

USC Shoah Foundation

The Institute for Visual History and Education

Eva Mozes Kor

Even in a tiny farming village in Romania, the Holocaust found Eva Mozes Kor.

Eva, born Jan. 31, 1934, was brought up in a very religious household with two older sisters and her twin sister, Miriam. The Mozes family lived and worked on their large farm in Portz, and they enjoyed a life full of the warmth of family. However, when Hungary annexed the slice of Romania where the Mozes family lived, they faced intense anti-Semitic harassment from students and neighbors. Classmates who were once friends now spit on Eva and called her names. Taunting youth often surrounded the Mozes' house and threw food and rocks at it for hours. They were the only Jewish family in the village.

Eva and her family were forced to move into the Cehei ghetto in Simleu Silvaniei, Romania, in 1944, where they stayed for about two and a half months. The ghetto had no housing facilities, so the family made a tent out of sheets, which the Nazi commandant would order them to tear down and rebuild in the rain to torment them. In May, they were squeezed onto cattle cars with the rest of the ghetto and sent to Auschwitz. Eva remembers her father saying his morning prayers even as they arrived at the camp.

On the selection platform, Eva and Miriam were immediately recognized as twins and separated from the rest of their family, who was taken to the gas chambers. They were taken with other twins to a special barrack, where Dr. Josef Mengele housed subjects for his medical experiments. When Eva came upon the corpses of three children in the latrine on her first night in Auschwitz, she made a silent pledge to do everything in her power to make sure she and Miriam would not end up on that filthy floor.

Mengele gave the twins injections, drew large amounts of blood, and meticulously measured their body parts and photographed them, often for six to eight hours at a time. One injection left Eva gravely ill. She was separated from Miriam and left to die in the sick ward. She remembers Mengele saying sarcastically, "Too bad, she's so young—she has only two weeks to live." Determined to prove Mengele wrong, Eva battled the high fever and five weeks later was reunited with her sister.

That winter, the approaching Soviet Army triggered the Germans to send the majority of camp inmates on death marches to lands that were still under German control. The Soviet Army reached the camp on Jan. 27, 1945, where only the children, elderly, and sick were left behind. Eva and Miriam were first sent to a convent in Katowice, Poland, to recover, and from there traveled with other survivors to Minsk, in the Soviet Union. A woman named Mrs. Csengeri, who had been imprisoned in Auschwitz and was a friend of Eva's mother and the mother of twins herself, took care of Eva and Miriam until they made it back to Romania and were reunited with an aunt and a cousin. In 1950, Eva and Miriam moved to Israel. Eva served in the Israeli Army for eight years.

Eva married Holocaust survivor Michael Kor in 1960 and joined him in Indiana and had two children, Alexander and Rina. She dedicated herself to raising awareness about Mengele's Auschwitz medical

experiments, and in 1984 she created Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors (CANDLES) to unite the survivors and lobby for the release of Mengele's files. In 1995 she founded the CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Terre Haute, Ind. That same year, Eva made a profound personal discovery: she had the right and power to forgive the Nazis, though she would never excuse their actions. By exercising this power, she says she freed herself of the burden she had carried for 50 years. Eva still speaks around the country and the world about her experiences, urging healing through forgiveness.