

## Book Review

# Review of *The Twin Children of the Holocaust: Stolen Childhood and the Will to Survive*, by Nancy L. Segal

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In this book, renowned twin researcher and author, Nancy Segal, offers a unique and photographic perspective of her journey with twins who survived the brutal medical experiments conducted at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The journey encompassed two significant destinations: a reunion of nine twin survivors on the 40th anniversary of Auschwitz’s liberation and a public hearing in absentia for Dr Josef Mengele, held at Yad Vashem (‘Hand and a Name’), in Jerusalem, Israel. Mengele, infamously known as the ‘Angel of Death’, conducted the horrifying experiments on twins and on other selected inmates.

Nancy begins the book by recounting how she, as a postdoctoral fellow working on the Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart, learned about these planned events. Being a psychologist specializing in twin studies and a Jewish twin herself, she felt a strong connection to the experiences of these twins and was motivated to swiftly raise funds for the journey. Accompanied by the twins and a large press contingent, Nancy embarked on the trip.

Through her conversations with the twins, Nancy discovered stories of how the twins were separated from their families upon arrival at Auschwitz, where their loved ones were later exterminated in gas chambers. Twins held a special status in Mengele’s eyes as subjects for his research, driven by a mixture of science, ideology, and pseudoscience. Mengele’s experiments lacked ethical considerations and scientific merit, disregarding distinctions between different types of twins, but most importantly, the humanity of his young victims. The book includes photographs of the twins, a list of the anthropometric data collected by Mengele, and briefly touches on the more horrific experiments that have been extensively documented elsewhere.

Driven by a sense of justice for the twins against their tormentor, Eva Mozes Kor, a survivor of Auschwitz, along with her identical twin sister Miriam Cziagher, founded the movement that led to the events Nancy describes. They established the group ‘Children of Auschwitz’s Deadly Laboratory Experiments

Survivors’ (CANDLES) and organized the journey to Auschwitz and Jerusalem. The reunion at Auschwitz allowed the survivors to come together in prayer and pay tribute to those who perished. The twins wore yellow ‘Jude’ (Jew) stars as they had during their time in the camp and in the ghettos. The hearing in Jerusalem held significant importance as it marked the first such event since liberation, as Mengele’s whereabouts had remained unknown after he fled Germany. Although the twins insisted on Mengele being tried for his war crimes, it was later discovered that he had died in Brazil six years earlier, denying the twins their justice. The hearing allowed a greater number of twin survivors, alongside figures like Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal, to listen to the shocking testimonies of 30 witnesses who recounted the atrocities committed at Auschwitz. It was a significant moment, as most of their voices had never been heard before.

The book predominantly features candid photographs of the surviving twins participating in these two events and more. The rawness of the images effectively captures the twins’ mixed emotions as they meet fellow inmates and recall the horrors of the camp. Alongside photographs of the twins before and after their liberation, Nancy’s annotations provide vital and authentic historical context. Particularly powerful are the photographs depicting the surviving twins coming together in prayer for those who suffered and died at Auschwitz. One standout photo showcases ‘fraternal twin’ Ephraim Reichenberg reciting a prayer through a voice synthesizer (German made), due to vocal cord damage caused by one of Mengele’s experiments. Of note, Reichenberg was not actually a twin but assigned as one by the Nazis, together with his similar looking slightly older brother. The cover is also arresting, showing the identical twins Miriam and Eva at age 49, standing before their 9-year-old-images depicted in a still from the film made by their Soviet liberators in 1945. Aptly, Nancy discusses the ‘power of pictures’ to document such significant events, as the photos breathe life into the narrative.

Nancy possesses a special ability to connect with these twins, and through this journey, she listened to their stories and formed lasting relationships. One pair, Annetta Able and Stephanie ‘Stepha’ Heller, also stood out — Nancy introduced me to them when she visited Melbourne for a conference in 2014. What shines through in the book, however, are the twins’ personal stories of resilience and resourcefulness at the time of their captivity to the time of their reunion. Annetta and Stepha described themselves as ‘two bodies, one soul’ — a phrase that applies to all the pairs. I highly recommend *The Twin Children of the Holocaust* for all twin researchers and for everyone who wants to know about this tragic time in human history.

## Reference

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