation of Hungary

- After the Germans were defeated at Stalingrad, Hungary wanted to negotiate an armistice with the Allies
- The Germans occupied Hungary March 19 1944, hoping to prevent this from happening
- The new Prime Minister put in place by the Germans helped them to deport Hungarian Jews



Soviet soldier waving Red Banner



- In April 1944 Hungarian Jews were moved into ghettos
- The Hungarian authorities worked with the SS and began deporting Jews starting in the middle of May
- 440,000 Jews were deported from Hungary, most going to Auschwitz

Ghettos in Hungary: 1944

Moving to the Ghetto

- With the Germans now in control, life in Romania began to worsen for Irene
- She had to wear a Jewish star at all times, and a curfew was put in place
- Eventually, they were told that they had to move into a ghetto
- The perimeter of the Satu Mare ghetto started at the next street over from where they lived, so Irene's family had to pack up their stuff and move in with an uncle
- After four weeks of living in the ghetto, they were deported



Ghettos

- areas in cities that were often enclosed
- Germans used them to concentrate Jews in small areas and force them to live under horrible conditions
- 1,000 ghettos were created in Poland, Germany and the Soviet Union

The Train

- Irene and her family were told they were being taken to Debrecen
- They were packed into cattle cars by the SS with no room to sit, little food and water supplies, and no sanitary facilities
- The train traveled for 3-4 days
- Conditions during the train ride were so awful that a friend of Irene's sister died on the trip



<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/images/Holocaust/chelmno1.jpg>

• after the “Final Solution” was decided at the Wannsee Conference, the Nazi’s co-ordinated how the deportation would run

• The SS, Nazi Party, and German officials worked with the Ministry of Transportation to organize train schedules

- When the train finally stopped, they had arrived at a place that no one recognized
- The gate read “Arbeit Macht Frei”

Life in Auschwitz

- After being sent to the right, Irene, her sister and her mother had their hair shaved off, and their belongings and clothes were taken away and replaced with uniforms
- Next, they were marched to their barracks in camp "C"
- They stayed there for around 6 weeks

Hungarians in Auschwitz

- Of the 440,000 Hungarian Jews deported, approximately 426,000 went to Auschwitz
- 320,000 went directly to the gas chambers
- 110,000 were forced laborers



<http://www.ushmm.org/lcmedia/photo/lc/image/90/90326.jpg>

Auschwitz

- The largest concentration camp established
- Included 3 main camps
- Used prisoners for forced labor, and the camps were used as killing center
- In total, 1.1 million Jews went to Auschwitz



http://failedmessiah.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/auschwitz_gate_1.JPG

Moving to Stutthof

- One day they were told that it was time for a selection
- Irene went up to the man doing the selection, who turned out to be Dr. Mengele, to ask if her, her mother, and her sister could stay together



<http://www.stutthof.pl/imgs/galleries/newcamp/newcamp1.jpg>

Stutthof

- Established in 1939
- A concentration camp 22 miles east of Danzig
- Surrounded by wire fences and in a wooden area
- More than 60,000 people died at Stutthof



http://isurvived.org/Pictures_iSurvived-4/mengele-left.GIF

- Luckily, they all were kept together and were transported to a camp called Stutthof
- At Stutthof, Irene was assigned to clean the toilets early in the morning
- Her next job was working in the kitchen, where she was able to collect extra food

Liberation

- The Germans knew the Russians and Americans were closing in on them, so they began evacuating the camps and moving the prisoners
- Eventually Irene's group reached a body of water, where they boarded a ship
- A lot of the Nazi's started to abandon the ship, And when they reached land, fewer and fewer were walking with them
- They arrived to a football field where they were greeted by soldiers with barrels of food
- They had been liberated



<http://www.ushmm.org/lcmedia/photo/lc/image/48/48296.jpg>



<http://www.holocaust-lest-we-forget.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/holocaust-liberation-300x256.png>

Life After Liberation

- Since their stomachs couldn't handle all the food they were given by the British, Irene and Olga ended up in a hospital
- Irene refused to stay there because they wanted to shave her hair again
- Instead, she stayed at a school in Neustadt and after a week, Olga joined her
- Irene took a trip back to Satu Mare and reconnected with an uncle and aunt
- When she returned to Neustadt, Irene and Olga got in contact with an aunt in Philadelphia



Coming to Canada

- Irene met her husband Teddy at a DP camp and they got married in January
- They joined a Zionist group and ended up in Austria, then in Budapest
- They lived in Budapest for ten years, and had their daughter Judy there
- Because of the Hungarian revolution starting in 1956, they moved to Canada January 10,
- Their son Ron was born in Montreal
- They found great opportunity and peace in Canada.



Photos and Documents



Pre-War



Wedding

Photos and Documents



DP Camp



Bl. b. N. - 21

ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
D. P. INDEX CARD
G 21 733798

1. *Blaszczyk*
(Registration number)

2. *Blaszczyk* (Family name) *René* (Other given names)

3. *[Signature]* (Signature of holder) D. P. 1

NOT RE-ENTRANTS