



Sidonia's Thread

Crafting a Life From Holocaust to High Fashion
Exhibition Catalogue



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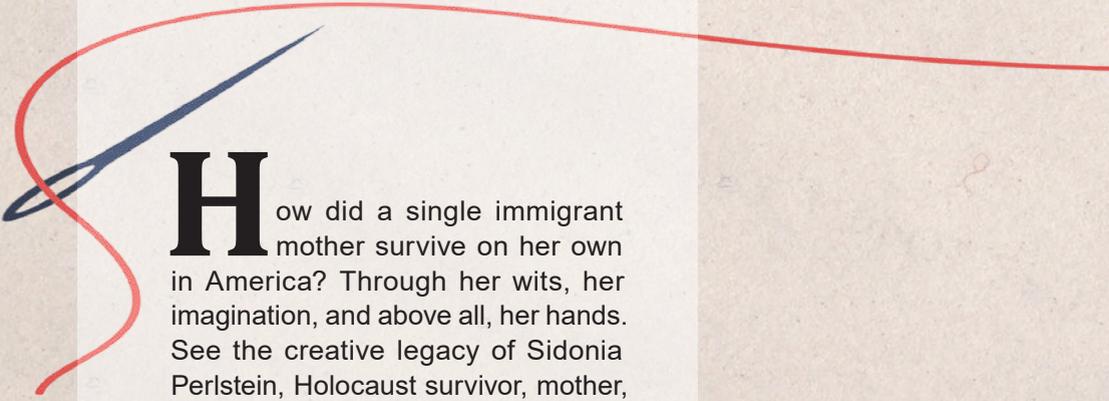
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How did a single immigrant mother survive on her own in America? Through her wits, her imagination, and above all, her hands. See the creative legacy of Sidonia Perlstein, Holocaust survivor, mother, and master of needle work!

Sidonia's Long Journey

1913

Sidonia was born in Damoc, a small Hungarian village

March, 1944

Sidonia and her family are deported to a ghetto

May, 1944

Transported by cattle car to Auschwitz camp

August, 1944

Transported to Dachau camp

December, 1944

Transported to Bergen Belsen camp

April, 1945

Liberated as the only survivor of her family
by British Armed Forces

April, 1945-June, 1949

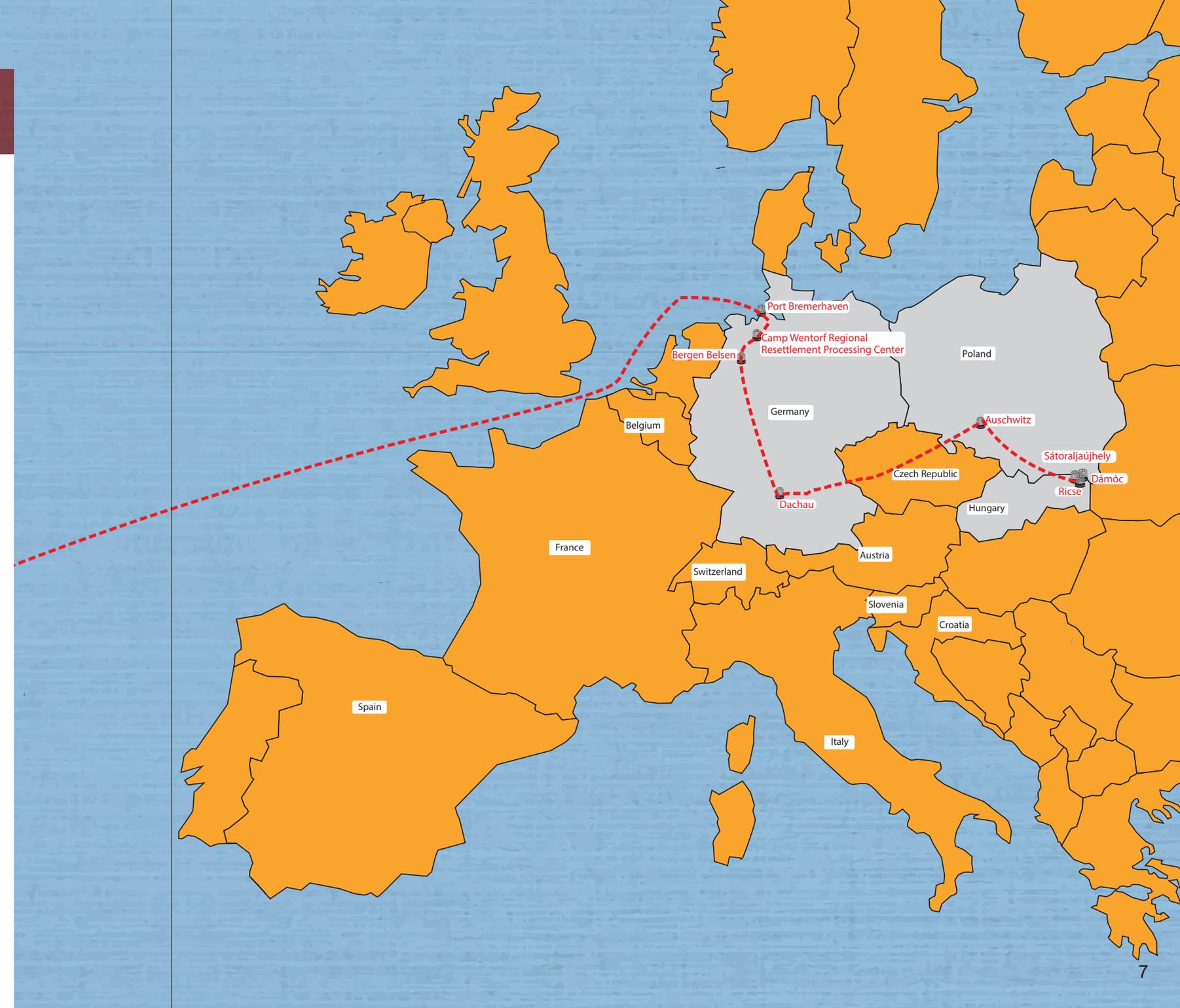
At the Bergen Belsen Displaced Persons camp

June-July, 1949

Sidonia and her daughter, Hanna, arrive in USA
on the USAT R.L. Howze and arrive in Springfield, MA
on July 5, 1949

May, 2006

Sidonia lives in Springfield until her death





Who was Sidonia?

Sidonia Perlstein was born and raised in a tiny, remote Hungarian village, far from the urban centers, like Budapest, where shops and stores supplied city residents and where cinemas, automobiles, cameras, and daily newspapers were common. None of these modern conveniences were present in her little town.

Born in 1913, Sidonia was the youngest of six siblings and learned to sew at a very young age. The family wore simple work-related garb, suitable for farm chores in an agricultural hamlet. Until the age of thirty-one, Sidonia, still unmarried, lived a contented life as part of a large family and as a member of her village's communal economic enterprises.



Sidonia and Hanna outside the Bergen Belsen DP camp
Summer, 1948

The Impact of World War II And the Holocaust

Sidonia and her family were deported from their village in Hungary in March, 1944 and herded into a ghetto in a nearby city. Eventually, they boarded a cattle train on their way to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, where most of the members of her family were gassed soon after their arrival. Only Sidonia and her sister, Laura, were chosen for slave labor. For the next year, Sidonia and Laura traveled to two more concentration camps, Dachau and finally, Bergen Belsen, where Laura died of typhus.

Liberated in April, 1945, Sidonia was the only member of her family who survived. After living in a displaced persons camp for four years, and giving birth to a daughter out of wedlock, Sidonia and her daughter came to Springfield, Massachusetts in 1949 seeking a life of freedom, security, and opportunity.



SURNAMES: PERLSTEIN		SERIAL: 78738	
NATIONALITY: Jewish		CHRISTIAN NAME: SIDONIA	
DATE OF BIRTH: 28.12.1917		SEX: female / נקבה	
HEIGHT: 5'9"		PLACE OF BIRTH: Bausza	
COLOUR OF HAIR: brown		COLOUR OF EYES: brown	
VISIBLE DISTINGUISHING MARKS: [blank]			
PLACE OF ISSUE: Rakva Camp		DATE OF ISSUE: 13.2.47	
SIGNATURE OF HOLDER: [Signature]		SIGNATURE OF AUTHORITY: [Signature]	
STAMP OF D.P. ASSEMBLY CENTRE: [Stamp]		STAMP OF AUTHORITY: [Stamp]	
SIGNATURE OF D.P. ASSEMBLY CENTRE: [Signature]		DATE REGISTERED AND DATE: 6.11.47	
D.P. ASSEMBLY CENTRE: [Stamp]		DATE OF RENEWAL: [Stamp]	
SIGNATURE OF AUTHORITY: [Signature]		SIGNATURE OF AUTHORITY: [Signature]	
DATE OF RENEWAL: [Stamp]		SIGNATURE OF AUTHORITY: [Signature]	
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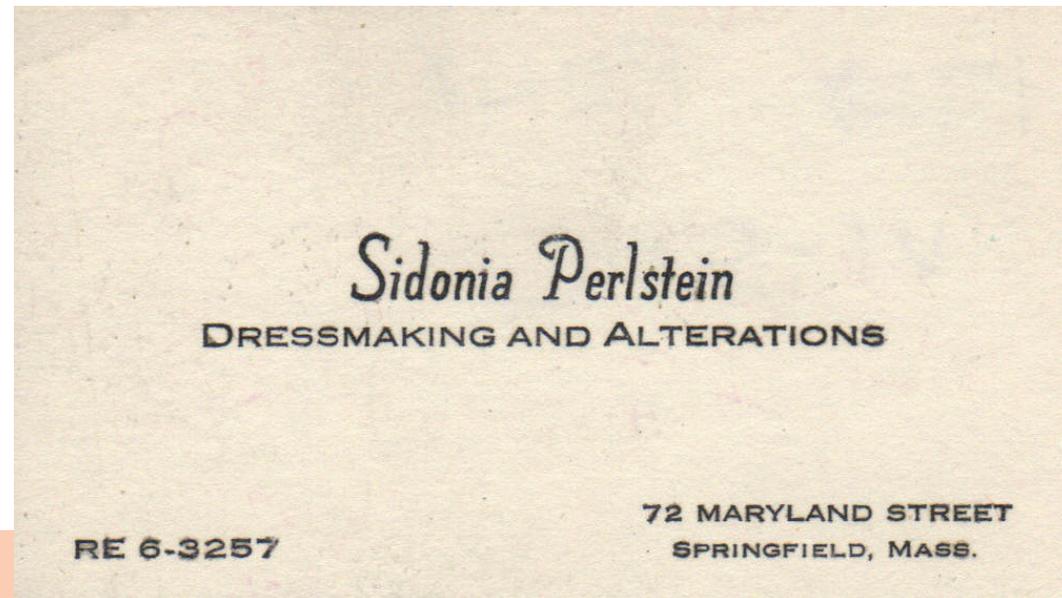
Sidonia's life as an immigrant



Sidonia's life as an immigrant in America bore no resemblance to the one she had lived in her little Hungarian village. She was totally on her own, with a child to support and no family to assist her. With little formal education and no knowledge of the English language, Sidonia had to determine how she could make a living as a woman in a male-oriented society. She decided that her design and dress-making skill was the only way she could both earn a living income and make a name for herself in America.

Sidonia and Hanna on the corner of Osgood and Dwight Streets in homemade summer clothes, Springfield, MA, 1957

As a single mother, Sidonia had the responsibility to make a living for her little family by using her innate sewing talent. She began working at a women's clothes manufacturing company as a machine operator and after a few years, as the company recognized her talent, was promoted to forewoman.



Sidonia eventually left the garment factory in the 1960's to start her own dress design and tailoring business. Starting off small with only one or two customers, she became widely known for her formidable sewing skills. By the end of that decade, she had hundreds of customers, all wanting a garment made by Sidonia.

Hanna at the Bar Mitzvah, May 1960, wearing a raw silk dress with short bouffant sleeves, full skirt, accented by a thin gold belt.

The dress represents Sidonia's "debut" as a noted fashion creator, setting the stage for her emergence as a brilliant designer and dressmaker, drawing customers from areas far beyond her immediate neighborhood.





Sidonia's Style

Like most immigrants, both male and female, Sidonia knew that hard work and perseverance were necessary to succeed. As her fluency in the English language improved, so did her ability to manage her own business and interact with her growing number of customers. As time went on, and more people sought her one-of-a-kind designs, she achieved her dream of local fame and recognition for her creative acumen. She had climbed the economic and social ladder to become a contributing American citizen.

1.

1987-TWO-PIECE SKIRT SUIT

Light grey wool gabardine double-breasted collarless jacket with contoured waist is enhanced by set pearl buttons

2.

1989-THREE-PIECE ENSEMBLE

Indonesian block print on madras and navy-blue cotton sleeveless top, skirt and jacket enhanced by a set of gold buttons

3.

1991-TWO-PIECE SKIRT SUIT/ COLLARLESS JACKET

White waffle weave cotton pique embroidered with flowers matched with solid white straight skirt

4.

1995–SPRING ENSEMBLE/ JACKET,
CULOTTES AND TOP

Jacket and culottes with inset seam
pockets uses light brown wool window
pane check

Accessorized by a mustard-colored
linen top

5.

2003–SPRING TWO-PIECE SUIT

Spring floral-patterned cotton jacket
and skirt is the last complete garment
made when Sidonia was 90 years old.

Accessorized by a lemon-yellow
polyester top

6.

1993–THREE-PIECE SPRING
ENSEMBLE

Floral patterned rayon sleeveless
top and straight skirt complemented
by a lavender cotton jacket with
notched lapels



4



5



6



Sidonia's memories of her simple, frugal life in her farming village and of the depravities of the Holocaust helped her not only to save every dollar possible, bringing two dollars to the bank every week, but to create imaginative garments, where every piece of fabric is utilized with no waste. Her designs represent her will to survive.



7.

1995 – SUMMER JACKET AND SKIRT ENSEMBLE

Lightweight paisley challis features antique gold buttons

7



8.

1997 – TWO-PIECE ENSEMBLE

Magenta glen plaid wool tweed collarless jacket complemented by black wool skirt

See full ensemble to the right on p.23.

Sidonia remained a secretive loner for most of her life in America. Her best means of expression was through her creative art with textile and thread, pouring her emotion into her tailored garments. She was a keen observer of style and trends, often a forerunner of styles that had not yet gained popularity. Her favorite patterns were Vogue and Butterick, adding her own special touches to each garment.

She could often be found reading fashion magazines to learn the latest trends and frequently created garments for her daughter that were not as yet known to residents of New England. Most of the items in the collection were made for Sidonia's daughter, Hanna, and some for her granddaughter, Brenda. Hanna posed for weekly fittings during all of their life together.





9



10



As you examine Sidonia's designs, you can learn a great deal about her personality. Note the precision of the stitching; the variety of colors and prints; the attention paid to perfect buttons to match or offset the garment; the use of various natural fabrics, especially wool, silk, and cotton; the use of a particular pattern to highlight the fabric; the economic use of textiles, with no fabric ever wasted; and the overall beauty of her creations. Her styles were distinctly her own.

9.

1990 – TWO-PIECE ENSEMBLE/
DOUBLE-BREASTED JACKET

Scottish-plaid wool flannel jacket and
black wool skirt

10.

1998 – TWO-PIECE SUIT

Wool twill striped jacket and skirt with
asymmetrical double pleat

11.

1995 – TWO-PIECE ENSEMBLE/DOUBLE-BREASTED JACKET

Blue, red and green plaid wool twill jacket and red wool flannel straight skirt with asymmetrical double pleat



12.

1997 – VEST AND SKIRT

Flowered printed velour with black wide stripes



13.

2000 – TWO-PIECE SKIRT SUIT/DOUBLE-BREASTED JACKET

Purple over check twill wool tweed offset with gold buttons





14



15

14.

1998 – TWO-PIECE SKIRT SUIT/
DOUBLE-BREASTED JACKET

Warm red cotton jacket
complemented by gold buttons

15.

1991 – TWO-PIECE SKIRT
SUIT/JACKET

Black textured wool blend

16.

1991 – TWO-PIECE SKIRT SUIT/
DOUBLE-BREASTED JACKET

Navy blue shadow striped wool
Sleeveless top of multicolored
polyester

17.

1997 – THREE-PIECE ENSEMBLE:
JACKET, VEST AND SKIRT

Red and black wool crepe exhibit
gold/black buttons

18.

1986 – TWO-PIECE PANTS SUIT

Novelty weave wool with charcoal
grey buttons

During the 1980s and 1990s, Sidonia embraced the “Power Suit” as women began to express their empowerment. Sidonia created many garments and ensembles with shoulder-padded jackets and straight skirts and trousers. Many of these were created for her daughter, Hanna, during her career as a licensed clinical social worker and administrator. They reflect the attitude of a self-assured woman, confident in her authority but also in her femininity.



16



17



18



19. & 20.

1973 – THREE-PIECE
INTERCHANGEABLE SUIT

Jacket with notched collar, front
pleated pants and skirt made of
multicolored barleycorn wool tweed



19



20

Sidonia admired natural fibers and textiles, including wool tweed and used different types of woven tweed for the garments she made. Observing rough, multicolored surfaces and patterns for the garments makes an instant connection between her life in a Hungarian farming village where no synthetic fabric existed and life in the United States as an appreciated dressmaker and designer. She had the talent to use these textiles rooted in peasant life to create sophisticated high fashion garments.

21.

1986 – ENSEMBLE/JACKET AND SKIRT

Combination of black and white wool houndstooth and black wool felt

22.

1997 – SLEEVELESS TOP WITH BELT AND SKIRT

Houndstooth wool blend ensemble



21



22

23



24



25



23.

1997–VEST AND SKIRT

Wool challis ensemble with gold metallic buttons as an accent

24.

1996–VEST AND SKIRT

Checked wool tweed with gold metallic buttons as an accent

25.

1997–VEST AND SKIRT

Brown cotton velvet with gold metallic buttons as an accent



26



27



29



28

26.

1997–SKIRT AND TOP ENSEMBLE

Black rayon with multicolored circle pattern top complements an off-white ribbed cotton skirt

27.

1997–TWO-PIECE ENSEMBLE

Combination of paisley wool challis scalloped neck sleeveless top and tan cotton gabardine skirt

28. & 29.

2002–INTERCHANGEABLE ENSEMBLE: SLEEVELESS TOP, SKIRT, PANTS, JACKET

Powder blue striped lightweight crepe wool blend ensemble



30

31



32

30.

1993–BLACK EVENING DRESS
A combination of polyester and chiffon dress complemented by black and gold lamé scarf

31.

1989–DRESS SUIT
A combination of black silk taffeta strapless dress and matching jacket

32.

1993–BLACK EVENING DRESS
A combination of polyester and lace for evening wear

33.

1993—DAY DRESS SUIT

Made of cream color wool crepe decorated with lace trim

34.

1969—SLEEVELESS DRESS WITH MATCHING JACKET

Jackie Kennedy mother-of-the-bride ensemble made of pink wool-silk blend with inset seam pockets

It is the oldest garment in the collection.

35.

1993—ONE-BUTTON DAY DRESS SUIT

Combination of cream color wool crepe and lace







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