

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back. And I am the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo, New York. It is Monday, February 19th, 1990. And we are in Channel 4.

Our guest this evening is Eva Koepsell, who was born in Hungary and will tell her story. Eva, will you tell us about your parents, please, and your family?

OK. My parents were both born in Budapest, Hungary around the turn of the century. When I was born, my dad was 50. My mother was just a little over 40.

I was born during the war, 1944. My parents had been married just about a year at that time. And my father was a physicist in Hungary. My mother was a social worker and had worked for the Budapest social work office for about 20 years.

I think we have a picture of your parents and their family. And you could tell us about the pictures, the people in the picture. It's on the screen. So you could just look at it over there.

Oh, OK. Yeah. That's my mother's family. That's my mother's mother and her sister, my grandmother's sister, and the three little girls. That would have been right around 1906.

All of the people except for my mother are dead. Some of them died during the war, during the Holocaust.

Were they in labor camps or concentration camps?

My mother's sister, Jolan, went to Auschwitz. And her other sister died right after the war. Her mother died during the war. My mother's father starved to death during the war.

We have a picture of your mother in 1943.

Yes, this is my mother's wedding picture when she was 40 years old.

And how did the lives of your mother and father change as a result of Hungary joining the Axis and the Nazis entering Hungary?

Well, very specifically, my mother immediately lost her job.

Your father, too?

My father worked for a private company. And he didn't lose his job right away. But when it looked like it was not a good idea to have Jewish people working for you, he eventually did. My mother lost her job back, actually, in '41, before the war really got to Hungary. My father continued to work until 1943.

Why did your mother lose her job? Because she was Jewish?

Because she was Jewish.

And was she able to get another job?

No.

So that was very difficult--

It was very difficult--

--for them?

--at that time. Yeah.

Now you're born a year afterward. And we have a sweet little baby picture coming up. And where were you born? And were the conditions very difficult for your parents at that time?

Yes, well, I was born in Budapest. And the first few months after I was born, things were not terrible yet. When the bombing started, even though by that time they had set up ghettos for Jews, the worst part physically came when the bombing started and food was cut off.

By the time I was eight months old, we were living in cellars in the Jewish ghetto. My father was taken away to a labor camp. So my mother was left to take care of me and her sister and her sister's newborn baby as well. And basically there was no food. Her sister's baby starved to death in the cellar next to me.

How did that affect your aunt, the baby's mother?

My aunt managed to survive that. But eventually found out that her husband, Imre, who had been sent to a concentration camp also had died. And my mother's sister Blanche committed suicide.

After the war?

After the war.

After the war. So the will to live was just gone.

She lost it.

How did that affect your mother, her sister's death?

Even into her 80s, she feels guilty about it. She can't forgive herself. I don't know what she could have done. She constantly talks about having fed me and not having had enough milk for her sister's baby and so having to make that choice.

But the sister, of course, was the mother of the baby.

Was the mother of the baby, but had not had enough food to produce enough milk. And there was no other food.

So the baby just died?

The baby died.

Quite a tragedy. We have a picture of your mother's sister. Do you want to explain this?

That's her other sister. That's Aunt Joli. And Aunt Jolan was in Auschwitz. She went in, she was taken away in 1944, a few months after I was born.

She came back when the camps were liberated. She survived. However, she never could have children. She had surgery. She was one of the people that had experiments--

Oh, she had medical experiments.

--medical experiment. She's a very beautiful woman who always wanted family. She had been engaged prior to the war. And she did meet her fiance after the war by some amazing circumstance, miracle.

Where was he? Where had he been doing--

He had been in Austria also in a camp. But I don't-- not in Auschwitz. And they met again when they came back. And they did marry quite a number of years later. They waited for quite a--

Do you know the nature of the experiments that were done on her?

No. All I know is she, as a result, couldn't have children, could not have children.

So here you are. Your father is in a labor camp. And your mother and you are in cellars. And of course, you were too little to remember anything. But what did your mother tell you about that life?

Oh, it was a series of choices on how to survive. At one point-- and I wrote a poem about this-- at one point she decided that the only way really to survive was to take the star off. Take off the band. Leave the ghetto.

At some point, they had gotten papers that they had converted, that they were Roman Catholic. Those papers didn't carry very much weight. And they knew that, too.

My mother felt that the only way to survive was to hide out, was to get me to a safe place. And there had been Red Cross nurseries set up for, quote, "unwed mothers." And apparently they did save thousands and thousands of children and babies that way.

My mother took me to one of those. According to her, she had to leave me there for a couple of months. She would come to see me, but she couldn't stay there because they were so crowded, they couldn't take the mothers.

Was that one of Wallenberg's safe houses?

I believe it was. I don't know that for sure. But from everything I've read, it had to have been. Because we had nothing like that prior to '44.

Because the Nazis couldn't touch those houses.

Apparently, they were safe enough to have saved thousands of children, thousands of children. My mother also, because she had heard that they were not rounding up very old women, the very old, she decided that she would make herself over into a very old woman. And she knocked a tooth out so that she would have a missing tooth. Because she was quite a beautiful woman, but emaciated by this point, she says and looked quite old at this point, and walked around as if she were a crazy old woman whenever it looked like there was danger. I don't know. She decided what kinds of things were--

So she left the ghetto, ostensibly.

She did. She did.

And how did she manage?

When she had me, she would go to people that she knew, friends that she had. Everything was in chaos apparently that year, by the end of that year.

'44, '45.

'45, yeah. And we would get into an apartment house, go down into the cellar. There were constant air raids. I mean, it was a period of eight months of constant air raids, almost living in the cellar constantly.

But which cellar? You would move from cellar to cellar. If you knew of someone, and you knew that there was some food somewhere, or that the gas wasn't leaking, and the water wasn't pouring out, then you went there if you knew about it.

And it seemed like her only directive, the only moving force was to keep me alive. Keep herself alive for me, as she tells it.

At what point did she convert?

I don't know. I don't know. Because I didn't find out about the change. I was raised Roman Catholic. And really, my earliest memories are of being in New York in the Bronx. I remember coming over on the boat. That I remember.

What year are we talking about?

'47.

So you were four years old?

And we came over on a marine transport. Three, I guess three and a half when I came over. And we were on a marine transport. And I remember coming in there.

But the only thing I can really think of in terms of hungry are things that she's related to me.

Apropos of that, we have your birth certificate. And perhaps you can tell us about-- it's on the screen.

Oh, great.

And there it is. And you can just tell us what all the information in Hungarian is.

Well, it shows that these two people were married. My parents were married. And that they were Roman Catholics.

And off in the corner of the document, and this was supposed to provide some safety so that if they were challenged anywhere in the city, or if they would try to escape, that it would offer them some proof that they were not Jewish. But over in the corner of the document, there's a little box that shows that they changed their name from what in Hungary was a very Jewish name to a very old Hungarian name. And if that box were filled in at that time, which I believe it was, then that protection vanished.

You mentioned they changed it from [? Freed ?] to Martin.

[? Freed to ?] Martin.

Martin.

Right.

So why do you think that they put that little information in there?

Well, they didn't do that. whoever was within the bureaucracy, whoever made the document, perhaps that information was added later. This is the part that I'm not clear on. Perhaps that information, because there is a notation in there, 1946.

So if it's your birth certificate, it would have to be done earlier.

Right, right. So it's possible that information about the change of name wasn't added until later and then notarized. But if

it was in there, then certainly the whole thing didn't turn out to be of any help. I mean, if someone would read the sidebar. Although just because the name was changed, I mean, there could be an argument--

That you were still--

Still Catholic, right.

--still Catholic. Do you remember going to church in Hungary?

Oh, no.

You don't remember anything like that?

Oh, no, not at all.

But you did talk about the poem that you wrote about that time.

About returning?

Well, about that time.

About '44, '45.

So perhaps it would be appropriate for you to read that now.

When did you write this poem?

This poem I wrote about three years ago.

I nursed at your breast. And the milk of your fear formed the bones and sinews of my being. It was my only nourishment during the time of hunger and war.

Mama said each night I searched the gutters of Budapest for something I lost. Hidden, I watched the trains loaded with Jews leave the Western station. Among the massed crowd of the already dead, I saw my sister Joli.

So with you in my arms, I tore the yellow star from my sleeve and fled the ghetto. Somewhere along the city streets, my heart petrified. I lost my sense of being human.

And it was not strange, when the bombs came, to live like an animal, creeping from the cellar at night to rip meat from the carcass of a horse lying on the boulevard. Urinating on the floor while the foundations heaved.

And you laughed as babies do when they're bounced. I offered you what milk I had and a paste of flour and water to keep you alive. We scuttled from place to place, wherever it felt safe.

Papa died. And my sister Blanche's baby starved to death. We inhabited hell for a year.

And heaven was a young red-haired Russian soldier, the liberator with a sack of potatoes and news that the war was over. We came up, blind night animals to the light, nearly starved, but still alive, to reclaim our humanity, not yet aware of the total obscenity of those times. Faceless, nameless, homeless, to learn to live again like ordinary people.

Very sensitive. Did you read this to your mother? Has she read the poem?

Yes, my mother read the poem.

And what were her comments?

My mother tries to distance herself as much as she can from those times. And she's very upset by the fact that I dwell on it, or that I try to recall it, or try to memorialize it.

She likes my poetry generally. But she's terrified. She's terrified that it's all going to happen over again.

So she was completely traumatized?

She was completely traumatized, completely.

Did your aunt read the poem?

No, no. My aunt didn't get to see the poem.

Now you talked about liberation. And this, of course, is second person. What was told to you about liberation? You mentioned a Russian soldier.

Well, it was that we had been in the cellars for so long. And whenever you heard footsteps above on the pavement or coming toward the opening where the cellar doors would open, my mother said it was always the sense that someone was going to come in and shoot you. And so when the war was over, it happened to be after a bombing raid. But everyone was afraid to come up that had survived there.

And the soldier or a group of soldiers were knocking and yelling, come on up, come on up. And no one wanted to move.

They were petrified.

They were petrified, absolutely. And he came down into the cellar. He couldn't speak Hungarian. He could only speak Russian.

He had a sack of potatoes. And he kept saying the war was over. And the people just moved back away from him. And he put the potatoes down. And he smiled at them. And eventually, they believed that maybe the war was over and maybe they were liberated.

Now you mentioned you spent so much time as a very young child in the cellars. And you also told me that you suffer from lupus. Is there a connection, perhaps?

I don't know. There was some very immediate, real effects of having been in the cellar. One was that I came up from that situation having been quite emaciated-- you can't tell now, but I was-- with double mastoid infections. And no antibiotics, because the war had eliminated all the antibiotics.

So they operated on both my ears. I lost my sense of balance.

Does that affect you till today?

Yeah, yeah, and the emaciation. And the fact that I rock, and I always rocked when I was a child. I mean, from the time I could walk. I couldn't walk until I was 2 and 1/2. I mean, there was no place to walk until well after the war, well after the operations. So I talked very early, but I didn't walk.

And there's no relationship with the lupus?

Lupus? I don't know. You know, I don't know if they can trace back. I mean, I just don't know.

Well, let's replay this scenario. Your mother and you are liberated along with other people with whom you're hiding.

And when does your father reappear?

My father had, by that time, gotten out and had gotten back to Budapest. And he had, somewhere in that point, reappeared. Because they were together at that point when liberation came.

And will you tell us a little bit about your father's incarceration?

My father was in a labor camp, a forced labor camp. I don't know very much about it except that he escaped. He and two other people escaped and made their way back.

Which my mother thought was really stupid. Because he then put himself in the position of being--

Taken away again?

--taken away by the Nazis, yeah, to a concentration camp.

So do you think your father's having been in a labor camp instead of a concentration camp was because they were already converted and changed religion?

Well, no. The reason my father was in a labor camp was because he smoked. And he got into the labor camp because during one of the blackouts when you were supposed to go downstairs and just hide out and everything was dark, my father had to have a cigarette. And when he went up to light a cigarette was just when a group of soldiers were going by.

They immediately-- I don't know what happened at that point. But he was taken away to the camp. And he was there just really for a matter of months, not too, too long.

I don't think, from everything that I've heard, that the papers-- at least the papers my parents had, or the conversion, or anything like that protected them in any way. Because there were other people that they knew, friends of theirs, who were converts, or who had been for a longer time, or who were just simply second generation, whose parents had converted but still had Jewish blood. It didn't make a difference.

They were still taken away?

They were still-- you were a Jew.

So what you're saying is that their safety, or their being recovered, or just staying alive was a fluke.

It was a fluke. It was a fluke.

And the conversion paper might have helped them, or might not have.

Right, right. I don't think it ever even-- when I asked whether they ever had to even use it or whether it ever would have helped in a particular situation-- that it was ever taken out and shown. Because everyone who knew them knew they had been Jewish. And it was basically people who knew each other who turned-- I mean, it could be someone from work who would say do you know there's a Jew living over on--

Who turned in.

That's right.

Who turned in Jews.

So it really didn't.

You don't know. It could be one of those miracles that the survivors always talk about.

Yeah.

What was life like in Budapest after the war?

From the stories, it was very, very difficult. It was a time of chaos and starvation and no medical supplies. I would think pretty much like other bombed out cities. People desperately, among the Jewish community, trying to find out who had survived.

I don't think-- I think for a long time the Hungarians felt that they would be-- I don't want to use the word immune. But somehow this was all very distant, more distant to them than what was happening in the other countries. I think Hungarian Jews felt completely assimilated. They were loyal Hungarians. They would be protected.

And to some extent, because of Wallenberg, they really were, I think. The Hungarian Jewish community lost less than most of the other big cities in Europe.

But they suffered greatly--

They suffered tremendously.

--in a short period of time, from what we hear.

Yeah.

So your father came back. And shortly after that, they emigrated or applied for emigration?

I'm not too familiar with what happened in the government at that time. But they were eventually reinstated. My mother's job was eventually reinstated. And my father was affected by the brain drain type thing, where American recruiters went around after the war looking for scientists and physicists to work on various projects. And they decided to leave all that behind and come to the United States.

And what year did they actually--

'47.

'47. And what was their life like, from what you remember, what you've heard?

Well, that I remember. I start remembering right around that time. The first year was a relatively good year, a lot of eating--

To make up for--

To make up for, right. Taking me to doctors all over the place to see what residual problems I'd had. And a year after we came here, my father got a stroke, a very, very bad stroke. And he wasn't able to work anymore.

My mother couldn't speak any English. My father couldn't speak English. My mother wound up cleaning houses.

This was in the Bronx?

Well, first we lived on Long Island. My father worked out at the St. Albans, at the Port Washington Naval base on a project out there. And then we moved to the Bronx. And I grew up there.

And did you have any relatives living nearby?

Nearby in Brooklyn, I had an aunt. And I had an aunt and uncle in the Queens. So they were relatively close by.

That was pretty much all the family here. That was all the family here except for some children of the cousins that were born here. And very few family members left in Hungary, just Aunt Jolan, a few other cousins.

Then your family was decimated by the Holocaust.

Decimated-- no one left.

And we have a picture of your parents, taken in 1953. Your mother looks so much older than the picture of 10 years before.

Yeah.

It's amazing. And maybe you could tell us a little bit about this picture.

Well, by this time my dad had been quite sick for a number of years. My mother had a great deal of difficulty adjusting and has to this day. I mean, I think the experience was so traumatic, I think, on both of them.

Although my father seemed to do somewhat better. But then, again, he got a stroke when he was 54, 55 years old.

That's very young.

And paralyzed on one side of his body. We wound up having a very, very tough, difficult life. We wound up going on welfare which, on top of everything else, was, like, totally humiliating for my parents.

And my mother continued to try to find work. She eventually found-- my father couldn't continue living in New York. So she started looking for a job. She had some people she knew up here in the Buffalo area. And I moved up here with her so she could work here when I was 14.

And my dad went to live with some friends in the country. And then they were reunited a few years later.

So their life, again, is assuming abnormalcy.

Yeah, yeah. I don't think anything was normal after the '40s. Once the war started, once the Nazi persecution started, I mean, it wasn't an ordinary war.

I mean, they had been, both of them, really, through a war before. My father remembered the First World War. I think my father had a bullet wound from the First World War. But that was a civilized war, you know? And I mean that as a total pacifist and with great irony.

And my mother remembers the First World War and the Cossacks riding through the fields and training and the war to end all wars, I guess. And then they went through another one.

Now you mentioned that at age 12 you began to ask questions about your religion and your background.

Well, in the Bronx, I was sent to a Catholic school. And I went through communion and confirmation. My Aunt Kathy and my Aunt [? Oshi ?] and Uncle Joe were Jewish. But I took that all into stride. It didn't seem strange to me.

And when I went to catechism class and we learned about Jews and Jesus being a Jew, and I would go home, my parents would talk up being Jewish, that it was a wonderful thing. But around the age of 12, I said how come my other relatives are Jewish? What's the story here?

And then they told me that actually they were Jewish. And because both our families were Jewish. That's why they were--

Was that a shock to you?

Yes, it was a shock. By that point, at that point, up to that point, I hadn't heard, really, any of the war stories. I knew there had been a war and was constantly told to eat and how awful it was when we were starving. But I didn't know about the Holocaust.

And then they started telling me why it was a good thing that I was a Catholic. And that I should not-- actually, more my mother than my father. My mother always felt that it would happen again. Always felt it.

To this day, is just absolutely convinced it will happen again. And that here they safeguarded me and protected me and did what they thought was the only way to protect me from the next Holocaust.

And that was their rationale, of course.

That was their rationale.

Now, you told me that your father died and your mother decided to go back to Hungary. Wasn't that strange to go back to the land that was a disaster to her?

Well, she had her surviving sister Joli. And I had actually, the first trip back to Hungary which we took as a family in 1979, where I took my son, I had wanted desperately to go back and see where I was born. I mean, my whole life was a series of stories told about the past. And I always felt strange and different.

And I was raised in a little Hungarian ghetto of my own. My parents, we all just spoke Hungarian. And I heard so many stories by that time. I couldn't take David here to any place to show him really where my roots were.

So the first time back in '79, I wanted to go. And we went together. And I got to meet my Aunt Joli, whom I didn't remember. And I found that was very important. And I wrote a poem about that.

Would you read that poem, please?

Returning to Budapest, May 1979. I've come back to my birthplace to study bones. Not those anonymous and polished clean by time that gleam surprised in parking lot excavations, but bones that still have names and lie in unviolated bits of Earth. They may sing to me in a half-forgotten tongue, or speak my name in unseen remembrance.

The bones I seek should be fleshed and waiting at the airport, with tears and smiles and crushing embraces. But they were irrevocably delayed. I've come too late, except to listen to whisperings of the history built of bones, to sift through the skeleton of my past.

Did your mother see that poem?

Yes.

And what were her comments?

She liked that poem. That was OK. Because that didn't refer very specifically. It left things rather nebulous. And most of the things my mother objected to sprang out of fear. So that she didn't she didn't object to.

Was she happy with the man that you married? Did she feel you would have security?

Yes, yeah.

So that must have been comforting to her.

That was. That was comforting. She was unhappy with the name I chose for my son.

David?

David.

Why would she be unhappy with that?

The name was too Jewish.

So she was afraid--

Come the next Holocaust, he would be picked out.

Of course, it's a universal name now.

I know.

Even though it's from the Bible.

Yeah.

But she's afraid.

So traumatized, oh, absolutely.

So Hitler did a good job there not only with ruining your family, but with traumatizing your mother.

Yeah. I want to say brainwashing. And in a sense, maybe you can be brainwashed, even from a distance and totally traumatized.

How has it affected you personally?

Well, sometimes I feel guilty.

Guilty for being alive?

Yeah, yeah. And listening to the stories, listening to the story of her sister's baby who was lying next to me, asking questions. Why did I survive? How come I lived and he died? Maybe there should have been-- maybe I should have gotten less.

Guilty that life seems so normal when it can be so horrible, you know? And just not knowing what my role is or how come I did survive, how come she survived. She says she survived to keep me alive.

But then there's a role that I have. And I'm not sure what it is.

Well, your being here tonight is one indication, too, to tell the story.

Yeah, maybe. That may very well be.

You have some other poems that reflects your feelings.

Yeah.

Would you read them to us?

This poem was written about my mother's sister Blanche.

The one who committed suicide.

The one who committed suicide. And her husband Imre Komuves was a poet who was becoming somewhat known and had been published, started to be published right before the war. He was taken to a concentration camp. And it was in Austria. And he died there.

And I had written the poem about my aunt when I was sent a whole volume of his poetry in Hungarian that I was leafing through. And I found a poem that he had written prior to the war that seemed to dovetail with a poem I'd written about my aunt.

Part of the following poem is my translation of his poem memory. And it was very tough. I'm not a good translator. But it was a fairly short poem. And "Memoriam" is the poem that I wrote prior to having received his poetry. And there's a segment of a letter, or there is a whole letter inserted in the poem I wrote that was actually written by him to Blanche.

Did he ever see his baby?

No, he did not. He never saw his baby. Because she was pregnant when he sent this. And he was on his way to be-- he was supposed to be taken to Dachau.

I wrote this poem in kind of a dovetail fashion. But it may be difficult to read that way. So I think I'll read his poem first and then my poem.

Memory by Imre Komuves. It blinded me whatever light that was. Lightning searched and pierced me. Misfortune came from unknown parts. I lost you, it seemed, through the haze of my bitterness.

I remember the black wind's silken shroud, the neverending keening. Oh, annihilation, you struck me there. I never knew or hardly knew you until then. Cruel one to steal my thoughts and splinter any hope I may have had.

Mourners came like a congregation of ravens. But when will I reach the promised land?

And this is my poem, "Memorian." What did Imre, the poet of dark stanzas and soaring metaphors write to his pregnant wife while being transported to Theresien am Wald on the way to Dachau? Dearest Blanche, the trip so far hasn't been bad. So please don't worry about me. I'll be fine.

But you, little wife, in your wonderful condition must take extra care of yourself. Go to Janos. He'll give you eggs and butter. He knows I'm good for it. So don't be shy.

I'll write again as soon as I can. I love you, Imre.

Blanche bore her baby with hope, hope that dried through the months, like her milk. Their baby withered and starved.

Imre tried his best to stay alive. In Theresien am Wald on the way to Dachau. For Blanche, for the baby, until the camp was liberated. Two days later, wracked with typhus, he died.

With Imre's letter in her hand, Blanche, who couldn't understand why she survived, locked the doors and windows of her room, shaved her head, and turned on the gas.

So.

That was published, was it not?

No, this has not been published. No. '44, '45 was.

What kind of comments did you get from the published poem?

I got some phone calls. A person called me out of the blue and said, you don't know me but I read that poem. And I just had a baby a few weeks ago. And I was so moved by the poem.

And so it had an effect. It had an effect.

Are you going to publish this? You should. Yes.

But that letter was actually-- my mother has that. My mother has that in Hungary, written in pencil, and it's still visible, from her husband, from Imre to Blanche.

Another shattered life.

Oh.

Three, three lives. So your mother had a very difficult time adjusting here. And you told me that eventually she went back to Budapest.

She did go back. Her sister Jolan got very sick with pancreatitis three years ago. And my mother wanted to be there, wanted to be in Hungary.

And Joli died. My mother wound up staying in Hungary. My mother was 80 at the time when she went back.

When was this?

Three years ago. And she wound up staying in Hungary. After she moved out of Joli's apartment, she wound up going to an Orthodox Jewish home the elderly.

Did she feel comfortable there, after so many years of assimilation?

She did. She had a choice of where she could go. And she went back there. And you had to make application. And you had to certify. Here you had to certify that you were truly Jewish to be accepted.

And they accepted her?

And of course they accepted her, yes. That was not hard to prove, her family. And they accepted her.

And I went to see her about a year after she went back in very ill health. And the home that she was in, it was called [NON-ENGLISH], which is love home, for loving care, probably. And had a special significance, it was a home that was very much affected by the Holocaust, by the Nazis.

Why do you say that?

It had a special significance in that it was attacked in a way. And I'll read a poem that tells that particular story. People that were there, everyone that I had met and everyone that I knew of that there were actual concentration camp survivors. All in their 70s and 80s, very, very high frequency of suicides for all the years that they--

Many stories of tragedies.

Yes, they did. And I went there. And they offered me a room there while I was visiting my mother. And it was a wonderful-- I mean, I met some very wonderful people.

But I did ask why am I here? And then people would tell me their stories. And I would hear what I would hear.

And I thought, well, maybe there really is a reason. Maybe there really is a reason I'm here. And I wrote a poem about that place. OK.

Did Dante mention the hell for those who have suffered too much? It exists between the circle of those who were tormentors and those who didn't care. It is a building on the high side of the river, gray, as ancient as suffering, with rooms that face the courtyard, with the chestnut tree and empty flowerbeds, or the street where the baker starts his work at 2 AM.

The rooms are filled and there's a waiting list. From floor to ceiling on every wall in every room are plaques with names in memory of and always room for one more plaque.

Those who have suffered too much sit in their rooms and wait to die, or try to speed things up to no avail. Those who have suffered too much have no photographs. Their minds are cameras. And the pictures never fade, stark and clear as the numbers tattooed on their withered arms.

The walls echo in the hell for those who have suffered too much. Marika hears the sound of a gun, the scream of her son, 10 years old, dying in her arms as she presses him to her breast. Ilona hears her husband's goodbye, the cries of her mother and sister, as if it were now, forever now.

Down the hall, the old man howls night after night. Lock the doors! The Nazis are coming to murder us! The rooms are locked with heavy iron keys and chains. No one tells him to be quiet. It's become their lullaby.

In the hell for those who have suffered too much, stories are inscribed on bodies, glittering eyes, a cruel twist of arm or leg, faces mapped with pain. In the hell for those who have suffered too much, there's a stairway to the third floor. Blocked and barricaded now, it wasn't then. 63 women were hurled from the roof.

I hear the heavy fruit drop from the chestnut tree, whistling as it picks up speed, 40, 50 feet to the barren ground. The sound it makes as the fruit breaks. And at 2 AM, the baker down the street takes out his steaming bread and makes his rounds as he did then. That day was no different from for him than any other.

Did your mother see that poem?

No.

That would be just too difficult. What do your husband and your son say about all these experiences?

I think they understand that it's important for me to remember them as stories, to talk about them, to write about them. I think it's very hard to convey. It's even hard for me, who was a baby and didn't actually live through it, I lived through the stories, to understand what it was really, really like.

They've been very supportive. They've been very supportive, very horrified. I think my son is keenly aware that not to learn from history condemns you to repeat it. And sometimes it's just very tragic that we forget so easily.

And that history does repeat.

Yeah.

Before we conclude, do you want to say anything in summation or give a message of sorts?

I think that it's important to recognize what the truth is about what's going on and to stand up for the truth, to bear witness. I mean, if more people had believed what was going on during the Holocaust, if more people had been willing to actually tell about-- I mean, there were stories that people did really know what was going on in the camps.

Maybe it won't happen again. I sometimes worry a great deal that it's happening, like in China. You know, where you can just twist the truth around and people continue getting killed. Hopefully someday we'll learn something.

The Garden of Eden.

In the Garden of Eden? As they say, from your mouth to God's ear. Thank you very much, Eva Koepsell.

Thank you very much for having me. Thank you.