

The Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship
Teachers' Workshop
Identity Charts
"Kitty Salsberg and Ellen Foster"

***Never Far Apart* by Kitty Salsberg And Ellen Foster 2015: Naomi Azrieli Publisher is a book about the memories of 2 sisters, Kati & Ilonka Mozes-Nagy who survived the Holocaust and later came to Canada. Their book is the source for this paper. The following information was compiled by Sharon Rosenberg.**



The sisters were born in Budapest, Hungary. Kati was born in 1933 and Ilonka was born in 1935. Their earliest memories are of poverty, exclusion and upheaval in their home and in their country. The sisters lived with their parents and grandmother in a one room basement apartment that had no hot water, electricity or toilet. Their father was a philandering salesman who made little money. Their mother suffered from depression. Fighting between the parents and between the mother and grandmother was oppressive. In spite of everything both parents were warm and very loving to the girls. Judaism was of no significance in their lives but for being called 'dirty Jews' by stick swinging children. Their classmates treated them with contempt and isolation.

Life for Jews became more and more perilous. Their father was conscripted into the Hungarian Army in 1940 and died in 1942. Their mother did her best but just like when their father was alive, there never was enough food. Eventually, their mother was transported to Dachau Concentration Camp where she died.

The sisters were placed in a Red Cross Safe House by their uncle. In November 29, 1944

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the Nazis marched all remaining Jews into the Budapest ghetto. The Jews were completely cut-off from the rest of the city. Guards ensured no food or medical supplies got in and no one got out. Garbage, excrement, typhoid and death ran rampant in the Ghetto.

Kati, the older sister decided her only mission was to try to protect her sister and to try to find food. Although on the brink of starvation Kati did succeed in keeping them both alive until the Ghetto was liberated January 8, 1945 by the Soviet Army. Kati was 12; Ilonka was 10.

Kati went searching for family. Their maternal grandparents, two aunts, two uncles and cousins had survived and returned. Their Aunt Margaret and Uncle Vili returned from a concentration camp. The sisters were promised they would always have a home with them once they were re-established.

Jewish organizations set up orphanages for Jewish children who either had no parents or had parents who had no homes. First the sisters were sent off to convalesce in the countryside. The sisters agreed the farmer and his wife were kind but while Ilonka loved the farm; Kati could not wait to get back to the city. After one month at Kati's request the sisters entered a Zionist run children's home in Budapest. Both girls loved the orphanage. It was physically comfortable. Food was plentiful. There were many activities and games to keep the children engaged. They were also helped to work through their experiences and loss.

Kati became uneasy in the orphanage. She did not want to go to the war zone that would later become Israel. So at her request, the sisters went to live with their Aunt Margaret and Uncle Vili. Aunt Margaret and her poultry stand supported the sisters and 6 other extended family members. Ilonka was signed up for tap, ballet and acrobatics. Her aunt and uncle were kind and generous with their love and their money. She felt safe, loved and happy.

Kati was driven academically to show up her non-Jewish classmates who isolated and scorned her after the war as they had before the war. By year's end, she stood first in her class. While Kati also expressed great love for her beloved Aunt Margaret, she became convinced over time that her future did not lie in Budapest. In particular, Aunt Margaret refused to support her education beyond Grade 8 as she wanted Kati to help run the poultry stand and become a business woman.

Kati stumbled upon another option. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

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('the Joint') told Kati that she and her sister, as healthy Jewish orphans under 18 years, were eligible to apply to immigrate to Australia, South Africa or Canada. The sisters were promised they would be adopted together in a home that would support and educate them. Kati only knew that Canada was big, cold and empty. Kati thought that was perfect and chose Canada.

Ilonka was torn. She loved her aunt and uncle but could not see herself apart from her sister. Aunt Margaret was heart broken but gave them permission. The vetting process was lengthy and exhaustive. It included many physical, psychological and cognitive tests. Proof of age and orphan status was required.

In 1948 Kati, 15 years and Ilonka, 13 years began their journey to Canada. There were Jewish adults guiding and helping them all along the way: a train to Paris, a boat to London, and an oceanliner to Halifax and then a train to Toronto with 20 other Jewish orphans.

On arrival in Toronto at the temporary housing centre, the sisters were met by a social worker who took them shopping for new outfits head to toe. There was no talk of the sisters being adopted together.

When Kati was shown several rooms for rent she realized that Jewish Family Services would support her and pay for her education but there was to be no family for her. She refused and was placed with a childless couple, the Feingolds. Mrs. Feingold belonged to a Jewish organization: Pioneer Women whose members took children in and provided for them without financial help from the community. Kati found the Feingolds to be warm, loving and generous.

Ilonka had 3 priorities: find substitute parents as she missed her mother, father, aunt and uncle very much, food (even though food was plentiful and she was no longer hungry, she hoarded food all the time as many orphans did) and make friends. Ilonka first placement was with a Jewish couple and their 2 sons. After some initial difficulties she made friends at school but at home, she was sad and lonely. The father ignored her; the boys resented her. Just as she had decided to accept the situation and make it work, the family told her social worker they needed her room for a relative.

Next she was placed with a couple and their young child. She was treated as a tenant and a babysitter. She lost all hope of becoming part of a family. She told Kati who complained to the social worker. Ilonka was sent to B'nai B'rith Camp for the summer and in the fall was placed with a third family where she again felt like a tenant and a

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babysitter. She decided to remain silent and accept the situation. This home was physically closer to her sister's and she did want to move and change schools again.

At 16 the sisters were expected to be self supporting. Ilonka took secretarial training. She was working as a receptionist when she met her future husband. Ilonka was welcomed into her husband's warm and loving family. He owned a printing shop. Shortly after the wedding, Ilonka moved to California with her husband and his family. They have 4 children.

Kati completed Grade 12 and then applied to train as a teacher but her accent was considered too heavy. She obtained a bursary to attend University of Toronto full-time for one year. The Feingolds reluctantly agreed. She concentrated on reducing her accent and was accepted into teachers' college the following year. Kati became a teacher for children with special needs. At age 21, she married a teacher. They also have 4 children.