

# OLGA ROTHSTEIN



“When we knew that the Polish Jews were in trouble, we thought: It can happen there but never in Hungary,” says the former Olga Stark. “The Jewish people were leaders, full citizens in Hungary. My father owned a winery and could pick up the telephone and talk to any senator.”

But in 1944, late in the war, the Nazis did come. And in the Holocaust, Olga Stark lost her father, mother and younger sister. Only her brother and she survived.

Her career in Hungarian schools had been a success. Although she was the only Jewish student in Catholic schools, she felt that she was resented because she was smart. Yet her father discouraged her from higher education, holding that it wasn't necessary for girls. He also discouraged close relationships with non-Jewish friends. Her best friends lived in the next town near the synagogue.

Her parents, Herman and Sally Stark, wanted Olga to have a skill in case of bad times, so she learned to sew. Her father even dreamed of selling everything, using the proceeds to buy a small airplane and giving the plane to the pilot – in return for flying the family to the United States. He had learned to be a kosher slaughterer, preparing for a new career in America that would never happen.

He also wanted his daughter to marry young. Several women visited her parents to see about arranging a marriage with their sons. An uncle, however, argued successfully against the marriages, and for that she was later thankful. The Nazis imprisoned her at Dachau, and she found that women with children were the first to the crematorium. Not being married, she now believes, saved her life.

In the concentration camp at Dachau, she had met Michael Rothstein. At liberation from Dachau she was 23 years old, and the two were married in Italy. Olga bore her daughter there. Unable to enter Palestine when she became pregnant, the couple considered moving to South Africa. Eventually, thanks to papers sent by their friends Sam and Elizabeth Nussbaum, whom they had known in the camps, the Rothsteins moved to America and to Kansas City.

Their first apartment was a damp basement at 709 Paseo. “But it was fine,” she recalls feeling, “because we knew it will be better.”

In Hungary, her father had spoken to her in Yiddish and she had answered in Hungarian. Now it was time for her to learn English, but with a young child she found it hard to go to school. So she read the newspaper.

She also became a leader in Beth Israel Abraham and Voliner. To remain within walking distance of the Orthodox synagogue, the Rothsteins moved three times.

“We're a very interesting family,” she says. “My husband is Lithuanian. I'm Hungarian. Ann is Italian. Our son, Steve, his wife, Karen, and our granddaughters were born in America. My son-in-law is English and my grandchildren in Israel are *sabras* [native-born Israelis].”



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

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