

# Rudolf (Milu) KATZ Story

Interviewed by

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**Rudolf (Milu) KATZ, born 1927, Klucsarka, Czechoslovakia**

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~ Dedicated to the memory of my family members murdered during the Holocaust ~

"In April 1944, when I was 17 years old, my family and I were taken along with all of the other Jews of Klyucharki to the Munkacs Ghetto. We remained there for one and a half months before being transported to Auschwitz concentration camp."

"When we arrived at Auschwitz, there was a selection process and about 90% of the Jews of Klyucharki were murdered immediately. My two older brothers, Joseph Alter and Mordechai Yankiv and I were selected for a slave labor camp. After about 5 days, the remaining Jews of Klyucharki (about 10%), anyone strong enough to work, including my brothers and I, were transported to Wolfberg, a German Slave Labor Camp responsible for building a railroad."

"In January 1945, when the Russian front against the Germans was nearing the Wolfberg German Slave Labor Camp, we were forced to walk two weeks in freezing cold, snow and rain to the city of Leipzig. This was called the "Death March" because only about 30-35% of the prisoners arrived in Leipzig, with the others perishing due to the elements, weakness or being murdered along the road."

"Three days after we arrived in Leipzig, the Germans were worried about the Russian and American fronts closing in on them, the Germans decided that they

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need to get rid of the prisoners by murdering them. However, the Germans changed their mind and decided to transport all of the prisoners in open wagons to the Ebensee German Slave Labor Camp to work on the railroads and building tunnels."

"It took us a week to get to Ebensee because the Germans were taking back roads attempting to avoid the advancing Russian and American Armies. Before entering a city on the way, the Germans stopped the wagons and any that perished due to the freezing cold or hunger were dumped along the side of the road. Ultimately, only about 15-20% of the original 30-35% of prisoners arrived in Ebensee, now a German Slave Labor Camp totaling over 20,000 prisoners."

"I remember after arriving at Ebensee, sometime in March, Abraham Spiegel, a friend from Munkacs, asked me to pull out his gold teeth to buy bread to eat, which I did. This is the same Abraham Spiegel who paid for the Children's Memorial at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel (photos below)."

~ Children's Memorial at Yad Vashem ~

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"The Germans planned to take all the prisoners of Ebensee into one of the railroad tunnels and gas us. This was ten days before the liberation of Ebensee by the American Army. In the meantime, on April 29, 1945, I got sick and was taken to the infirmary at Ebensee. Six days later, May 5th, 1945, Ebensee was liberated by the American Army. However, before the liberation, most all of the prisoners at Ebensee were murdered."

"After the liberation, I left the infirmary, I searched for my brothers among the few remaining prisoners of Ebensee, but I did not find them - they were

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murdered. I would later learn that I was the only survivor of 9 family members transported to the Auschwitz concentration Camp or Slave Labor Camp."

"After the liberation of Ebensee, my friend from Klyucharki, Halpert Yehuda Ber and I traveled by train to Prague, Czechoslovakia. Once arriving in Prague, we were both sitting on the corner of Masrekova Nadrasza, next to and across from two hospitals. Just then, a black car pulled around the corner and it was the President of Czechoslovakia with his wife arriving to visit injured soldiers in the hospitals. I recognized him since his photo was displayed in my school."

"Before going into the hospital, the President noticed us in tattered concentration camp uniforms and walked over to us to talk to us. I spoke perfect Czech language and was able to communicate with him. The President asked, 'where are you born, where did you come from and where are you going?' I explained to him that we were both Jewish, born in a small village called Klyucharki nearby Munkacs, that we just arrived in Prague by train after our release from the German Slave Labor Camp at Ebensee, and that we were on our way back to Munkacs and our village."

"The President said, 'You can't go back there.' I guess the President knew that the Russians were going to take back that part of Hungary where Munkacs was located and that life under Communism would be very difficult and hard for us. The President gave me 1000 krone and I was very embarrassed. I gave it back, but the President's wife put it back into my shirt pocket. I asked, if we don't go home, what are we going to do? The President said, 'I want to do something for you Jewish boys by having you go to a Sanitarium (Healing Hospital) for 3 months to get healthy and then get educated at a military school to become Generals, because I need trustworthy young men loyal to Czechoslovakia.' He saw this quality us. The President asked us to visit him at his home the next day to finalize the plans."

"In the meantime, both Halpert and I had a fever and we went into the hospital. Halpert also suffered from severe frostbite on his feet, so he was kept in the hospital. I was released, but because my friend Halpert was not at my side, I decided not to go visit the President without Halpert. After saying good-bye to Halpert, I boarded a train to return to Munkacs and then travel on to Klyucharki."

"I arrived in Klyucharki on a Friday, but I didn't go immediately to my boy hood home. I first went to the store that I managed as a young man, before the deportation, for the store owner's wife while the owner was in the army at the front. It was a surreal event because the lady had a baby girl that I used to entertain when I wasn't busy in the store. All of the time that I was away in the concentration camps, I was told that the baby girl cried for me to return. When I

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did return, the child said, 'G-d answered her prayers.' That child, Elenara Paulick, still lives in Munkacheve (Munkacs), Ukraine today (photo below)."

~ Elenara Paulick and Rudolf (Milu) KATZ ~

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"They made a wonderful dinner for me and gave me Slivovitz liquor to drink, which I drank like water. After three, I was sufficiently drunk. This was the first time I drank liquor. The next morning, I awoke with a severe fever again and was taken to the hospital in Munkacs. The doctors there were unable to figure out how to bring down my fever, so one of the doctors told me to drink a liter of cold red wine. That did bring down the fever somewhat."

"While in the hospital recovering, I was so weak, I could not eat the food they were bringing me and I remember them taking the food away. I couldn't move or open my eyes, but I could hear all the conversations of the doctors. After a couple days, I became alert and I saw a food cart in the hall. Getting out of bed I fell because I was so weak, but somehow I was able to get to the door to steal a loaf of bread and an onion off the food cart. After 3 weeks in the hospital, I had enough of this treatment and in my hospital gown, I left out of the hospital after midnight and returned to Klyucharki at 2:30 in the morning, leaving my clothes behind."

"The delay to return to my boyhood home was complicated because Russian soldiers occupied my boyhood house. They had their cannons out front, with horses to pull the cannons. After 2-3 weeks, the soldiers finally moved to another place and I was able to return to my boyhood home. However, a non-Jewish family had taken over his home. I asked them if I could look in the house and they let me in. The only things I found were; one photo of my father's

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younger brother, Emmanuel and call note from the post office to claim a package."

"I then went to the post office and picked up a 5 kilo package addressed to me from Tech Sergeant Victor KATZ, US Army, a first cousin to me. After the liberation of Ebensee, I learned that TSgt KATZ saw my name on a list of Ebensee Camp Survivors that were liberated and released to return home to the address listed (Klyucharki), so he put together a package of coffee, sugar, chocolates, rice, etc. and mailed the package to my address in Klyucharki. I have never forgotten his kindness."

"By this time, another first cousin of mine, Erno Spiegel, returned from Mathausen Concentration Camp. Erno was the only survivor of 10 family members. I wanted to go to the United States, to Pittsburgh, PA to be with my Uncle Sam, but Erno was not sure if he wanted to go to the USA or not. Our delay in deciding to go to the USA resulted in having to remain in Klyucharki because the Russians closed the borders preventing us from leaving Russia, the 'Cold War' started."

"Shortly thereafter, I met another camp survivor, Dina Gelb, and we got married in February of 1949. First, we had a daughter that died after 27 days. Afterwards, we had two sons, Samuel (Sasha) and Nikoli. I worked my way up in a company to a Senior Manager position by proving my loyalty and demonstrating my work ethic, etc. My job had a lot of responsibility. I employed between 1,500 and 2000 people: bookkeepers; lawyers; tax people; and I had a driver and special car. I worked over 30 years as a manager in the same company and was very well known and respected in the Zarkapats'ka."

~ Rudolf (Milu) KATZ and Dina Gelb c. 1949 ~

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"In 1986, Gorbachov was the 1st General Secretary of the Communist Party. He was younger and was the first General Secretary with a university education. Gorbachov was responsible for opening the borders after the Chernobyl accident and released 150 families that were on a list. My oldest son, Samuel (Sasha) was fortunate to be on that list, largely due to the efforts of my Uncle Sam KATZ, of NYC, NY. He wrote letters to Senators, Congressmen and even to the President of the USA, playing a large part in getting my son Sasha's name in the first list."

"Sasha left the Ukraine for the USA in 1986 with his wife and four children, settling in Columbus, Ohio. In 1989, I visited with Sasha in the USA for three months with my wife Dina, then in 1990, my wife and I visited Israel. In 1991, my second son, Nikoli immigrated to the USA with his wife and son, then after two months, my wife and I visited the USA for a second time. Finally, in August of 1993, my wife Dina and I left the Ukraine for good and immigrated to the USA where I now live in Columbus, Ohio, closeby my two sons and their families."

"In 2007, my wife Dina passed away. Today, at 81 years of age, I enjoy Synagogue, gardening and spending time working on KATZ Family Genealogy with several members of my extended family."

Source: Personal interview in 2008