

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum acquires photos that were stored in Miami home

By SERGIO CARMONA

JEWISH JOURNAL |

JAN 21, 2022 AT 2:56 PM

For more than 30 years, a collection of Holocaust photos were stored in a Miami home.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. has acquired the collection, which includes more than 100 photos and documents. The collection includes rare photos of imprisoned Jews in a French internment camp.

During a cleaning spree of her childhood bedroom at the beginning of the pandemic lockdown in 2020, Miami resident Silvia Espinosa-Schrock came across a box that she had not thought about for three decades. As a 19-year-old art student in New York City, Espinosa-Schrock purchased a cardboard box of black-and-white photos on a sidewalk for \$5 in January 1990. She used the box of photos in an art installation assignment as a Cooper Union student. “When I took the photos to my studio, it dawned on me they were taken around World War II with the way the people were dressed, and I came to realize they were a Jewish family,” Espinosa-Schrock said.

Espinosa-Schrock was determined to find the family, but when she graduated in the early 1990s, she packed up the photos in storage boxes that were sent to her parents’ home in Miami. She had not seen the photos in approximately 30

years until the 2020 cleaning spree, having forgotten she stored them in storage boxes in the closet.

“Now that there’s internet, I wanted to see if there was someone out there who is related to the family in the photos,” she said.

When Espinosa-Schrock looked closely at the box’s contents, she found the name “Joachim Getter” written on one of the photographs. She conducted an online research of the name and found one of Joachim Getter’s pictures posted on the [“The Jewish Przemyśl Blog.”](#) created by David Semmel, a descendant of the family.

In April 2020, Espinosa-Schrock reached out to Semmel, who resides in Bloomington, Ind., and wrote: “I think I have something that belongs to your family.”

Semmel, who spends the winter month in Fort Lauderdale, had family members from Przemyśl, a town in Poland, who were killed in the Holocaust. When he when he received the photos from Espinosa-Schrock, he was overwhelmed to see pictures of his mother as a teenager, and also of his aunt Chaya and uncle Joachim, whom they called Muni. He donated them to the museum.

“After piecing together the family trees of the people in the photos using the [JRI-Poland database](#), I realized how valuable this trove would be for Holocaust historians, and I contacted the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum,” he said. “I didn’t want the collection to sit in my attic, and I hope someone someday might recognize the other people from the photos when they’re on the museum’s [collection website](#). Who knows? Another big discovery could happen.”

Espinosa-Schrock said, “I’m very delighted that I contacted David Semmel.” “If he had not had that blog, these photos would still be in a box, in my room, and I would not know what to do with them,” she said.

Semmel said he is grateful to Espinosa-Schrock on several levels.

“Many in my direct family were not in the Holocaust, as most of my relatives came over to the United States well before the war, but there were some exceptions,” he said. “My grandfather’s sister and his brother were both lost in the Holocaust, and because of that, he knew very little about them. They were always people who were talked about in a sad way as people who didn’t get to live full lives. In the case of my aunt Chaya, we only had a single photograph of her when she was 12 years old. That’s all we knew of her. All of a sudden, I open this box, and I can see her whole life. I can see her back in the old country in Przemyśl.”

Suzy Snyder, a museum curator, assessed the collection and provided Semmel with documents to help him better understand the historical context of the collection. According to Snyder, the collection contains never-before-seen photographs of Beaune-la-Rolande, an internment camp in central France located 55 miles south of Paris, which the museum had limited visuals of. She also mentioned that the images belonged to someone named Salomon Abend, “These photographs were sent from Salomon Abend to his then wife Paulette [born Perla Rosiner], two Jewish people who were both persecuted during the Holocaust,” Snyder said. “They are extremely rare because, somehow, these photographs were produced in a place that had extreme deprivation. Also unusual is how the photographs survived once they were sent to Paulette, who, herself, was likely in hiding during the Holocaust. We have no idea how these rare images survived, which, if Paulette had been discovered to possess, would have easily given her away as a Jew.”

Snyder said, “David donated the collection to us, and will we catalogue it, digitalize it and put it online in the next couple of years so that other people can use it as research tool.”

“We keyword everything so that the appropriate collection is easy to find,” she said.

Robert Tanen, director for the museum’s Southeast Regional Office based in Boca Raton, said, “It’s a great feeling to know that we uncovered yet another piece of history that would’ve potentially been lost.”

Visit ushmm.org for more information.