

Eva Kor by LeeAnn Sharpe

Could you forgive the most hated group of people in the history of all mankind? Eva Mozes Kor is a survivor of the Holocaust, a tortured subject of the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele, and a forgiveness advocate.

"How can people overcome atrocities and still make a meaningful life for themselves?" she inquires. "The only way is through forgiveness. I don't think most people understand what it really is. The injured party is the one who does the forgiving, rather than the perpetrator. I am often told the Nazis don't deserve it. Maybe so, But I deserve it. If I don't pardon them, I remain a victim for the rest of my life. And I don't think that is a destiny anybody deserves."

Porta is a tiny Romanian village in Transylvania, where Eva and her twin sister Miriam were born in 1934. Their father, Alexander Mozes and his wife, Jaffa, were wealthy landowners and farmers. Along with elder sisters Edit and Aliz, the twins attended a one-room schoolhouse. The Mozes household led a quiet rustic farm life.

In 1940, the country was occupied by Hungary. Tensions mounted, as hatred of both Jews and Romanians were felt by the Mozes clan. As Hitler rose to power, and the Germans expanded their territories, Alexander Mozes never believed the Nazis' reach would extend to his small farm, where his wife and children were the only Jews in the area. But when the Nazi occupation expanded to their village in March 1944, the entire family was transported to the Szilagyisomlyo ghetto.

A few weeks later, they were loaded with other Jewish prisoners from the region onto a packed cattle car and transported to Auschwitz. Eva remembers being angry that her father had not taken the news of the approaching Nazis more seriously.

Eva and her loved ones emerged from the train onto the 85 foot by 35 foot selection platform at Auschwitz that, according to her, saw more families ripped apart than any other strip of land in the world. Terrified, ten year-old Eva and Miriam gripped their mother's hands as the mass of people poured out. Eva recalls, "When the doors to our cattle car opened, I heard the SS soldiers yelling, 'Schnell! Schnell!' ordering everybody out. My mother was always trying to protect us, because we were the youngest. Everything was moving very fast, and as I looked around, I noticed my father and my two

older sisters were gone. As I clutched my mother's hand, an SS man hurried by shouting, 'Zwilling!' (Twinst!) He stopped to look at us because Miriam and I looked very much alike. He queried my mother 'Are they twins?' Frightened, she responded, 'Is that good?' He nodded yes. 'They are twins,' she affirmed. 'Immediately, the SS guard took us away from our mother, without any warning or explanation. Our screams fell on deaf ears. I remember looking back and seeing her arms stretched out in despair, as we were led away by a soldier. That was the last time we saw her.'

Eva and Miriam cried as they were pulled away from their mother. Determined to remain strong, that was the last time Eva wept. In her autobiography *Echoes from Auschwitz: Dr. Mengele's Twins, The Story of Eva and Miriam Mozes*, she blames the death camp for stealing her childhood.

The sisters became part of a group of children who were used as human guinea pigs in medical and genetic experiments of unspeakable brutality conducted under the direction of Dr. Josef Mengele. Twins as young as five and six years of age were usually murdered after the procedure was over, and their bodies were dissected. Approximately 1,500 sets of twins were abused. Most of them died as a result. Hideous tests included injecting chemicals into the eyes of children in an attempt to change their eye color, surgeries performed without anesthesia, transfusions of blood from one twin to another, injections with lethal germs, sex change operations, and the removal of organs and limbs.

Eva recalls a woman trying to reach out to children who were being gruesomely torn apart by the German shepherd dogs, as the guards stood by and watched. She witnessed horrors like these on a daily basis.

Approximately 3,000 twins passed through Auschwitz during World War II until the liberation at the end of the Holocaust. Eva herself became deathly ill, but through sheer determination, she stayed alive and helped Miriam endure. About 200 children were found holding on to life by the Soviet Army at the liberation of the camp in January, 1945. The majority of the children were Mengele twins. Eva and Miriam Mozes were among them. Her two elder sisters, father and mother had perished in the death camp.

Mengele had injected Eva's sister Miriam with a drug that stunted the growth of her kidneys, causing her problems all of her life. After her first child was born, the organs started to malfunction. Eva begged her not to have any more children, but after her third child, Miriam's kidneys failed. Eva donated one of her kidneys to her sister in 1986. It extended her life by another six years until she passed away in 1993. Eva feels her sister would have agreed with her agenda of forgiveness.

During a recent trip to the death camps, Eva met with the adult children of Nazis, including Bettina Gehring. Herman Gehring's grandniece. She told them to stop feeling guilty and instead, use that energy to help someone. Eva encouraged them to excuse their parents and grandparents, and move on with their lives in a positive way. She feels free to dance and sing at the death camps, where she has released the pain of the past. Onlookers were shocked when she danced at Auschwitz with another prisoner of that terrible camp, but came to understand when her history unfolded.



Recently, Eva challenged her husband Mickey to write a letter of clemency. She believes that reconciliation is a Christian concept, while non-believers have a harder time. He was reluctant to give up his hatred of the Nazis, but Eva found a way. "I will pay you \$2,000 to write the letter," she offered. He was motivated by her desire, not by the money, and finally he wrote the letter. Now she sends the challenge out to the other Mengele twins, who made it through similar atrocities to do the same. It is for their benefit to



Above: Liberation, 1945: Eva and Miriam held hands at the front of the line
Below: An exhibit about Eva and Miriam on display at the Candles Holocaust Museum in Terre Haute, Indiana



be freed of the burden of being the prey of those vile times.

Eva's project also encompasses programs for school children. She finds a lot of insecurity among youngsters in today's hectic, materialistic world. They are easily intimidated and bullied, leading to violent behavior. Her lesson number one is "Never ever give up." They need to hear that. She tells them, "If I survived Auschwitz, you can survive."

The exhibit about Eva Kor's experience is now at the Candles

Holocaust Museum in Terre Haute, Indiana. Eva's account and her passion for teaching are well worth a visit.

Eva doesn't want anyone to confuse forgiveness with forgetting. How can you forget, when you are telling your testimony over and over again? "We need to accurately understand the full truth of what happened, to find ways to repair the wounds of the worst event that took place. Besides, Eva says with a smile, "I ruined their experiment. I survived." **mt**