

Andra and Tatiana Bucci



Tatiana and Andra with their cousin, Sergio (date unknown; *The Washington Post*)



The Bucci sisters at Auschwitz, 2014 (noimagazine.com)

Tatiana and Andra Bucci are among the youngest child survivors of Auschwitz who have memories of their experience. Just six and four years old when the Nazis arrested them and their mother, aunt, grandmother, and cousin and forced them from their home in northern Italy, the girls were dressed in matching gray coats and passed as twins on the Auschwitz Judenrampe, the “Jewish platform,” on April 4, 1944. Four-year-old Andra’s first memory of Auschwitz was the long jump down from the cattle car.

Twice the “twins” chose to obey instructions that likely saved their lives. After getting their tattoos, their mother, Mira, made them promise to remember their names. She instructed the girls to wish each other good night, every night, by name. The twins believe this helped them reunite with their parents after the war.

The second instance came one day when the girls received a warning from the *blokova*, a female prisoner who oversaw the children's barracks. The *blokova*, in an effort to save them, warned that a man would come to the children's barracks and announce that whoever wanted to see his or her mother should come forward. The *blokova* insisted that the girls must not move. When that man came to the barracks, Andra and Tatiana stood very still. Tragically, the girls had relayed the *blokova*'s warning to their cousin, Sergio, but as an only child, he could not resist the chance to see his mother. He went away with a group of 20 children, and the girls never saw him again.

After liberation, the sisters were sent to a loving, welcoming center for orphaned children, called Lingfield, in southern England. It was, Tatiana said, "the land of toys . . . to us, it seemed like a fairy tale." The girls began the long process of adjusting to normal life. Meanwhile, Mira—unbeknownst to her daughters—had not died at Auschwitz. She had been transferred to another camp, survived, returned to Italy, and reunited with the girls' father, who had been a prisoner of war in Africa. In December 1946, Andra and Tatiana returned home, the only children from Lingfield to be reunited with their families.

Since 1995, Tatiana and Andra have returned to Auschwitz-Birkenau 23 times, usually accompanied by student groups. They have spoken to schoolchildren and audiences around Italy, including crowds numbering in the thousands. Having fully accepted the burden of memory-keepers, they patiently and unforgettably testify to the human suffering, evil, and goodness they encountered.

Tatiana's tattoo number: 76484

Andra's number: 76483