

Julia Lentini

Julia Lentini was born to Ludwig and Johanna Bäcker on April 15, 1926, in Eisern, [Germany](#). Julia and her fourteen siblings spent their summer months traveling with their parents throughout Germany. Julia's father, a basket weaver and horse trader, was also a talented woodworker who built traveling family wagons. She recalled a happy childhood in a close-knit [Sinti-Roma \(Gypsy\)](#) family, which spoke Romani at home but conversed in German with friends.

Julia's life did not change much when the [Nazis](#) first came to power in Germany in 1933. She sometimes peeked through windows into [Hitler](#) youth meetings or gave the "Heil, Hitler" greeting because she didn't want to seem different. After the Bäckers relocated to Biedenkopf, Germany, Julia and her sisters worked in a knitting factory and on local farms.

On March 8, 1943, Julia and her family were taken from their home and put on a train, holding hands during the three-day journey to Auschwitz-Birkenau. They had known nothing of the existence of such camps. Julia remembered it took hours to be processed into the camp and that other than her mother's plea that the family be kept together, her family remained mostly silent. Julia and three of her sisters were assigned to kitchen detail. There Julia contracted typhoid fever and was transferred to a sick block (revier). Within six months, Julia's mother and father and a



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sister, Mathilde, had all succumbed to disease and starvation. Around the same time, her brother, William, was taken away and never heard from again.

In early 1944, Julia was transferred without her siblings from [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#) to the Schlieben [concentration camp](#) where she was again placed on kitchen detail. She was given 150 lashes in front of all the other prisoners after she was caught stealing food. While she was recuperating, a munitions factory near the camp was blown up, causing panic in the camp. The camp guards took all the provisions and abandoned the camp, leaving the prisoners behind the electrified fence. A few days later, Russian soldiers arrived to [liberate](#) the camp and during relocation,

Julia and three friends snuck into a nearby [American](#) camp. Aboard an American military truck, Julia returned to Biedenkopf where she found a few of her siblings at her home that had been stripped of its possessions.

While in Biedenkopf, Julia met Henry Lentini, an American soldier. Eight months later, despite language barriers, they married: Julia in a borrowed dress and Henry in uniform. In 1946, Julia and Henry arrived in America to start their new life together, settling in California. They had two daughters, Cynthia and Rosanne, three grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren at the time of Julia's interview in 1995.