

*Counting Days*

Saanvi Lanke, grade 8

Shady Grove Middle School, Gaithersburg, MD

Teacher: Brook Lundy

Survivor: Eva Mozes Kor

Before she allowed herself to move, she listened. Breath. A small shift of weight on the wooden bunk. Proof.

Around her, the barracks fractured into sound, coughing that tore through chests, boots striking the floor, and shouted German commands. Bodies rose. Only after the breathing beside her steadied did the day begin. In that place, she learned the rule: if one twin died, the other would be killed.

She was ten years old when she arrived at Auschwitz after three and a half days with no food or water. An officer's finger snapped toward her and the girl beside her. "Zwillinge." Twins. Hands seized their shoulders and pulled them toward the experiments as their mother was forced in the opposite direction. That was the last time she saw her.

Her name was Eva Mozes Kor.

Stamped with the number A-7063, Eva was treated as what Josef Mengele called a "treasured experiment subject." From May to December 1944, needles found her arm again and again; sometimes she could count five going in at once. Fever curled through her like fire. Mengele glanced at a chart and laughed, "Two weeks."

Eva did not cry or beg. In the barracks of the living dead, she kept a litany she later named in her testimony. "I must survive. I must survive."

So, she made survival small. Not years. Not liberation. Today. When she could no longer walk, she crawled. When she could not reach water, she dragged herself across the floor, splinter by splinter, inch by inch, until her hands closed around the cup. Swallow by swallow. Day by day. She taught herself to read the thermometer and manipulate the results before the nurse checked it. It was for the one who shared her face and fate, her twin sister.

When Miriam fell ill, Eva became her caretaker. She lay beside her on the wooden bunk, her own body shaking with fever. One rise of the chest. One fall. Again. As long as Miriam breathed, Eva preserved what the camp designed to erase: the belief that one life could still matter enough to fight for. When speaking with her son, Alex Kor, he said, "Every day was another day to be killed, and every day was another day to live."

Hope, in Eva's testimony, is discipline. It is waking each morning and refusing to let the future's cruelty devour the next hour. It is the deliberate accumulation of an extra sip of water, a bite, a small deception that buys another morning.

Years later, she spoke when silence was easier and taught when forgetting felt safer. She gathered the stories of other Mengele twins and carried them forward.

Because of Eva, I count differently. When school pressure, expectations, and fear feel overwhelming, I reduce the future the way she did, not into years or outcomes, but into the next task, the next hour, the next breath. Hope is not something I wait for. It is something I practice.

Tomorrow is uncertain. Today is not.