

Clara Hilt

Wartime Experience: Camp Survivor

I was born Klara Hubel in Drohobycz, Poland on Sept 4, 1915. My father Samuel was a grocer and a businessman. My mother was named Otillia. Both died in the camps. There were also my older sister Adele, younger sister Anita, and brother Moses.

I married Ziggy Lieberman in 1936. I was living by the Baltic Sea. There was an order that women had to leave the city. I was put on a train to my parents in Krakow. I never saw my husband again. He was such a doer. I thought it was impossible for him not to survive. He sent me a letter, and I didn't look to see that there was no stamp. Somebody smuggled that letter out for him. I still remember every word of that letter. It was six weeks into the war. That is my nightmare, that I may have contributed to his death when he sent me that letter.

The Germans did not come to the Polish Corridor as expected, but instead came to Krakow. The Polish army was retreating from day one. My father and brother and sister walked the east with the retreating army. I stayed with my mother and older sister to take care of the grocery store.

Slowly, there were different edicts. You didn't have the right to stay if you don't have an essential job. The working people became important. Jews were not supposed to do business, so we worked in fear. Poles took advantage of us, and it became more and more difficult to get provisions. We had to leave the city. We didn't know where to go. We went to a friend in the vicinity. We packed our few belongings and moved to Wolbrom. We rented a room with another family. We had some money, some savings and tried to get by. My mother cried every day because we had no news of my father, brother or sister who had left.

My older sister got a job with the Jewish leadership. I gave private lessons to Jewish children who were not permitted to go to school. I still remember how eager the children were to learn. We had to do this in secret. I was paid in food. I enjoyed teaching them, and I saw how bright they were. Then there was an "action", and they took the families and whoever was left in the apartments. Since my sister was working for the Jewish agency we knew in advance.

We stayed in Wolbrom for two years until they decided to make that town "Jew free". We wanted to stay together with another family, the Rosners. We were told to go to a large parking lot and were told we were being sent to work. My father and sister had returned from the East. My brother did not, and we were told that he died at the front. My mother was taken and was soon killed. I went to Plaszow camp. I was there close to two years. The camp was liquidated and I was not lucky enough to be on Schindler's list. I wasn't pretty to them. I was alone. I was only hoping that my husband would come.

I was sent to Germany to make guns in a German factory. There were 350 women there. We stayed until the Germans retreated. The SS put us on a train to Theresienstadt where we were liberated.

I was sick with gall bladder trouble and had to be in a hospital. You make friends even in a camp, and I was never short of friends. But, I wanted to go back to Poland to see if my family had survived. I didn't find anybody. I found out that my parents had died in the camps. My sister Adele had died on the death march in the last month of the war. I never got official word that my husband had died.

I stayed in a big home where students had dances before the war. The Poles were very anti-Semitic. We were in the flea market trying to sell some old second-hand things and the Poles were in a mob. We were saved by a Russian officer who had a machine gun. I decided to go to the free zone with a friend. We had to smuggle ourselves out and finally we arrived in Prague where I found my younger sister Anita in a hospital. I found that my brother had survived and was in Italy. He went to Israel and now lives in Florida.

In Munich I met Edward Hilt again. He had helped me in the camp. In 1945, in Poland. I married him. Our son Sam was born in Germany. I was so naïve. I had no mother and no grandparents and I was afraid to go to the German hospital to have the baby.

In 1950, after five years in Germany and hating every second of it, we got our visa and came to the US. We lived in New Jersey for eighteen years where I opened a dress shop. I would still be there but Eddie got sick and we and retired in Florida where Eddie died in 1986.

Even my beautiful sister is dead from food poisoning. During the war parents wanted to save their children, but children wanted to save themselves and would have survived on their own. If they stayed with their parents they died.

There are many days when I wonder why I survived when so many died. I smile but I do not laugh. My son was raised in a home where laughing was a crime. He turned out to be a beautiful human being and now is married and lives in California with his children Sienna and Emma. I moved from Florida to be closer to them.