

# ZELMANOVICS Story

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Once in Szurte, there was a family known as the Zelmanovics.

Lazar (Yosef Lev) was a scholar and a rabbi, and was known to have prepared many young men for their Bar Mitzvahs. Unfortunately, not much is known about him other than that he was married to a woman named Khana Weiss.

The story was that sometime during the 1920's, Khana came into the house from the fields, and found Lazar dead on the floor. He had had a heart attack.

Out of their 9 children, David was their eldest and only son. At some point in his life, he decided to move to Szighet, Romania. No one however knows why. We had only heard that he was not eligible to immigrate to America due to a lung disease. It is our guess that he wanted to be with his cousins in Szighet.

David's sister Anna was the eldest of the eight daughters. When she was in Szurte, she bought herself a cow. When it was big enough, she sold it in the market and was able to afford passage to America. Once she arrived in America, she made enough money to send to the second eldest sister to buy herself a cow as well, and the tradition continued.

Betty was the second youngest sister, so in time, it was her turn to come to America. Betty was very brave and told her younger sister Serena to go in her place.

Since there were only two sisters left, one of them had to stay and take care of their aging mother.

Serena was forgetful, and had a few minor mental issues, so Betty felt she could not be trusted to take care of their mother alone. Serena came to America, and Betty stayed with her mother.

Their mother Khana was a strong woman. She worked hard in the fields and cared much for her family. As a rabbi's wife, she had a strong role in her community. People remembered Khana for her kindness. Khana did not die until the 1940s at the age of 93 or so.

Unfortunately, by this time, the borders had closed, and Betty was trapped in Europe. Her sisters tried to find a solution in America, but were not successful.

We only found out afterward the fate of Betty and the rest of her extended family. Khana's sister Esther Grunbaum lived only one village away in the town of Nagykapos.

Esther, her husband, her 12 children, and many grandchildren were deported along with Betty and were interned in the Uzhgorod Ghetto.

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The ghetto was an abandoned brick factory. Since there were so many people, and the space inside was so small, the majority slept outside for a period of 5 weeks.

One day a train came and a thousand and a half people were deported to an unknown location. The next week, the same thing occurred, and continued week after week. Betty and her cousin Ruzniena (Rosa) were placed on a train and found themselves in Auschwitz.

Ruzniena's mother (Esther Grunbaum), father (Samuel Grunbaum), and many of her brothers and sisters were gassed that first night. Ruzniena told me that she was forced to work in the ammunitions factory along with Betty, and her niece, another Betty.

One day, Betty (Khana's daughter) collapsed as a result of Typhus. It was the work of her cousins that kept her alive for so many days. In the morning, Ruzniena and her niece held Betty up during roll call, and during the day, they had Betty under the straw in the barracks. Eventually, the kapo found out, and took Betty away. Betty died during the summer of 1944 in Auschwitz.

Ruzniena however miraculously survived and immigrated to Israel with her surviving siblings, nieces, and nephews. She then moved to New York, and passed away at the age of 99 last year.

Additional info:

David married a woman named Etel nee Rup. They had 5 children in Sighet: Lazar, Solomon, Matei, Israel, and Sara. They were deported to Auschwitz. On their first night, Etel, along with their son Israel (13) and Sara (8) were gassed. David and his three eldest sons were then deported to Buchenwald. Lazar died 13 days before liberation. Out of the family, Matei was the only one to survive, but we have never been able to find out any of his whereabouts.

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