

# Judith and her twin Magda Edelmann

The twins were born on December 4, 1924 in Kosice, Czechoslovakia. They were two of five lively children in the Edelmann family: four girls and a boy. Their father, Josef, was a farmer but also owned some type of shop; their mother, Thereza, took care of the children. Judith remembered a large house filled with music and dancing, a nice Jewish community, and many gardens. Her family and other Jewish families were well integrated into life in Kosice.



After the Germans invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia in March 1939, life began to change for the Jews in Kosice. Security forces took away the radios so Jews could not know what was happening. Judith and her sisters stopped going to school. The security forces required Jews to wear a yellow star and warned them not to go out anymore after a certain hour. Judith recalled her father suffering from a gunshot wound and having no antibiotics. Despite this upheaval, Josef didn't believe that the Nazis would send the Jews away, since Germans were the most educated and cultured people and would never resort to this.

*The Edelmann family, early 1940s (courtesy of USC Shoah Foundation)*

When Jewish families were being rounded up and sent to the ghetto outside of Kosice in March 1944, 15-year-old Lesley Edelmann ran away to hide with cousins in the countryside. The rest of the Edelmann family was forced into the ghetto, an old brick factory located in a large open area and surrounded by a fence. Judith recalled soldiers taking all of their belongings, even her watch, saying, "You won't need it." The families were too scared to ask questions. Judith felt that most non-Jewish people in Kosice went along with the Germans because the Germans promised them new homes and items from the Jewish houses.

In May 1944, prisoners were deported from the brick factory ghetto to Auschwitz. The guards ordered them into cattle cars as fast as they could to confuse everyone. Children were crying on the train. There was no food, no understanding of where the train was taking them.

Judith recalled the train arriving at Auschwitz in the daytime. On the platform, Thereza was helping with the children and somehow became separated. Judith and Magda never saw her again. A Polish boy noticed that Judith and Magda were twins, and they were taken to a different place. (Judith's testimony becomes unclear here.)

Judith didn't get a number tattooed on her arm. "They ran out ... didn't expect so many customers." But her head was shaved, her eyeglasses were taken from her, and a large red line was painted on the back of her outfit.

Twins were taken to a different place for experiments. A female SS officer heard the loud screaming of the prisoners and ordered them to be quiet. The guard wrapped a belt around a mother's neck and pulled, then shot her. Everyone in the room became very quiet. Judith was given a drink to stop her menstrual cycle. (This is the only information Judith provides about the experiments conducted on her at Auschwitz).

From Auschwitz, Judith and her three sisters were sent to Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp in Latvia to work (June 1944). Their job was to select clothes and hidden items from people who had been imprisoned there. As the Soviet army advanced westward and entered Latvia in August 1944, the Germans began to evacuate the inmates of Kaiserwald to Stutthof concentration camp in Germany. Those who were not considered able to survive the trip from Latvia to Germany were executed, as were all prisoners who had ever been convicted of any offense, no matter how minor. In October Judith and her sisters were put on a ship loaded with armaments bound for Stutthof. Judith was very sick with a high temperature and couldn't move. But when a soldier kicked her and threatened to kill her, she found the strength to walk across the wooden plank to disembark from the boat.

From Stutthof the sisters were transferred to Magdeburg, a satellite camp of Buchenwald, in November 1944 to work at an ammunition factory. Judith recalled a soldier who liked to scare Magda and her because they were twins by firing his gun to the ceiling so people outside the building would think they were dead. Magdeburg was bombed frequently, and Judith remembered many fires. She and Magda contracted typhus. A woman at the camp warned them that sick people were being shot, and somehow she saved their lives.

As American troops closed in on the camp in April 1945, German guards forced prisoners on a march, with only wooden shoes to protect their feet. German boys threw hand grenades and killed many prisoners during the march. How tragic for these prisoners to have died at this time, remarked Judith, after having fought to survive for so long. Judith's testimony is not clear here, but the sisters may have marched to the Elbe River, where the Germans released them, only to recapture them and take them to a town named Ladeburg, even as Russian and American troops were close by.

Judith and her sisters were liberated by American troops. They met five Czech boys who were planning to return to their hometown. The boys promised the sisters that if they could find bicycles, they could accompany the boys back to Czechoslovakia. And so that's what they did. The mother was so excited to see the boys. She cooked something delicious for all of them and offered them baths. Later, the boys took the girls to the train station so they could make their way back to Kosice. Upon their return, the sisters were overjoyed to find their brother, Lesley. However, the townspeople who had been friends with the Edelmanns prior to the war now expressed disappointment that the girls had returned to their town.

Judith had met her husband, Frank Nemenyi, before the war, in 1940. They had promised each other to marry at the beginning of 1944, "even if you came back without hand or leg, just come back." They were married in 1945, even though they had very little money or food. Judith and Frank lived in Hungary for a while, near her husband's hometown, and in Czechoslovakia as well, but they didn't feel comfortable and could not settle down. So in 1949 they decided to emigrate to Israel. In 1967(?), they emigrated to Australia, where they raised their family.