

USC Shoah Foundation

The Institute for Visual History and Education

Eva Weiss Slonim

Though they came from the same family, Eva Weiss Slonim and her sister Marta (standing next to each other in the photograph) each had to overcome different challenges to survive the Holocaust.

Eva was born August 29, 1931, the oldest girl among six siblings in her family when World War II began. Though she had had a happy childhood, Germans invaded her hometown of Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, in 1939, and began confiscating Jews' belongings. Their non-Jewish friends stopped talking to them and Eva remembers German soldiers viciously attacking her grandfather in their home, which was her first sign that the situation was very serious.

Eva's father, a textile manufacturer and shop owner, employed a beautiful German woman named Mrs. Tafon to take each of the children to relatives' homes in Hungary on false papers. Only Eva –who with light hair and blue eyes had a greater chance of passing as Gentile – stayed in Bratislava with their parents. Eva would often place dolls in a baby carriage and take them to pick up their food rations so neighbors wouldn't suspect that the rest of the children were gone.

After about two years, conditions in Hungary became so bad that Marta and the other children attempted to return to Czechoslovakia. Eva and Marta posed as Catholic orphans in a flat in Nitra, Czechoslovakia, for several months, until soldiers interrogated and arrested them. Even Eva's new friend, a girl her age whose father was a top SS officer, could not save them from being sent to Séréd concentration camp and then to Auschwitz.

Because they were sisters but had different-colored eyes and hair, Eva suspects, she and Marta was sent to Dr. Josef Mengele's infamous barrack which housed twins and people with physical abnormalities who were to be subjected to his medical experiments. Eva was given injections that gave her stomach cramps, had large amounts of blood drawn, and was forced to play games with the other children in which they inadvertently chose Mengele's next victims. A sign reading "Each beginning has an end" hung in the barrack.

Eva contracted dysentery and typhoid but Marta stole potatoes for her which saved her life. In January 1945, the approaching Soviet Army triggered the Germans to send the majority of camp inmates on what would be death marches to lands that were still under German control, but Eva and Marta stayed behind, and the Red Army liberated them on January 27, 1945. After a long journey back to Bratislava, Eva and Marta were reunited with their parents and siblings except for one sister who had been killed.

The family immigrated to Australia in 1948 after Eva's brother died in a drowning accident. Eva worked long days in her father's new wafer factory and went to school at night. She met her future husband, Benjamin Slonim, at her 17th birthday party. After they were married in 1953, Eva worked as a bookkeeper and secretary and they had five children, Edwin, Malcolm, Sharona, Daniel and Aviva. Eva and Benjamin have 24 grandchildren.