

# DORA EDELBAUM



In a small house on the outskirts of Lodz, Poland, in the town of Pabianice, Dora Kiwasz lived with her mother and father, Hinda and Hersh Kiwasz, an uncle and four siblings: Yakov, Kalman, Avram, and Manya. The house was a wedding present.

When Dora went outside to get water from the well, her father would go after her, objecting that “girls do not carry heavy things like that.” Yet Dora retained her independent streak. One day in public school, she lost interest in the lesson. Leaving her lunch behind to make it appear that she was still present, she walked out of the classroom and headed home. “My mother was shocked,” she says.

Hersh Kiwasz was a tailor who specialized in making uniform tops. Hinda Kiwasz helped in the evenings with hand sewing. Dora was thrilled when she was finally allowed to pick out her own patterns and take them to a nearby dressmaker. The clothes her father made for her were always too big, so she could grow into them. Dora preferred styles that fit.

“When I came home from school, all the food was made,” says Dora, recalling most vividly kugel, potato casserole, and knaidelach, a dumpling soup. Her mother was adamant about one thing: She detested gossip. For Shabbat, Sabbath, Dora’s father brought poor people home for a meal and a place to sleep. On motzei Shabbat, the evening after Sabbath ends, her parents went to meetings for an organization that assisted orphans and the poor.

Dora attended a Hebrew school for Jewish girls. After synagogue, she and her classmates delivered food to the home for the elderly. For recreation, children in Pabianice walked together, went to the park and ate ice cream cones. It was a treat to hear an outdoor band. The Kiwaszs’ neighbors were predominantly Christian. Dora had friends who weren’t Jewish, but came to be afraid of them after an incident when they ripped off her clothes.

When the Germans invaded, the first thing Hinda Kiwasz did was to hire someone to teach the children German. One of Dora’s brothers wanted to go to Israel, but their parents did not want the family to separate. To be safe, Hersh Kiwasz sewed 500 zloty, the Polish currency, and a birth certificate in each child’s coat.

When Dora was liberated from Bergen-Belsen in 1945, she had typhus. In a displaced persons camp, instead of eating, she traded food on the black market for money to buy shoes. When she and her husband, Ben Edelbaum, arrived in America in 1947, she kissed the Statue of Liberty. “And I kissed the ground too,” she says.

They found jobs. They went to night school to learn English. And they had children: Harold, Helen, and Estelle. Now, they have five grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

“I always felt strong,” says Dora. “I didn’t give up.”



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

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

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