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OK. Our speaker today is Kay Bonner Nee who lives in Fridley, Minnesota. And she was one of the American liberators at the Buchenwald concentration camp. We haven't talked about Buchenwald, per se in this course. But some of you may have read the book by Leon Kogan called The Theory and Practice of Hell, which deals extensively with the life of the SS and the life of the inmates at Buchenwald.

But Kay can explain why she was in Europe in the 1940s, and some of her reactions to seeing Buchenwald.

Thank you. Thank you, Steve. And I'm happy to be here this morning. And I'm glad that you're all here. And I hope that this will be informative. And I hope it may even be interesting to you.

When I was first asked by the Jewish community in the Twin Cities a year ago to speak at a special service which was the Holocaust Day, which memorializes the martyrdom of the 6 million Jews who perished in the Nazi Holocaust, I was both honored and humbled. Because I was asked to speak as one who had been a liberator of the death camp.

Now, I never thought of myself as a liberator. I said that I had been there at the time, that I had witnessed, but that I had not actually at least in my mind been a liberator. But I was assured that as a witness, if I could remember what I saw, that I would qualify. And I do remember. I could never forget what I saw. The memory has been seared in my mind.

I may have forgotten some of the details, those that were too painful to remember. But to the best of my ability, I will try again today to reconstruct for you the camp as it was at the time that I was there.

But before we start that journey together, perhaps you would like to just a little bit of the background of why I was over there in Europe in the first place. I was there during World War II as a field entertainer. I was a civilian. But I was attached to the Fifth Corps of the First Army's Special Services division. Another woman and I drove a two-ton truck, and it was equipped with a side that let down to make a stage.

We carried a small piano and a microphone, and when we let down the side of the truck, then it became a stage. And we pushed the piano out, and we were all set to go. So after working in England for some months, we were moved in after D-Day to the continent, and launched from Utah Beach on D-Day plus 15, the first American women to arrive on the continent.

Our assignment was to go into the field and entertain where USO groups and other troops would not be able to go. They needed stages, large ones, real ones. They needed all sorts of equipment, and lights, and microphones, and we needed nothing but our truck to make a theater out of any field and woods where we happened to be. And we performed many times while the soldiers were still watching us from their foxholes. And the V-1 rockets were buzzing overhead.

The buzzing sound was something that you always listened for and the rockets. Because as long as the buzzing sound could be heard, you knew the rocket was still going. It was when it suddenly cut off and there was silence that you all ran for cover as fast as you could, because you knew then the rocket was going to fall and wreck devastation on whatever part that it happened to hit.

We moved as the Fifth Corps moved, and were present at the liberation of Paris. As a matter of fact, we were there before the official liberation when the Germans were still making an attempt to defend the city, or many of them at least were still hidden in certain buildings in parts of the city. Unfortunately, the uniforms that we wore were gray blue in color, the same color as the Germans. And by some mistake, our hats were shaped somewhat like the German officers.

And I remember riding through Paris one dark night, and of course, there never were lights after night of any kind, nor were there street signs. All the street signs had been taken down and if you didn't have your own sort of secret map that you could read, or were familiar with the city, it was pretty hard to find your way around. This, of course, was true of the whole continent. There were no signs anywhere to tell you what town you were in, or what street you might be on.

And anyway, as I was riding in Paris that night, it became obvious that the Jeep I was in was being fired at. And the driver was wise enough to know that my hat was being mistaken for a German's in the dark. So I took it off and sat on it

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for the rest of the time till we reached our destination.

Three days later, the famous Liberation Day parade took place. That was the one that was led by General Eisenhower. I'm sure many of you have seen pictures of it, all of the soldiers marching down from the Arc de Triomphe down the Champs-Elysees. And it was indeed a day to remember.

When we left Paris, we went on through France and into Belgium. Just before the Battle of the Bulge, we were called back from the field to Eupen, Belgium to organize a Christmas show that would be produced there, and the troops would be brought back in to see the show. Eupen was now being used as a rest center, and we were only five miles from Monschau, where the breakthrough by the Germans occurred.

For four days, we stayed while the city was fired on, and the streets were strafed. And the German parachutists landed, and were disguised, and hidden in the town. Eupen was only 17 miles from the German, or from Aachen. It was closer to the border in other spaces. And there were many German sympathizers in Eupen who were very happy to help out the Germans as they came into the town.

Finally, we were ordered to leave and we left in the dark of night with the tracer bullets that fill the sky, the only light we had to see by. During our flight, the girl who was with me was killed. I'll always remember Katie Cullen, and I'll always remember her as being one of the unsung heroes of the war.

After the Bulge, the army moved into Germany, and I went with them. And I was with them when they came to Buchenwald. I was not with the first wave of troops, the troops who did the actual liberation. But I was with the second group that entered a day later. The Germans were gone, although some were still being flushed out of hiding. Most of the Germans had left before the liberation of the camp, fleeing when they knew that the Americans would be there.

In the days before, they had killed as many prisoners as they possibly could. Their goal had been to eliminate all the prisoners by whatever means possible, so that when the Americans came they would find an empty camp and no evidence of what had really been taking place there. So there had not been enough time. There were too many prisoners, and they couldn't accomplish their goal.

They left behind many of the dead, the near dead, and the half living. As I entered the camp, I was overcome with the horrible stench, the combination of still burning flesh, hair, decayed bodies, and the unsanitary conditions of the place were overpowering. I remember thinking they can take photographs. They can write stories about Buchenwald. But it will be impossible to describe the terrible odor. And indeed, it was indescribable.

And now, I'll just take you through the camp as I saw it. The office of the commander was near the rear entrance. Outside were contraptions on which they hung prisoners by first tying their hands behind their backs, then attaching rope to the hands and pulling them backwards and up, and hung them from the posts. A prisoner did not have to hang very long before the arms were detached from the sockets. It was a torturous device, indeed, and had been used constantly at Buchenwald.

Inside the camp office, the furnishings were lavish but garish. It was here that the wife of the commander, known as the Bitch of Buchenwald, had displayed her lampshades made from the human skin of the prisoners. At if you not believe that they were human skin, she had left the concentration marks, the letters that had been tattooed onto the prisoners still on the lampshades.

At the right of the camp as you entered, were the crematorium. The ovens were still smoking. In their frantic effort to destroy, the evidence the Germans had kept the ovens going for 24 hours a day without stop. Half-burned bodies were still in the ovens, where they had been left as the Germans had fled the camp, before the Americans came. Beside the ovens were the emaciated bodies of prisoners they had not had time to burn.

They were naked, stacked like cord wood, men and women together, as you would fireplace wood. Further down, were slat-sided carts that were also filled with dead bodies. These carts were used to bring the bodies from the gas chambers. And they had not had time to unload them.

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I remember thinking, no one will believe this. And I must take some pictures. But my hands, in fact, my whole body was shaking so that I jammed the shutter, and I dropped the camera and broke it. So I took no pictures. But the picture of the reality of Buchenwald will remain in my mind forever.

These emaciated skeletal figures were real people, human beings that I was viewing. They were not plaster. They were not even animals. They had all lived, and breathed, and loved, and talked as is the right of every human being. To end in the ovens stacked as cord wood on the ground or piled in a cart seemed the most inhuman ends to a human life, as indeed it was.

Not far from the ovens was a cement torture chamber. The man who took me through it had been a prisoner. He could speak some English, and could still walk. He said, they brought prisoners to be punished into this structure. There was a drain in the middle of the cement floor, so that they could use hoses with hard streams of water to wash away the blood from the beatings.

On the walls were great meat hooks, where they literally hung prisoners like chunks of beef until they were dead. The prisoner who was pointing out these instruments of torture told me that his wife and his two sons had died on the hooks. Further down from the torture chamber and to the left as you faced it, were the beginnings of the barracks. These were wood structures, unheated and with few windows.

The wood bunk beds with no mattresses reached to the ceiling. In winter, many froze in these flimsy structures, froze in their bunks and remained there until there was room at the crematoriums. The people in these first barracks were still alive, but dressed in their torn and dirty striped camp clothes. And of course, very ill, and very hungry.

In the last barracks, was to me the saddest condition of all. These contained the living dead, the people so ill, so emaciated, that they were more dead than alive. Some were conscious enough to know that liberation had come. I remember one old man, on the other hand, he may not have been old. It was impossible in their condition to tell their age one way or the other. He grabbed hold of my trench coat and said, American. American good.

And then the good American, out of ignorance did the worst thing she could have done under the circumstances, I gave them all the food I had. And the food consisted of chocolate bars, and cheese, and whatever else was in a K-ration which we all carried. And it was all concentrated food, and richer by far than any regular food, of which we had none.

It did not occur to me at the time, and I excuse my ignorance because I was young, because I had no experience, had no training in medicine, that the rich food would be impossible for people who had been half-starved for so long to digest. When the medics came later they fed them gruel mixed of a mixture of dried potatoes and watered powdered milk. Many of these living dead did die.

I have always thought that I contributed to some of the deaths by my foolish actions. The medics tried to comfort me by saying, you didn't know. Most of them would have died anyway. You did what you thought was right. And this may be true. But it's still does haunt me.

I looked into the eyes of death in this people. And I did what I could. I hugged them, and kissed them, and cried with them, and murmured with them in a language that most of them did not understand. And I watched a number die while I was there, one whose hand grew stiff in mine as I held it.

And I wondered about these people. What had their lives been like before Buchenwald? What their lives had been after their arrival at the camp was only too clear. And even then, I could only guess at some of the atrocities that had been committed. These living dead will live with me forever.

The next day at Buchenwald, we began the series of visitations with the towns people. We brought them out to the concentration camp in groups, and showed them through the camp. You did this, we tell them. Look at the remains of what you did. Oh, no, no, no, no. They said, it was not us. It was not us. It was Hitler. We knew nothing about it. We didn't even know the camps were here.

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And the prisoners told us that this was a lie. They said they had been taken in work gangs to the town to fix the roads and to repair the buildings. They said that many villagers had taunted them and thrown stones, and how could they not have known that the camp was there. And how could they not, I wondered, at least have smelled it? But these questions and these visitations had a very deep effect on me.

When I returned to the United States, I remembered it. If, I thought, we held the German prisoners responsible for what had happened and we held the German citizens responsible for what they had done to these prisoners, then surely I am also responsible in some way for my own government. I had not been politically active or even aware before the war. But I became so afterwards.

And whenever I become tired, or I feel that one person can't do very much, or that what I'm doing is not important, or it's not having any effect, I remember the Germans saying, no, no. We are not responsible. And our answer, yes you are. You allowed it to happen. And then I keep on trying.

Never, I pray, will anyone say to us, you and to me, you are responsible. You let it happen. I would hope we could at least reply in good conscience. But I tried. I did my best to keep it from happening.

To remember Buchenwald is not easy. It's a difficult journey. But it must be remembered. And it's a journey that we must take again and again. How could there ever have been a Buchenwald, or a Dachau, or an Auschwitz, or any of the other concentration and death camps? How could they possibly have come to pass?

We may never know all the answers. But this we must resolve. This we must profess that it must not be allowed to happen again. I thank you. And if there are questions, I would be more than happy to answer them if I can.

Was Buchenwald in Germany?

Yes. It was in the far part of Germany. As a matter of fact, when we were-- those of us who were over there, you hear the story that people will say, they didn't believe the death camps existed. They didn't believe that what went on there really went on there. And we were over there, and we didn't actually believe it ourselves until we came to Buchenwald.

And there it was in all its horror, very real, very existent. And it did happen. Yes?

Did you find any paperwork or files on all the people who had been in the camp, or had these not been kept, or had they been destroyed before the camp was liberated?

So far as I know, they had all been destroyed, although I believe the army was able to find some of it. I was not involved in that particular part of the liberation. The intention of the Germans had been that they would do away with all the prisoners, that they would kill them all, and burn the remains, and then they would do away with all the records and everything else in the camp, so that when the Americans came, there'd be nothing really left of evidence of any kind.

For them it became impossible. There were too many prisoners. And they just, working 24 hours a day, could not eliminate all of them. So the remains were there for the Americans to see when they did arrive. Now how many of the papers they were able to recover, I'm not sure. I understand there's an excellent book out on Buchenwald, which Mr. Feinstein was telling me about this morning, which I have not yet read, but which I intend to. Yes?

I assume that ever since the war you've been sharing these recollections with people here in the United States. And I wonder what change in attitude you see over the years, and where we are now. Are we more concerned, less concerned?

In actuality, I have not been sharing these with people all over the United States. At the beginning, no one wanted to talk about the death camps. And as time went on, nobody wanted to believe they even existed. And it has been my experience that it's only been in the last few years that people have owned up to the fact that not only did this happen, that these atrocities were true, but that there is the possibility of another Buchenwald, another Auschwitz, or another form of real inhumanity to man which has happened in other places, and that people must become aware.

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They must be reminded. And maybe for a lot of people, especially those who were there, some of the pain has now eased somewhat. And so it's possible for them to talk about it in a logical way, without becoming so emotionally involved that it's impossible for them. And I think it's also possible for people who were not there, are now at a great enough distance so that they can look at it, and say, it was terrible. Because they were, after all, much too young to do anything about it themselves at that time.

But I think it's a good thing that it is being talked about now. Yes?

Since you had witnessed these conditions on the liberation of the camp, were you involved at all in the war crimes trials? Did you give any testimony?

No, I was not. I was back in the United States at that time. I understand there is a judge who was at the war crimes trials, Mr. Feinstein was telling me this morning. I'm not sure. I've read reports of the trials. And I find them fascinating. And I think it would have been certainly an unforgettable experience to have been present at the time. But I was not there. Yes?

I understand that there are still some Nazi criminals in this living in the United States that we've never deported that are still-- came into this country. I don't under what guise, and every now and then years and years later, they pick them up, and send them back.

You may be absolutely right about that. I think some of them were able to get over here in the guise of-- I think some people sponsored them probably not knowing the people they were sponsoring. Or--

A lot of them came in because of the Cold War, because of the tensing relations between the Soviet Bloc and Western Europe. And they were able, there was a great suspicion about evidence that came from the Soviet Union or from Poland after 1948. So people were able to say, I was not in the SS. I was just simply living in the area, and there was not a thorough search.

There was a Congresswoman, Elizabeth Holtzman from New York, who was on one of these committees where they felt that they should be deported. They're digging up these individual cases, but she didn't have much success.

I suppose it would be pretty difficult at this point if they've been here that long, and if their records have been at least publicly spotless. But I suppose that's one of the things that happens in any sort of--

There is a special war crimes commission now in Washington, and they have about 60 cases going at present. And the most perhaps interesting and contradictory is a guy named Trifa in Michigan, who was an Archbishop in the Romanian Orthodox Church, who became a priest after the war, but was actually responsible for the deaths of about 40,000 people in Romania. So it's like a schizophrenic personality where there's a drastic change after he comes to the United States, and it's caused a lot of mixed feelings between the Romanian Orthodox Community in Michigan and the government, as well as with the Jewish community in Detroit, which pushed for the prosecution of war criminals, generally.

I suppose it is possible. I'm not suggesting it, but I suppose it is possible for a person after a time, to realize themselves the horror in which they were involved, and to try to do some sort of penance, as you may call it, or to do something to compensate for what never should have happened. Yes?

What's your view of groups like the Posse Comitatus, and the neo-Nazis, and survivalist groups, and things of that nature today?

Well, it's difficult to say. I think the most important thing is that we must keep an eye on neo-Nazis and so forth. I think they must not be ignored, and that we must be aware that what happened before could happen again. And it happened because of the condition of the country, and of the people letting it happen. And the people saying that they needed a strong leader at that time.

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And when the intellectuals, and those who were involved with the universities, and the other people found out what was really happening, it was too late. And that's why it's so important to be ever-vigilant which is something we must be in the United States. There was a question over here too, yes?

I had the experience of meeting a number of the German scientists who worked on the V-2 bomb. And they were supposedly screened to make sure they were not ardent Nazis. But these were all employees who worked under Hitler to develop these bombs. The United States was tickled to death to bring them here, so that we could use them to go to work for us.

And I got the feeling from knowing some of these people that they really were not-- they didn't necessarily feel the way the Nazis did, but they had to have jobs. And they just didn't have strong characters. That's about what it was, and I'm sure that was true of a lot of other people. And I feel that maybe if the same-- if I were in a similar situation, I might have felt that way.

I know that lynchings have taken place in the South. And I'm sure a lot of Southerners didn't approve of these things. And yet, they were afraid to speak up, because, well, they just didn't have strong enough characters. It didn't mean that they themselves were so terribly bad.

But it was I found that in spite of the fact that most of my mother's family was wiped out during the Holocaust, that most Germans are human beings like everybody else. It's just that some of them didn't have any guts. And that it seems to me we have to develop the strength to be able to speak up, even if it's dangerous to us, and will affect our livelihoods and things like that.

I think you've just made an excellent point, is that we do have to have the courage to speak up. They were all human beings. And I know you've seen movies. You've seen TV. You've read books, reports of the commanders of the death camps even who were very loving and playful with their own children, and good to their wives, and could somehow divorce themselves with their life on one hand and what they were doing on the other.

And of course, you know is at the trials, they all said, but I was just following orders. And so I think every human being has to make up their mind when do you stop following orders when you know in your conscience that this is wrong.

And as of the way of the scientists, they were scientists first, and they were Nazis second. And they said, I am a scientist. I'm doing what I'm was what I studied to do, what I love, what I want to do. And so I put this other in the back of my mind, and I don't think about it. And the United States was happy to have them because they were superior scientists, and they could put behind these are people that are scientists first, and Nazis second.

I mean this debate about when do you-- it's not difficult for me because I've made up my own mind that if you have to do anything that it's against your conscience, it's wrong no matter who's telling you to do it. But it's not an easy conclusion to come to. And it isn't, if you have a family to support or if you have an intense interest in your work, such as the scientists did, and it's not easy.

And human beings are very complex people and they many times can divorce what they're doing with what's happening and excuse themselves, especially if they're in an army situation, as I am following orders. This is what I've been taught to do. This is what I've been taught is right, and so it must be right. And how do you counteract that? That's a good question. Or do some of you feel that that's the way it is?

I have a question.

Yes. I'm just wondering if you made any friends with any of the survivors and if you still keep in touch with anybody that was a survivor?

Not any longer. Everyone that I knew that survived is now dead. One of the saddest things that happened too, of course, after the liberation was what were we going to do with all these people. So we had liberated them, and they were no longer prisoners in the camp. And where were they going to go? Who was going to feed them? Who was going to take

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care of them?

They didn't know where their relatives, were most of them. They didn't know where they could go. They had lost everything they owned. And one of the saddest things that I watched after that would be these streams of refugees just marching down the road, straggling down the roads with maybe one tiny little sack of possessions, hoping that somewhere along the line, they were going to find a relative, a friend, someone they knew, or someplace that they could stay.

We were not prepared to take care of these refugees. And that was, well, I suppose it was an act of not really believing there were going to be that many, or that these camps really existed. And the other just was we just hadn't made plans for them. So some of them just went from the concentration camps into a different form of concentration camp, where it was hoped that they would be able to find-- we would be able to locate someone, some relative, some friend, or some person who would take them in or could get them back to their original town or city. Yes?

After liberation and once the basic needs of the people who survived were met, what did these people ask for? Did they ask for relatives, family members? Did they ask-- give me a gun, so I can go shoot a German? What were their wants once they were back on the road to recovery?

The basic ones were where is the rest of my family. Find the rest of my family for me. I mean they were beyond revenge at that point. I mean basically, I think because most of them were too ill. And they could see that the Nazis were on the run at that time. And they just wanted to get back to where they had come from.

You young people might not realize, but when they finally got them out of the displaced camps, we have had them coming to the United States, to our larger cities. And for instance, I lived in an apartment complex. By then, their nourishment was a little better. But you always knew them by that number on the arm. So we did save some, and they were living decent lives once they came to this country.

Yeah, after a matter of time. I know that in Fridley, where I live for instance--

Oh, I'm talking about Cincinnati.

We had a-- well even in Fridley--

I'm surprised. That's a small town.

--we had a Polish doctor for some time. And you could always see the concentration marks on his arm. And he unfortunately was killed in an air accident on his first visit back to Poland after he had been here in the United States, which was quite a tragedy.

But we didn't do--

But some of them did end up here.

--as much as should have done during the war. I think we were aware of what was going on, but no one was doing anything during the war time. We had some knowledge.

No, it was all just going too fast.

Yeah.

Thank you.

You're welcome. Yes?

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When the American troops came into Germany, did they know that the camps existed or when they came upon a camp they surprised to find what they found?

They knew that the camps existed. It was just that no one quite believed that they existed as they did. It's-- I can see where for a young person like you, it would be very difficult. I'm sure you've seen pictures. But to look at a picture or a TV show, or something keeps it far away from you. But it was very, very real.

And the troops knew they were that these camps existed. They just were not prepared for the depth of the atrocities that had been committed there. They seemed unbelievable to most people.

How old were you at the time?

21.

And how did that affect you in your life later, in what ways? Did--

Mostly in that I think I became politically active after my return to the United States because I remembered, as I said so strongly, our bringing the Germans through the town. Those who lived in town bringing them through the camps and saying you did this, you were responsible. And they said, no, no. We didn't do it. Hitler did it. And we said, no. You did it. You allowed it to happen.

And I hadn't thought of things in that way before. But after I came home, I thought I have to take an interest in my government. I have to take an interest in what's happening. Because if we can tell the Germans you're responsible and I'm responsible too for what happens here in the United States. Just, I feel we all ought to feel. Because if you just sit back, anything-- people are governed about as well as they deserve. Which means if you do nothing, you don't have good government. Yeah?

What was done with the bodies after liberation? And was there any attempt to identify any of them, by perhaps talking to the survivors that were there? It was almost impossible to identify the bodies that were already dead. And the United States buried them. We did find out the names of some of those who died after we arrived there. But trying to find and locate relatives and so forth was a really difficult thing to do.

And I would suspect that most of those never made it back, that they died before they ever got back to where they came from. There were only the stronger ones, the newer ones that had come to the camp that were able to make it.

Were there any SS people around when you liberated the camp? Were they--

Oh, no. They'd gone.

They'd all fled?

Uh-huh. They had all fled. The only ones that were still there were those that had been ordered to stay and keep the crematoriums going, and hope that they would have it all cleared out before the Americans came. But all of those in command and the SS, et cetera, had all taken it on the lam before the Americans ever arrived.

They weren't going to stay there and be caught. There was no nobility about it, I can assure you. Yes?

I think the people I know who go through relatively minor traumas in their lives and never quite recover maybe use it as an excuse to not lead very productive lives. And I have trouble imagining how you go through something so horrible and aren't depressed forever more. Does it have sort of a galvanizing effect? Help me understand the psychological reactions if you can.

From the point of view of the prisoner or just a witness?

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Prisoners most of all?

Well, I suppose from the prisoners, I could-- the only thing I could-- you've seen Sophie's Choice.

Yes.

And I'm sure that told one of the ways in which there was a great effect. I don't think you ever do quite recover from it. And I think it was most unfortunate that a lot of these people were not even when they found relatives who had not been to the camps or were taken back, were asked not to talk about it. Because they didn't even want to hear about it. And they didn't want them, as they said scaring the younger children with tales of this.

And so they felt not only had they had to go through the camps and then bereft of their families, but then they weren't being accepted back. So they were sort of in a no person's land. No. I don't think you ever completely-- you couldn't possibly be the same again after having gone through that sort of experience.

I think it left very deep and open wounds, even with the young children, or maybe especially even with young children who went through the experiences that some of them did.

There are several books that deal with it. There's one called New Lives, which talks about how people recovered psychologically or tried to. What you find is that they become fairly introverted. They move into their own family more, or try to re-establish that, or their own community of friends. A lot of them related only to survivors for a long time.

Certainly there would be a lack of trust.

From the Jewish point of view, a lot of them became very ardent Zionists, because of the lack of self defense during the Holocaust. And a lot of them have problems with dreams, and nightmares, and a great deal of guilt for surviving. This is one of the biggest problems. Because it was sort of a luck of the draw for those who survived. We've heard a number of people, and it's only because they had the right job at the right time or a series of lucky circumstances led to their survival.

But among the survivors themselves is a syndrome of guilt for surviving. Because there it's incalculable to know why you didn't end up in the oven, and why you, in fact, did survive.

I thought Styron brought that out really well in Sophie's Choice, especially in the book, if you read it. The guilt that she felt for surviving when the rest--

It's easier to die.

Yeah.

And you know, why did you survive when no one else did? Instead of saying, hurrah, hurrah, I was the one who survived, you feel--

There have also been books written about the children of survivors, and the children of survivors are obviously cared for in a very special way, intense closeness between parents and children because of the fact that them being sort of the last hope when there was no hope. And also they, like parents, they tend to be a very aggressive group, aggressive in terms of pursuing career options and things, very high success rate among survivors children because of their knowledge of the past.

The speakers here yesterday said that she has two real problems. And one is that her mother has no grave, and she can't go to any place where she can say something. That bothers her a lot. And she feels she's been deprived of something because her mother was killed in a forest in a massacre. And the second thing that she said she had, she has frequent dreams about going back to Poland and about wandering in the forest and finding bones there. That these women who were massacred with her, when she was a survivor, might still be lying there unburied in the forest. And that has all the

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characteristics of this type of syndrome.

I think so. And someone over here?

Yeah, I was just curious as how you dealt with it yourself upon hearing the several different speakers we've had. It had an impact with me, not as great as what David had. But you think about it at night before you go to sleep. And you wonder, now how did this affect you, and how did you cope with it?

Well, I had a little difficulty at the time, and reacted very emotionally. But as I explained, the lasting effect was that I felt I should do something in my own country to see that nothing like this would ever happen there.

I guess maybe I might have been a little bit guilty after first returning from Europe to being a little bit like some of the other survivors and trying to put it out of my mind for a while, and not think about it. Because sometimes when things are extremely painful and you feel there isn't anything you can do right then, you just try to put it out of your mind.

But it's just something you can't forget, and shouldn't, and should do all you can to see that it never happens again. Which is about what you can do now is just to try to go forward because you can't undo what was done. Yes?

You mentioned before about how they made the German people nearby go through the camp, and see all this. And you also mentioned that many of them or whatever said that they didn't know anything about it. And I've read that before and I heard that before too. But what I was wondering was after they saw it, or after the German people went through, what type of other reactions did they have? Was it shock? Were they ashamed, things like that?

And then did any of them or whatever offer to do what they could for these people, take them into their homes, or whatever, this type of stuff? Or what was the general reaction, other than just saying they didn't know about it?

Well, the general reaction from the people that we took through from Buchenwald was a very defensive one. One had said, you can't blame us for this. Don't blame us for this. We had nothing to do with it. It was all Hitler. We didn't even know the camp was here. And they would cry and they would carry on. And there was not much real substantial help being offered from them, however.

We did set up some small command posts in which Germans from the town were recruited to help find homes for these people, or to try to trace their relatives out. But it wasn't the sort of thing where they said, oh my, this is what happened. Now what can we do to help you? And it was just obvious that they did know the camp was there. As I say, the prisoners had told us they had been taken into the town to do road work, and repair work, and so forth. And that the people had thrown stones at them, and called them names.

And as I mentioned, there was no way they couldn't smell it, because you couldn't be anywhere near it. It was just such an atrocious odor coming from the camp. But their I think number one reaction was one of defense, not me, not me. I didn't do it. Yes?

And what were their reactions when you came back and you talked to people? Did you get a cold shoulder? I mean, did you feel like people didn't believe you, or they thought that--

In most instances, I felt as if people didn't believe me, and they were not particularly interested in hearing about that aspect of the war, and would sometimes shut you off by saying, oh yes, I saw those pictures in the paper. And then they wanted to talk about something else.

Maybe that's a very human reaction. I'm not sure. But it isn't until really in the last few years that people are really talking about the Holocaust. And this includes survivors, people who were there, people who were involved in one way or another. And maybe when something that horrible happens, it takes a number of years and a certain perspective before it can be brought into the open again.

Because I did find that when I returned, people didn't really hear about it at all.

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Why do you think that was?

I think they didn't want to believe that it really happened.

The Germans could have been reacting in the same way then to all of it.

Oh, yes. Yes, I think a lot of the Germans truly believed that, especially those who had never been involved with the camps or seen the camps, maybe truly believed that this could not have been that way. Well, it is a difficult thing to believe. I find it, if I hadn't been there myself, I might find it a little difficult to believe.

One kind of has to wonder, taking people's action into consideration, that most people jump on the bandwagon and possibly might, when Hitler came to power, that everybody, all the Germans were saying, yeah, he's doing the right thing. So let's take care of them Jews. And then all of a sudden, he starts losing, and the Allies come in. And oh, no. We didn't know anything about it.

Did you find anybody that definitely said, Hitler is still right, from the German people who stood firmly to that belief?

None that said that to me. They were all presenting themselves as victims at that point. But at that point, of course, they knew they were losing. And we're hoping, I think, to be handled as easily as they could be by the United States. And I guess I honestly think there were a lot of Germans by their apathy and by their not really doing anything as Hitler was first coming into power, did allow this to happen, who never would have if they had had the vaguest notion that it would end up the way it did.

Hitler had some sort of hypnotic power. And Germany was in its depression. They needed a leader. They had no idea he would go as far as he did. And I think very sincerely a lot of them felt that way. And then when it was out of hand, it was too late. And some of them capitulated to save their own lives. And others went underground, as we know.

And it's very easy to sit here and say, they shouldn't have done that. They should have done this. They should have done this. They should have done this. And then you have to be-- if you look very deeply into your own soul and ask yourself, if you were in that same situation at that same time, what would you do.

You'd like to think that you would at least go underground, if you hadn't spoken out before. And that you would do everything you could. But I guess I'm hesitant to say what anyone would do under a given set of circumstances that takes place at a certain time that's removed from where we are. Yes?

Yeah, earlier you mentioned that you felt that the Nazis were to blame, and the Germans, and even your own government, America was to blame for Buchenwald, essentially. Could you elaborate a little bit on the role that America played in leading up to Buchenwald? I just finished this book, While Six Million Died, discussing about our immigration policies and things like that. But could you elaborate a little bit on the role that America could have or should have played prior to all this?

I don't know exactly what the United States could have done in this. They certainly could have had better intelligence forces, I suppose. The United States, well, I suppose we could have entered the war earlier. I'm not saying we should have. I guess what I was saying when I said the United States part, is that it is incumbent on us now to see that something like Buchenwald will never happen again in the United States of America, or that hopefully our policies would be those that would help people in any part of any country to keep this sort of thing from happening.

How would that relate to the Haitian refugees or refugees from El Salvador? What do you suppose we should do in those situations?

Well, it's difficult to say, again. I feel we should give refuge as the Statue of Liberty says. Of course, we did that once with Cuba and got ourselves into a lot of trouble, as you know. But I think we should do what we can to make the United States a sanctuary for people who are truly being persecuted in their own countries and that we should make very

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sure that our own policies in the United States do not allow for any of this.

We know that during the war, the Nazis had taken films or photographs for propaganda purposes and to document their actions for posterity, as it were. How did these fall into Allied hands? Was any of this documentation found at the camps such as Buchenwald?

Yeah, some of it was. I was always amazed that the Germans had even taken some of these pictures. But apparently did so as a true record of-- I don't know-- it could be the Watergate tapes I suppose or whatever. But I find it amazing that we have as much of a record as we do of the actual camps and the actual executions. And I feel sure that probably is only a minor part of it.

I mean if we saw the whole thing, we would, again, find it unbelievable. And the Europeans are amazing. They take not only movies, but photographs of everything. I mean, when we were moving through Germany, we had to stay in German homes. We didn't have to stay in German homes. But it was cold and it was warmer in the houses, and easier than trying to set up tents.

And it was always amazing to me that there was never a home that didn't have, not one, but maybe up to 10 to 15 to 20 albums of pictures, picture albums. Pictures, great picture takers. They keep records of everything, all the family, all the relatives, all the friends, every place they'd ever gone. I'd never seen so many picture albums in my life as I had in Germany.

So they were inordinate picture takers. And they had a lot of good photographers on their staff to take films. And that's why we do have some of these records, and we're able to confiscate some of them. And I think they considered them very precious, which is one reason they didn't destroy them.

Any more questions? OK. I'd like to thank Kay for coming. This is only about the fifth time she's spoken on this subject. So this is not her profession. Actually, she's the first lady of Fridley. Her husband is the mayor of Fridley, Minnesota. I'd like to thank you for coming and sharing your experiences with us.

[APPLAUSE]

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