

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	MUNCI KATZ	
Name of Interviewer	Sidney Elsner	Date 9/5/84
Name of Abstractor	Michelle Heyer	Date 9/10/87

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Munci Adler Katz was born in Rakov, Czechoslovakia. It was a town of 60,000 near the Polish border. Rakov is now part of the Soviet Union.

Before the war, Rakov had a large Jewish community with three temples. Munci belonged to Mizrahi, a Zionist youth organization. The Adlers were a very orthodox family.

Her father worked in a factory and they had a stable financial situation. Munci's mother died when she was 13 and her father remarried. She had three sisters, one of whom was married.

Munci recalls a happy childhood and a close family life. She attended a Czech public school for eight years and at the age of 14 or 15 she learned the trade of dressmaking.

Before the war, there was no anti-Semitism in Rakov, but immediately after the Germans took control the people became viciously anti-Semitic. Munci's pregnant sister was attacked and after that the family stayed inside the house as much as possible.

The Jews of Rakov were ghettoized briefly, but since the Adlers' house was in the ghetto, they were able to remain there. Shortly, however, they were sent to the crowded ghetto in Matejovice, and four weeks later they were deported to Auschwitz.

Munci's father, stepmother, and two sisters were sent to the gas chambers immediately. Since Munci didn't see them go, though, she retained the hope that at least her father had been spared throughout the war.

After three months at Auschwitz, Munci and her sister were selected to go to a work camp in Geistlingersteiger, Germany. Munci was given the job of camp seamstress and was able to get extra food and better treatment. The camp commander showed unusual kindness to her, giving her special tasks in exchange for gifts of food.

As the war neared an end, Munci and the others were evacuated to Dachau, but it was so crowded they had to move on to Allach. Munci's situation there was similar to Geistlingersteiger; she

was once again a seamstress, and the same commander was in charge.

A few weeks after they arrived at Allach, most of the women were again evacuated to the Tyrol mountains. Munci and her sister were among the 130-150 who stayed behind.

They were liberated on May 9, 1945 by a unit of black American soldiers. Many died after liberation, however, when the soldiers overfed them, and a typhus epidemic broke out.

Munci felt a strong need to return to Rakov to see if her father had survived. Before going there, she and her sister found two of her father's brothers in Tsiget. They settled there, and Munci was forced to become engaged to a friend of her uncle's.

Munci returned to Rakov and found a farmer neighbor living in their house. It was filthy, and the neighbor had been cruel to her before the war, but Munci stayed long enough to find some money she'd hidden before the war.

When she returned to Tsiget, Munci told her uncles her father was sick in Bucharest. It was really an excuse to leave her fiancée.

In Bucharest, Munci met Harry Katz and became engaged to him. When they went to Tsiget to break off her other engagement, they discovered Munci's sister had taken Munci's money to try to get to Israel. They did not hear from her for six years.

Munci and Harry received permission to emigrate in 1964 and they came to Cleveland, where Harry had an aunt. He became a cabinetmaker and Munci worked as a dressmaker.

They currently live in Cleveland and they have two children.

ABTRACTOR'S NOTE

This interview is frequently difficult to understand because of Munci's difficulties with English and her strong accent. She occasionally speaks Yiddish and German (she does usually translate it into English).

ABSTRACT

VIDEO 1 OF 3

PRESENT LIFE

Has lived in Cleveland 20 years. Husband is a cabinetmaker. Worked as a dressmaker. Has two children.

MAIDEN NAME IS ADLER. FROMOVITZ IS MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME

BORN IN RAKOV, CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Now part of Russia. Near Polish border. Taken over by Hungarians in 1939. Woodworking town and ski resort.

60,000 INHABITANTS - MANY JEWS

There were three temples.

FAMILY STRUCTURE/LIFE STYLE

Had three sisters - one was married. Mother died when Munci was 13. Father worked in a factory. Owned their house.

RELIGIOUS LIFE/ZIONISM

Adlers very orthodox. Munci belonged to Mizrahi - youth Zionist organization. They wanted to go to Palestine but parents wouldn't allow it.

FAMILY LANGUAGES

Spoke Yiddish, Czech and Rumanian.

MUNCI'S EDUCATION

Went to Czech school for eight years. At age 14 or 15 learned dressmaking.

ANTI-SEMITISM BEFORE AND DURING WAR

Before war, no anti-Semitism at all. After Germans invaded, people suddenly became extremely anti-Semitic.

ANTI-JEWISH INCIDENTS - 1942

Had to wear Stars of David. Father had to shave off beard. Pregnant sister was attacked by Germans. After that they went out only when absolutely necessary.

JEWS WITH POLISH ANCESTRY ARE DEPORTED TO POLAND

MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TAKEN TO LABOR CAMPS. FATHER SENT TO LABOR CAMP FOR SIX MONTHS

WHEN JEWS ARE GHETTOIZED, ADLERS ABLE TO REMAIN IN THEIR HOME, WHICH WAS WITHIN GHETTO WALLS

ALL JEWS DEPORTED TO GHETTO IN MATEJOVICE, HUNGARY THE DAY AFTER PASSOVER 1944

MATEJOVICE VERY CROWDED. THEY STAY THREE TO FOUR WEEKS

Sister's baby born. Sister had chicken pox.

FAMILY IS DEPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ

All were together - Munci, sisters, father and stepmother.

AT AUSCHWITZ, FATHER, STEPMOTHER, TWO SISTERS AND BABY ARE KILLED

Sister refused to give up her baby, so was sent to gas chambers. Munci wanted to go with them, but another prisoner held her back. She told younger sister to go help older sister, so she was killed, too.

MUNCI SEES MANY POLISH JEWS COLLABORATING WITH THE NAZIS

MUNCI AND YOUNGEST SISTER ARE TAKEN TO A BARRACKS

Munci gave most of her food to younger sister. Lost much weight.

THEY ARE IN AUSCHWITZ THREE MONTHS

All prisoners were counted every morning. Those who couldn't stand were sent to the gas chambers.

MUNCI HAS A PANIC ATTACK AND TRIES TO RUN OUTSIDE

She fainted, was carried back in by sister.

POLISH GIRLS TEASE THEM ABOUT THEIR FAMILIES BEING DEAD

MUNCI STILL HOPES HER FATHER IS ALIVE

Thought he might have been chosen to work. This thought kept her going.

AIRPLANES FLEW OVER AUSCHWITZ SEVERAL TIMES, BUT NEVER DID ANYTHING

MENGELE SELECTS MUNCI FOR WORK

She had a wound on her leg, but was able to hide it by carrying her clothes over it.

SHE IS SENT TO A FACTORY IN GEISTLINGERSTEIGER

MUNCI DISCUSSES MENGELE'S MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS

GEISTLINGERSTEIGER IS NEAR ULM, GERMANY

Many nationalities there - Italian, French, Polish. Did no work first three weeks, then most were put to work in a factory. Sister was with her.

MUNCI HAS NEEDLE AND THREAD. IS ASKED TO BECOME SEAMSTRESS

Commander noticed she'd sewn on sister's number and her own. Asked her to sew on all others.

FACTORY WORK IS IN VMF AIRPLANE FACTORY

MUNCI IS ORDERED TO COME TO COMMANDER'S OFFICE. SHE IS VERY FRIGHTENED

He told her there was a camp seamstress, but she was sick. Asked Munci and other girl to take her place. She got extra food.

IN GEISTLINGERSTEIGER SEVEN MONTHS. COMMANDER IS A GOOD MAN

Asked Munci to clean his quarters. Left food out, but she never ate it. One day he asked why - it was left there for her.

A FRENCH BOY IN NEXT CAMP TOSSES MUNCI A SANDWICH AND A NOTE

It said he liked her very much and not to worry - the Allies were near.

THEY ARE TAKEN TO DACHAU BY TRAIN

At one station a German woman gave them food and water. SS Guard pretended not to see.

VIDEO 2 OF 3

DACHAU IS TOO CROWDED AND ALLIES ARE NEARLY THERE, TOO

Heard planes overhead. SS terrified, yelling they were Americans. Prisoners were not afraid.

THEY ARE TAKEN TO ALLACH

Big camp, many prisoners but not many Jews. Had same commander, and Munci was given job as seamstress again.

MUNCI RECALLS AN INCIDENT AT GEISTLINGERSTEIGER

Commander asked Munci to make him ski pants for Christmas ski vacation. She had a toothache, couldn't work, so commander had her taken to dentist, then gave her aspirin so she'd be well enough to sew. After vacation gave her a big package of food, but when she thanked him he pretended he knew nothing about it.

MUNCI DISCUSSES THE SS GUARDS

GETS TO ALLACH MARCH 1945

Felt her life was over.

AFTER A FEW WEEKS COMMANDER SAYS THEY WILL BE TAKEN TO WORK CAMP IN THE TYROL. MUNCI SAYS SHE AND HER SISTER ARE SICK, THEY WANT TO STAY

JUST BEFORE THE CAMP IS EVACUATED, PRISONERS ARE LOCKED IN BARRACKS. THREE HUGE TRUCKS OF DEAD BROUGHT FROM DACHAU FOR MASS BURIAL

Munci still has nightmares about seeing this.

130-150 GIRLS LEFT AT ALLACH, INCLUDING MUNCI, SISTER

MUNCI BELIEVES THAT BETTER EDUCATED, HIGHER CLASS PEOPLE HAD LESS SURVIVAL INSTINCT THAN THE "SIMPLE" PEOPLE.

ONE DAY THEY WAKE UP, NOTICE SS ARE GONE. 14-YEAR-OLD HITLER YOUTH THERE INSTEAD. APRIL - 1945

Began shooting Jews. Czech prisoners from men's camp rescued them, hid them until Hitler youth left. Three girls had been killed.

THEY STAY IN MEN'S CAMP THREE DAYS WITHOUT FOOD, THEN HEAR SHOUTS OF "AMERICANO!" A UNIT OF BLACK AMERICAN SOLDERS ENTERED CAMP

SOLDIERS GIVE THEM HEAVY, FATTY FOOD. MANY DIE. THERE IS A TYPHUS OUTBREAK

DATE OF LIBERATION - MAY 9, 1945

MUNCI AND SISTER GO TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

On the way there, they recognized a Gendarme who's been a family friend. He buys them food, clothing.

MUNCI WANTS TO GO HOME TO SEE IF FATHER IS STILL ALIVE

Warned not to, because it was in Russian zone, but felt she had to. On train, Russian soldiers harassed them until Munci told they had typhus.

IN BUDAPEST THEY FIND CHILDREN OF UNCLE WHO DIED IN ALLACH

THEY TRAVEL TO TSIGET. FIND BROTHERS OF FATHER

They wanted her to stay, but she had to go to Rakov.

FINDS FORMER NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR LIVING IN THEIR HOUSE IN RAKOV

It was filthy.

MUNCI DISCUSSES THIS NEIGHBOR AT LENGTH

He told her that all Jews in Europe would be killed.

VIDEO 3 OF 3

MUNCI IS FORCED TO BECOME ENGAGED TO UNCLE'S FRIEND IN TSIGET

Uncle was worried about having to support her.

IN RAKOV, SHE FINDS GOLD AND MONEY HIDDEN IN HOUSE BEFORE WAR

WHEN SHE RETURNS TO RAKOV, SHE HEARS THAT HER FATHER IS SICK IN BUCHAREST. LEAVES RAKOV TO GET AWAY FROM FIANCEE

MEETS FUTURE HUSBAND IN BUCHAREST

MUNCI DISCUSSES HER HUSBAND'S SITUATION DURING THE HOLOCAUST

MUNCI AND FUTURE HUSBAND GO HOME TO END HER OTHER ENGAGEMENT. SISTER HAD TAKEN MUNCI'S MONEY TO TRY TO GO TO ISRAEL

They rushed to find her, but her boat had left the day before. Munci didn't hear from her for six years.

MUNCI MARRIES HARRY KATZ

Lived in Rumania. Harry was in fruit business.

THEY MAKE MANY ATTEMPTS TO GO TO ISRAEL

Got papers in 1964. But Harry had brothers in Montreal and an aunt in Cleveland, so they went to Cleveland instead.

HIAS HELPS THEM GET TO ITALY

THEY COME TO U.S. IN SEPTEMBER 1964

Spoke no English, got no assistance from any organizations.

HARRY LEARNS CABINET-MAKING. MUNCI WORKS AS DRESSMAKER

SHE STILL GETS UPSET WHEN SHE THINKS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST - NOW MORE SO THAN WHEN SHE WAS YOUNGER

THE HOLOCAUST HAS AFFECTED HER EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

She still has terrible nightmares. Has a plastic hip.

MUNCI HAS NEVER TOLD HER CHILDREN THE WHOLE STORY OF HER EXPERIENCES. WANTED TO PROTECT THEM

SHE FEELS MOST AMERICANS DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THE HOLOCAUST AND NEVER WILL