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Mar 8, 2026
History 133D

Youngest Survivors of the Holocaust

About Ryan Lopez

I am a third year history major at the University of California Santa Barbara. I am from Los Angeles California and have always had a fascination with history. My interest in this story grew from a simple google search to discovering a new story not yet fully told to the world. I found this story only two days after it had been uploaded online. After learning a little about background events associated with this story, I became intrigued to learn how this story plays a role in a society that has present-day genocides.

This past spring was the 80th Anniversary of the end of World War II, and after so much time has passed there are only few Holocaust stories yet to tell. "60 Minutes," one of the world's most successful television programs, has found one. There is one story which only recently was covered that the world needed to hear. This Holocaust story is about three young women who became pregnant in 1944 and managed to avoid Nazi detection. Those babies today are now eighty years old and are believed to be the youngest Holocaust survivors. Marky Olsky, Eva Clarke, and Hana Berger Morgan were all born days apart inside the Nazi concentration camps and only until recently have discovered one another. Each with their own unique story on how their mothers were able to survive the camps and life after being liberated by the Americans. In a thirty minute interview by 60 minutes we are able to unravel their families history and first hand source of life during the Holocaust and how they were able to survive.

Mark Olsky was born on April 20th, 1945, and his mother's name was Rachel. She had eight siblings and was from a Textile manufacturing town in Poland. While Mark was growing up his mother told him he was born on a train, but he didn't know the details of his birth until growing up much later. His mother never told him much about his father when Mark was young, but she would mention him to her grandson, Charlie who is Mark's son. Rachel would tell her grandson that he looked just like his grandfather but that's all because he was a very elegant man. When the Nazis had invaded Poland, she was still in her nightgown, with a toothbrush in her hand, when she was tossed into the streets. They came in early morning in Warsaw where the young married couple had just started a life in their first apartment. Eva Clarke was born on April 29th, 1945 and her mother's name was Anka. Eva's parents met one night in a crowded nightclub. Anka was from Czechoslovakia and lived east of Prague. She was an elite athlete who was a champion backstroke swimmer for the entire country of Czechoslovakia. Hana Berger-Moran was born on April 12th, 1945 and her mother's name was Prisca. Hana and her mother grew up in Czechoslovakia. She grew up in a small town and her parents were owners of a cafe in Czechoslovakia. Hana's father was a journalist before they were taken by the Nazis. Hana's grandparents were taken in 1942 and her aunt was taken in 1943. It is apparent during this time that they knew exactly where they were going when the Germans took them. They were loaded into freight cars and sent to camps. As stated in the interview "Mark's parents spent most of the war in Warsaw in Łódź ghettos, Eva's parents were sent to a camp in Czechoslovakia called Terezín where she was conceived in violation of camp rules". In these camps if you were found pregnant in the camps it was punishable by death.

In early 1944 the Nazis had intensified their killings and they were starting to send Jews to Auschwitz. Hana's parents were sent together on the freight train as they sat next to each other on the way to Auschwitz knowing it was a "death camp" as Hana describes. During the peak of their killings the Auschwitz camp killed more than 6,000 Jews a day. Most women, children, and elderly were sent straight to the chambers to be killed. One week after arrival Hana's parents saw each other one last time through the barbed wire fence and her father told her mother, "Be careful only think good thoughts". The lucky prisoners who weren't gassed were sent to slave labor camps in Germany. These three young women were all selected to go to these camps more specifically Fryberg Saxony after being stripped and shaved. They were sent to another insufferable place where they were given dirty water, thin soup, sometimes coffee, and a piece of bread every other day. While at this camp they worked long 12 hour days and were stuffed in overcrowded barracks. Historian Wendy Holden gives us a more detailed account in her book *Born Survivors* about the three miracle babies, "Several thousand inmates remained in the new camps, manufacturing vital goods for the German war effort, but an estimated 58,000 were sent on to forced labour camps further east as part of what the Nazis called the Osttransport". While the three women were at these camps together at the same time they never met once as far as we know. It was extremely important that they kept their pregnancies secret because they could be sent back to Auschwitz if caught.

To make matters worse Hana's mother while in line naked was seen by Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele who is known for his inhumane experiments on camp inmates. Mengele looked at Hana's mother who was pregnant at the time and in German said, "good looking lady are you pregnant?". Her mother denied any accusations to keep her and Hana alive. Why would a Nazi, especially one of high ranking such as Mengele, allow Hana's mother to live? Did she really deceive him or was he keeping her alive for his insane experiments. When doing further research about Mengele's experiments it is evident there were no real scientific advancements made for what he was doing. In another 60 minute video by the same interviewer Lesley Stahl in 1992 she goes out and tries to find his test subjects. During this interview with multiple people she finds out Mengele had over 300 twins he was experimenting on. Most of these people were children and he would take blood, inject dye into their eyes which caused blindness, and in some experiments children died. There are witnesses who say Mengele would try to sew twins together eventually killing them. To this day many of Mengele's work can't be found as it was probably destroyed before the Allies arrived. His test subjects in 1992 were still dealing with health problems from his experiments when they were injected with unknown substances. Mengele was heavily influenced by Alfred Rosenberg who was one of the key people behind Nazi Ideology and race superiority. In these experiments Mengele was attempting to play god and try to find a way to be able to refine the master race. These experiments were most likely influenced by his thoughts on race superiority. Witnesses who saw his test subjects say he would give candy to the kids in the camp before he experimented on them or sent them to the gas chambers. Mengele was in charge of choosing who would be gassed, sent to a slave labor camp, and helped test the gas they would use to kill Jewish people. It is highly likely that he left Hana's mother alive to possibly experiment on her or Hana. All three women met Mengele and all three were sent to Germany. Many children were killed immediately arriving at Auschwitz because they were too weak to work, but twins were spared for his experiments. Eva Mozes Kor was in Auschwitz and recalls her first night there in an interview by the Guardian, "Most of the people who arrived at Auschwitz were killed within hours. The smoke from the chimneys told us what had happened to

them". The only way these women might have been able to hide their pregnancy was because laborers were given the clothes of those who were gassed. These women wore baggy dresses to try and hide their pregnancies.

Spring of 1945 the Allies were coming for Germany and Auschwitz was to be liberated. In an effort to get rid of any evidence of how badly these people were being treated they sent everyone on a train to Austria to Mauthausen-Gusen, one of the last camps remaining. The labor camps had run out of material, there was no work and there was no food so they stopped feeding the prisoners. Before leaving for Mauthausen, Hana's mother went into labor right on the factory floor. The guards watched and made bets on if it was going to be a girl or boy. Only 36 hours after giving birth Anka and Hana were placed on a train with the rest of the laborers headed to Mauthausen. After giving birth and hiding her pregnancy for the six months Anka was in a camp there journey just beginning as they had a 16 day train journey ahead with no food. Eva's mother while sitting on the train that had an opened door was seen by a farmer passing by. The look of horror could only be described as the farmer seen Eva's mother who was starved and pregnant. He came back with a glass of milk and Eva's mother believed this is what kept the both of them alive. Mark's mother was so thin she was under seventy pounds and was put on a sick cart. People were dead or dying in this part of the train and some were tossed out of the train if they were dead. This is where Mark's mother went into labor in this cart as someone shouted it's April 20th! It's Hitler's birthday today! Mark was born on April 20, 1945 ironically Hitler's birthday. Nine days later on April 29th, 1945 Eva's mother went into labor as the train arrived at Mauthausen. She was forced to give birth on the train and then walk up the hill into the camp unaided. Just one day before the train had arrived the Germans had run out of gas. They were not going to be killed but it was another week before help arrived. There were a number of other babies on the train besides Hana, Mark, and Eva but none are believed to have survived.

Hana was infected with sores and wounds when the 11th Armored division of General Patton's third army was checking the area and accidentally found Mauthausen. Hana's mother recalls a green army truck coming up the hill playing music, "Here comes the barrels, here comes the barrels". coming to their aid. Even while being liberated in an excerpt from Born Survivors we can see the true reality of that day, "One survivor said that at first their minds couldn't grasp what that could mean, even though they'd been waiting so long to be saved. They were, she said, 'too weak and too empty to feel happiness'". A twenty two year old medic from Illinois named Leroy Pete Peterson found Hana's mother and she gave him baby Hana. They used new treatments of penicillin on baby Hana which saved her life. After the war the families returned to their home countries in search of any relatives. All three of the young women's husbands had died. Each woman from here on with the rest of the world tried to go back to a normal life. Mark's and Eva's mothers later remarried, but none of the women had any other children. The three miracle babies grew up as only children and learned about their past in bits. Later in life Hana reconnected and found the young medic who had saved her life. She found out the exact division who had liberated them from Mauthausen. Peterson became a father-like figure to Hana in his last remaining five years from when they met in May 2005. To this day Hana and Brain are like brother and sister. The 11th armored division's website was found by Eva as well and reached out to them with her story. The division connected these two women who were believed to be the youngest Holocaust survivors. Charlie, Mark's grandson in an effort

to find a good birthday present for his 65 year old father, researched anything he could on Mauthausen. Here is where he came across the 11th armored division's website and came across Eva's story. Mark was no longer alone as the three were reunited at Mauthausen for the 65th celebration of the end of World War II. While this interview was conducted by the legendary Lesley Stahl there is still something missing from this piece. I am eager to ask questions more about Mengele after we know so little about what happened during his experiments. When you have someone first hand who saw and spoke to Mengele, why not ask them more? Ask them questions on if their parents ever mentioned seeing any of his test subjects before and after. They knew his name and knew clearly of him so my only question is why not ask more in that area. I like how Lesley Stahl includes Historian Wendy Holden who wrote *Born Survivors* about these three babies, because she is able to give little details that were extremely important to get the story across. Most historians argue about what happened in a historical event, but having key details like the name of the camps or the name of other prisoners helps paint a better picture.

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