

IBOLYA GROSSMAN

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Ibolya Grossman (born Ibolya Szalai), daughter of Ignasz and Laura, was born on December 10, 1916, in Pécs, Austria-Hungary (now Pécs, Hungary). She had two

older half-sisters, Ilona and Margit, and two sisters, Ezri and Aranka. Ibolya's father worked as a tinsmith. The family went to synagogue on holidays, and Ibolya was a member of Hashomer Hatzair, a Zionist-Socialist youth group. When Ibolya was a teenager, she attended a Hashomer Hatzair camp, where she met Zoltan Rechnitzer-Reti. The two corresponded after camp, and eventually became engaged. Ibolya went to school and learned to become a dressmaker. At age seventeen, she moved to Budapest and began working in a factory.

In September 1939, Ibolya and Zoltan married in Budapest. Their son, Andy, was born on July 16, 1942. When Ibolya was in labor, she faced antisemitism at the hospital, where she was told to have the baby on the floor. Eventually, she was allowed to use a bed. When Andy was four and a half months old, Zoltan was taken to do forced labor. Ibolya and Andy lived with Zoltan's parents, and they were able to see him for about a year. In March 1944, Hungary was occupied by Nazi Germany. Life quickly began to change for Ibolya and her family. They were forced out of their house and taken to a big racetrack, where Ibolya and Andy were separated from Zoltan's parents. Ibolya eventually found them, and the family was allowed to go home.

Ibolya heard about protected Red Cross Houses in Budapest; Jews who lived there were safe from deportation. Ibolya, Andy and her mother-in-law were able to live in one of those houses. They remained there until they were liberated by Soviet armed forces.

After liberation, Ibolya found out that her husband had died. She and Andy tried to leave Hungary but they were arrested and detained by the Communist government. Andy was allowed to leave jail and live with his grandparents, but Ibolya remained in jail for a few months.

In 1956, during the Hungarian Revolution, she and Andy left the country. They settled in Canada, where they lived in Winnipeg and Ontario. Ibolya met and married Emil Grossman, a Hungarian survivor. She worked at the Bank of Montreal until her retirement. She published a memoir, *An Ordinary Woman in Extraordinary Times*, in 1990. This interview took place on February 21, 1995, in North York, Ontario, Canada.