

Judith and Ruth Rosenbaum

Judith and Ruth Rosenbaum were born on May 25, 1934 in the small town of Brasov, Transylvania, Romania. Their father was a clerk, and their mother, Rosie, stayed at home to care for their twin girls. The girls were the center of their world.



Judith, Rosie, and Ruth Rosenbaum, 1935 (courtesy of the USC Shoah Foundation)

In May 1944, all the Jews of Brasov were moved to the Cluj ghetto; from there, they boarded trains that took them to Auschwitz. Judith remembered that no one in the ghetto realized they were being deported to an extermination camp. Some believed that the local Jewish council had secretly allowed Nazi officers to send fake postcards to families in the ghetto, falsely telling them that former ghetto prisoners had been sent to labor camps to work—not to extermination camps—and that their lives were not in danger. So no one in the Cluj ghetto knew the fate that awaited them.

Judith and Ruthie had just celebrated their tenth birthday when they and their family were deported to Auschwitz. Their father was immediately separated from them on the selection platform upon arrival; Rosie and the twins were ordered to stand in a line with other women and children. When Josef Mengele noticed that Judith and Ruthie were identical twins, he sent them—with Rosie—to another line, with other twins.

One night in the fall of 1944, the camp officer forced the twins to stand outside for roll call for hours in the cold and snow because a prisoner was missing. As a result, Ruthie's feet were severely frostbitten, and she had to have surgery to remove some of her toes. She could not walk after that. Back in Brasov, Ruthie had loved to dance, and after the surgery she frequently asked Rosie whether she would ever dance again.

In the middle of January 1945, as Soviet troops approached the camp, SS officers began destroying evidence by setting fire to storage buildings and blowing up crematoria. Rosie decided it was time for them to leave the camp. Ruthie was too sick to walk, so Rosie found a wheelbarrow, lined it with blankets and pillows, and sat her daughter in it. Judith took her mother's hand, and the three of them set out to leave Birkenau. But they had to turn back.

After liberation, Rosie and her twin daughters stayed at a Red Cross clinic near Auschwitz for a time. Ruthie died there on March 30, 1945, primarily of tuberculosis. Judith and her mother eventually made their way back to Cluj, Romania, and found an uncle who had survived. He was the only family member to return home, and

one of the few Jews from Cluj to return. Judith enrolled in school but had a very difficult time concentrating on her studies because she missed Ruthie so much. Rosie also took Ruthie's death very badly; although she was a young woman, she never remarried.

Judith didn't feel comfortable living in Romania after the war, and she wanted to join the growing number of Jews emigrating to Palestine. However, her mother was not keen on leaving her home country. After much prodding, Judith convinced Rosie to move, and when they received their visas, they traveled by train to Constanza, a port on the Black Sea, and then boarded a ship to Israel.

Rosie regretted leaving Romania and disliked Israel from the moment they landed. She and Judith began their new lives in a refugee camp, in tents rather than houses, and life was very hard. Some of the refugees from Asia and North Africa walked around the camp in striped pajamas, which reminded Rosie of the striped uniforms that prisoners wore at Auschwitz.

After three months, Rosie and Judith moved into a small apartment in Netanya, and Rosie earned a living by knitting dresses for babies and young girls. Judith attended school and helped her mother knit dresses after classes. She made few friends because Rosie was so protective of her. One day, however, Judith accepted an invitation to a party hosted by another refugee from Eastern Europe. There she met her future husband, Thomas Yagoda, a survivor from Yugoslavia who had lost both parents at Bergen-Belsen. Rosie didn't approve of the marriage, but Judith went ahead with it, anyway.



Judith and Thomas, 1955 (courtesy of the USC Shoah Foundation)

After graduating from university, Thomas launched an electronic company and became very successful. He purchased an apartment for Rosie, and he and Judith moved to a new home in another town. Judith decided she did not want to dwell in the past; instead, she and her husband set their sights on the future and raised two children. (adapted from *Children of the Flame* by Lagnado and Dekel)