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The Twin Children of the Holocaust

Foreword by David G. Marwell

It is one of the many ironies of the story of Josef Mengele and his escape from justice that the first coordinated and effective international search for him should have been launched only after he had been dead for six years. I tell this story in the second half of my recent book, *Mengele: Unmasking the "Angel of Death,"* in which I trace the origins of that investigation which, although it did not locate a living Mengele, led to the discovery of his body and accounted for his whereabouts from the time he left Auschwitz in January 1945 until his death by natural causes on a beach in Brazil in 1979. A second striking irony is that it took the effective efforts of his victims—rather than those of the institutions of justice—to provide the moral and political pressure that impelled the investigation. Those who were exploited precisely because of their powerlessness were able to orchestrate the instruments of power and move governments to action.

The agents of this campaign for justice were the surviving twins of Mengele's experiments, led by Eva Mozes Kor, a real estate agent from Indiana. Aware of the power of publicity and the strategic use of spectacle, Eva played a major role in organizing two events at the beginning of 1985. First was the return to Auschwitz of a group of twins on the 40th anniversary of its liberation, and, shortly thereafter, a mock trial of Josef Mengele in Israel.

Nearly outnumbered by camera crews from around the world, Eva and her fellow twins, including her twin sister Miriam, made the painful return journey to Auschwitz—the place that had changed their lives forever. Eva described to the press how she still suffered under the weight of having “never said goodbye” to her mother. Marc Berkowitz said he was “searching for the child” he was before “this happened.” If the trip to Auschwitz represented an emotional tsunami for the twins who made the journey, the mock trial at Yad Vashem provided a searing indictment of the man who embodied the evil that took their families and their childhoods and left an unbounded expanse of physical and emotional pain.

The mock trial was held in conjunction with “The World Convention of Twins and Others Who Underwent Experiments by Mengele.” To add pedigree and credibility to the proceeding, key figures in the history of war crimes investigations and prosecution were chosen to serve on the six-member board of inquiry, among them Gideon Hausner, the former Israeli Attorney General and lead prosecutor of Adolph Eichmann; Gen. Telford Taylor, the former American Chief Counsel for War Crimes at Nuremberg; and Simon Wiesenthal, the famed Nazi hunter. The thirty witnesses at the trial included Simone Veil, the Auschwitz survivor and former French minister and President of the European Parliament, and one of the dwarfs who had been subjected to Mengele’s experiments, but they were mostly twins. Forty years after the liberation of Auschwitz, dramatic testimony, much of it heard for the first time, detailed the crimes that were perpetrated there. The remarkable event, held at Israel’s national Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem over three days in early February 1985, would, it turned out, be the first and only public forum—despite lacking legal authority and the empty dock—available for Mengele’s victims to testify about their experience with the man who became known as the Angel of Death.

The story of the twins and their ordeal at the hands of Mengele, which had been movingly described the previous year in a cover story in *Parade Magazine* by the late, crusading reporter Lucette Lagnado, provided a face—or, perhaps better expressed, twin faces—to the crimes of the Nazis and the failure of their victors and victims to have attained justice. This story was crystalized in the twins’ traumatic return to Auschwitz and their agonizing testimony at Yad Vashem, and it catalyzed a powerful mixture of politics, pressure, and potent memory that moved those in power to act. It is no accident that on the final day of the mock trial in Jerusalem, U.S. Attorney General William French Smith announced in Washington the launch of the Justice Department’s investigation into the “whereabouts of Josef Mengele.” Germany, which had carefully followed the planning for the trial, soon joined the U.S. in the investigation as did the State of Israel.

Now, nearly forty years later, thanks to Nancy Segal, we can catch a glimpse for ourselves of these extraordinary gatherings and their assembly of witnesses and memories. Readers should not expect to see carefully composed photographs or artistically rendered images; these are, instead, mostly simple snapshots: the quotidian record of an extraordinary event. It is as if Nancy Segal, who was both witness and chronicler of the twins’ journey in 1985, forgot to

retrieve the rolls of film from the drugstore where she dropped them off decades ago, only to pick them up now and share them with us along with her memories of that historic trip. They are displayed here, providing an eloquent photographic memory that connects us across time to a truly remarkable slice of history.

Preface

The Twin Children of the Holocaust: Stolen Childhood and the Will to Survive will have universal meaning for those who care deeply about the injustices and cruelties done to innocent children. Between the Spring 1943 and January 1945, several hundred twins were subjected to unthinkable medical experiments at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. Dr. Josef Mengele was the physician behind the experimentation and other atrocities that involved not just the twins, but also people with various genetic anomalies.

I was privileged to attend the twins' 40th anniversary reunion held at the camp, located in the southern Polish town of Oświęcim, about 45 miles west of Krakow. A record compiled by a prison doctor and bacteriologist forced to work for Mengele showed that 732 pairs of twins were studied;¹ however, estimates have ranged as high as 1,500.² It is thought that approximately 200 twins survived, but this estimate has also varied, so it is likely that the exact number will never be known. Having attended the reunion event in Poland I can affirm that only nine twins were present, given the difficulties of obtaining visas and the hardships of winter travel. The nine twins included the members of one complete pair, six individual twins from different pairs, and one non-twin "assigned" as a twin upon arrival; see photograph 6.3. The reunion was followed by a three-day public hearing on Dr. Josef Mengele's war crimes, held at Yad Vashem ("A Memorial and a Name"), the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, Israel. Many more twins attended this hearing, most likely because a substantial number of them live in Israel.

As I listened to the twins' memories of horror, pain, and fear, I marveled at the clever tricks these young children used and the tall tales they told to unsuspecting officers to obtain extra food, visit a twin sister, or escape from the infirmary. Their resolve and reliance were extraordinary. Whenever possible, they have rebuilt their lives by getting married, raising children, and pur-

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- 1 Andy Walker, "The Twins of Auschwitz." *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30933718>, January 28, 2015.
 - 2 Jennifer Rosenberg, "A History of Mengele's Gruesome Experiments on Twins." ThoughtCo, <https://www.thoughtco.com/mengeles-children-twins-of-auschwitz-1779486>, January 1, 2021; Nancy L. Segal (1985). "Holocaust twins: Their special bond." *Psychology Today*, 19 (8), 52-58.

suing productive careers. Virtually all of them believe in the importance of educating the public about what had happened to them at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and have done so through lectures, exhibitions, and films.

I wanted to do my part by publishing the photographs I took thirty-eight years ago, only a fraction of which have been seen by my students, family members, and friends. Many of the pictures I took have languished in binders stored in my university office as I pursued other projects. However, I have become increasingly aware that the twins are a unique minority of the youngest Holocaust survivors who are alive only because being a twin made them valuable to the Nazi doctors; but their number is dwindling. As a psychology professor dedicated to public education—and as a Jewish twin—it is time for me to offer these photographs to those who wish to see them, and to those who need to see them.

I have taken all the photographs in this book, with just a few exceptions that I have noted. The order of presentation is generally, but not strictly, chronological because some pictures were best displayed when grouped together. I believe these pictures speak for themselves, but brief annotation is provided for viewers to fully appreciate their context and meaning.

1. Minneapolis to Auschwitz and Jerusalem: How Did it Happen?

Beginning in the Fall 1982 and for the next nine years, I was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Minnesota, where I worked on the *Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart*. Gathering data from newly reunited identical and fraternal twin pairs was a fascinating task, but my excitement was no match for the pure joy and uncontrolled glee that the reunited twins displayed or described when meeting for the first time. I understood their excitement—as a fraternal twin I was raised alongside my twin sister, Anne, who looks and behaves very differently than I do. We had our differences as children and still do, but we also relish our close companionship, unconditional acceptance, and shared understandings. The situation was far different in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s: the evolving ties of Jewish twins (mostly children) were tragically severed as they became unwitting subjects in Dr. Josef Mengele’s horrifying medical experiments after being torn from their families.

I know that as a Jewish twin, had I been born in another time and place, I too, along with Anne, would have been singled out by Nazi officers for study.

I attended both the Auschwitz-Birkenau gathering and the Yad Vashem hearing. This is how it came about. In September 1984, Minnesota twin study director, Professor Thomas J. Bouchard, Jr., chose me to be part of Pat Mitchell’s *NBC* televised talk show, *Woman to Woman*, the first such program to be produced and hosted by a woman.^{3,4} This meant flying to Los Angeles for the taping, followed by a trip to Disneyland with a California friend, both of which

3 The program on twins produced by *Woman to Woman* was broadcast on September 12, 1984. A sample segment from that show can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McUgTQWYviY>. *Woman to Woman* was nationally syndicated in 1983-1984 and later became a segment on *NBC’s Today Show*. Pat Mitchell is currently involved in numerous projects focusing on women’s issues.

4 Pat E. Mitchell, “Trained by a Life of Change.” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/jobs/patricia-mitchell-trained-by-a-life-of-change.html?>, March 9, 2013.

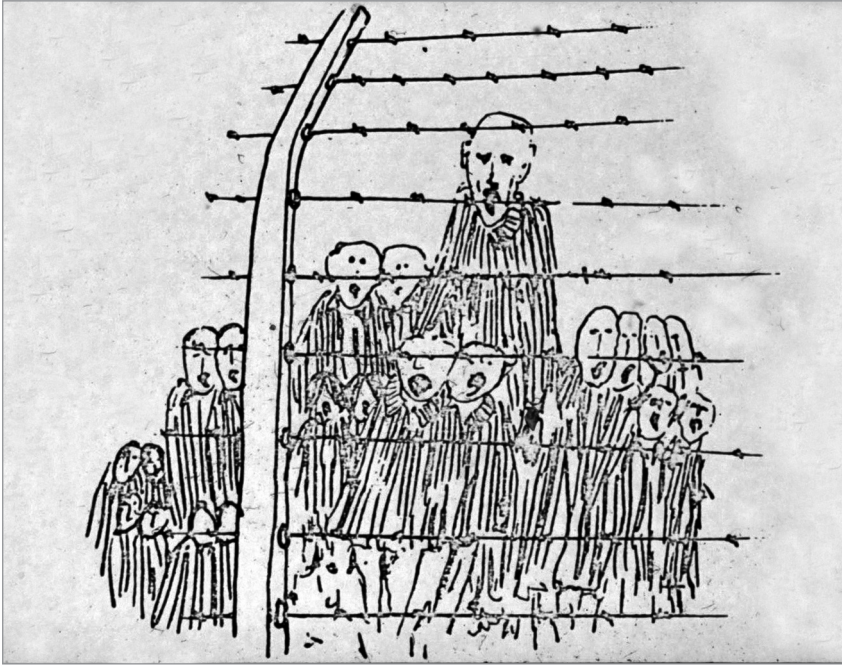
were enormously appealing. In those days, I had a habit of listening to late night radio and that is how I learned about C.A.N.D.L.E.S. (Children of Auschwitz's Deadly Laboratory Experiments Survivors). C.A.N.D.L.E.S. is the organization of twin Holocaust survivors that would be gathering in Poland, and later in Jerusalem to reclaim the fragments of their young lives, honor deceased relatives and try to bring the former Nazi doctor to justice. At the time, Mengele was believed to be hiding in Paraguay, but that ultimately proved false. I also learned that some twins were attending these events hoping to reunite with their twin brother or twin sister, the primary focus of my work in Minnesota.

Once I heard the news, I *knew* I would be going. I called Professor Bouchard the next day, outlined my plan to go to Poland and he said we would discuss it. But he must have sensed my determination to attend because when I entered his office, he offered me \$300 and said, "raise the rest." I headed to the Genetics Institute on campus where then director Jack Sheppard, matched that amount. I was grateful, but I needed additional funding to travel to Poland *and* to purchase a Nikon camera and tape recorder, essential equipment for the activities ahead. My next step was to call the Minneapolis Jewish Federation—and after a single telephone call I was promised \$500.

Over the next few weeks, I realized that I must also attend the Yad Vashem hearing in Jerusalem to fully understand and appreciate the twins' life histories. I also realized that this journey required even more financial assistance. I discussed my revised plan with Bouchard who arranged a meeting between the two of us and the late Dr. Norman Garmezy from the University of Minnesota's Child Development Institute. Garmezy was famous for his work with "invulnerable children"⁵—youngsters who thrive despite traumatic and stressful surroundings—but also known for his savvy in navigating collegial connections and opportunities. I will never forget that afternoon. Garmezy raised the idea of contacting psychologist Greg Kimble, a member of the *Psychology Today* Committee. "He owes us a favor!" Garmezy insisted. One of them called Kimble, and I was promised \$2,000, contingent upon providing an article for the magazine.⁶ I was on my way . . .

5 N. Garmezy (1986). "Vulnerable and invulnerable children: Theory, research, and intervention." *Master Lectures on Developmental Psychology*, 137 *Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association).

6 Nancy L. Segal (1985). "Holocaust twins: Their special bond." *Psychology Today*, 19 (8), 52-58.



1.1. Drawing of twins at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The artist's identity is unknown. I begin my public and classroom lectures with this slide as it sets the tone for the pictures that follow. The sketch may depict older twin Zvi Spiegel, surrounded by the young twin boys; see section 8 and photographs 8.11–8.14.



1.2. This sign was circulated by identical twin Eva Kor at a Washington, D.C. gathering of Holocaust survivors. Eva met fraternal twin Marc Berkowitz at that event, and C.A.N.D.L.E.S. was born.

1.3. C.A.N.D.L.E.S. Memorial Candle. These candles would be placed in six locations at Auschwitz, to recognize the six million Jews who perished in the camps across Europe; four million people died at Auschwitz.



1.4.
C.A.N.D.L.E.S. banner: "Eternity: Auschwitz Twins." This banner was displayed at all significant activities conducted by C.A.N.D.L.E.S.

2. Pre-Event Activities: Meeting Twins

In December 1984, several weeks before leaving for Poland, I was invited to a gathering at the home of René (Guttmann) Slotkin, located on New York City's upper west side. René had survived Auschwitz-Birkenau along with his twin sister, Irene Hizme (née Renate Guttmann). The twins were just six years old when they arrived at the camp in December 1943 and were placed in separate barracks; they didn't meet again until they were twelve and a half years old. A Long Island, NY couple had adopted Irene—and when she told her new parents she had a twin brother, they found him in Czechoslovakia and brought him to the United States to be with his sister. The extraordinary twist of events leading to their reunion is told in their 2005 film, *Rene and I: From Auschwitz to America*;⁷ also see additional annotation for photograph 6.6.

Other people present at this gathering were Peter Somogyi, a fraternal twin who had spent time at Auschwitz-Birkenau and his wife Anna, as well as the twins' spouses, June Slotkin and Samuel (Sam) Hizme. Interestingly, June has an identical twin sister, Jean, and Sam had a fraternal twin sister, Shirley, now deceased. A reporter from a local Jewish newspaper was also present.

Intriguing events occurred as we sat around the Slotkins' large dining room table. Two moments are memorable. Peter, who was eleven years old when he entered Auschwitz-Birkenau with his twin brother Tom (Tomas), picked up a pencil and sketched a map of the camp on a sheet of white paper. His wife, Anna, was stunned because in all their years of marriage Peter had rarely spoken to her or to his children about this experience. I discreetly picked up that little map, placed it in my notebook and kept it for many years. The other event that has remained with me is Irene's sudden statement that "Mengele wore green boots!" She announced this with great certainty after denying that she had many memories from the camp. Psychologists studying

7 G. M. Angelone, Director (2005). *Rene and I: From Auschwitz to America* (New York: Twin Pix Production, LLC).

traumatized individuals believe that their memories can return when their experiences are validated and receive emotional support.⁸

One of my missions during the visit to Auschwitz would be to determine the actual identity number (IDNO) that had been tattooed into René's arm when he arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. His number (169061) is a string of 0s, 1s, 6s, and 9s, so can be read differently depending on which way he holds his arm. Having this personal information was important to him. Interestingly, the opposite-sex twin pairs did not appear to have contiguous IDNOS



2.1. René Slotkin (Guttmann) (left (L) and Irene Hizme (Guttmann) (1985) at age forty-seven years. The twins were featured in the 2005 film, *René and I: From Auschwitz to America*. Irene passed away in May 2019, at age 81; René passed away in July 2022, at age 84, as this book was going into production. René preferred using the accent mark in his name, but interestingly it does not appear in the film's title.

8 David Hosier, "Childhood Trauma and Memory—Why Some Remember, Others Forget." *Childhoodtraumarecovery.com*, <https://childhoodtraumarecovery.com/all-articles/childhood-trauma-and-memory-some-remember-others-forget/>, accessed 2022.

as did the same-sex twins—Irene’s number was 70917.⁹ René and Irene would not be visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau, but I would meet them again in Israel for the public hearing at Yad Vashem. René explained that he and Irene did not feel terribly affected by having been in the camp. Curious, I asked him why he had held this particular gathering at his home, and why he would be traveling to Israel. He answered, “Because I thought there might be something in it for me.”



2.2. Fraternal twins, Tom Simon (Tomas) Somogyi (L) and Peter (Péter) Somogyi, originally from Pécs, Hungary. Tom and his wife Lisa now live in Ontario, Canada; Peter and his wife Anna now live in Wilmington, Delaware. This photograph was taken in Jerusalem, 1985. A photograph of Peter and Tom Somogyi, taken in March 1945 after their return to Pécs following the January 1945 liberation of Auschwitz, hangs in the rabbi’s office of the original synagogue in Pécs; also see photograph 10.13.

9 C.A.N.D.L.E.S., “Mengele Twins Found by CANDLES.” C.A.N.D.L.E.S. Holocaust Museum and Education Center, <https://candleholocaustmuseum.org/educational-resources/twins-found-by-candles.html>, 2022.

3. Traveling to Poland

January 24. Travel to Poland with the twins and their companions began at TWA's terminal at John F. Kennedy airport. The first part of the journey took us from New York City to Paris (Orly Airport) where we boarded a train for the city; we would fly to Warsaw later that night. This brief excursion was an opportunity to meet the members of our unique travel group that included twin and non-twin survivors, their children, members of the public, and members of the press.¹⁰ I was amazed to discover Auschwitz survivor Mike Vogel, from Indiana, whose daughter Caryn had worked with me at the Illinois State Psychiatric Institute during my graduate student years. In fact, I had met Mike at Caryn's wedding. I also met *Los Angeles Times* reporters Bob Dallos and Ron Soble, who were going to Poland to cover the twins' reunion, as well as the experiences of Polish citizens who had moved to the United States but returned home.

January 25. Later that evening, we boarded an Air Lot flight in Paris bound for Warsaw. The aisles (rather than the rows as in most other aircraft) were designated as "smoking" and "non-smoking" sections, exposing non-smokers to the smell and fumes they hoped to avoid. The restrooms were the largest I have ever seen on an airplane. I still have my copy of Air Lot's inflight magazine, *Kaleidoscope*, dated 2/21/84.

After landing in Warsaw, our group boarded a bus for the *Hotel Grand-Orbis—Warszawa* for the night. My guest card, which I discovered while writing this book, showed that my room assignment was 329. The hotel was modern and comfortable, but uninteresting and nondescript. I was grateful that my suitcase had arrived intact, protected by the bright yellow tag that had been fastened to its handle before we left New York; the tag was tucked inside my copy of *Kaleidoscope*.

There was little time for exploring Warsaw, but I recall the half-empty shelves of food shops and clothing stores. Knowing that I craved fruit, Andy Berkowitz (son of twin survivor Marc Berkowitz) presented me with some

10 Jon Shean, one of several correspondents working for CBS news, interviewed several of the twins.

apples he had found, albeit slightly spoiled. And I managed to buy a beautiful gray fur hat that I still love.

January 26. The next day we boarded another bus that would bring us to Krakow, approximately 225 miles to the south. We arrived at the *Holiday Inn Krakow*, where we would spend the next five nights. Joining us were several new twin survivors, family members and television news correspondents.¹¹ Buses transported us each day from Krakow to Auschwitz, about 45 miles away. Our first visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau would be the following day, January 27, 1985—exactly forty years to the day that the camp was liberated by Soviet forces.

3.1. Former United States Representative Elizabeth Holtzman with fraternal twin Marc Berkowitz. She came to wish us well as we were preparing to fly from New York City (John F. Kennedy Airport) to Paris before transferring to Warsaw. The date is January 24, 1985. See *Additional Annotation*.



3.1. Elizabeth Holtzman, a Democrat, represented New York's 16th congressional district for four consecutive terms (1973-1981). She also has a fraternal twin brother named Robert.* Marc Berkowitz, co-founder of C.A.N.D.L.E.S., had arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau at age twelve. "After the war there was no childhood for the children of Auschwitz," he said.

* Eli Lederhendler, "Elizabeth Holtzman." Jewish Women's Archive, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/holtzman-elizabeth>, June 23, 2021.

11 Sadly, Bob Dallos passed away in August 1991; Ron Soble passed away in June 2021. We were in touch for a while after the twins' reunion, especially after Mengele's body was discovered in Embu, Brazil, in August 1985. I have fond memories of them both.



3.2. Preparing to leave JFK Airport for Paris, en route to Warsaw. Several twin survivors brought their children with them. Andy Berkowitz, son of Marc Berkowitz (R), is in the foreground.



3.3. Ron Soble, one of two *Los Angeles Times* reporters who came to cover the trip. He is seated on the train that took us from the airport in Paris to the city.

4. Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau: Reunion and Re-enactment

Our group spent four days (January 27–January 30) visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau. The bus ride from Krakow to Auschwitz-Birkenau took about 90 minutes, and every freezing cold day brought chilling reminders of what the twins had endured. Only eight twins and their family members and friends were able to attend (one of the twins stayed at the hotel due to an illness), but we were joined by over forty more at the Jerusalem hearing. There were, however, seventeen camera crews from the United States and Europe. Two members of the Israeli Parliament, Shevach Weiss and Dov Shilansky (a Dachau survivor), were also present.¹²

As we approached our destination it was possible to see the tracks over which trains transporting Jews and other prisoners traveled. At the station ramp Nazi officers called out for twins, who were taken to a special location, giving Dr. Mengele easy access to them for his cruel medical experiments. The twins were safer for a while, but their safety was fleeting.

Our first day was devoted mostly to hearing the twins recall their happy childhoods in Europe and the stark contrast with the frightening events awaiting them at Auschwitz-Birkenau. They reminded us that they were relatively young survivors whose history had been generally neglected by Holocaust scholars. Visiting the camp was also a rare opportunity for the twins to share their life histories with their children and, in a sense, visit the graves of their family members who had perished.

January 27, 1985, was an extraordinary day—the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the camp. The Nazi officers, anticipating the arrival of the Soviet army, tried to destroy evidence of their horrendous activities and move the prisoners to other locations. The exodus from Auschwitz came to be known

12 Michael T. Kaufman, “Auschwitz Echoes to Prayer as Mengele’s Victims Return.” *New York Times*, Section A, p. 1, 4, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1985/01/28/038741.html?pageNumber=4>.

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