

At the capital's Convention Center in Washington, DC, on April the 12th. Go ahead.

I was born in a little town in Wyszkw.

Where?

Wyszkw, Poland. And in 1939, when the Germans entered our town, they took the first group of Jews. They put them in the synagogue and burned them alive.

In the synagogue?

In the synagogue. Among those people were a few of our relatives. I was only not quite 10 years old, because my birthday is in February and the war started in September, and didn't realize the impact of all what was happening. My parents, my brother, and sister were outside of the city in trenches because the bombs were falling and the guns were shooting.

But when we were discovered by the Germans, we were taken outside of this little town, Wyszkw. And we were separated from the Poles.

The Jews-- because you were Jews?

Right. The Poles were put on one side, and the Jews were put on the other side. The Poles were given some baked potatoes and some food because we didn't eat for three days, being in the trenches. The Jews were not given anything.

Who were you with?

With my parents-- my mother, my father, my sister, and my brother. I looked very much like a Polish girl, child, with blonde hair and blue eyes, and long, blonde hair. I ran over to get a potato for my parents and my brother, but I still didn't realize what was happening. Now, the Germans told us to dig trenches, because again, there may be some shooting. But little did I know that those were the graves that we were digging for ourselves.

About two hours later-- it's so many years later, but I'll never forget that gift of life that this German said to us. Was after he must have been a Wehrmacht officer, whatever he was. I didn't know. And he said to us, I'm giving you a gift of life. Get out of this town and go anyplace else, and that was our first gift of life. But that did not last very long.

Well, how could you get out of town? Was there transportation?

We were walking.

Walking.

Walking, it was a small town, Wyszkw. We never came back to it. Then in 1940-- excuse me.

Let's stop it just for a minute while you--

My brother's name was Moshe, and my sister's name was Rivka.

What the last name?

Rosenberg. And my mother's name was Feiga, and my father's name was Chaim. We left without anything whatever we had in our bags, and in 1939 was a terrible winter. We found out that Poland was divided into two parts. Russia took part of Poland, and we remained with the Germans.

My father tried to get us over to the Russian side because they told him that we may be safe there. But he went by himself, and we thought that he was killed. Because for weeks, he did not come back.

But we found out later that the people that left to go to the Russian side were laying on the borders for weeks. The Germans would not let them go back, and the Russians would not let them go in. And they were freezing to death. So my father chose to remain on the part that the Germans occupied-- the part that was occupied. And we still didn't believe that things were going to get worse.

Were you in inside, or were you outside? Where did you sleep?

We were still-- we had a little-- one room in a Polish family's house that my father was doing business with in a little village by the name of [NON-ENGLISH] which is right near-- not far from Warsaw. In 1940, they rounded up all the little villages and the little towns, and they created a ghetto. And that was the Warsaw ghetto.

When we got to the Warsaw ghetto, there was no place to eat. Families occupied a room-- five, six, seven families. There was no place to sleep. They were sleeping in shifts. The roaches, the lice, the mice-- it was hell.

How old were you then?

I was only 10, about 11 years old-- 11, 11 and a half.

Wow.

I was the business lady. I used to bring out some things from the ghetto, and sell it to the Poles, and bring in some food till it got harder and harder to get out from the Warsaw ghetto to bring anything in. Just before selections were being taken, we didn't know what was happening to anybody. My father said to me--

My mother was already taken away, and my sister was already taken away.

How did they take them away?

On the selections.

Were they given numbers? Were they--

No, they just--

They would point them out?

--had to round-- no, they had to round up a certain amount of people. And my mother and sister were taken first. And she was younger than I. She was about 11.

And you were how old?

I was 13 by then.

Still in the ghetto?

Still in the ghetto. And he finally said to me, my child, go and save yourself. If we ever survive, we'll meet--

Some day.

--some day. It was a very cold winter-- the winter of '42. I'll never forget that. I had no Polish documents. I had nothing. I was trying to get documents for my family, so I went out of the ghetto to get them Polish documents for money.

And I was pointed out by a Polack that I was Jewish, and they took me to bring me to the Gestapo because they would have been rewarded with either sugar, or salt, or whatever they were given. But first, they wanted to know if I had any money, if I had any jewelry, if I had anything.

Did you?

And they kept-- I didn't have anything with me. So I couldn't give them anything. So they were going to turn me over, and I don't know what happened at this point. I just jumped out of the window and got into a trolley car, ran in.

And when I got the main terminal, I was just hiding and shaking. And I said to myself, what am I going to do? Where am I going? I have-- but my father had gotten, I'll never forget, was a \$100 bill he sewed into my skirt.

Did you know it was there?

I didn't know it for a while. He says, maybe you'll save yourself with this. But that was a hindrance because I couldn't cash it. I couldn't do anything with it. And I said, where am I going?

So without any documents, without any Polish documents or any--

Any papers.

--any papers, you are doomed. Or if anyone would have pointed you out, you were doomed. So I said, where am I going? And I remember my father's words, go and save yourself so some day you could tell it to the world what is happening to us.

So I thought about it. And I said, I had a friend that I knew from my hometown, and she was baptized in a little village.

Was she Jewish?

No, she wasn't. She was baptized. She was a Christian girl. But if I could get to that parish and tell them that I am her, perhaps I could obtain a birth certificate or a baptism certificate.

That was smart.

And with this, I could save myself because I had no other way of getting any other documents. I remember going into the church, and I don't know where I got the nerve. I guess life, the thought of surviving, and telling what was happening. I went into the priest, and I kneeled, and I kissed his hand.

And he says to me, what are you doing here? And I said I came to get my baptism certificate because I'm going into Warsaw to go to school. And you know what's happening now. Without any documentation, they may even think that I'm Jewish.

He gave me the baptism certificate. And then I said to myself, this is not enough. Because I wasn't afraid of the Germans, that they were going to recognize me, because I looked typically Polish. And my Polish was very fluent. I was afraid for the friends, or for the Poles that may recognize me.

The friends?

My friends, Polish.

Oh, your Polish friends?

Polish friends, not my Jewish friends.

Your Polish friends might recognize you from your town?

From my town and point me out to the Germans again. So I sat for a while, and I said, which train should I take? I was in the train station. And I decided to take a train to a place where nobody would know me.

I decided to go to the part of Poland that was occupied by the Russians in 1939 so nobody would recognize me there. When I got off the train, I went from place to place to the villages to find out if they would need a maid. Somebody hired me as a maid, feeding the pigs, milking the cows, working in the fields.

How old were you then? 13?

I was 13 years-- I was still 13 years old. Because that was in 1942.

You must have been a big girl.

No, I was not a big girl. I was an average girl, but I kept up with anything. They were very abusive, and I couldn't even eat. I couldn't-- in the place, at the first place that I was the maid.

So I got another place. Somebody recommended that I go to those people. And over there, I became-- I shouldn't be suspicious. I went to church, to communion, to confession every Sunday after working seven days a week.

And I'll never forget one day, I guess I must have been talking in my sleep, and I said something in Jewish. And they turned around and said, what is this?

Was it Yiddish?

Yiddish. I said something in Yiddish, and I don't know where my head was. And I said to them, no, this is German-- that I'm fighting with a German. Because in Poland, it is not like in the United States, you have a melting pot from people from all over the world.

There was not such a thing in Poland. You came from one place. So they started questioning me, where do I come?

And I told them that I was coming from [NON-ENGLISH] where in 1939, when the Germans entered there, they had like 50% of that population was Poles, and 50% of the population were Germans. So they dispossessed a lot of the Polish people from that state in order to make rooms for the Germans.

And I said, my father was taken to the Polish army, and my mother was killed-- died. And my brother was taken into-- he was older, and my brother was taken into the labor camp to work for the Germans. And I never knew anything about Christianity. I had to remember and to watch them as to what I should be doing and what I shouldn't be doing.

And I was working in the fields, and I never knew. I never knew any field work, or milking cows, or feeding pigs, or anything like that. But I watched, and I always had to be better than anybody else. And one day they said, you're working like a Jewess. I didn't answer.

What did they mean by that?

Because I wasn't tying the corn or the--

Husks

--properly. And my numeration for this work was a pair of wooden shoes and a little apron and the food I was getting from 6:00 in the morning till all hours of the night.

Where did you sleep? In the main house, or in a barn?

I slept in the main house, but I always had to be aware not to speak too much, not to discuss anything. If my own father or mother would have passed by, I would have had to make believe that I don't even know them. And when I heard of the uprising in the ghetto, they said the Jews are still fighting.

I'll never forget when I was liberated in 1945-- '44, at the end of 1944.

You stayed in that place the whole time?

In that place all the time, not knowing what happened to my father, to my brother, hoping that somebody would be alive when I come back.

What about your mother and your sister?

I knew my mother and sister were already taken away, and they were talking about Treblinka.

Was Treblinka near where you were?

Right, was very much near the place that I was on my Polish documents. They were coming back and telling us about the destruction of the Ostrolenka ghetto, and how everybody's taken, but they were rejoicing. There was no feeling of guilt or help. They were just rejoicing that it's--

The family, the family where you lived?

Yes, the family that I lived, they were just rejoicing that we finally getting rid of the Jewish people-- of the Jews.

They agreed with what the Germans were doing?

Yes, they were agreeing. They had no-- well, when I realized the teaching of Christianity, if I was not born into a Jewish family or being a Jewess to start with, maybe I would have the same hate. I remember going there for Easter, and it was a terrible feeling of what they doing when they took Christ, and resurrected him, and told the children that Christ was killed by the Jews.

Now, they were actually teaching hatred from the moment the child was born.

That's right.

A seed of hatred. We were the killers of Christ. Many of the times, I wanted to tell them that Christ was not killed by the Jews. Christ was killed by the Romans, and Christ was a Jew. But they were so ignorant of the facts.

And I was afraid to say anything because I had to be a good Christian in order to survive. Because I promised my father--

You had to feel the same way they felt, or they would--

Would be suspicious of me as to what I am and what I'm-- because I came to them very unknown. And I was very lucky to be taken in working as a maid without shoes, without clothing. I remember when they were cutting the corn, and the stumps in the fields were hurting my feet, and I developed a skin that was like an elephant skin because of the-- a maid, I had to make sure that I will not fall back on my work. Otherwise, they would get rid of me in the first place.

Did you ever find your father or your brother?

No. In 1944, when we were liberated by the Russians, I remember him going into a large town which was the closest--

Ostrolenka.

Who was him?

The farmer.

Where you lived?

Yes. And of course, we had the shooting, and the tanks, and the liberation, and a lot of Poles were killed at the time, too. And my boss, the farmer's brother, was killed, and the houses were burned down. All that happened with the liberation of the Russians and the Germans leaving that part of Poland. I was--

I just want to make sure that it's--

Go ahead. As long as that's still running.

I was rejoicing in the fact that I'll be-- I'm being liberated, and perhaps I'll be able to join my father and my brother.

When the Russians came in, I remember this farmer going into town, and he met a couple of his Jewish friends that came back from the partisans-- that were in the partisans. And he came to the house and he said, they didn't kill all the Jews. There was a couple of them left over. With this, when the shooting stopped, I picked myself up and I told them I have to go and find my father and my brother. I never told them that I was Jewish.

When I came to my hometown, I was the only survivor. And there was nobody there. They told me my father and my brother were taken away and killed.

So I met one family which were nearby. Not from my--

How far was this that you went from--

From Ostrolenka back to Wyszkw.

Where? How far?

Which is about--

How many days?

Well, I was hitchhiking, and it took me about three days to get back with a horse and wagon when you hitchhiked. There was no automobiles or anything like that. When I came back, I found out I was the only survivor.

So I went to the place where we were during part of the-- during the war from 1939 to '41 when they rounded up all the small towns, and I found a couple of Jewish people survived. So we were in a house together for a while because we were trying to contact relatives. And my father left me a-- he says, my child, if you survive--

You got a note?

Yeah, he told me, contact my sister in America. Because he had a sister in America and a sister in Cuba.

Did you remember their names? Did he tell you their names?

Yes, he did. He told me their names. He says, contact. They'll take care of you.

How old were you then?

15 by then. I was 15 years old. It was two years from 1942, the end of '42, to the end of '44.

I realized that I was left all alone, and I had to make a living. So again, we were buying Russian clothing and going into the villages to sell it in order to exist. And one evening, I went to this village, [NON-ENGLISH], and I slept over there. I knew somebody there.

And when I came back, the Poles attacked the house that the few Jews remained. And that was in [NON-ENGLISH] which is right near [NON-ENGLISH]. And they killed two children that survived with the parents-- with the father. They killed them after the war.

Why? After--

After the war, the Poles--

Still hated the Jews?

Hated the Jews. They felt that Hitler did not do the job. And they were attacking. In fact, my aunt, my father's sister, and her family left in 1939 when my town, Wyszkow, was being bombed. And when they wanted to return to Wyszkow during the war, they were sent to Siberia, or to the Russian part.

And when Poland was liberated again, they came back to Poland. And they were trying to get out of Poland when she was killed by the Poles--

After the war?

--after the war, and her daughter was killed by the Poles after the war. At this point we felt we cannot build our lives on graves. We found out there was a Jewish brigade that is taking out Jewish children with the people that were liberated from concentration camps. We registered the few people that remained and were going on cattle cars camouflaged from country to country. My first--

Who arranged this?

There was a Jewish brigade--

Jewish agency?

A Jewish agency. It was the Jewish brigade in the English army, and they arranged for the few Jews to get out, especially the children that had nobody. We were taken in cattle cars and camouflaged from Poland to Czechoslovakia before Czechoslovakia became an iron country. Was a democracy there. I think they were less antisemitic. I think Czechoslovakia was like the little America of Europe.

And from there, we were, again, camouflaged, and we were supposed to be talking the language of the people that were liberated. Like the Russians inspected all the cattle cars, and I remember as a child, they told us to say [NON-ENGLISH]. If I was going from Czechoslovakia to Hungary and cattle guards, we were not supposed to talk anything else but Hungarian. And I didn't know Hungarian.

Can you stop it for a second?

Where was I?

On the cattle cars--

On the cattle car--

--you were supposed to say a certain word.

Yeah, we're supposed to speak the language of the people that have survived. So we went from Czechoslovakia to Hungary on the cattle cars.

How long did all this take?

Well, we spent a couple of weeks in Czechoslovakia until they arranged for transportation-- was illegal transportation-- to Hungary. And then from Hungary to Romania. And then I remember going over the hills into Austria, which was Graz. We were in Graz, Austria.

And then they already had-- it was on the English side. They had DP camps for people that survived that was on the English side. And when we were in the DP camps, when I recall it now, a lot of the Ukrainians said that they didn't want to go back to Russia because of communism. And they were the big antisemites that cooperated with the Germans.

And we found out that they are in the same DP camps with the Jews, and they felt that too many of us survived.

Well, why-- were they spying? Were they--

No, they just-- they were cooperating with the Germans. They were the biggest antisemites, so they were afraid to go back to Russia or to Ukrainians. Because they would have been arrested by the Russians because they were cooperated with the Germans.

They were collaborators with the Germans.

Right. So instead, they turned around and said to the English and to the Americans that they don't want to go back because they don't want to go back to communism. Because they were afraid to go back. And therefore, we have so many Nazis that have come in to the United States, and to Canada, and to-- very legally they went in.

And how did you come from Austria?

From Austria, we smuggled into Italy over the hills, and also the Jewish brigades. They used to take trucks from the English, camouflage the trucks in the middle of the night, and take us, smuggled over--

How many people?

Oh, there was-- in fact, I met a girl here, we were in a DP camp together, and I know that she is in Connecticut. We do speak to each other. And we do come to each other's affairs when we have it.

Is there an organization that you belong to?

Yes, the Holocaust survivors in New York. And we were in a DP camp together in Italy together.

She recognized you?

Well, yes.

Or you made arrangements?

No, we just met accidentally right here. And I was in a DP camp for two years in Italy and trying to get into the-- then they called Palestine. I didn't want to go anyplace else. I did contact my family in--

New York?



--in New York. I don't know if they got my letter or they didn't, but finally, I contacted a cousin of mine that they never met me, my family. I was a child-- my father was not even married when his sister left to the United States. So it's like--

But they knew that you were born.

Right, of course. But it's like coming to strangers. I didn't know anything about them. And after a while, my aunt in Cuba had sent papers, but I never wanted to go anywhere else but to this Palestine. I remember in the middle of the night smuggling out a few of the time and trying to get to Naples, which was the--

The port.

--the port where illegal immigration was taking place, either in Italy-- and the government of Italy were--

But when we entered Italy, I felt in all honesty, though it's a Christian country and I said, the Pope is here. And the cradle of Christianity is in Italy, but I felt the first breath of fresh air. The Italian people were marvelous. They cooperated.

They tried to invite us to their homes, but we were afraid to go. We took inventory of our losses of our families. I remained all alone, a child alone in the world. My parents, my grandparents, my uncles, my aunts-- no one survived.

When your papers came, you were in Italy when your papers came?

Yeah, I was in a DP camp in Italy.

And you chose to come to America rather than Cuba?

Well, I passed-- I went to visit my aunt in Cuba.

Oh, you did?

Yes.

I turned it over.

But it would be-- I must mention a woman that I was in Italy with. Her name was Marcella. When we were taking all the inventory of our losses, and I was a young girl, but I felt like I had lived already a lifetime of hell, and she was like my chaperone in Italy. She lost five sons and a daughter.

And I used to write letters for her to her family in Denver because she could not--

In English?

In English. She could not write English, and I used to write for her. And she said to me, my child, you are a tree, in her very simple way. I'll never forget it till the day I die. You are a child that's going to bloom. I'm an old, dried out tree at 42 by losing five sons and a daughter.

And she says to me, it's a terrible thing to lose parents, sisters, brothers, aunts, and uncles, but there are no words when parents lose children. There are no names-- you're a widow, you're a widower, you're an orphan. But there are no words when parents lose children. It went over my head. I was 16.

I finally came to the United States. First, I visited-- I went to Cuba first, and I stayed there about a couple of weeks. And I decided I will go to the United States. I yearned--

You went to New York?

To New York. Directly to New York. And I stayed in my aunt's house for a while, and I was yearning for an education that was denied to me during the war except for my mother's teachings and keeping up with my education or my own anxiousness as to know a little bit about everything. Otherwise, I would be lost forever.

When I came here, I went to school. I got my high school diploma.

Was your aunt in condition financially to take care of you, and--

I went to work. I went to work because I have taken English in the DP camp. So I spoke English, and I went to work.

And I went to school at night. I paid her. I think my first job was working in a Loeser department store in Brooklyn. I made \$30 a week, and I gave my aunt \$10 a week. I shared a room with my cousin, and I paid her for my room and board. Because my aunt was really not an aunt. I came to a stranger.

It was an obligation, I think, that she signed to take me over, and--

She wasn't really your mother's--

She was my father's brother-- my father's sister, but she never knew me. So it wasn't a closeness that I thought that she would display to me, but she didn't.

But you see, family is family.

I stayed there, right. Well, she tried, but I guess she had children of her own. And I was just another person. And I did pay her.

How long did you stay with her?

I came here in 1947, and I did get married from her house. I married in July of 1949. I met my husband, who was also a stranger coming back to the United States. He was discharged from the service.

Was he--

An American.

--an American.

Yes. My husband had just come back from being discharged from the United States Army. He was rather young, but he, too, had gone through a very-- the army and the service. And we were going out, and I just felt completely inadequate.

I said, well, what do you want with me? There are so many American girls. Why do you want to be bothered with me? I have so many problems that I want to solve within me.

I have to go on to school. I want to do this, or I want to do that. But I yearned to belong to somebody-- to a family. We fell in love. We got married in 1949.

Do you have children?

I have four beautiful children. My son, I am repeating the words of Benjamin Neate, [NON-ENGLISH] that we have lost. I have four children. My son is a graduate of West Point. He's a major in the army now.

My second daughter has a master's degree in education. My third one is a doctor, and my fourth one is only 17. And I

hope he, too, will follow in the footsteps of his brother and sisters.

You have no pictures, no nothing of any of your family?

No, I have nothing except for a picture that my uncle has given me when I came here of my mother.

Which uncle is that? Your--

My uncle was my mother's uncle. It was my great uncle. He had a picture when my mother sent it to him when she was a young girl, 17. And I had a picture that my father had given me, and I was hiding it during the war-- one picture of my father. I do not have any pictures of my brothers-- of my brother, or my sister, or the rest of the relatives. I have nothing.

And you know that they did not survive?

No. Nobody survived. I've been looking after the war with all the correspondence, with all the things.

You went to Israel? Where are their records of these days? Where are the records kept of the survivors?

Well, we have contacted the HIAS after the war. We contacted every Jewish organization where survivors would register. Nobody was there. The only relatives that I have was my aunt that-- my aunt was-- my only relatives I have now was my three cousins who I have sponsored to come over right after the war where her mother and her sister was killed in Poland by the Poles after the war.

After the war.

They came here, and they all got married from my house. And they live-- my cousin lives in Long Island, and my cousin Helen just passed away very young of cancer. And she was like my own sister. And I want her-- miss her very much.

That's the only people I have except for the family that I have created here.

Is there a social life around the people that are Holocaust survivors, or are they Americans mostly?

Well, my social life, when we make affairs, we invite, of course, people that we know from the survivors, from different walks of life, not necessarily. I myself had to be completely occupied. So I'm a professional. I'm a travel agent and a real estate broker, and I feel I make people happy.

And one day, I could go through the entire world of travel. And I'm involved with my children, and now I have four grandchildren. And that keeps my mind completely occupied.

And I try to go forward, but I will never forget. And I feel I'm not better than anybody else. I still remember the gift of life that the German thought he gave me in 1939 of September, 1939. I have experienced love. I have experienced motherhood. I have experienced even to be a grandmother.

So when people were asking me, where did you come from? I said, I came from hell, and I have heaven here. So I don't know what it is on the other world, but I feel in my heart no matter what problem came along in the years that I'm here, they were very small problems. We were able to solve them because it was only problems of--

People don't realize how lucky they are.

I never needed a psychiatrist. I never needed a psychologist. I never needed my children to take to any of those things. I always used to tell them, you are very lucky to be born in a nice geographical area because there are people today that would give their right arm to be here. And you have the whole world in your hands. You have education that you could take, the opportunities that you have, and parents that want to give it to you.

What does your husband do?

My husband is in the building line. And I think I do have my gift.

--near Kings Highway?

Right. We live on east 17th that we're now in for 26 years. And I have my office on Kings Highway and East 19th Street a travel office. And we're not rich, but I am counting my blessings the gift of life that I have had for 40 years.

I think that's fantastic. OK, let me put--