

Eva And Vera Weiss

Twins Chaja Blau and Rachel Eitan were born Eva and Vera Weiss in 1932 in Kosice, Czechoslovakia. They were older sisters to their brother, Tomi, who was born two years later. Their father worked in a bakery and later opened the city's first pasta factory.



Chaja Blau and Rachel Eitan, born Eva and Vera Weiss, 2014 (courtesy of Expressen.se)

After Germany's ally, Hungary, occupied Kosice in 1938, many Jewish men were sent to labor camps, and the twins' father was shot to death when he injured his foot and could no longer work.

In March 1944, the remaining family spent several weeks in a ghetto located at a former brick factory outside of Kosice. From there they were transported in crowded cattle cars to Auschwitz. In one month's time, all of the approximately 15,000 Jews from the city and the surrounding area were taken to Auschwitz. Almost all were gassed shortly after arriving, and only about 2,000 survived.

When the train doors opened after the three- or four-day trip, the occupants fell out onto the selection platform. Chaja and Rachel remember total chaos on the ramp: dogs barking, and German soldiers with rifles and bayonets shouting, "Schnell, schnell!" "Fast, fast!"

Everything happened very quickly. They were ordered to stand in rows, and the twins became separated from their mother and little brother. Mengele, tall and handsome, shouted, "Twins, twins!" He asked Chaja and Rachel if they really were twins, because they did not look identical.

The twins recall being sent immediately to the shower and tattooed; Chaja's number was A-6026, Rachel's A-6027. Twelve-year-old Chaja cried for three days, longing for her mother. The other prisoners pointed to the flames of the crematorium, saying, "Look at the flames, now they burn your mother."

Each day the twins saw the flames of the crematorium and smelled the burning flesh. But they felt their lives were protected because Dr. Mengele needed them for his experiments.

Chaja remembers doctors measuring every part of her body—ears, fingers, legs, everything. She also recalls being exposed to radiation. The doctors injected something into Rachel that caused her to have sores on her legs that would not heal. It wasn't until she arrived in Sweden after the war that she received treatment for them.

Rachel was very ill at Auschwitz. She had a high fever and a swollen stomach. She was in so much pain that she did not want to live—many prisoners committed suicide by throwing themselves against the electric fence. But Chaja convinced her to fight and live.

In January 1945, as the Soviet Red Army approached Auschwitz, Rachel and Chaja were among thousands of prisoners forced on a death march. They had no warm shoes or coats. The Nazis shot anyone who fell behind. Rachel found it impossible to walk; her legs were swollen and she wanted to give up. She urged Chaja to leave her behind, but Chaja vowed that she would never leave her sister. "Chaja saved my life."

After the march they were herded into open wagons and taken to Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany. From Ravensbrück they were taken to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. With the war winding down, the Germans evacuated Bergen-Belsen, leaving the prisoners on their own without food and water, completely emaciated and seriously ill with typhus and other diseases. A week later, British troops liberated the camp.

Chaja and Rachel were taken to a hospital in Landskrona, Sweden. They stayed there and in other Swedish refugee camps for two years, trying to recover from the horrors of the war. Rachel recalls visiting many beautiful places in Sweden and receiving the kindness of Swedish families who gave them cookies and other treats.

In 1947, Chaja and Rachel left Sweden to emigrate to what was still the British Mandate of Palestine. During a dramatic journey across the Mediterranean, their ship was stopped by the British navy and redirected to an internment camp in Cypress. They eventually settled in Israel and found themselves in the middle of the first Arab-Israeli War.

However, despite the war and the difficulties they faced settling in a foreign land, the twins were happy in Israel. They were so young and had gone through so much. Now they felt they were finally at home.

Chaja and Rachel both married at age 18, and they both married Holocaust survivors. They created new families in Israel, and together they have 20 children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Rachel works as a seamstress; Chaja is a housewife. Both have coped with physical and psychological problems through life because of their experiences during the war, but they have worked hard to move forward.