I'm Mark Goldman for the Holocaust Resources Center.

And I am Lucy Ogus Cripps, born in 1922 in Vilna. I grew up in a very close Jewish family. I had a brother that was three years older, and a sister that was six years older.

We had a very happy home, and always full of books. And I remember my father used to say, even at the age of seven you should read already the paper. And we religiously used to read the Jewish paper.

I was in a public school. Always the main language was Polish. But at home we used to speak Jewish and Russian. And in this way I was fluent in three languages-- Polish, Russian, and Jewish.

My father was a salesman in the leather branch. And my mother was a housewife. My grandparents always lived with us.

In 1939, the war broke out. And there we were. From Poland, the Russian took over. And for seven months, we had to change our language in school in Russian.

Then, the Russians went out and give Vilna to Lithuania. Then we had to change the language in Lithuanian. That was very difficult.

This was like this till 1941. And then the Germans declared war on Russia. At the time, there were bombing going on. We didn't had shelters.

After 10 days, the Germans came into Vilna, and there it started. Already we felt. We knew the danger that we were exposed to.

Every day we had different laws. We weren't supposed to go out after 5 o'clock. It was a curfew. We weren't supposed to walk on the sidewalks.

We had to have the star. First it was on the left side. Then it was on the right side. Then in the back. Everybody had to give up any jewelry we had.

And they started catching people on the street. They told you, take just soap, and a towel, and a toothbrush. And they were going that men-- mostly they used to catch the men first, and they told them they are going to work. We never saw the people anymore.

My father was lucky. Once they came to our building to look for men, and he was hidden. And this way he survived the big provocation it was, that a Jew shot a German man. They took out about 6,000 people from the old ghetto, and took them to Ponary.

Ponary was the massive grave where they used to shoot all the Jewish, Russian prisoners, Polish resistant, a lot of clergymen. Ponary used to be a resort. Was about 8 kilometers outside Vilna.

By some luck, a woman escaped from under the dead bodies, and came back, and said that she had wounds, that she was in Ponary in the grave. And somehow she went out. And nobody wanted to believe her.

Till September the 6th, everybody had to go in the ghetto. We went and left our apartment with all our belongings. We couldn't take any-- just what you were wearing. And I remember it. It was such a hot day, with a little bundle on your back. And we were just like a herd of cows chased on the road-- it was cobblestone-- to the ghetto.

We got in, and we went in. We were 16 people to a room by 8 by 9. There were no beds, nothing. We were just-- we found some boards. And that's the way we slept from September 6, 1941 to October 1943.

The life in the ghetto was very difficult. I worked outside the ghetto at the airport. It was work. In the wintertime we had to shovel the snow to clean the runways for the German planes that were on their way to Russia. We used to live 6 o'clock in the morning and come 6 o'clock at night back in the ghetto.

My sister was a nurse, and she was employed as a nurse in the ghetto. We used to get rations, just small-- two slices of bread. Once a week we used to get a few-- I would say maybe 10 teaspoons of sugar. And meat or fish, there was no-- nobody had this.

We had to organize. And I was fortunate to organize some food. I used to exchange a few belongings that our nanny came and took just before we went to the ghetto. And she used to endanger her life, and meet me, and bring me some food or some piece of fabric. And I used to exchange it.

I was a very-- I wasn't afraid of danger. I used to get out, and even with my Jewish looks. Because in Poland, the Polish people are mostly blond. So to recognize you, even if you took off your star, and you had dark hair, they would right away say, she is Jewish. This was handicap. We didn't think then about dyeing our hair the way we do it now.

The trouble used to be for every Jewish holiday, they used to come and say, I need 2,000 people to go to work. Or the older people, we are take-- they used to say, you wait. They have it so good. We are taking them in the nursing homes.

And we believed them. With seeing really that they were just exterminating us slowly, we still believed them.

There was no way of escaping. There was many people that had some money, were just taken in by the Gestapo. They used to send in some people who would say, listen, if you have money, we'll take you. We'll hide you. And some people went for it.

And they used to go out, and they used to put them on a big truck, and they said, don't worry, you are going to a safe place. And they used to-- they used to drive them right to the Gestapo. And they used to take them right to Ponary. Many, many people went like this. Very sad.

What we-- they used to call it-- they used to come in an Aktion, they used to say it in German, to catch people and take them-- just take them away. It was very difficult for the Jewish police that we had in the ghetto.

I haven't-- they really didn't do any atrocities. They just were there, and whenever they could help, they helped. They perished just the same, the way the other people.

Our president of the Jewish community was shot because he wouldn't give enough people they asked. And I don't think that they could have done other-- he could have done otherwise. I never thought that they were helping the Germans.

As a matter of fact, I once even was-- I was coming in back from work, and I had potatoes. And we used to try to smuggle in some food. Otherwise, we would have starved. And we used to put each potato in a little bag with partitions, separate.

And just happened that one of the SS men was standing at the gate. And he said to me, come here. And I said, oh, my god. That's it-- the end.

And then I knew one policeman. And I said, what does he want? He didn't touch me. And I'm sure he couldn't see the potatoes on me. He said, we don't know. He has been standing here all day.

My mother was waiting for me on the other side of the gate, and she saw this. She fainted. She said, that's the end.

But lucky for me, I was the-- he said I was the same height of his wife, and he wanted that the Jews make her a fur coat, and of my-- and I should be the model. This was a time for me that I survived, just the scare with the potatoes hanging on my side till I got in in that room where they brought me.

And I said to the Jewish policeman, look, I have something hidden. He said, just wait. Maybe we can do something.

And he helped me. He took it away. And then, when he came finally in, he said, that's right. She is just the right size. And that's what he ordered.

Because the Jews worked in a fur factory. They were making fur coats for the German soldiers in Russia. And this working [GERMAN], in German that word is. This-- how will I say? [GERMAN] It's like a small camp. Stayed down in Vilna.

Just before the Russians came in, they came in and started shooting them. A few escaped, but not too many. They saw this. They survived, the people. When the ghetto was liquidated, they stayed outside the ghetto.

And this way, till 1943, in September, we were chased out. We were already left about 4,000 people. We went in. We were 40,000 in two ghettos.

And they put us in a field. And they said, we are not going to destroy you. We are taking you to working camps. And we laid there in this field for two nights and two days without knowing what was going to happen to us.

The third day, there was a call. Everybody should start going towards the segregation. To the right was life. To the left was death.

I went to the right. Somehow I was pushed to the right. My sister, they pushed to the left. I was lucky to pull her back. I couldn't pull my mother because my grandmother pulled my mother to the left.

I forgot to say that my father died of natural cause in the ghetto in 1942. He was lucky. He didn't had to be sent to Auschwitz.

They took only 1,000 women from the 4,000, and the rest went to Auschwitz. We were put in cattle cars, 60 in a car, without knowing where we were going.

Now we got-- during the night we arrived in Riga, Latvia. And we came in a camp, Kaiserwald, that wasn't actually finished. The barracks wasn't even ready for us. And they were unfinished when we got in. They put us in it.

And right away, we were stripped of our clothes, and we had to go to showers. The word "shower" used to scare us because we knew-- there were rumors-- that in all the camps, before they put you in the gas chambers, you had to go through the showers. So there was screaming and yelling. And somehow we went to the showers.

And standing in front of the young doctors. And they were-- didn't pay attention to you. They just took advantage of you. But you had to take it. And we walked out from the showers alive.

Now all this worked on everybody psychologically very much. I always said, I will survive. Whatever they're going to do to me, I will survive this horror. And I did.

Was it my destiny or was it a miracle? It's very difficult to say. But a human being can take so much if you are just determined.

What we've seen from the beginning in the ghettos, people who were weak, who were-- who had no chance for survival. You had to be very-- you had to be very strong mentally. Physically, I don't know where I got the strength to work like this, because I never did work, manual work and physical work, like this, working from, as I say, from 6 o'clock in the morning till 6 o'clock at night on a small ration of food.

I was lucky. I had said to my sister-- she was the weaker one. I had to do the work. The three weeks that I was in Kaiserwald I had to do the work for her because she just couldn't.

But I managed somehow. And I said, listen, we have to get out from here. We cannot stay on in this Kaiserwald Lager.

And one day-- they used to come and take out the prisoners to working camps. And I, working, before they liquidated the ghetto, I worked in the-- on the railroad in Vilna after the airport.

The railroad people were more understanding than the others. They couldn't do much, but they were somehow more humane. They couldn't see the atrocities.

And there came an Appell. They are looking for 35 women to go to work on the railroads. I pulled out my sister and two friends of hers. And I said, girls, we have to get out of here.

And lucky for us, they picked us. And we came in the railroad camp in Riga. There were already about 250 people, mostly German Jews and Jews from Riga. They were exterminated too, because the Jews from Riga perished because they brought in a lot of transport of German Jews and put them in the Riga Ghetto. So there was a very small percentage of the Riga Ghetto of the Riga Jews who survived.

Also, I worked very hard on the railroad. My sister got in a [NON-ENGLISH]. That's the place where they used to check the [NON-ENGLISH] for the cars. They used to bring in the bombed railroad cars, and the Jewish mechanics electrician had to fix it. They were doing some sabotage, because after a month, the cars used to be back.

But this kept going. The railroad employees, we actually, they could have done without us. But this way they stayed on on the jobs and didn't go to the front. It was for their advantage too.

Now they were-- we had an SS man and an SS woman that were supervising us. And sure as I say, we had to try to organize food. We didn't have much to eat. And when you were caught, it was bad.

Eight men were caught stealing cigarettes. There was a car that came in that was going to the front, and went broke, broke on the way. And they brought it in with the cigarettes. The men were fixing it, and they had to open it up.

And suddenly, the SS man came with the guards. And they caught them, and 3 o'clock in the morning then hanged them. And we had to stand there and look at it. This stayed with us. It was a terrible sight to see.

Somehow the Russians were get-- this was already the end of 1943, beginning of '44. And the Russians were coming closer. The Germans are losing, were losing the war on the Russian front. The Russians were coming closer. And they decided to evacuate us.

We didn't try to escape. Just like little lambs, there we go. They had the cars of their disposal, 16 car. And they started for a week. We were going back and forth, back and forth. The Russians were coming closer, the Germans were running away. We were going one way, the other way.

And eventually they took us to Stutthof camp. Stutthof was a camp, as the guide said now in this article that I have. In 1972, a man went to visit the Stutthof camp. And he said, this was a small camp. We had only one crematorium. And there were only 85,000 Jews that were to put to death. This was a small camp.

Stutthof was-- used to be-- it's a resort. And the name was Elben in Poland. Usually, the concentration camps were put in low land, but this was right-- it was a beautiful spot very close to the Baltic Sea. Why they did it, they don't know, but that's the way it was.

We were there. And there, when once you go to Stutthof camp, you seldom got out of there to go back to your same working camp. The railroad kept us there for two weeks.

And we really had it very bad there because the SS was after us. They used to make us jump through-- there was three little windows in our barrack, and they used to make us jump through the window, and beat us, and hit us. It was really murder.

Anyway, we survived the two weeks. And suddenly they said, everybody out. And we went. We went out through the gates. This was a miracle. We just couldn't believe it. And there were the railroad people waiting for us.

They build another working camp for us with the same people. We were 450 people. And they took us to Stolp in Pommern. Was also the same work we had to do that we did in Reichsbahn in Riga.

We even had showers that they took us every-- once a month they took us to have showers. This was very unusual.

We had two SS women now and two SS men. And we had Ukrainian and Lithuanian, Estonian guards. The war was going very bad. And we stayed there till April '45.

In April, the Russians were so close, we found the leaflets throwing down from the planes. We'll be here in two days. Still, we just let ourself again put in the cars without trying to hide or escape.

Yes, I forgot to say. Why we couldn't escape. We had our heads shaved. We were without hair. We had a stripe prisoner's clothes. It was very difficult to escape. When you are dressed like this, you are weak. You have nothing to go, to run away, with what you can save yourself.

This was for seven days. We were going-- bombs were falling everywhere. The two SS men escaped. The two SS women escaped, and the second day or the third day the two SS men escaped. We had just the guards.

And they brought us to a deserted camp that was 4 miles from-- 4 kilometers from the Russian front. We could hear the Katyushas going over our heads. And they dropped us there. And it was-- a lot of us were injured there because the bombs were falling everywhere.

And the camp was also evacuated. And only sick people were left there that were sick of typhus. So the camp was infested with typhus.

We stayed there, and we thought, oh, nobody. They forgot about us. They'll leave us here.

We stayed there for three days. And suddenly, the SS is back. There was SS, and probably more than us prisoners, because you see what happened. Everywhere, they were-- the prisoners were running away. The SS was running away.

And here they found us again, put us in columns. And we are walking. We were walking. And suddenly, the English and the Russians were bombing. So they run away, the SS, and we are just all laying on the ground.

I begged my sister, let's get in the hole and stay here. No, no, no, no.

So after a few hours, it quiet down. They came back. And there they found trucks for us, put us back on trucks.

And you wouldn't believe it. They drove us back to Stutthof camp. That was also evacuated. It was only with sick-- there were only sick people.

When we got there again, it was a terrible sight to see. The skeletons, people dying, laying around. And there we are coming in.

From the 450 people, 200 right away got typhus and were laying-- they died there. And then the SS decided whoever was able, they'll put on a ship, and they take you to the Baltic Sea. The people that were sick, or had typhus, they put you on a boat-- this one-- with a yellow flag-- contagious.

They kept us there for four or five days. People were dying. They used to overthrow you overboard. No food. We were just living-- I don't know how we survived this.

And unfortunately for us-- it was already the end of the war-- the English threw bombs on a German Nazi ship that had young people, the Hitlerjugend. The bomb didn't hit their ship, but it hit our cargo ship.

The panic was unbelievable. I was injured in the back. I found a potato. And my sister was so sick, sitting next to me. And there was a next-- a lady was sitting there. It was just pulled apart.

And I was away with the potato. I was trying to cook this for her. And that's when a shrapnel hit me right in the back.

I couldn't straighten out, but I had the force. I kept the cup with the potato. And I run to see what happened to my sister.

And when I came to her, she says, you know, you are bleeding. I say, I am bleeding? I don't know. I don't feel anything.

And then finally, I couldn't straighten out. They survive, the few survivors on the ship.

The German ship came towards us and said, we'll take you over, but the people were pushing and screaming, and so many fell in the sea. We couldn't move. The injured and the very sick just stayed down.

The SS said, there is no more danger. They put out the fire. The ship-- the cargo boat. It wasn't a ship. It was a cargo boat. It's not going to explode. Don't worry.

And we left. They said, we put a white flag, and nobody will bother you anymore.

And we were laying on the deck. The night was very cold. Injured, hungry, and didn't know what was happening to us.

And finally, the cargo boat went. How do you say it? It went in the sand. And the SS got off the cargo boat and went on the ground. And we were laying there.

And some people went on the bottom of the cargo boat and found tremendous amount of food, the supplies they had that they never gave it to us. And the people just throw themselves on the food, and they died because that was the worst thing they could have done, is to just start eating a lot after being so hungry for so many years.

And the SS, for two days they were preparing to blow up the cargo boat. And this was in Vaps.

There was a German Graf, Graf Moltke. He was from the First World War. And he had a lot of prisoners, Russian and Poles, that worked for him. And they had it very good with him.

They came to him and said to him, listen. We saw some black smoke on the sea, and we see there is a boat.

He had some-- well, as I say, it was about four days before the end of the war. And they were-- we heard rumors that Hitler was already dead. So he got a few Wehrmacht soldiers, and he brought them to the cargo boat, that you could look at, to the-- oh, how do you say it? The edge of the sea? What do you call it?

Yeah. Seashore.

The seashore. He came to the seashore with the German soldiers at the time when the SS were igniting the dynamite to blow us up. And they were able to shoot them.

Then he came with small boats, because we were standing quite a ways from the seashore, and they took the survivors on the boats, small little fishing boats, and brought us to the seashore, and took us right away to a-- there was a [NON-ENGLISH]. That's a hospital for Marines. And we got first aid.

Now this was the English-- so later on, in four days later, the English came. And they had a big battle not far from there, in Kiel. And that's why it took so long for us to be liberated.

Now he brought us to a place, Eckernforde, and put us all in a big room in a hotel, on straw, on the floor. And we had to stay there for four days and wait till the English came in.

The first Englishman that walked in was my husband, Frank Cripps. He was in the English Army, and he was born in Germany. And in 1938 he went with the last transport of children to England.

So he wanted to find out if there were some Jewish people. And when he came there to our place, he found out that we were-- there were quite a few Jewish, but also there were Yugoslavs, there were Poles, there were all other nationalities.

And he right away went to the German hospital in Eckernforde, and called the head doctor, and told him, if you don't take in all these people right in the hospital-- the doctor told him, I don't have the room. And Frank said, you are-- I am going to make the room. All the Germans will be out, and you are taking in all the prisoners that are so critically ill in the hospital. And that's what he did.

The first day, I was still all right. They cleaned out my wound, and they didn't know that I had a shrapnel right next to my lung. They didn't do X-rays.

And the-- we did lay there. And he saw that my sister was really critical ill. And the doctor, when he came for me, he said, I'm taking her. And I said, oh, no. You are not taking her. I'm going with her. I didn't want to let her out for my sight.

Next day when he came, the doctor, he said, oh, you-- he was just saying, now you can both go to the hospital. So when they got me in, I came down with typhus, and I was quarantined right away. I was really-- they gave up.

We were three girls. One girl passed away in the room, and we two. So that I survived was just a miracle.

And when I was delirious, the English doctor wrote down my brother's address, who was in the Foreign Legion. And then I tried to find him. And I found him in 1946 thanks to the American lady, Mrs. Simpson, that was the head of the UNRRA in Eckernforde.

She went to Paris. And she had a friend that worked in a French hospital for plastic-- they were specializing in plastic surgery. And she left the name of my brother there.

And about six weeks later, he got in contact with Mrs. Simpson. And in 1946, in July 1946, I joined my brother in France.

I would like to say I came to the United States in 1954. My husband came to Paris to marry me in 1953. We have a son, Steven Cripps who is a lawyer in Florida.

I always told them what happened to me, how I survived. I found that people that didn't tell their children is a big mistake. I think it's much easier on the family that you talk about it, and I was always able to talk about it. I think I understand children of Holocaust survivors had some big problems because they weren't told about it. I think they should have told them.

And I can see we had never had any problems with our son. From a young kid, he used to say, my mother was in a concentration camp. He wasn't ashamed. He talked about it. It didn't affect in any way.

I forgot to say that when they evacuated us from Riga in 1943, we went on a big ship. All the labor camps from Riga were put on a ship-- we were about 5,000 people-- for seven days. We didn't know where we were going.

But some Latvian guards said, listen, they are not taking you to exterminate. They are evacuating you. And this time they were right. They told us the truth. It was always, in the back of your mind maybe somehow you'll survive.

And when I-- I can understand the people. When they read the books, or when they hear on television when it was the

Holocaust reunion in Washington, oh, that's impossible. It cannot be.

It is hard to believe. Even that I am a survivor, sometimes I think, god, is it really true that I went through all this? It's even hard for me to believe it. So I can understand.

But I think they should know about it. Everybody should know about it.

And I don't exclude that it cannot happen again. It can happen again, because this is history, and history repeats itself. So I think it can happen again. I hope it doesn't. And that's it.

That's great.

Good?

Yeah, it's wonderful.

Oh, gosh.