



HOMEPAGE

She bought a box of old photos for 5 bucks. And 3 decades later, a family mystery is solved

BY CARLI TEPROFF

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Silvia Espinosa Shrock gave David Semmel a box she had found of old photos. The photos, which include images of before and after the Holocaust, are of Semmel's relatives. DAVID SEMMEL



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-06:54

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Silvia Espinosa Schrock was walking to Cooper Union arts college in New York's East Village more than three decades ago when she stumbled upon a man selling knickknacks and books on a blanket.

She spotted a worn-out department store shirt box packed with old family photos. Something about the pictures captured her eye. Espinosa Schrock, who was 19 at the time, handed over a \$5 bill, tucked the box under her arm and continued on her way to school.

"I wondered why he would have it, why he would be selling it," she said of the street peddler. She wanted to return the pictures to whoever they once belonged to.

"It was someone's story."

Then they were forgotten, stashed away in her parents' Kendall home.

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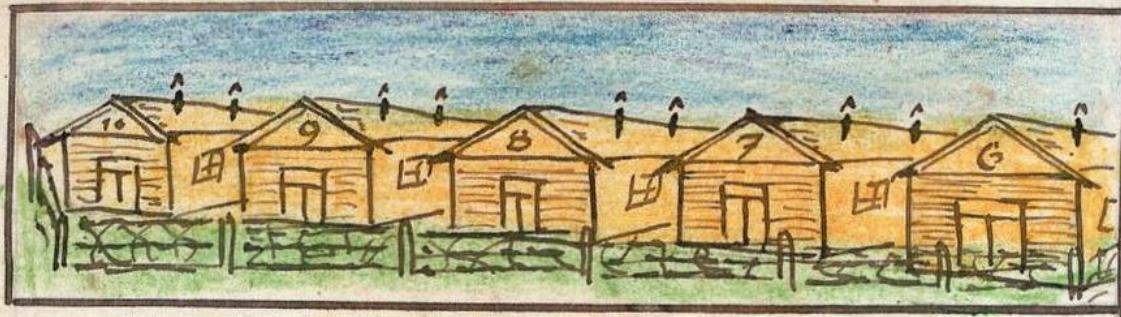
Fast-forward about 32 years, and Espinosa Schrock, now 52, discovered the box again — this time while she was doing some pandemic cleaning.

After a late-night Google search, the Miami Dade College art history professor found a blog by David Semmel, a family member of the people in the photos.

The photo collection is now in the hands of the [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) in Washington, D.C.

The donation — which includes [rare photos](#) of Beaune-la-Rolande, an internment camp in central France, 55 miles south of Paris — came ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Thursday, Jan. 27. The day marks the 77th

anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, a concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Poland.



Écrite de Beaune la Roland
Pour ma chère Paulette
Salomon

Salomon Abend drew a picture of the barracks at the Beaune-La-Roland camp in the 1940s and sent it to his wife Paulette. Abend did not survive the Holocaust. *U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM*

Suzy Snyder, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum curator in D.C., said the collection is important in the museum's quest to document and preserve history. With more than six million Jews losing their lives under the Nazi regime, Snyder said there are thousands of stories that remain untold.

"By donating a collection, it allows us now to illustrate people who did not survive the Holocaust or people who were victims," she said. "You want to be able to tell a story for each number."

THE BOX

When Espinosa Schrock arrived at school that winter day, she began going through the photos one by one. She saw two people in love. She saw families with big smiles. And then she saw pictures of what appeared to be a camp.

And then people in some of the photos were not in others. They were gone.

“I knew it had to be a Jewish family and that some of the people died in the Holocaust,” she said, adding there were words written on the back of the photos in Yiddish and Polish.

Espinosa Schrock, who says she is a devout Catholic, used them for an art installation project, where she displayed the photos in a box with lights.

When she graduated in 1992, Espinosa Schrock stored the box in a plastic bin, which was kept in her parents’ Kendall home.

She went on to study in Vienna and eventually settled back in New York before moving back to Miami in 2012.

She forgot about the box.

Then in March 2020, Espinosa Schrock decided to go through her things in her childhood bedroom so she could move some of the stuff to her own house.

When she came across the box, she knew she had to find that long-ago family.

“Without the box, these people will be forgotten,” she said.

THE SEARCH

After a late night Google search, Espinosa Schrock found a family member of the people in the photos. She searched the name Joachim Getter, written on one of the photographs. That search led Espinosa Schrock to “[The Jewish Przemysl Blog](#),” created by Semmel, a descendant of the family.

“Searching in 2020 was a lot easier than when I found it,” Espinosa Schrock said.

Semmel, who lives in Bloomington, Indiana, and spends the winter in Fort Lauderdale, has done a lot of work to trace his family tree. He started a blog as a

way to share information about the Polish city his family was from.

Espinosa Schrock knew she was right. She had found the same picture of Muni Getter on Semmel's blog that she had in her box.



Joachim "Muni" Getter *U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM*

She contacted him on the blog.

"Hello David, I have a box of many photos of who I believe is Muni Retter, Chayal, Florine Retter and many other relatives," she wrote, guessing the spelling of the names. "I found the box in around 1989 in Manhattan. Is Muni's name actually Joachim Retter who later married Paulette Salomon? I have pictures I can send you so that you can identify them. I have had them since and forgot about them all this time, until tonight. I was going through them and began searching for Joachim Retter, the only name I could really make out. Please contact me so that I can send you pictures and perhaps you can identify them."

Semmel said he couldn't believe what he was reading. Muni Getter was married to his grandfather Emil's sister, Chaya Silberman.

Silberman died in the Holocaust.

After the war, Getter married Perla “Paulette” Rosiner. Paulette had lost her husband, Salomon Abend, in the Holocaust. Some of the photos included the time he was in the French internment camp.

Semmel said he believes the box belonged to Paulette, who died in the 1980s in New York. He thinks the box was discarded when her apartment was cleaned out.

After a lot of back and forth, Espinosa Schrock sent Semmel the box.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT HIS FAMILY

Semmel had a single photo of his great aunt Chaya. He knew little more about what happened to her.

“She became a real person,” he said. “It was both thrilling and incredibly sad at the same.”

Semmel went to work using information from the U.S. Holocaust Museum, [the Jewish Record Index — Poland](#), and other distant family members.

Paulette Rosiner and Salomon Abend were high school sweethearts in Przemysl, Poland. In the mid-1920s, they immigrated to France, Semmel learned.

Muni Getter married Chaya Silberman in 1926 in Przemysl and they eventually moved to France. They had a daughter named Florine, according to Semmel.

Semmel said it is believed that Florine survived the war because her parents handed her over to a convent.

Meanwhile, Abend was arrested and brought to the Beaune-La-Roland camp. It is not clear how Paulette survived, according to [a document Semmel created](#) of his family tree.

Eventually, Paulette met Muni Getter, and the two married and settled in the Bronx.

THE DONATION

Semmel said the box helped him fill in a lot of the missing branches of his family tree.

But he knew right away the best option was to donate it to the Holocaust museum as a way to preserve history.

“The amount of sadness in the box was almost unbearable,” he said. “I knew that this had to be shared.”

He credits Espinosa Schrock for recognizing that the photos were important enough to track him down.

“I think the message here is that you never know what you may find stored away somewhere,” he said. “It’s important not to just throw things away.”



Silvia Espinosa Shrock is pictured as a 19-year-old art student at Cooper Union in New York.
U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM



CARLI TEPROFF



305-376-3587

Carli Teproff grew up in Northeast Miami-Dade and graduated from Florida International University in 2003. She became a full-time reporter for the Miami Herald in 2005 and now covers breaking news.



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BY DAVID J. NEAL

JANUARY 27, 2022 7:37 AM



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