

SEDLÁŘOVÁ, Hildegard Lex
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Abstract

Hildegard Sedlářová was born into the Lex family in 1926 in Šternberk, Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic). Before the war the Czechs, Germans and Jews “lived side by side like one big family” in Šternberk, she says.

When the Germans forbade Jewish children to attend regular schools, Hildegard’s one Jewish friend, Heidi Klimešová, became too afraid to speak. Hildegard says she was aware that Germans took Jews’ belongings and confiscated or destroyed their stores.

Two Jewish women, a widow Mrs. Geslarová and Mrs. Brachová, hid with the Lex family for “a long time” in the 1940s. Mrs. Geslarová was hiding Mrs. Brachová, even from the Lex family. A neighbor eventually informed on them and soon the Gestapo arrived. Mrs. Geslarová fled as did her son Max, who had not hidden with the Lex family. Hildegard’s mother took Mrs. Geslarová to the train for Vienna, where a contact had a plane ticket for her emigration to safety.

The entire city “turned their backs” on her family after learning they hid Jews, Hildegard says.

After the war, one of the biggest problems was Russian soldiers raping many women, Hildegard adds. She was not harmed, but was always hiding. Once, she saw dead girls who had been raped. She says that Russians beat up a Dr. Rudolf, then entered a hospital and raped women. The doctor and his wife shot themselves. “Suicides were very common,” she says.

Post-war, families of German descent, even if innocent like hers, were treated very badly, she says. Czechs took what they wanted from her home, but left the family’s cross. The Czechs established a camp for Germans and a mass grave outside Šternberk. She says the Czechs caught and killed a few hundred Germans and buried them in the mass grave.

She and her husband went to see the camp and saw an open mass grave. “It was a terrible sight.”

Oral history interview with Hildegard Lex Sedlářová

1-10 min.

Hildegard was born into the Lex family in 1926 in Šternberk, Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic). In Šternberk before the war the Czechs, Germans and Jews lived side by side like one big family. Everyone was friendly and saw no differences among them. Hildegard remembers many Jewish families, such as the Geslerovis, Brachovis and Netlovic. A lot of Jewish families had stores in the city's center. The Geslarovis owned a textile store.

Hildegard didn't have any Jewish classmates, although Jews were allowed to attend school until the Germans arrived.

She had a Jewish friend, Heidi Klimešová, whose family owned a textile factory. When Heidi and her brother found out that they were no longer allowed to attend school, they didn't even cry. They were too afraid, so they didn't speak at all. This was the only change in the life of Jews that Hildegard witnessed. But Hildegard says she was aware that Germans forced Christians to leave Jewish families at night. Germans also took Jews' belongings and confiscated their stores.

Mrs. Geslarová and Mrs. Brachová hid with the Lex family for a long time. They were both very afraid of concentration camps. One of the neighbors informed on them and soon the Gestapo arrived at their home. That caused Mrs. Geslarová to flee.

10-20 min.

Mrs. Geslarová was hiding Mrs. Brachová in secret. Even the Lex family didn't know about it. This went on for more than half a year.

One day Hildegard's mother opened the door and saw a young man. His name was Max Geslar. He was very grateful that they took care of his mother.

The fact that the Lex family was hiding Jewish people caused the whole city to turn their backs on them. Mrs. Geslarová was living with them since 1943.

Her son Max ran away and her husband had died before the war.

All of the Jewish-owned stores were either confiscated or destroyed. Stones were thrown into the windows of some stores. Hildegard started working in one of the stores in the city center. But her boss, Mrs. Weislarová was terrible. She loved Adolf Hitler and hated the Jewish community.

Šternberk also had some mixed families, like the Netlovis, who had two boys and two girls and owned a store. Two of the children were sent away to camps and did not survive. Hildegard's father had died before war, in 1931.

20-30 min.

Hildegard didn't see any signs on stores in Šternberk. She knew that in Olomouc, some signs marked where Jews could and could not go. The mixed families could stay in their own homes, but all the Jewish families began to disappear overnight. Nobody had the time to say goodbye. Mrs. Geslarová couldn't even be in contact with her relatives because she didn't want to risk being discovered. One day a letter postmarked Vienna said to send her by train to Vienna, where they had a plane ticket for her, so she could emigrate. Hildegard's mother took her to the railway station and Mrs. Geslarová left.

Before the war, Hildegard had not witnessed any glorification of the Germans or Nazis. There weren't even any political gatherings in Šternberk, just some parades. She didn't see any anti-Jewish posters in public places during the war

The last days of war were very chaotic. People who had ratted out their neighbors were running away to Germany. After the war, people were so happy! Everybody cried and laughed. But the fact that Šternberk was a city where many Germans lived and people spoke mostly German, meant that after war, people who were German but didn't have anything to do with war, could not find any work.

30-40 min.

Hildegard liked the first Czechoslovak president T.G. Masaryk. Times were good. But the minute Edvard Beneš was made president, everything went wrong. Hildegard called him Little Hitler. The Germans who didn't have anything to do with war began being punished.

In May 1945, when the war ended, the city was finally quiet. But then they began to evict all Germans from their homes, even the innocent ones. They had no housing. Soldiers could do anything they wanted to do. It was quieter when the Russians came, but then they began arresting people, just for listening to the radio from London.

At this time, rape was one of the biggest problems. For example, an older Pole who lived with them, got raped by drunken Russian soldiers. Hildegard was lucky, she was not hurt, but everyone around was. Once she went around the creek, where she saw raped dead girls.

At this time, suicides were very common. When they saw the horror, everybody was afraid of what was yet to come.

The Czechs came and the Germans got thrown out of their homes. After the war, Germans were sent to a camp that was built near the city. A mass grave was established across from the camp. Once, they came to Hildegard's home and took what they wanted, but fortunately they did not take the family cross.

40-54 min.

Hildegard and her husband went to see the camp and the mass grave. She still could not speak any Czech, just German and she was very scared. She saw that the Czechs behaved very badly toward the Germans. A few hundred Germans were killed and then buried in the mass graves. She heard about the horrors going on in the camps. She remembers Mirka Mrvu, who told them about it.

He told them he saw Czechs who caught and killed the Germans. It was awful.

She knows that now the Czechs are good people.

Hildegard remembers that after all Ms. Geslerová had been staying with them since the 1940's.

When the raping was haunting the whole city, Hildegard was always hiding under the bed or under the roof. She did everything not to be found. Some Russians beat up a doctor, Dr. Rudolf, and entered a hospital where they raped women. Shortly afterward, the doctor and his wife shot themselves. Some of the rape victims became pregnant, therefore many children were born of rape. The women were infected with Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

Hildegard saw a mass grave when it was open. It was a terrible sight. There is still no plaque, no cross.