

Esther and Malka Deutch

Esther and Malka Deutch were fraternal twins born to Hermann and Cherna Deutch on April 14, 1925 (or 1923) in Sekernice, Czechoslovakia. They had seven brothers and sisters and lived on a large and prosperous farm. Esther recalled that they “had cows, horses, grew potatoes, corn, wheat, everything you can imagine.”



Esther Deutch, 1945

In 1938, Hungarian soldiers entered Sekernice and imposed harsh antisemitic laws. Jewish people in town had to wear yellow star armbands. They were not allowed to travel. Children could no longer go to school. Esther and Malka stayed home to work on the farm, but in 1938 the farm was taken away from their family.

Nearly 300 trees grew on the Deutch family farm. One night, a group of people living nearby cut down all the trees. The Hungarian police did nothing. Hermann asked for guns to defend his family, but the Hungarian police ignored him. Hermann believed that if the family became Hungarian citizens, they would be protected. The Hungarian government made the family pay a lot of money to gain the citizenship papers.

All of Esther's brothers were forced to go to a labor camp to make bunkers for the soldiers. Although all of his sons were gone and no laborers wanted to work for a Jew, Hermann still tried to keep the farm going. But townspeople stole from them, and there was little food for the family to eat.

Their train arrived in Auschwitz at 10:00 in the morning. Dr. Josef Mengele and Dr. Hans König were standing there, along with many SS soldiers and dogs. As people got off the train, they were separated to the right and to the left. At first, Esther, Malka, and their younger sister Rifka stayed together, even though Rifka was only 15. But Mengele asked the twins to raise their hands. Esther didn't want to, but someone from her town knew that she and Malka were twins and urged her to raise her hand. The eight sets of twins from that transport were separated

from the rest of the group. Esther remembers seeing the smokestacks, but didn't understand what they were. Her parents stood in the line leading to the chambers, and when her father saw her, he called out "Esther, Esther," but Mengele told her to keep quiet. So all she could do was wave good-bye.

When Esther was brought to the hospital, she was tattooed with the number A-3628. She slept in a barrack with other twins. Twice a week she and Malka were transported by car to Auschwitz I and then separated for experiments. They sat completely naked while doctors, under the instruction of Mengele, measured their bodies and took blood. They were not allowed to cover themselves at all. After a while, the twins no longer cared—they felt numb. Esther describes Mengele as a very beautiful man, while König was a skinny, not-so-nice-looking man. Esther also described Mengele as a "quiet murderer," because he never spoke with the twins. She felt she would never get out of Auschwitz alive.

Esther's memories:

Esther had heard about soldiers took the 500 most beautiful girls to have pleasure with them, then they shot them. Esther was beautiful, so Malka suggested she make herself look ugly.

Twins kept their dresses; they did not have their hair shorn. When Esther's dress became too ragged, she was given another one from the pile of clothes brought in from the other prisoners. There was an orchestra at the gate to make the prisoners happy as they went to work.

A Polish girl named Mala had been imprisoned in Auschwitz for three years. She told Esther early on that her family had gone up in the flames, become ashes. Mengele, on the other hand, had told Esther her family was in another barracks. Esther considered going to the electric fence behind the hospital to electrocute herself.

Esther was taught to clean the toilets of the sick people at the hospital. Every morning Mengele and König came to the hospital to see who was going to die. They put those people in a Red Cross car and led them to believe they were going to a nice place to recover, but they were taken directly to the crematoria.

A Jewish woman helped Mengele in the hospital office and thought Mengele would marry her after the war. She wore the most beautiful clothes and jewelry, and had her hair styled every day by a special beautician.

On the day of evacuation in January 1945, the kapos, Dr. Mengele, and Dr. König had already fled. Bombs were falling everywhere. As the girls were forced to march from the camp, many were killed if they stepped out of line. They walked for five or six days, then were loaded into wagons filled with snow and taken to Ravensbruck. Esther and Malka stayed in Ravensbruck for six weeks. They saw Russian and American planes bombing a nearby city. When American soldiers liberated Ravensbruck, they gave the prisoners chocolate. Esther thought she was too sick, too weak to live, but Malka convinced her she would survive. An American soldier discovered them and took them to a hospital, where they stayed for five to six weeks. Every day, the soldier came to visit them, and he offered to take them to America. But Esther wanted to return to Sekernice to see whether any family members had survived.

Eventually the twins were reunited with their oldest brother, Mordecai, and the three of them returned to their hometown to see what was left of their belongings. The family farm was green and beautiful. When Esther reached for a potato, however, a neighbor told her she couldn't take it. She saw all of their belongings, but couldn't touch anything. The neighbors had taken everything—their mother's earrings, gold jewelry—and had no intention of returning anything. The neighbor claimed she bought the jewelry. Esther decided she would leave and never return.

In 1946(?) Esther and Malka set sail from Marseilles, France, bound for Israel. The journey took two-and-a-half weeks. As they approached their destination, however, their ship was diverted to a camp in Cypress. Although the conditions were quite good, the refugees caused many problems for the British soldiers stationed there. The refugees poured Benzene and lit the camp on fire. During her time in Cypress, Esther learned Hebrew, met many people, and had a nice social life. Esther met her future husband there. By 1947, she relocated to Haifa, Israel, and lived on a kibbutz.

Malka wanted to move to the United States and convinced Esther to leave Haifa and move with her. In 1962, they left Israel. It took Esther awhile to get used to life in America. She missed the beauty of Israel and her friends. But little by little, she grew to love America and call it her home.



Esther (Deutch) Young with Simon, Helen and husband, Eliezer, 1956 (courtesy of USC Shoah Foundation)



Esther, Rifka, and Malka, 1990 (courtesy of the USC Shoah Foundation)