

# LILLY SEGELSTEIN



Life in the 1920s wasn't easy in Klucserka, Czechoslovakia, but who knew the difference? The Lebovitz home – like most in that suburb of Munkacs – had no electricity, no running water and no indoor plumbing. Every other week, the family boiled kettles of water for laundry, hung it on the clothesline and ironed every piece.

For Lilly Lebovitz, the second of Jacob and Gisella Lebovitz's five children, chores left little time for play. Her father, a furniture maker who read each night by candlelight, and her mother, a dressmaker, worked at home. The three girls slept in one bed, in the same room as their parents. The boys had a small room of their own. Yiddish was spoken at home.

Lilly was 6 when she changed her name from Lydia because her neighbor's dog was named Lydia and her brother teased her.

Before antisemitism forced the family to move to Munkacs, Lilly spent summers on her grandparents' farm. "We loved to soak our feet in the little creek behind the house," she recalls. "They put food in the creek to stay cool because they didn't have refrigerators."

The Lebovitzes grew most of their food and raised their own chickens, because the kosher butcher was too expensive. On Fridays they had chicken soup and prepared *cholent* – a beef, bean and barley stew – for *Shabbat* afternoon. Neighbors shared ovens to bake the *cholent*, "On *Shabbat*, when my father and brothers came home from *shul* [synagogue], the *cholent* was nice and hot and the best thing," says Lilly.

In Munkacs, barred from school, Lilly learned to sew in a dressmaking shop.

Later in Auschwitz, Lilly and her sister Leah were among 200 selected for slave labor in a munitions factory. From their family, they alone survived.

After the war, they joined a group trying to reach Israel from Italy. Leah eventually made it. Lilly and her new husband, Boris Segelstein, waited 2 ½ years and came to America.

"We came with two dollars," she recalls. In New York, Boris went to night school to learn clothing design. Lilly was a dressmaker until their son David was born.

In 1953, a job brought them to Kansas City, where Cookie and Cindy were born and the Segelsteins bought a home. Lilly and her friend Evelyn Bergl owned an alteration shop in Waldo for 29 years.

Today, says Lilly, "I'm very Americanized. I work the computer. I exercise at the Jewish Community Center. I work with kids in daycare at the synagogue, and I babysit for my grandson."

The Segelsteins have four grandchildren.

Lilly had tried to spare her children from the Holocaust. Yet Cookie is a board member of a Second Generation group in New Haven, Connecticut. Cindy wouldn't let her mother go alone to "Schindler's List."

"We went out," Lilly recalls, "and both of us broke down crying."



Portrait by David Sosland  
Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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