OK. Speed. [INAUDIBLE].

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Gertrude Shafer on January 16, 2019 in Miami Beach, Florida. Thank you, Gertrude. Thank you so much for coming to talk to us today.

Thank you.

Our interview is a little bit unusual in that we had hoped and you had hoped that your mom, Mrs. Leah Burstyn, would be able to come and share her story with us. But it was too hard for her to do so.

Yes.

It was just-- it was too painful and too hard. And you have agreed to talk a little bit about what her story was and a little bit of your own in her stead. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to ask a few questions about your life. And then we'll go and see what we can hear about your mom's experiences.

Great.

All right. So tell me, what was the date of your birth?

May 29, 1957.

And where were you born?

Boston, Massachusetts.

Really?

Yes.

And do you have many siblings?

Well, we were five children-- an older sister, who was born after the war in Munich, Germany.

When was she born?

She was born 1947-- February 13, 1947 in Munich, Germany.

And what was her name?

Sarah.

Sarah.

Yes.

Is Sarah still--

No.

She passed away?

Yes.

And then what other siblings do you have?

Then next is my brother, Samuel Burstyn, who's named after my mom's father, who was killed in the war. And then I had a brother, Jerry, who passed away at 43.

Oh, dear. Very young.

Very special boy-- very young. Then myself, and a younger sister, Shari, who's named after my mom's brother.

What was the mom's brother's name?

The Hebrew name is [? Zurich. ?]

[? Zurich? ?]

Yes.

You gave me the date of birth of your sister. What about your brothers and your other sister?

So my brother Sammy, whose name is Shmuel Yitzhak who was named after my mom's father, his birthday is November 2, 1952.

And then your other?

My brother Jerry is August 31, 1954.

And your sister?

My sister Shari is October 8, 1964.

Wow.

Yes.

So between 1947 and 1964 is when the five children were born in your family.

That's correct.

And aside from your sister, who was born in Landsberg, Germany, was everybody else born in the States?

Yes.

All in Boston?

Yes.

What part of Boston?

Boston-- I guess Brookline.

In Brookline.

Brookline, Massachusetts, yeah.

And did you all grow up there?

Yes.

What did your father do for a living?

Interesting. My father in pre-war learned cement and concrete. And when he came to America already, he, after living in the woods for 2 and 1/2 years, came back with very bad arthritis-- crippling from the dampness and everything. So they were forced to do whatever work he could get-- painting, wallpaper hanging, things like that.

So is that what he did?

Yes.

So he was part of the building and construction industry?

Yes, to a certain extent.

Did your mom work outside the house?

Actually, she worked with my dad. Many times, she would be wheeling the babies and painting with a roller. Yeah. That's what she did.

Did they have their own small company, or did they work for others?

Yeah, just odds and ends-- little jobs.

What language did your parents speak at home with each other?

Yiddish.

They spoke Yiddish. What about with you kids?

Yiddish.

So even though you're born in Boston, you're growing up in an American environment, home life was in Yiddish?

Yes.

And did you speak English first or Yiddish?

Yiddish.

Yiddish? OK. In the neighborhood that you lived, were there many other Jewish families?

Yes.

Were they also-- I take it you were Orthodox?

Yes.

Were they also Orthodox?

Pretty much, yes.

So it wasn't unusual?

No.

Not for your neighborhood.

Right.

And your parents were immigrants to the United States?

--correct.

Where did they come from?

Poland.

What part of Poland?

Chelm.

Chelm. So would that be C-H-E-L-M?

That's correct.

All right. Both your mother and your father?

My father was a few kilometers out of Chelm in a little village. My mother was in the city proper of Chelm. It was a big town-- not huge, but it was a city. She was in the city of Chelm. My father was a few kilometers out.

Did your parents talk much about their childhoods and their early life with you kids?

Interesting. Not so much with me. With my older siblings-- my older sister who passed on pretty much knew all the story verbatim, every-- yes. My mother-- after the war, and had my sister, she said in a sigh of relief, thank God I finally have someone who I can tell what happened to me, because no one's going to believe it. So she in a way regrets it, having shared very-- some gruesome details. But my sister knew everything.

Did your sister ever mind that she was the repository of all of this?

No. She was a very good, kind-hearted person. And she was very sensitive to it and very supportive of my mom.

What kind of a personality did your older sister have?

Very bright, smart, and very fun-loving, caring-- very warm, exceptionally warm, giving.

So she passed away quite young, then?

64 years old. Yeah.

And the other kids-- did you guys know much about?

So my next brother, Sammy, he probably also heard a lot of it. I was speaking to him. He remembers the effects on my mother and father. He probably saw more of the pain and the trauma on them because-- you know, my mother took it

very hard. She was very young at the time.

And she suffered from it. My father wasn't so verbal about the abuse and the killings. But my mother made it very clear that she saw killings and abuse and murders. It bothered her. It always bothered her. As children, we felt her pain because she couldn't understand why. Why would they kill my mother? Why would they kill my father?

Would she sometimes voice those questions as if-- you know, you don't have an answer for that.

Right.

Do you remember her just saying sometimes, why did they kill them?

Interestingly enough, in the younger years, not so much. But now in the older years-- because when we were young, it was a bunch of children. And she was busy. We were in school. We were running and going. My sister and brother probably heard that a lot. I heard it only recently in the past, let's say, 20, 25 years, when I was already, let's say, in the 30s, 40s. Before that-- yeah, as an adult. To this day-- to this day, yeah.

Was there ever a time in your life when you didn't know about something called the Holocaust?

Yes.

There was?

Yes. Actually there was. In high school, I think it may have been in seventh grade, where I came home and just mentioned haphazardly, not realizing. Yeah.

And you mentioned what?

Holocaust and what was going on to the Jews in Europe and Poland. And didn't realize what the word meant, even. I don't think I'd heard the word "Holocaust." I was a little bit of a different child. I was a little bit running, playing, doing-- very on the run, on the go. And it wasn't-- the house was always busy, so to say. So I didn't tune in necessarily to that. My older sister and brother, they heard it a lot.

So tell me, when you mentioned this-- OK, here's this Holocaust and what it represents. What kind of reaction did you get at home?

I can't say I remember it exactly, what the reaction was, because it was-- it may have been subconsciously hushed-up type thing. But I don't remember who even explained it to me at that point. But I think as the years went on, and then I probed a little more-- because when the relatives would come over, like on a Saturday night or this, they would speak certain things. And I didn't realize what they were talking about when they would make reference to the war and the beatings and what happened. Yeah.

Did the relatives also-- were all of your relatives also immigrants? Or were some Americans? Had there been parts of your family that had been in the States for generations?

No, no, no, no. My mother's family was totally annihilated in the war. She came out with no one. My father survived with four brothers and his mother.

And they are the people that you're mentioning now?

That's correct. His brothers would come over.

How did they end up in Boston?

My father's older brother had-- his wife had a distant cousin who sent for them. So when my father's brother, younger than him, came to Boston and settled in-- because they didn't let you out of the DP camp if you didn't have anywhere to go. So he came to Boston. And after maybe I don't know how long, they sent papers for my father to come.

So it was basically your father's family who would come over, and they would talk about these things. And it was not something where you connected the dots in the beginning of what they were talking about. Did you realize then after you came back from school, and there was this term "Holocaust," that this meant also your parents?

No, I don't think I connected the severity of it in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. It may have been a few years later.

Did your mother cry as far as--

My siblings have seen her cry. I didn't. Yeah, I didn't. I think I heard mentioned that she has cried about it, yeah. I haven't.

Tell me a little bit about your parents' personalities. What kind of personality did your dad have? What kind of personality does your mom have?

So my dad was older than my mom-- many years. Again, you know, when you grow up in America, they're trying to work. We're going to school. And again, it was the American-- like you say, playing and going, not necessarily European. So my father was a serious, hard-working man, very on the go, very busy, industrious, always doing.

And it was only when he was in bed for 12 years, bedridden with severe arthritis in his 80s, that everything came out of him-- that he started telling his story. We heard things for the first time because he never spoke about it. My father had a very positive attitude, whereas here he saw the good in it and thanking God that he survived it and how good God was to him. I never heard anything-- that he lost his brothers, which were all killed.

He had a family of 10. Only four survived. And he lost everybody. But he never, never, never spoke about it. I know if it was too painful. But he would always comment how thankful he is to be alive and how-- you know, he was a Sabbath observer, and they gave him very hard work to do.

And he prided himself that I was able to survive the war, seven years, and not have to work on Saturday. So I would look at him and say, really? That's what you-- I mean, but who brought this war? I mean, it was horrific. He never questioned God. Never questioned why God did or why these things happen. His faith even strengthened.

That's amazing.

Very amazing. And I only got to realize this in the later years because it wasn't anything relevant to me at younger years. But later, when we start questioning, and we start thinking, then we say, hey. And we saw that my father was a man of faith, great faith.

Because so many people came out with their faith broken.

Yes, many, or most. My father-- as a matter of fact, in hiding in the woods, there was one man who took a cigarette to start smoking on the Sabbath. They were hiding. So my father went over to him, because it was sort of like my father's little place. You can't smoke here, he said. You have to understand, today is Saturday-- Shabbos.

He goes, you have the Nazis that are looking for us. You have the Polocks, the Polocks that are eager to catch us. And there's only one God in heaven that's going to help us. And you're going against Him at this moment? Put that cigarette out now, or you're out of here. He was a little feisty, my father. He was a feisty man-- very tough, very strong, and very-- that's how he saved himself. He was a big fighter.

So what was your father's first name?

Abraham.

Abraham. And his last name?

Burstyn.

Burstyn.

Yes.

Well, let's start with him. Tell me a little bit about what you know of his early life and what kind of family he was born into.

He was a great man. At the funeral, my brother was commenting what a very humble person he was, being that he was a hero. He, on his own, carried out heroic acts of all kinds. He grew up, as I said, in a little village outside of Poland.

Outside of Chelm.

Outside of Chelm, right-- outside of Chelm. And they were very meager means-- no money there. And one of actually 12 or 13 children, but many died pre-war. His father was some sort of a business man-- cattle or whatever. His father died of natural causes at a young age and left his mom with many small children. My father at that point took the helm. He had to take care of the house.

Was he the oldest boy?

I'm not sure if he was the oldest, but one or two older ones may have been married already. So he possibly was the oldest in the home, with many siblings. And he took charge. He took charge. The mother was left as a widow with all these children.

And he went to look for some sort of business, what to do. And the Jewish people were not involved in cement work. It just wasn't there. They were the book-- you know, studying, or bakers, tailors. He wanted to learn cement work. This-- we're talking 1930, '31, '32, '33.

And he went to see people working in cement. And it's funny. He was beaten up many times because they knew that he wanted to see the work. He was literally like-- in other words, he didn't know how-- who was he going to learn it from? How was he going--

So he wasn't hired as an apprentice by someone?

No, not at all. He was looking. He had a feel for it. And it was very ambitious, very industrious, to do something. And he learned once he was-- you know, when I say beaten up, they-- in other words, he was seeing how they made it. He could figure it out, once and twice. And sure enough, he started a cement factory. I have the picture somewhere. He started a cement factory. He may have been 30 years old, 35.

Do you know the date of his birth?

No one knows that, but we're thinking it's something like 1900. We took the date May 1, 1900. I'm not sure.

But that means he had you when he was 57 years old?

And my sister when he was 60 something.

Wow. And your mother's birthday, just for the record?

February 20, 1925.

So she's really quite a bit younger--

25 years.

She's younger than your father.

Much, yeah.

We could say that when the war started, he was already entering middle age.

That's correct.

Whereas she was still a girl.

17, yeah.

So he started his own cement business still in this small town outside Chelm in Poland.

Yes.

And is that how he helped support your grandmother and all those other children?

Yes.

That's pretty amazing.

Yes. And there is a picture-- I don't know how we have it-- of him standing as the foreman with the people making the cement. Even my grandma was in the picture. Yeah, they were very-- she was also a very tough lady-- tough willed, strong.

You got to know her, right?

Yes. She survived the war, which was unusual because most people-- yeah.

If he was entering middle age, she would have really been in upper middle at least.

Yes. She could have been easily 55, 60. Yeah.

What was her first name?

Esther.

Esther Burstyn. Do you know what her maiden name was?

Nuremberg.

Nuremberg?

Yeah.

How interesting.

Yeah. Maybe Nirenberg or something like that, yeah.

And when the war started, what do you know of what happened to your father and the rest of his family? What happened?

So 1939-- pretty much, they-- at first, everyone was hearing what was going on. So they were all trying to think of, is this real? Is this not real? Where we go? What do we do? The people tried to save themselves. They didn't know to run away, to stay.

Many people didn't believe it because they couldn't imagine what they were hearing. But sure enough, after a year or two of different slave laborers and certain people being herded into ghettos and this, one of his brothers-- at this point, his older brother, who had two or three children, was already taken to one of the camps to be killed-- burned. And believe it or not, my father went to put himself in to save his brother. He said, he'll go to stay there and let his brother, who has a wife with children, out.

And they wouldn't let him. They thought they were human beings. They wouldn't want-- and they went to ask a rabbi. And the rabbi said, you can't do a life for a life. That's what's meant happen for him. You can't do it. You can't take your life. They took him and this, and they wanted to do all kinds-- my father and possibly another sibling also wanted to go change places.

So one brother was killed already in the camp. And then others were taken away. Somehow-- again, it might be a little sketchy as exact details. But as the war went on-- let's say '39, '40-- at that point, my father even went to the city hall, so to say. And as he approached the building, there were guardsmen, Nazis at that point.

And he went in. He got in somehow. He claims that they were-- both of them were-- either they were-- they weren't looking for a minute. He got in, into the city hall. And he went up to the engineer of this, who knew the mayor-- I don't know-- who knew my father as an engineer in cement. And he says, what are you doing here?

He goes, are you crazy? What did you-- he had the yellow band at that point. And he said, listen, I need you to help me. He says, I have many forms from the cement. I have all kinds of things. I want to give it to the Polish. I don't want it to go into the Nazis' hands, this and that.

So then he said, and he says, give me a paper that I can work or give me some sort of paper or whatever. And the guy looked at my father. And there was a joke-- well, we always repeat it-- I guess in German or Polish. I'm not sure what they were speaking. And he said to him, Burstyn, because they knew him very well, you see. My advice to you is to throw yourself under the train tracks and don't fall into the hands of the Nazis. Don't even try to do-- just-- so we joke today. We go, my advice to you, anything happens-- because they told him. And he tried as much as he could, but it didn't help.

So this was a Polish man?

It must have been a Polish man, but I think the house was already surrounded by Nazis, I think. The Polish man was there and says, stay out of their hands. You don't want to be caught by them. They knew already. It was-- you know. And then, somehow, whatever paper he had, they put him to work. He was a skilled laborer. So it was useful to the Germans. And that's how he was known as a [GERMAN] I guess-- a cement worker. [GERMAN]

[GERMAN]

[GERMAN] Something like that. And there were four brothers and the mother. And he, my father-- they were known as the Burstyn brothers. You know? In German, I guess. They knew. And he developed this plan somehow. And he got into one of these labor camps. And he ran-- they used to make forms for the roads, for the pipes, for the pipeline. And he worked on the cement. That's how it helped him. He saved himself.

So in other words, he ended up having to work for the Germans.

Yeah, in the labor camp.

But he had the skill that was very useful for them at that time.

At that time. It could be for six months or a month. You don't know at what point. They just kept you busy. You know, the tailors, the watchmakers-- they kept them, but they killed them off, because-- this was a little skilled-- more skilled.

And more demand for it because they needed roads. They needed buildings. That's interesting. And it's amazing, too, that he was able to keep his mother alive. Because how could she work on this?

Yeah, at that age, right.

Do you know what happened to them? I mean did they all spend most of these war years in the labor-- in labor camps?

So they were-- I think-- 39, 40. They must have been in that-- it was by the bahnhof. You ever hear of bahnhof? By the train station.

Bahnhof. Bahnhof means the train station-- any train station.

Any train station. So somehow, they called it the bahnhof. It was on [? Koliova ?] Street. The bahnhof-- where the trains went-- the [GERMAN] You know, the street from the--

The street from the--

Right. So that train station, I guess, being from Chelm, that's where they heard it everywhere, because that's where my mother ultimately came into. So my father worked at that labor camp with the cement. Interestingly enough, he had a certain amount of clout. Then they always-- and the mother worked, and they did all kinds of work. I guess because he was able to negotiate, so to say, to get them all to work. They all did something.

And then they always brought new people because this was-- this labor camp was the transit spot, where they would bring people, do what they could with them, and then go for-- either to Sobibor or to go further. So they brought a bunch of people, and they-- my mom, as she was running away, you know, was [? trying ?] to my father-- she ended up coming into here-- herded in, in all kinds of ways. Somehow, she was working in that labor camp. It was very hard work.

It says here she was cutting stones and dragging stones with wheelbarrows and very hard-- talking at 14 it broke out, till 16-- 14 to 16, she was working labor camp. And when she got here, she was about 16, 17. She was working all kinds of jobs. And they used to get a raw potato if they found one or they smuggled one.

And that was their food. There was no food, of course-- zero food at the labor. A piece of bread was thrown at them or watered-down soup. So when they had a potato, they had to do everything sneakingly. These cement workers, they had a fire going on some sort of tire or something. So people would always walk by, putting their potato somehow. Have you heard such a story? Yeah?

Tell me. Tell me about it.

So they would put in the potato. And after their day of work, they would come back for the potato. But it was survival. They had to survive. Many people took those potatoes. And when you came, your potato was gone. However, my father saw my mother putting the potato. And he would save her a potato-- when it was ready, when it was baked. Slowly, slowly-- we always joke that's how the romance, if you call it, has started right there.

So she would put the potato. The next day, he had it for her. And it was another day and another day. Different work went on like that. And somehow, he managed to get her to work for him in that area because there was always-- he had

to have people working with the cement, with the rocks, with the pebbles-- whatever. It was grinding.

How she-- I'm not sure it was three days or a week. Anyways, one day, my mother was sitting outside, she said, like this, in one of the-- there were many of the-- all kinds of-- they used to come, these big SS Nazi generals. And he said, Sarah, come here. They called everyone "Sarah." That's who they called every Jewish-- come here.

And in a second-- till today, she says, why was I sitting outside? What was I thinking? You have to stay out of sight. He just grabbed her and immediately pushed her into a lineup. There were all the people ready to be herded out. They kept them moving. They kept them there for a week or two.

So she was in the line. And my father got wind of it. And he comes running out. And he sees her in the line. And he sees the gate open and the truck that they're going to herd them onto. Anyways, he runs out, and he's thinking he knew these people. He said, hey, that's my helper. I need her. She does all my work.

He goes, don't worry, Burstyn. Tomorrow, all new girls are coming. You're going to have a whole bunch tomorrow. You're going to have a whole truckload. So he goes, no, I need her. She's the working-- I trained her. She has to work. And he said, no. And he went to another guy, who, again, kicked him.

And he hurt-- like my mother says, he like rolled around. He got up again, and he went to a very old man. I have the name written down. He's called a certain name-- maybe 90 years old. And he said, please, you got to help me. I need my worker. She works for me. I need her. Please, help me.

I guess being that he had that sort of protection, the old man came with a cane, my mother says. And he says [GERMAN].

[SPEAKING GERMAN]

[GERMAN]. He banged three times. So they didn't say "please leave." They took her, and they pushed her out of the line.

And what happens when they pushed her out of the line, being surrounded with dogs? So she was 17. The dog bit her. You know, she started to tell you she has a big hole right here in her foot. The dog bit her.

Let's cut for a second.

Yeah, I doubt if it-- oh, God, I'm--

So your mother was pulled out, and then dogs came around. And she started-- when she talked to me off-camera, she said that the dogs bit her.

Yes.

So that's what you're referring to?

Yes, one dog, I think. Right here-- bit out a chunk of her foot.

Right above the knee?

That's correct.

On the inner knee? On the inner leg?

Yes, ma'am, right there. Bit it right there. And of course, they just left her there, bleeding and in pain and crying and whatever. And they just went on, business as usual. And they herded out all those people through the gate that was open.

And interestingly enough, some people made it to Auschwitz or to the crematorium. It seems from this place, they took them to the nearest ditch and shot those people-- just shot them, to the nearest ditch, right where they were working. So that all those people went. So now my father somehow caught-- again, this is so third-hand. I mean, it's just how I've heard it.

My father quickly took her, or whoever brought her back to the room. They were in with my grandmother. And he had to treat her. Again, he was shrewd and sharp, my father. He somehow would take, smuggle, get something.

[PHONE RINGING]

Please, buy us some medicines, who you would send--

OK, let's cut.

Cutting. Speak.

So your father had to use his wits to get medicines for your mother for her leg to heal and use whatever pool, whatever contacts he had. How did things develop for him? For his brothers? Did your mother then become part of your father's family in a way? Was she alone? Was there other people there?

Interestingly enough, yeah, I guess it-- somehow he did take a liking to her. And she did work with all of them. The brothers even pointed out, you have us and your mom. We can't really save someone else. There was a little jealousy or concern. You know, you got to be very careful. Now's not the time. Leave her be.

But my father realized she was an orphan and had nobody. He realized right away that she had nobody. And interestingly enough, when you want to put a positive spin on something, we say that dog bite saved her life. Because when my mom had typhus, and they wanted to immediately remove her, my father was able to say, this is from the dog bite. Don't you remember? She was bitten. She doesn't have typhus.

And he would make her work with high temperature. You know, they iced her down. But he did it somehow. And she did have typhus. He somehow treated that. But he was able to say it was from the dog bite-- an infection and different things. They accepted her. She worked. She became one of the crew, yes.

Let's break for a second and see what the phone says.

OK. Speak.

All right, so what happened then? Your mother becomes part of the crew. He takes an interest, or he kind of becomes her protector. And how do things develop in the labor camp with the cement? And when do things change?

So being that they were there, let's say, about a year and a half, they worked constantly. And again, I don't know all the details so much. But I do know that he was, like you said, protecting her. And they had a very strong regimen to work. He got her permission to stay. And they stayed for, I guess, a good year, working.

It was hard work. It was very-- they gave so much work, it was almost humanly impossible to do it. Like I said, they had to do so much work. And come Saturday, my father somehow devised a plan to do all that, to double up, so that on Saturday, he shouldn't have to do work, but to pretend to be working so that he shouldn't desecrate the Sabbath.

And that was a lot of work because it was impossible to do. But he devised plans. They would pretend to work. They would pretend to bang and hammer. They would pretend to do the things that they ordinarily wouldn't, or they did it in a way to do what would be permissible on that-- to save the Saturday.

That was his focus under such dire circumstances-- to make sure that they kept on to the Judaism that they had-- the

religion-- to whatever they could. I guess it gave them that strength, that courage. They never questioned God. But as time was going on, they were very vigilant. They were aware. They had to pay attention. They saw more and more people getting wiped out of the camp.

[PHONE RINGING]

As, again, the tailors went out. The watch men went out. They kept on to these [GERMAN] because they were useful. Then my father was catching wind. Somehow, the past weeks, they were thinking of an escape plan. How, what, when-- my father and the brothers had some sort of idea of this.

What they did, if they broke through the front fence, or-- I don't know. But one morning, my father had a dream. They were already planning this. And in the dream-- you've heard many people have had dreams from dead parents or siblings. And he says, [YIDDISH]. Run.

And who was speaking to him?

His uncle-- his Uncle Baruch Labe, that was his name-- Baruch Labe, an uncle. My uncle came to me in a dream. [YIDDISH]. In other words, get out. They were--

The camp is burning.

Right. You better run for your life. And slowly, 5:00 in the morning, him, his three brothers, and my mother and his mother and I think another sister-in-law, they somehow ran out of the camp. 5:00 in the morning-- it was dark. They were running and running, and sure enough, they were shooting at them.

And I don't know if there was a chase, but they were running fast. So as my mother says-- I mean, this is factual. They were running like their life depended on it. My mother said the boys, the four brothers, knew the roads because they were from that area, from business.

But my mother and the other girl, who became a sister-in-law, they didn't really know. They couldn't run, keep up that pace, with the grandmother. So many of them, they fell as they were running. And there were comments like, forget about it. Leave it. Let's go.

But he says-- my mother tells the story that my father crawled back on all fours to drag her through the-- it was the woods or something-- to drag her out. And somehow they escaped. The word came later that-- they said, wow, the Burstyn [GERMAN] They thought we were going to kill them? They were surprised, the Germans. They really thought we're going to kill them? Because they felt that they were loyal to them, that they were working to them, but my father knew that they were next. It was a matter of time.

Isn't that interesting?

Yeah, it was.

And I mean it's a very strange kind of reaction that the German overlords would have said, why would they think that we would have killed them?

Something to that extent. They showed a little snake.

So that is a new phase that they enter, which is hiding.

Yes.

And let's break for a second. And you can take a look and see--

We're ready?

Yeah.

Speed.

So they managed to run away. And so that starts a new phase. And what happens then? I mean, look, we're-- again, we're focusing on your father's story at this point. What does he do? Where do they go? How do they survive?

Interesting. When we asked my mom that question, she has no idea. They don't even know themselves how they survived. It seems that-- I can't say it just happens, but they-- knowing the woods-- maybe [? Poplovich ?] Woods? There must be a name to them. They went to the woods and started digging and digging. And they just dug living graves. And that were their hideouts.

At one point, my father built something. At one point, they had about 14 people already. And then my father just, out of the blue, on some sort of inclination, he decided he didn't want to stay there. And he left that group, and he went further in a different direction, which ultimately they found that other group and killed them. They found them in the war-- that hideout.

It was risky. They came sometimes with dogs, with people. And they found-- they went further, and they dug out an area in the ground. At one point, there were 14, 15, 16 people in a living grave. And they would cover it up with branches and twigs and leaves and all kinds of things.

It's very hard to recall exactly, but the fact is there was no food, no clothes, no heat. They were drenched from rain. We're thinking mattresses, blankets, beds? No, they sat in a sitting position. They couldn't even stand up to straighten out their bodies-- close to two years, two winters and a summer-- winter, summer, winter, summer. It was tough.

Well, they must have had food from somewhere.

So at night-- at night-- the four brothers, the four men, would go out. And there was a nightlife. They would get potatoes, potato peels-- like my mother says, garbage. There were some people that even had-- we call them the Righteous of the World-- who would bake bread at times. They would find somebody who would give them bread.

Whoever did risked themselves as well. This was wartime. This was 1943, '44, '45. So they had a risk. And they would go out and get potatoes. And they would get peels-- nothing substantial-- and bread. And my mother said they were so happy for the winter because they had snow to drink and to wash themselves.

You're talking sanitary conditions. You're talking a lot of details, which people ask. And my mother says, I don't know. I don't know. I really don't know even the answer. It wasn't easy. And they would go in the snow. They would clear up the tracks.

In the winter, there were many times, she says, that they were lucky that they didn't come with dogs. Many times, the Germans, when they walked through these woods, came alone. So my mother used to hear them talk-- you imagine the fear, being underground. And you hear big-- the big soldiers, coming along. And my mother heard like saying, [GERMAN].

Always further. Always further.

Yeah, that's right. [GERMAN]. So I-- Ma, what does that mean? "Nothing here. Let's go. [GERMAN].

So my mother kept hearing that. My mother does say that they had four birds on top of that grave. She always says that there were four birds she considers was angels.

But again, they were sitting in tight quarters. You can ask my mom. She doesn't remember. She can't answer. She--

you're talking Kleenex. You're talking sweaters, scarves-- nothing, a year and a half, two years. And the men went and got food. So they remembered living the starved life their whole life.

They always refer to it, that in the war, we didn't have what to eat. Now we're told not to eat. We finally have food we're not allowed to eat for health reasons. But this is a story which is very hard to comprehend. You're talking a 17-year-old, 18-year-old, 19-year-old girl living in these conditions in great trepidation, in great fear, not knowing the next minute-- they heard shootings, always. So at one point, some-- God had mercy and kept them out of harm's way.

As you were growing up, did you know your mother as a fearful person?

Fearful in what way?

Well, she was constantly afraid when she was in hiding. But was being fearful part of her personality?

Yeah, no. Interesting. I know what that means, when people that are always fearful or this. No. I see pictures of my mom when she had like a sister-- when I'm, say, two years old. And she looked beautiful, well-adjusted, dressed. You know, I can't even imagine. People always say the word, "I'm so depressed." And they were curled up in bed. I don't know how she got herself together.

Even now, she wants to make sure she looks right. I don't get it. She'll put on-- whether it's this or a pearl or. She never did manicures and beauty parlors. She wasn't that type, but she worked very hard. But she has pictures where she looks like a human being. You would think they would be savages. You'd think they would not come out normal. And my father also worked very hard in America-- tried to go on with life. Liked nice things.

How did that story end? That is, the part that was-- when they're hiding in the forest? What was the end of that?

It seems in 1945-- is that when the Russians? So don't forget, they probably had underground working. And they heard that the war is ending. And they heard that a few kilometers away, there were some Russians. And so there was-- they send out, I guess, a decoy, a lady who-- she spoke Russian, I think, and German to assess the situation.

And she saw the Russian Army coming. And she went over and asked. And she said, yes, yes. And they weren't sure because they thought, maybe you're bringing me spies. My mother said it wasn't that easy. You couldn't just walk out. You don't know if it's a trap. But the Russians liberated them.

And then they made their way westward?

And then, I guess, they went straight to Landsberg, to the DP camp.

OK. So let's pause here, because at some point, your mother's story and your father's story becomes the same.

Correct.

Let's go back to the part where your mother-- we're talking just about her story. So she is born in 1925, you say. And her first name was what?

Leah.

And what was her maiden name?

Aller. A-L-L-E-R.

All right. Did she have brothers and sisters?

Yes.

Who were her brothers and sisters?

So she had an older sister. Her name was Hannah Etel. And then her brother [? Zurich, ?] and then her. And then they had a young sister, Sima, who died before the war in an accident. She fell off a wagon. Yeah.

And what was her father's name? Do you know?

Shmuel Yitzhak. I don't know what they call it in Hebrew. Maybe [? Shmulek, ?] [? Shmeal. ?] I'm not sure.

Aller?

Aller.

And her mother's name?

Was [? Hiasura, ?] which is like Sarah. So they called-- she told me they called her [? Sorca. ?]

[? Sorca. ?]

Yeah.

So she's born in 1925.

Yes.

The war starts in 1939.

Right.

Your mother's 14 years old. What happens?

So she finished school till about seventh grade. That was it. And then slowly, they immediately was taken out, still living at home somewhat. But they took everyone-- slave labor. There was a river there, the [? Ucherka ?] River or something.

In Chelm?

In Chelm, where they had to go out. And they were digging a river, for no other reason, my mother says, than to keep them busy or to torture them, where they had to dig in the river, and dig to widen the river. It's probably documented, that river. And she would go and come home, go and come home.

And slowly, slowly, they would start putting in ghettos. They slowly, slowly took families out of their home, confiscated. They had to leave with nothing whatever. Didn't get much. My mother even says, when they packed away the Passover dishes, little did she know she would never see anything again. They just like-- left as-is. Nothing. And they slowly put them in ghettos and ghettos.

Were both her mother and father alive at that time?

Yes.

So both parents were alive when the war begins?

Yes.

And were they a well-to-do family?

No, no.

They were poor.

Very-- they never knew rich people, so they didn't think of themselves as poor. She thought of herself as very average, but very poor-- one room, dirt floor. Her mother, she says, always gave people food to eat-- whoever needed food. Very hard-working-- my mother would walk, say, a mile or something-- kilometers-- to a well to get water.

There was no water-- no water. There was no electric. Talking 1939-- no electric, no water. She had to pump the water, bring it home, go back. The poverty was there. But it was wholesome, this home. She remembers the warmth and the love of the home-- her mother and her father, kind, loving. Her sister, her brother-- very sensitive, all of them together. Seems that way. Very caring for one another.

That's what she transmitted to you?

Yes, that's correct.

So little by little, they're pressured. And they're herded into a ghetto. What happens then?

So as they were working in this ghetto, it was also the same routine-- going and coming and going and coming. But then-- again, I don't know the year. I would imagine '41 because two years was slave labor-- 1941 was Judenrat.

OK, there was the Jewish Council.

Right. And then they started-- or Judenrein. Judenrein, where they were--

Judenrein means extermination.

Right.

Basically, make it clean of Jews.

Make it clean of Jews. And that's where their trouble began. And everything went-- there was no way of knowing anything. And everyone started running. Whatever it was, you would see people going in the street, grabbing people, shooting people. You were just exposed to this-- just like my mother mentioned, where there would be three Jewish people with their beards in prayer shawls.

And just-- would shoot them. They would say, where is your God? Where is your God? And they would shoot them, right then. And they did awful, very painful things. She saw all these things. She saw a nursing mother being shot with the baby being shot. They saw all these gruesome acts, where they went into a synagogue mercilessly. They just-- they didn't know.

And at this age, really, it was 14, 15, 16-- her and her sister ran. And they ran into a basement, both of them. And everything happens fast. So one went to the left, and one went to the right. And before she knew it, they were in hiding. She says her sister, who was older than her, four years older, gave her her ring and said, keep this. You're going to need it.

She goes, why did my sister give me the ring? Why did she think-- she said maybe I'll be able to save myself to buy a piece of bread. That's what it boiled down to. And they were hiding in that basement. And all of a sudden, one of-- these are girls, not knowing what to do. Where do you go? Everyone's scattered.

A Polock came, a Polish man-- their neighbor. And the way my mother says, he's like, oh, my God. What are you doing here? He looked at them. What are you? Very close friends-- they played hide and go seek and all these games.

And he was already under German orders. He was in uniform with guns. He had to work for the Germans. And he turned them in. He had no choice. He had to turn them in. He had no choice. They played all the years together. And then he knew them, and he didn't-- he was shocked.

And at that point, when they took my-- again, took her sister, took her. She doesn't know what happened, where she ended up, how. But she knows that she never saw a sister again. And she somehow ended up on some sort of truck or running straight to that bahnhof, to that labor camp, where she ended up, not knowing-- but she did know that her mother father-- she did see them being taken away and shot. She saw that. And the sister-- she doesn't know what happened, but she never saw her again.

Now the brother, interestingly enough, the brother was away learning in a school in [? Otwock. ?]

Oh, yeah, [? Otwock. ?] I've heard of it.

My mother says it's like from New York to Boston-- I don't know, that distance. And he learned there. And the rabbi of that arranged for that whole yeshiva, that whole school, to be transported to Shanghai. I don't know if you know, there was a whole yeshiva that was saved. Hundreds of students went to China.

And he said, no, I can't go. I must go back and see my mother-- his mother. She won't survive it. They were very close. They had this bond. And he went with his religious articles with him. And he walked, my mother said, by foot, or hitched. Or I don't know. I don't know how she explained.

But he came with his clothes tattered and things. And he was beaten along the way, and they-- all kinds of-- and without shoes, till he made it home. And he did see the mother. But then my mother says, if he would have just gone to China, he would have been alive. What was he thinking?

And my mother-- he wanted to see his mother. He felt very much she wanted-- my mother says that her mother used to say, either we all survive, or we all die. But if anyone survives, it's going to be terrible for anybody. So that's how sensitive her feelings of that pain-- why should somebody-- why should one survive and not have everyone else?

They were close. They always had each other. There was a bond. You have them in your families and that. And then he came, and my mother saw him at that same bahnhof. Because Chelm, from that area, that was a route to Sobibor. That was in that route, the bahnhof. I guess that was from my father's village. It was the collecting area.

And as a matter of fact, she did see him there once. And she tells me always, she saw him looking at her longingly. And she couldn't do anything because my mother says-- like she told you, dogs and guns. Everything-- you couldn't go anywhere, couldn't go to the bathroom, couldn't do anything. There was no bathroom. They had guns. You couldn't step out of line.

Anything that looked-- of a wince or a look, a wink, they shot you. There was no-- they were shot. People were shot for anything-- asking for-- stretching out your hand, or getting another piece of bread, or anything. They shot you on the spot. That was their fear tactic, to instill a fear that you're going to obey.

They had the guns. They had the ammunition to a bunch of weaklings-- women, small children, men. Usually, the people that were studying or this, they weren't raised to be fighters and killers and murderers. So my mother's question is, how are they heroes? Because they came with a gun over their head?

So she would see my brother, and he wanted something. Till today, she doesn't know what-- she couldn't do anything. What could she do? And then she got word that they took him out from the bahnhof, they told you, to a nearby gravesite. And he was shot. They didn't even take them to the crematoriums. They shot them outside. They couldn't get rid of the people.

And how does she know that? Because my father's brothers, one of their jobs, other than the cement or whatnot, was they buried the people that they shot. They took the Jewish people to throw dirt over the people they shot in the mass grave.

So your uncles, whom you knew, were doing this kind of work. And it could be that in Boston, after the war, when they would come over to your house, and they would talk about things?

I don't know. I really don't. I wasn't there. I didn't hear. But I don't think they spoke about it because my cousins don't know much, either. I don't think it was spoken.

So how did you find out all that you found out?

When my father was in bed for 12 years with that bad arth-- here in this building, from, let's say-- he was about, let's say, from 75 till 90 years old. Or 77.

So that would have been-- if he was born around 1900, that would have been from the late 1970s until 1990.

Right. He died in 19-- wait a second. He died 1997.

So he died at age 97?

It was 1997 that he died, right? So we have 1900. Was he 97? 95? Maybe he was 95 years old-- 1902. I don't know the birthday. He did die in 1997. That I know.

And so in those 12 years before his death, that's when he talked?

well that's where I heard most of the stories because I used to live out of town. But my siblings would make-- but they never spoke about it. My mother never spoke. Again, my father spoke about the positive things. You asked what was my mother like? Fearful? What was my father's personality?

My father was optimistic and positive, like the man, Mr. Friedman. They didn't want to talk in the past anymore. They didn't want to know about it. It was done. They would talk about the positive-- that they saved themselves, that God helped them, that they had messengers that saved them, that they were spared, and that they were able to survive. Whereas my mother was, as a woman, very tearful and upset.

But I never heard her speak of the gory details also until of late. However, she may have spoken to my sister. She probably did. She would speak about her mother and her sister. She gave her the ring, and she had a beautiful picture. They were running, and she left the blouse with the only picture she had. She sewed in a picture of her family.

But that's all. I don't know if they spoke at those Saturday night-- I don't know. Because my grandmother, also-- she lived-- I even slept in her room so that she shouldn't sleep alone. Very strong. They didn't-- unless I didn't know about it. The pain was definitely there.

You could feel it?

Yeah, yeah.

How would you feel it? How would it express itself?

Because one of my father's brothers was very verbal and very sensitive. He was forced to remember. He didn't let any event go by without remembering. You know zachor? They have the pin-- remember, never forget. Remember. So he constantly drilled you. If you made a wedding or a bar mitzvah, whatever event you had, you had to remember what we went through. And he was-- but again, I didn't hear it so much in the conversations.

So it was remember that this happened, but not remember in the detail?

No. They probably spared the children. They probably wouldn't want to tell the children. And they probably couldn't verbalize it. It's very hard to verb-- you see, they have to bury it, like this man we met. He had to bury it. He's not going to now unbury it because it's closed.

Your mother never gave an interview to anybody?

No.

And we tried now, today, and she says, I can't.

She'll speak freeform. You know? That's why I have that little tape recorder, because I'll never know at what moment she'll tell me a detail, if she remembers. Her uncle, who was a very tall, big man, who had a brewery, a wine brewery, big-- she said like 6 foot 4, big man.

And she remembers how the Nazis came in and hit him on the head and killed him. She remembers all these things. So they must've had some sort of way to survive. Like my brother says, Ma is a survivor. Don't you get it? Because she's not well. And she knows how to fend for herself, to make sure she has.

So he says, you know, mom's a survivor. What that means, I don't know. But they have to know how to survive-- to get the help they need when they need it. But she's been through everything. Everything. She's been-- what more could there be of, like she said, dogs and being shot and seeing everyone killed?

These are words I say very lightly. But for a person to bring that up and to say it and to just-- what did I just say? Think of her mother and her father. She loved her mother and her father. Now, at this age-- up to two, three years ago, she was much more verbal. Why did they do that? she would say to the caretakers.

These caretakers never heard of the Holocaust. They're Jamaican. They took research to hear about it because why would they kill my mother and father? Why would you take a million children and burn them? These are questions they all have. And they don't want to bring it up anymore because there's no answers. And the pain is there. The pain is there. And the suffering is there.

You still see it. You still feel it.

Yeah, sure.

In them.

Yeah, sure, a lot of pain, a lot of pain, and all that. You can have a whole conversation, everything going well. Look how lucky I am. And I did this. God is so good. And as religious people, we pray.

And this-- look at this. God helped us, and we did this. And then she goes, but where was God in the war?

Couldn't bomb-- like this man just said, couldn't bomb those railroad tracks? Couldn't you bomb this? Couldn't you blow up the crematorium? It didn't take much for America to wake up and do it. Many people didn't believe it, or they didn't want to believe it. That's what this man we met was upset about because he said it's political, at the cost of 6 million lives.

How has this become part of your life, and how has it shaped you?

In every which way because we now realize that we have our own group. It's called Survivors of Survivors. And we are now an entity in and of itself.

Like an organization that is formed, that has bylaws, that is incorporated and everything?

Well, not to such an extent, but it definitely could be. We all suffer. We all suffer because being a survivor has their things to deal with. Now, how does a child of a survivor-- how do we deal when we see parents in a moment of despair, sadness, crying?

How do we deal with someone asking you, they killed my mother and father. They shot my brother. They killed my sister. We didn't have any food.

And we pick up all these things-- not to be wasteful, not to throw food away. My mother has never-- and I say never-- thrown out food. And I mean never.

In America, that's-- whatever we left over landed on her plate. And there was no such thing as throwing away food. And she would say, what, are you kidding? What I would do for a potato.

Until today, a potato was her main food. If you would give her a baked potato, it is in heaven. These are things that you grow up, again, just through osmosis. And you ask now, how does it affect us? It affects us because now, looking back, you see certain behaviors. And you see people now that are complaining or upset about all kinds of things. They lost their job. They this, they that.

And I'm saying to myself, hello, that's what you're depressed about? I couldn't-- when I went to college at 18 or 19, there was a very-- among the Americans, they were very depressed. They're not there. They couldn't find their shoes. They didn't get their-- and they really get into a clamor about being upset.

Depressed-- used to have people killed and murdered and burned. Why are you using the word "depressed" over this? Even if you-- whatever it is, you know? I have friends that-- very close with-- whatever it is, whatever the loss may be, it's not someone murdering their whole family.

Survivors of survivors-- I only have one or two friends, and we can talk for hours because we have an unspoken language between us that we now understand how I'm different than my American friends. American friends were raised with bowling, roller skates, pizza parties. They went on vacations with the parents. The parents were very involved with their education and going.

We weren't like that. Our parents held on to us for dear life. We were very much sheltered, like don't let anything happen. Call me. Where are you?

My father would always make sure-- I don't want to date myself, but we had dimes to call home. Just call. I don't care when you come, but call me. We had a five-minute leeway till I made that call. And if you said you were coming 9:00, by 9:04, I want to hear from you.

It was that fear. Don't take rides with strangers. Don't go out at night. Be careful who you're talking to. But it wasn't in a bad way because we didn't know what it meant. He cares for us. My American friends didn't have that. They could come whenever they wanted to.

I said, what? There was no worry of the parents. Are you all right? Are you OK? And my friends-- my friends, survivors' survivors, you look at the children. Are you OK? Are you all right? The American system is different. It's a very different.

Did you ever want to run away from it?

No. Thank God, I-- thank God I didn't. Others may have. See, when you-- you have to know, I wasn't exposed to the brutal part. By the time-- I came along fourth. And I was, let's say--

The fourth child.

The fourth child. So possibly my mother already vented it all. I think my two older siblings got the brunt of it, meaning that they were still raw-- that my parents were still raw. They were still immigrants. They were green. They didn't speak English. They didn't know anything.

And it was very-- but yet my mother was always there for us, cooking, cleaning, always. I never saw my mother crying or upset. Always worked very hard. I think I may have heard little things-- that that was the therapy, the working hard till you wear yourself out. Because she worked very hard. She always managed to be a very hard worker.

And what about your own children? How has this been transmitted to them?

It probably has, because as I'm getting older, and I deal with the brutalities, and as a mother, I'm thinking, wow. My mother and father-- think about it. You say, did you ever want to run away from it? Did you ever have a problem with your mother and your father? And you think to yourself, how are you going to be angry at parents who never had a childhood?

How can my mother relate to a teenager if she was never a teenager? So a teenager is a very rebellious stage in life. You hate your mother. You hate your father. My parents were older than us. We became caretakers all our life. Like you said, you calculated my father's age. So he started not being well-- doctors appointments.

My sisters, they lived here-- always going to the doctors with them. Always taking care of them. How do you not pity them? You can't have that relationship, like to-- I hate my father, I hate my mother. It didn't happen because you were so-- they were so fragile in your hands.

You looked at them like, wow, how did you survive that? Look what we go through raise children financially and to work. How do you get married and have children after such a war? How can you have any frame of mind to do anything with the daily struggles? To wash them, to clean them? You're broken in heart, broken in spirit, devastated. You lost everyone.

My mother-- nobody. And when I say nobody, I mean nobody-- not an uncle, not an aunt, not a sister, not a-- nobody. All of a sudden, this older man had mercy on her. And my father was very protective of her. That's the other joke-- very. He never let anyone look at her. She was very pretty.

We'll see her picture in a minute.

She was very pretty. And not-- it wasn't as much as the pretty. I guess young. So my father used to make a joke. Like when you have-- how does the joke go? When you have-- in Europe was horses. He worked with horses. When you have good horses, you don't sleep at night because you think people are going to steal your horses. And when you have a pretty wife, you know, every day, where's my wife?

It was a joke, but the thing was, she was very pretty. And he really cherished her, took care of her. And like she told you, he died in her hands. She took care of him in bed, 12 years straight-- 13, 14 years.

Well, one thing that comes through very clearly in your telling is the great deal of love that there is between the generations. It really-- in the way that you describe what happened to them and how you grew up. But I also want to defend that rebellious teenager, whoever that rebellious teenager is. They have a right to be rebellious because that's a normal stage of life.

That's exactly it.

And they have a right to be able to go through it and to be able to break away from parents and see all the bad things about parents and all of that. That's normal.

Right.

Did you feel guilt? Or do you think that for second generation, for the generations that are removed, there is a feeling of guilt, where you're caught? That you can't allow yourself to feel that because they're so fragile and they went through so much?

I would imagine many people have-- I didn't have that experience. I'm not sure why. But even in my siblings, I can't say for sure because my siblings have done unbelievable things for my parents. But of course, there are people who rebelled about the hovering over-- didn't want that. It was very-- the parents would-- you couldn't do anything.

You really had to get away. Sometimes, you had to leave home because it was too much. They were afraid of losing their children in terms of something should happen to them. So there were people that did have to go away or did had to leave. I, myself, personally didn't want to go away because I didn't want to miss them. I felt, thank God I have them. I didn't want anything to happen to them. And why should they-- why should I create them to miss another person?

So you didn't feel that kind of claustrophobia?

No, I didn't. I don't think I did. I'm forgetting a little bit. Now, as I mentioned, I live in New York, and my mother's all alone.

Here in Miami?

Yes. And then everyone tells me, you belong in New York. I have, thank God, my family there. But you saw what she looks like. How do I leave her alone? She can't handle a caretaker. She can't-- she feels, I have no family.

So I tell people, my mom-- you have to understand, my mom is abandoned again. She lost two children. She has nobody. How do you think she feels? I feel that she feels abandoned again because she'll many times mention, I lost two children already. I lost two children.

I can't imagine that. To have to bury your own children is something you don't want anyone to have to experience.

They were just children. They were both, like she says, my two favorite children. I know how that makes me feel. But they were her two favorite children. My brother was a hero. He was a pillar in the community of Miami Beach. He did for everyone. He was a person who you could ask anyone in Miami Beach. There was no one like him. He extended himself to all kinds of people-- the ill, the poor, anybody.

And my sister was with my mom all the years, all the years. My older brother always made decisions in life to choose certain schools to go to be nearby to his parents. And even now, wherever he is on vacations. And my siblings have a sixth sense.

When my father was not well, my brother, the older one, was in Colorado on vacation. In the middle of the night, he sensed something. And he doesn't know what he sensed. In the morning, he found out that my dad had a heart attack. He called like 7:00 in the morning. Is everything OK? He goes, why do you call?

He goes, I don't know. It was very-- I woke up at 1:00 in the morning, and I checked all the kids. I checked-- and then he goes, yeah, Dad had a heart attack. It was in our time. But he's been like that across the board. He goes, don't you know yet that I'm very in tune to everyone? He tells it to me over and over again.

All of my siblings, all of them are, because this-- somehow, I don't know if my parents made us this way, or. Don't forget, being religious keeps you very-- you have to honor your mother and father. And you have to-- what does it mean you have to? We are raised. That's our privilege, to honor our parents. And you wouldn't want to harm someone that's been harmed so much in life. And you can't blame her for certain things that she may not know.

Of course not.

Right. Many people came here, and they got secularized. They traveled. They had wonderful lives. Our parents didn't. My mother was homebound her whole life, always working, taking care of my father. Didn't have an easy life. But she made the house very pleasant. She was very happy to be home, always with a smile. You know? So I don't think we felt--

Well, that's priceless.

It is priceless. That's why I'm here. That's why I'm here. I only say it, not to pride myself or not, but in good conscience, it's very hard for me to go back to New York because she's very-- when she sees-- the caretakers are wonderful, very good.

And my other siblings live here, but everyone's busy-- not necessarily busy, but my mother needs full-time care. So I stay here for a month, two months at a time, because when I leave, she-- again, I'm alone. And I know in my mind, that's what I interpret. Great, now my mother's abandoned again. How--

Did she say that to you?

She feels that-- look, what am I living so long for? And I have no family. She often repeats and repeats, [YIDDISH]. You know what that is. [YIDDISH], sister.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH], yeah.

[SPEAKING YIDDISH]. The whole family.

Sister, brother mother, father.

Everyone killed, and this. I'm left alone. She still relates to that loss in a way more than I lost my husband because she realizes he was 95 years old. She realizes that's a normal-- that's an age you can die. I have to let go. It's my husband. But she can't get over the loss. See, when her husband died, she lost her husband.

But she did everything she could. She bathed him and washed him and did everything in bed for 12 years. She prayed with him, did everything with him. Never took caretakers. And I say it because it was with love, joy, and honor.

And that's how we were raised. That's how she took care of my father. People walked in and marveled and said, I'll never get this type of care. People marveled because they never saw it. They never saw it. They really never saw it.

Gertie, you have given an amazing testimony. And it's a testament to your parents.

I hope so.

You have.

Thank you.

I really appreciate it. And because it was so hard for your mom at this age to be able to tell her story, you've done it for her.

Thank you. I hope so.

Yeah. After we finish our interview, we're going to show a few items that you have. So we're going to film them. And I'll ask you to describe them. But unless there's something else you want to say, I think that we've covered the bases. Is there anything else you'd want to add to what we've talked about?

I think I-- yeah, let's see. My father was a big hero. The reason I am so-- I feel that we have this strength is because of the strength that he had. Because our mission really is in whatever way to preserve the tradition that he gave us. And we owe that testament to him, because we always say where there's questions of religion and doubts that we don't have the answers. And we all question because there has to be questions.

But we always say, why don't we just continue where dad left off? Because if he managed to get through those years, why are we questioning? He already dealt with it. If he could-- let's just grandfather it in and just continue going because he already lost everybody. He saw murders and everything. He saw a lot of things.

But what gave him that strength? How do we continue? And he gave it to us through our religion. When he came here, many people Americanized. And my father was very firm to send us to the yeshiva for a Jewish education. Many people didn't. They went to day school, or they did other-- it was very costly. It was a lot of money. They had no money-- zero money.

But he persevered, and he fought with the tuition committees, and he got to make sure. To him it was of paramount importance. You asked what language we spoke. Him and my mother spoke perfect Polish, but they didn't allow it in the house. And when we learned English, he said don't speak English in this house. You speak Yiddish in this house. And as a result, we know Yiddish.

As a result, my older brother with travels and business and his career will overhear people speaking Yiddish. Wherever he is, he can get in on a conversation through the Yiddish. My parents never wanted to Americanize. That wasn't the goal. That was nothing they ever wanted to do-- not in a bad way, meaning they didn't want to give up their heritage into the melting pot.

They're good, law-abiding citizens, and they tried very much. And we contributed a lot. We were all working and, thank God, doing different things. But it's that strength-- the love which you mentioned-- that strength of our Bible, of our religion, of our faith that allows us to go forward and pray to God that we live up to have our own personal salvations.

Oh, I couldn't have ended it on a better note. Thank you.

You're welcome.

And I will say that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Gertrude Burstyn Schafer on January 16, 2019 in Miami, Florida.

That's right.

OK, we've got two items.

Cut. Speak.

OK, Gertie, who is this? Who is this a photograph of?

So this is my mom, Leah Burstyn. It seems to me it was probably after the war in Landsberg.

And that's where she went with your father after they were liberated by the Russians.

That's correct.

Was the whole family-- did the whole-- the four brothers and grandma also go with Them

They went to Landsberg, yes. That was the DP camp till they would find out-- they all went to different places from there, yeah.

Is that where your parents got married?

Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Thank you for showing that. And we'll have one more item.

And then you can't move again. Don't move because we can see your arms. Speak.

OK, tell me, Gertie, what are we seeing here-- this little dress that's in this beautiful boxed frame?

Very, very, very sentimental. My older sister Sarah, who passed away in 2011-- she was born in Munich, Germany. After they were in the DP camp in Landsberg, in 1947, they had to travel to the hospital from Landsberg to Munich. Then when she was two years old, in the DP camp, somebody made this dress for her from a parachute. So we're not sure if it was from the US Army or from the Russian. We're not really sure.

But my mother says they used to be parachutes that would land there. It was still, I guess, after war, still somewhat of a war zone, so to say. And somebody-- a lady was-- there were many seamstresses. And they sewed my sister this beautiful dress. And this was my sister's pride and joy.

And my sister always kept it in her drawer. It was a fond memory for her. She was very careful in how she took care of it. And after she passed away, we came across it. And my older brother Sammy was very touched by it. And he said, let's preserve this-- the fabric. And it's intact. It's in excellent condition. It didn't tear, and it shows no wear in any place.

It's beautiful.

Yes.

It's just beautiful.

Yes.

And so carefully sewn.

It's from a real parachute material, yes.

Wow.

And so this material-- this dress is, I would say, 62 years old-- 62 years old. You figure 1959 till today.

Well, then it would be-- if your sister Sarah was born, it's even older. It would be 72 years old, wouldn't it be? Or something like that?

Right.

Or 70 years old?

64, 74-- she would have been 74. 72 years old-- correct, right.

Or 70 if she got it when she was two years old.

Two.

It's just such a lovely, lovely item. And you would never know that it was made from a parachute unless you told us that story.

Right.

Whoever made it had such skill.

Yeah. They stuffed the sleeves. They did it to preserve it. And it's been preserved. It was kept just in a little-- maybe a pillow case, all the years. Yeah, she had it.

Well, thank you for showing that and sharing that with us. Thanks again.

You're welcome.