

CLARA HILT

Clara was sent to the Plaszow concentration camp, then to slave labor in Germany, and Theresienstadt.

*"I smile but I do not laugh. My son was raised in a home where laughing was a crime.
There are days when I wonder what I am doing here."*

Clara Hilt (née Hubel) was born in 1915 in Drohobycz, Poland. In 1936 she was living by the Baltic Sea with her husband whom she had recently married, when an order came that women had to leave the city. Her husband was arrested, and she never saw him again.

Clara stayed in Krakow with her mother and sister to help in the family grocery store, while her father, brother, and another sister headed east with the retreating Polish army. With food shortages and Polish anti-Semitism, life for the women became increasingly difficult. Finally, they moved to Wolbrom, where they rented a room and Clara secretly gave lessons to Jewish children who were not allowed to attend school and was paid in desperately needed food.

When the Germans decided to "cleanse" the town of all its Jewish citizens, Clara was sent to the Plaszow camp (the setting of Schindler's List). She remained there for close to two years, and together with 350 women was sent to Germany to labor making guns in a German factory. Finally, the Germans retreated, and the prisoners were put on a train to Theresienstadt, where they were liberated. After being hospitalized Clara went back to Poland to search for her family. She found out that her parents had died in the camps, and her older sister had died on a Death March in the last month of the war. Only a brother and younger sister had survived.

The anti-Semitism of the Poles persuaded Clara and a friend to escape to the free zone and eventually go to Prague. After the war, Clara was reunited with Edward Hilt who had helped her in the camp. They married and lived in Germany where their son was born, finally immigrating to the United States in 1950.

Clara never got official word that her first husband had died. A single letter from him was smuggled from the camp in which he was held. It was Clara's nightmare that she contributed to his death when he took the risk to send that letter to her.