

# Yehudit and Lea Csengeri

**Yehudit (Csengeri) Barnea and her twin sister Lea (Csengeri) Huber** are the daughters of Zvi and Rosalia Csengeri. The twins were born on June 6, 1937 in Simleu Silvaniei, Transylvania, Hungary, where Zvi owned wine cellars and exported wine. Rosalia (“Rosie”) was a friend of Eva Mozes Kor’s mother, Jaffa Mozes; the two women would often exchange stories about raising twin girls.



**Rosie Csengeri poses with her newborn twins, Yehudit and Lea, 1937 (courtesy of USHMM)**



**Zvi Csengeri poses with his twin baby daughters, Yehudit and Lea, 1938 (courtesy of USHMM)**

The Csengeris lived in Budapest; Yehudit and Lea were cared for by teachers and governesses. The girls started first grade at a Hungarian school. In June 1942 Zvi was taken to a forced labor camp in the Ukraine.

Though he was told he would be away for only four weeks, he did not return until 1945. In the meantime, life became very difficult for Rosie and the twins. Food was scarce – sometimes Rosie could not even purchase flour or bread.

In March 1944, Germany occupied Hungary and immediately began instituting anti-Jewish decrees. On May 5, 1944, Yehudit, Lea, and Rosie were marched with the other Jews in the area to a transit ghetto at the former Klein brick factory. The Mozes family was also taken to that ghetto. The “lucky” families were able to find shelter in the few structures existing on the ghetto grounds; everyone else, including the Csengeri and Mozes families, had to build makeshift tents. The police at the camp conducted brutal beatings and interrogations; they forced prisoners to drink watered-down vinegar and conducted searches of naked men and women.

A few weeks later, the Csengeri and Mozes families were packed into cattle cars and deported to Auschwitz death camp. Somehow Rosie managed to send Zvi a postcard telling him about their deportation. On their transport, there were fifteen sets of twins in addition to Yehudit and Lea, Eva and Miriam. Upon their arrival in Auschwitz, in Rosie’s words (translated), “When I disembarked the train, in an instant, all my family disappeared from in front of my eyes.” The SS officer tried to pull Yehudit and Lea from Rosie, but the girls were clinging so tightly to her that she was selected to accompany them to Camp II B. There the twins were tattooed and given short haircuts. For days Rosie cried for her family, until a Polish Catholic prisoner pointed to the huge chimney with red flames rising from it and told her that her family had been gassed and burned, that she and her daughters had been saved only because the girls were twins.

Dr. Josef Mengele and other Nazi physicians took blood samples, measured, and photographed the twins’ bodies, and they injected Yehudit and Lea with various pathogens. One day Rosie heard her daughters screaming, and she ran into the examination room to try to stop Mengele from drawing her twins’ blood. In response, the doctors injected her in the back of the neck with the meningitis virus. She became very ill with a high fever and lost her sense of hearing.

When she recovered, Rosie worked in the infirmary disposing of dead bodies. Although the job was horrifying, it enabled Rosie to stay close to her daughters and to feed them her portion of bread. It also helped her escape being sent to the gas chamber on three separate occasions.

When the Nazis evacuated Auschwitz on January 18, 1945, Rosie and her daughters hid to avoid the death march. Many of the twins, including Eva and Miriam, stayed behind and were more or less on their own until Soviet troops arrived, wearing white overalls (that served as camouflage against the snowy fields), and liberated the camp on January 27th. Rosie, Yehudit, and Lea settled temporarily in a displaced persons camp in the nearby town of Katowice. Eva and Miriam had also settled in Katowice, in a convent providing shelter for children who had not yet reunited with family members. When Eva learned that the Csengeris were living nearby, she traveled to the camp to ask Rosie to pose as their aunt so that she and Miriam could leave the convent. Rosie agreed, took them in, and cared for them for the next six months. They traveled to other temporary camps, Rosie begging for food for the four girls. The Soviets gave them some army shirts from which Rosie sewed clothes. She somehow procured shoes for Eva and Miriam, and for Yehudit and Lea she sewed slippers from a blanket.



**The Csengeri family poses together in a garden after the war. Pictured are Rosie and Zvi Csengeri, their twin daughters Yehudit and Lea and son, Michael, in Simleu Silvaniei, Romania, 1948. (courtesy of USHMM)**

Finally, they returned to Simleu Silvaniei. Eva and Miriam continued to Portz to search for surviving family members; Rosie and her daughters reunited with Zvi. Yehudit and Lea recognized their father instantly, since Rosie had managed to keep photographs of him. Nine months later, Rosie gave birth to a son, Michael, and Yehudit and Lea resumed first grade at a Romanian school. Yehudit, Lea, her parents, and younger brother moved to Israel in 1960. Yehudit and Lea married. Rosie and Zvi lived to see nine great-grandchildren born.



**Yehudit and Lea light one of the six torches at a Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Yad Vashem, April 20, 2009 (courtesy of Yad Vashem)**

Yehudit's tattoo number is A-7058.

Lea's number is A-7057