

Goldie Speiser, 1745 East 12th Street, Brooklyn, New York. She was born in--

Munkács.

Munkács, Czechoslovakia. And we'd like to talk about the time when she left the camp.

I would like to talk about the time when I came back and I felt lost, not belonging to anyone, not having any parents. I met a man, and I got married, and that's where my life really started again.

I had my first daughter, who was born in Liberec in Czechoslovakia. Then we came to the United States in 1948. And my family really began. If anybody would have asked, do you remember this or that, I used to say no before. This was before my time.

So I was actually born and started my life all over after my daughter was born. Her name is Eve. She's my grandson's-- this is her son, Jonathan.

And after that, I had a daughter, Sharon, and a son, Leslie. And I made sure that they were taught the way I would have wanted to be at my home with my parents. They went to school, and I had a lot of joy with them.

But they used to ask questions. At certain points, I told them some things. At other times, they didn't want to ask, because they knew that maybe it would hurt.

But as they grew older, there was a quiet feeling between us that they did not have to ask, that they knew what happened. They read the books on it, and they knew exactly. If anything came on TV, they used to say, Ma, you don't have to watch it.

But I said, I'm all right. I made peace with myself. I could watch it now. And I do watch it. And I don't know, maybe it's a sense of punishment that I read everything about the Holocaust or the camps that I want to know.

So then the first one, my daughter Eve, got married. And it was really a joy that I can't even explain. And at this year, in January, we had my first grandson's bar mitzvah, Jonathan's.

And I wanted him to come here, and he was very willing to come. And I would like him here to see all these things, that he shouldn't forget. And knowing him, what kind of person he is, that other youngsters should not forget what happened, that all those millions of lives should not go to waste by not remembering them. And that's all we want. We cannot bring them back, but in their memory-- we want their memory and the things that happened that history should not repeat itself.

I don't know how I did.

Very well.

But now, I would like to read you this, what my grandson wrote-- that Jonathan wrote this. And I heard the stories of 40 years ago, of names that had no meaning to me until now. Sorrow and death, the tears, pain, and anger, flames that burned themselves out.

And like 1,000 angels, the 100,000 who died for my existence will live in my mind forever. Our posterity will live in our tales. Future generations will have our foresight. Jonathan D. [PERSONAL NAME] an observation of somebody else. This is a quotation.

And he writes here, Aranka Kleinman of Mukacevo, Czechoslovakia survived the Holocaust, married, changed her name to Golda Speiser, and came to America. Her daughter, Eve, was born in Liberec before the family emigrated to the United States. I am a son of Goldie's-- I am a son of Eve, Goldie's grandson. I am the third generation, and I must keep

the eyes of the world open that all may remember.

That's very beautiful and worth recording.

Jonathan writes poetry, and he could have done it much better than-- read it much better than I did.

No, it was written for you, so it's better that you should read it. Why did you pick Goldie as a new name?

Well, it's just a matter of I had a brother-in-law, who should rest in peace. He was so upset. It was to them an obsession, because they were in the United States. And he used to say, I don't want no foreign name. Let's use your birth given name. And this is my Jewish name, Goldie. And Aranka means gold in another language.

I see.

That's all it is. It's just changed for that reason. But I had to change it even legally when I became a United States citizen, because of everything else. The papers were different. Do you want to--

When we came here, we have family. My husband had here four brothers, so it was not really that we came to a strange country with not knowing the language. It was a very hard start for us.

But somehow, I had a child of two years. And she picked it up. In six months, she spoke the language beautifully. But with the other languages we know, we got along. And I think that we were-- this generation who came, the immigrants, were different than years ago.

How?

How? Because we came from a more modern generation and culture than 50 years ago, the people who came from Poland, or Russia, or from anywhere in Europe. They were cliquish. They stuck together, and they felt that their motherland language is more important than the language of the United States.

I didn't feel that way. As I said before, that I was born here sort of thing, and I wanted to know the language as well as possible.

And how did you learn?

I learned all by myself. It was pretty hard, because at the beginning, I didn't know today, tomorrow, or yesterday. I couldn't distinguish the differences. But I always said to anyone who heard me and said, you know, this happened already. So I said, tell me, how do you say it the other way?

So I got so mixed up that I really didn't make sense of it. But I was never insulted if anybody corrected me. I always took the correction as a compliment that they meant they wanted to help.

And I started out, ironically, with joke books, because they had pictures like they teach the children today-- by pictures, say action. And then I graduated to the very everyday language of a magazine, very light.

And I was here about a year. And I said, this is the time I'm going to take a library card and go to the library. So I go to the library and take out history of the United States, which was a big mistake. I came home, and I started to read one page. By the time I finished, I didn't know what I was reading. This was the big-- I couldn't understand. I didn't understand. The names were strange. Everything sounded different. I was not familiar at all.

But when my children started school, I went three times to elementary, three times to high school. And a matter of fact, when they were in college, they always evaluated my opinion. They evaluated highly, because when they wrote a composition, maybe I couldn't have written as well as they did with the misspelling or somehow, because it was not easy for me.

But the contents and how it should sound, I had a very good ear for it. So they used to read it to me. And I used to say, here you are wrong. Or else I heard one girl say to her mother, you don't tell me what to do, because you don't know anything. And I said, this will not happen to me.

So when they used to bring home their schoolbooks, their textbooks, I used to read up on the second lesson. And this is the way I got along.

And then I'm a very ardent reader. I love to read. And I think that helped me a lot-- the reading part and comprehending. But with the writing, I'm still not at ease because the spelling. I'm used to say it one way, write it one way.

And I had very little education at home. I was 12 years old. So I was not in school anymore. So formal education I really didn't have. So I consider myself first taught in--

In American.

In American.

And you never went to night school here?

No, I did not go to night school.

It's amazing that you learned as well as you did.

But this is all by reading. You don't have to go to school really, if you want to read. I mean, for my purposes. If you want to really be at ease with yourself, you just read about things. And I love to read.

What kinds of things do you enjoy most?

Well, as I said before, I enjoy more things, history things mostly.

Current history.

Current history or past history, too.

I like autobiographies, and I don't like these novels. I have to have the truth, even if it's a little bit colored with the romance in it. But it has to be based on truth that I enjoy.

Well, besides the papers that I'm not even considering, I enjoy reading these things. And, as I say, I read all the books, most of them what is about the Holocaust, and what's going on, and who was caught, and who didn't, and who survived, like in the United States. So many of them came in illegally, which even the Congress didn't know. People who were hurting, people in Europe helping the Germans along. And they are here free, and that hurts.

Of course.

It does hurt to see them live an enjoyable life in luxury and being rewarded for the things they did there, because that's what it is.

And as far as after this, I see my children went off to school, and I went to work.

What kind of work did you do?

I'm a dressmaker. I learned the trade here. I didn't have a chance to there. Now, I'm working at one place really for the 25th year. It's a large boutique, clothing. It's in Brooklyn. It's Harper's. It's a very fashionable store.

And I enjoyed working, and I raised my children, and I can say they are very nice people. My youngest is 30 now, going to be June 6, my son. He's not married. My daughter Sharon is married, has a son and a daughter.

Why don't you give their names and ages.

I'd say her son-- her husband is Robert. They are fine, F-I-N-E. Their son is Lee, and their daughter is Laura. My older daughter, who lives in Evanston, has three sons. Her husband is Jerry Goldman. He's the professor of Northwestern University. And their sons are Jonathan Goldman, Matt, and Joshua.

And how old are Matt and Joshua?

Matt is 11, and Joshua just was 8. And they are beautiful boys. And I am a very, very proud grandmother.

I can see that in your face.

Very happy about my little family and the most part of it that they belong. And I hope that they always will, that this will never happen. Which we really can't say anything about it, but I hope so. Not in their time or in my time.

And is your husband still alive?

Yes, he is. He was in the Czech army-- Czech Legion under the Russian army. He was fighting in the war under the Russians. And he's working.

Where does he live?

We live in the same-- Brooklyn.

And where does he work?

He works at a cabinet making shop. He's a manager of the place. And he was not from the concentration. He just couldn't take time to come. So I had my escort.

Jonathan.

Jonathan. And I don't think I could have chosen anybody else better, because he's so fantastic with the computers. If I have to find something or go anywhere, he is absolutely marvelous.

And are you looking for something special in the computers now or not?

I would like to see. I had a brother, and a sister, and my mother, who my mother and my sister I know didn't come back. My father, I had an eyewitness who saw him die after the war when he was liberated in Mauthausen.

But I had a younger brother that he was taken from Auschwitz, about 500 boys. And they were never heard of, never seen, which I really don't think that I would find. And then I'm looking for some friends that I only remember their first names.

But you know where they came from.

Yes. They came from Medzilaborce. It's also in Slovakia, Buska and Giza, two sisters. They must be in their 60s. So I don't know if they will be here, but I want to go down to the computers and see that maybe someone from their hometown knows anything or anything about them.

And in your life now in New York, do you see mostly survivors?

No, I don't. I don't see-- I have a few friends of survivors that I grew up with. But you see, I didn't feel. Like a lot of people feel that the Americans, they were not survivors. They didn't understand you or this and that. I didn't feel that way. I felt if you want them to understand you, you have to understand them. So I made mostly American friends. But I am still in touch with a few girlfriends who are my friends at home, and they feel the same way as I do, so we have no problem.

They were your friends before the camp?

Before the camp.

And you were in the camps together?

We were in the camps to a certain point, and then we were separated. So I don't feel that my friendship here-- I'm not a clannish person. And I raised my children the same way. I didn't hold on to them. As much as I would want to and fill them with stories, don't do this and that, I never wanted to put the burden on them.

You felt this was harder for you because you were a survivor than if you were not one.

No, it wasn't. I mingled with American bonds very easy. It was no problem for me. Because you see, when I made my peace, I was like kind of self-assured, secure enough to feel that I am not different than anybody else. And I think I was young enough to do that. Because a lot of people have problems, so they feel more comfortable between their own.

I could mingle with anyone, and I don't feel that I'm inferior or anything is wrong with me. Or if anybody doesn't want to [INAUDIBLE], I'm not going to just bother. But I didn't have no problems. I made lots of friends and just enjoyed.

I worked, and my children were very nice. They were normal teenagers with everything else. But as I said before, there was something about them that they know they were missing and that I was missing. But they, like, never wanted to discuss it.

They never wanted to discuss the camps, or they never want to ask questions about their grandparents?

They asked later on, because when they were old enough, and they saw that I felt better. But they only used to say, why don't they have grandparents or family or somebody. It's hard. So I used to tell them, but you can't tell too much for a three-year-old or a four-year-old.

And somebody like Jonathan, what would you tell him about his grandparents?

Well, he knows. Like Jonathan reads about it, and he knows everything. He asks the questions. Jonathan knows that his grandparents-- his grandmother died at the crematorium with his aunt, probably his uncle, too. And his grandfather died after the war in Mauthausen. Because when the Americans liberated the camps, they didn't have no way of knowing that these people are sick and the cattle, Coke cans, the rations would damage them. And thousands of people died because they were giving that rich meat.

And matter of fact, there was a survivor who saw my father and begged him not to take it. And he says, you're just like a Nazi, because he was hungry.

Sure.

And he died in that hospital. The Red Cross, matter of fact, took his name. That's how I know that he was alive. And my children knew the story, because I told my daughter. And then I bought the little book from Elie Wiesel that he wright, the Night.

And I think we came in on the same line, because before the book came out, I told it to my daughter how we came. And

she wanted to know then step by step. And she was already a mature person. And in the book he writes, she says, ma-- and his father said-- she says you should have written it. It sounds like you. I said, we probably marched down the same line.

Did you?

No, he comes in the same way he came in. So I told her. And now, as I say, if they want to know, I give them the book. And it says it.

And do they ever ask about their grandparents before the camps when you were a child or before you were taught?

They? They ask certain things, because we made a tape. My daughter is a very efficient person, a very coordinated mother. Right, Jon?

Very.

Very. She made a tape, was three years ago when you were at the country with us? She made a tape of history of our lives, my husband and I, separate interviews-- his parents, how many sisters, how many brothers? And the same of us, of my parent family. Because she wanted to have it on record. So I think all the children should do that to know where their parents came from, and their grandparents lived, and what kind of life they led. So we put it on tapes for them.

And for the children, too.

And for their children to preserve, to see that they belong, and that their grandma belonged, too, and grandpa. We all belonged. And now I am very proud to be here, because it means that I've survived, and I have my children, and they belong to us, which is a very important part to me.

Sounds like you not only survived, but you survived very well.

Yes, I think so. I did. And it's a matter of a lot of doing on your own. You have to be your own psychologist, and your own doctor, and your own help. Because nobody's going to help if you want to-- I remember it very deeply and feel it very deeply. But I cannot carry it on every day, or else I wouldn't be good for nobody. I wouldn't be able to function.

And when you came to this-- when I came to this state, I was young and fortunate enough to see foresight that I had to make a choice. And as I used to say, I would give my right arm to bring my parents and family back, but I cannot do it. And I have to go on. And as I started my own, I went on, and I adjusted. Here and there I'll break up at times, but it's normal.

Certainly. What is the hardest part for you?

The hardest part is I never had a youth. I never knew that. I tell my grandchildren always, and I used to tell my children. I said, enjoy it. It's marvelous, a normal thing with their homework.

And one decided I don't want to go to college. And I said, but I don't want you to go because you must. I said, but it's a privilege. She says, I don't need it. I says, OK. She decided anyway to go.

But I found it that an education, which may be because I was yearning for it so badly and never had it, was the first priority by me. I wanted them to go to school. I said, and learn as much as you could, because it's never enough. It's never enough. And I think that I did a pretty good job.

It sounds like you did an excellent job.

This is one of the first proofs, which is excellent. He writes poetry and music and whatever, you name it. And Jonathan, I'm sorry. I'm going to embarrass you. Because he doesn't like me to tell about him.

Do you do that, too? Are you musical yourself?

No, I don't know what I am. Let me say this.

Yes, you are.

I am musical, because I love--

Music.

No, I love music. I listen to all the classical music. I am in love with the violin. And I was given lessons when I was young, about 10 or 11-- violin lessons. But I never did continue. It's too old, too much arthritis in the fingers or what. So the best next thing I do is listen to it that somebody else wrote and played it.

I love music. I think it's part of life. It's a beautiful way to spend an evening, to listen to music or a concert. And he's the one who will sit with me, and listen, and go to it. He loves it.

So this is-- I'm looking, people from over here. Everybody left a big past behind them. And I don't think most of them remember it, because it's been such a long time that certain things I don't remember. And I say to myself, I must have really wiped it out, erased it. Because there could be a next door neighbor near, and I wouldn't remember their name. Because I don't want to talk about it. I didn't come to that. That was a very nice part of my life till I remember, till it started, till 1938.

My father had a bicycle shop. And then the whole thing changed. We were occupied in 1938. So he couldn't have any workers in the store, because we were Jewish. We were not allowed to have help. So I was working with my brother in overalls fixing bicycles.

So that's the nice part till then I remember. But in between those couple of years, I'd rather not even start it. Because as I say, I'm so well adjusted that I'll break down into pieces. So I wouldn't even attempt to start, because those horrors and atrocity, I leave it to the writers and the historians. Let them do the job.

That's certainly your privilege. You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to.

No really, it's just a repeated thing that it's written. And let me tell you something. They cannot put it on paper whatever they'll do, or [INAUDIBLE] feel to show what each individual went through when you were there. It's really. You cannot put it on paper, because nobody could feel it. You could sympathize with us, which I don't expect anyone to feel.

See, I'm not one of those people, you or [NON-ENGLISH] and we were there. That's not fair. But nobody could for you except the ones who were there, the horror. And the people read it, and see it, and says, it's terrible. It's horrible. But that is not even a glimpse of it when you are there what you feel.

When we came here, they told us. We had lights out, and we had rationed coffee and I don't remember what else. I said to mother. I said, that's ridiculous. You had coffee rationed? That was a terrible thing. But you see, to them it was terrible. To me, that was absolutely nothing.

This is Tanya, and I hope that I'll be well to enjoy these few years next, where I don't know how much I have. And go on, and if it becomes a gathering or something, I would like to be part of it, more of a show. It gets stronger then. That we really have to keep it, to show the world that it happened. And I thank you very much, Sybil.

Well, I thank you very much. And I think that just about finishes this side of the tape.

OK.

This is Jonathan Goldman, the grandson of Goldie Speiser.

OK. Well, I think the whole thing could have never-- it could have-- it couldn't have happened in the first place, really. A lot of people are to blame, not only Hitler but the United States for one. They actually turned away people who were running from this terrible thing that happened and turning them back into death.

And they knew. They knew what was happening. They could have bombed Auschwitz and destroyed it completely. But instead, they destroyed some other place. They knew that people were being murdered there. They knew everything that was happening, and they didn't do anything. And I think that's really too bad. England and France, too-- the whole thing could have been prevented. But it's just too late now.

And I think, for example, Germany later, they paid people for war crimes. There's no way to pay. If someone dies, there's no way you can pay for it. And that's about all I have to say.

Why don't you tell me how you feel as the grandchild of a survivor. Does this make you feel different from the other kids you know?

Yes, much different. Because when I was in second grade, and we had to do family trees, there was nothing in my tree-- nothing. Because there was no background that I had.

And you felt really strange, really different. You have no-- you have no background, really. And that's a really strange thing. For me it was.

And also you feel proud, at least, for those people who did survive. Because that is something that really takes a lot of you. And because she survived, I'm here really. And I'm very happy for that.