



A class of students in the Bedzin Mizrahi Hebrew-Yiddish School, circa 1938 in Poland. The Nazis killed all of them, except for one of the teachers, Mr. Eisenberg (pictured rear left). Filmmaker Mira Binford and Lucy Katz of Austin come from Bedzin.

PHOTO COURTESY YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH



Mira Reym Binford's doll (left) while a hidden child, from her film 'Diamonds in the Snow.' Below, Mira — then called Mirusia — poses in 1941 on her third birthday with her mother, Dora, who wears an armband marking her as a Jew. The family name Rembiszewski became Reym when they came to U.S.



Above: Lucy Katz's mother and father (right) hold her in Poland, as a man unknown to Katz looks on. 'The photo was placed in my blanket when I was smuggled out of the ghetto with the hope that, if my parents survived, whoever had me would be able to recognize them from the photo,' Katz says. The Nazis murdered her mother, but later Katz was reunited with her father.



Left: Maria Dyrda holds Luscia Taus — today, an Austinite named Lucy Katz. A Polish Catholic, Dyrda took in Katz as an infant. She took in two others, too, including Mira Reym Binford, who went on to become a filmmaker.

Filmmaker to share experience as hidden child of Holocaust

Austin observance to feature screening of 'Diamonds in the Snow'

By Tonya Cone

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While attending a 1990 conference for hidden children of the Holocaust in New York, Lucy Katz of Austin hoped to find the other person in a photograph from her youth, another Jewish child who was hidden during the 1939 Nazi invasion of their city in Poland, Bedzin.

Katz did not immediately find the woman she was seeking, Mira Reym Binford, and when faced with the opportunity to try to connect with her through a message on a bulletin board, Katz could not bring herself to post a note. After the Holocaust, Katz's father found her through a message left on a similar board, and she found it too emotionally draining to relive the experience.

When Katz walked in a room where a "meet and greet" was held for conference attendees from Poland, she scanned name tags and looked for a blonde woman resembling Binford in the photo. Suddenly, Binford came up from behind her and, crying, embraced her in a hug.

"She was saying, 'This baby saved my life,'" Katz recalled. "It was an incredible experience."

Katz — then called Lusja Taus — survived the Nazi invasion of Bedzin because Maria Dyrda, a Catholic woman, had agreed to hide her as an infant. Dyrda arranged to walk by the outside of the war camp at a planned time so Katz's mother could see how much Katz had grown. When Katz's mother was forced to work at that time, however, Binford's mother stood by the window so she could describe to her what the infant looked like.

When Binford's mother discovered that the family was willing to hide Jewish children, she asked for the family's help with her own five-year-old child, who was in the camp. The family helped the child to escape and, to hide her for the rest of the war, Dyrda's sister, Clara Zroyska, took Katz.

Despite the protestations of her husband and the fact that she was risking the lives of her family members, Zroyska agreed to hide Katz because she did not believe what their priest told them — that Jews were not to be helped because the Holocaust was Jews' punishment from God for killing Christ. The priest said those who did help Jews would suffer the same fate and would go to Hell when they died.

"She believed that God was a just God," Katz said, "and that terrible people were creating these horrible things."

Katz said she blocked most of the experience from her memory and today only remembers snippets clearly: being in bed with her war sister, her war mother standing beside the bed, and kneeling down



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— Austinite Lucy Katz (right), recalling her 1990 reunion with Mira Reym Binford at a conference for hidden children of the Holocaust

in her nightgown alongside the family in front of crisp, white sheets to say prayers at night, with a picture of Jesus on a cross above the bed.

After World War II, her father was homeless, so Katz — three years old at the time — stayed in an orphanage. When the Zroyska family learned she was there, Katz's war sister took her home, until Katz's father returned for her two years later, in 1947.

"I had three mothers: my biological mother, my war mother and my adopted mother," Katz said.

She also remembers being smuggled out of Poland and coming to the United States in 1949.

FACING THE PAST

Katz contacted her war sister in 1988, after the Russians left Poland and four years after her war mother passed away. Two years ago she visited Bedzin, a city that was once home to a sizable, vibrant Jewish community, and learned that German was her first language.

Her experience as a hidden child continues to impact her life, Katz said. Even though she is scared and has received hate mail after telling her story on the radio and in print, she finds it important to stand up for what she believes in and to focus on the positive things in life.

"I will not allow my life to be robbed of the sweetness and goodness I have by the challenges I have to face each day. I've got an amazing life," said Katz, who has two sons and daughters-in-law and four grandchildren. "No matter what tragedies we go through, we have to put one foot in front of the other and find beauty in each day. We have a responsibility to each other

and our families to make the world better than we found it."

Katz, whose biological mother was murdered by the Nazis, said that, while members of society do not have to forget what happened in the Holocaust, it is important to forgive.

"Otherwise," she said, "it's like a stone in our hearts."

Binford, a documentary filmmaker and professor emeritus of communications at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut, learned the power of her personal history as a teaching tool when she noticed her students could relate better to the history of the Holocaust when she told parts of her story than when she showed "Night and Fog," the Alain Resnais documentary about the Nazi concentration camp universe.

This realization, along with thoughts of mortality when she turned 50 years old, the death and fading memories of Holocaust survivors and an increase in Holocaust denial, led to creation of "Diamonds in the Snow," her autobiographical documentary about her experiences as a child saved from the Nazis by strangers. Out of thousands of Jewish children, she — along with Katz — was one of only about 12 to survive the Nazi invasion of Bedzin.

"One day, as I was about to enter a conference on the Holocaust in Boston, I encountered demonstrators with placards proclaiming, 'No Jews were gassed at Auschwitz,' and I felt I had run out of reasons to put off making this film," Binford said in an e-mail interview. "Probably all these elements helped to galvanize me."

Those who were small children during the Holocaust, she said, were unable to understand why they were marked for

death and had to hide to survive.

"Many of us were left with the feeling that somehow we ourselves were at fault, responsible for what happened to us," Binford said. "We had to learn to adjust to 'normal' life. I've had to work hard to overcome the basic feeling that I don't deserve to live, don't deserve to have a good life."

At the same time, she has been able to laugh at some of her responses to her experience, like the fact that she stocks her refrigerator and cupboards full to overflowing because, she said, "you never know what might happen."

Getting to know other women and men who survived as she did was one of the gifts of making her film, said Binford, who interviewed about 150 people and traveled to six nations while doing research for the documentary.

Since making "Diamonds in the Snow," Binford's 10th documentary film, she has co-taught a course on the Holocaust at Quinnipiac University with a historian and has been working on a research project that involves examining the many documentaries on the Holocaust that have been made in Poland by Polish filmmakers since the fall of communist rule.

YOM HASHOAH PROGRAM

Austinites will have the opportunity to view the critically acclaimed, international award-winning documentary "Diamonds in the Snow" as part of the Jewish Community Relations Council's 2008 Communitywide Commemorative Events for Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day.

The film, which will be followed by a question-and-answer session with Binford, tells the story of three women, including Binford, who spent their childhood hiding from the Nazis and reflects on the courage of those who helped them survive.

Council chair Jan Soifer said, "I think we're really fortunate to be able to meet and talk with people who were there. It's not going to be very long before even people who were children in the Holocaust aren't around to tell their stories in person, so that's one reason documentaries are so important. Knowing people who survived holocaust and hearing their stories makes it more real for all of us."

Roberta Clark, Austin community director of the Anti-Defamation League, said a Holocaust art exhibit, sponsored by the White Rose Society of Texas Hillel, will complete the evening's experience.

"It's important to come together as a community to remember history so we can learn from it," Clark said.

"Diamonds in the Snow" will be shown at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, May 1, at Texas Hillel's Topfer Center for Jewish Living, 2105 San Antonio St. The event is free, but reservations are required, due to limited seating. For reservations, call Elaine Vasquez at 735-8012, ext. 17.

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