

# USC Shoah Foundation

The Institute for Visual History and Education

## **Miriam Mozes Zeiger**

Miriam Mozes Zeiger didn't have long to enjoy her idyllic childhood on a farm in Portz, Romania. By the time she was ten years old, even school had become a place of torment and oppression.

Miriam lived with her twin sister Eva (both born Jan. 31, 1934), their two older sisters, and parents on a working farm in Portz, a rural village without running water or electricity. They were the only Jews in town and lived a very religious lifestyle. But when Miriam and Eva started school in 1940, the Hungarian occupation had just begun, and anti-Semitism was high. The girls were punished for a prank some boys played on their teacher because they were "dirty Jews" and were spit on and pushed around. Their teacher even showed a movie in class about how to catch and kill Jews.

Though the family tried once to escape Romania (they were caught at the border of their property and forced to return home), they were sent to the Cehei ghetto in Simleu Silvaniei, Romania, in 1944. They stayed there for about 2 ½ months while Nazis tortured their father, who they insisted was hiding gold and silver. All the inhabitants of the ghetto were put on cattle cars and told not to bring any belongings because where they were going, they would have everything they needed.

At Auschwitz, Miriam and Eva were separated from their family and put into Dr. Josef Mengele's barrack for twins and others who would be subjected to his medical experiments. Miriam and Eva were separated for two weeks, and Miriam was under constant Nazi surveillance while Eva was given injections. Later, they found out that if Eva had died, Miriam would have been killed immediately, as well, so their autopsies could be compared. Over the next nine months, Miriam contracted dysentery and a kidney infection as a result of injections she was given. Yet the two survived.

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. Miriam and Eva recovered at a convent in Katowice, Poland, before making their way back to Romania under the care of Mrs. Csengeri, who had also been imprisoned in Auschwitz and was a friend of Eva's mother and the mother of twins herself. Miriam and Eva reunited with an aunt and cousin before moving to Israel in 1950.

Miriam studied to be a nurse, married Yekutiel Zeiger, and had three children, Yaffa, Ariella, and Ayala. She also had ten grandchildren. However, she suffered from kidney disease all her life because of Mengele's experiments. Eva donated a kidney to Miriam in 1987, but Miriam developed cancer and died June 6, 1993.