Interview with EDITH EVA EGER

Holocaust Oral History Project

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BY MS. PROZAN:

Q. THIS IS THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW OF EDITH EVA EGER TAKING PLACE ON AUGUST 13TH, 1992 IN SAN FRANCISCO. MY NAME IS SYLVIA PROZAN. THE SECOND INTERVIEWER IS MARCI JENKINS.

EDITH, WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

A. I was born in Kosice, which is on the border of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and in 1927 and September 29th, so I'm going to be 65 years old this year.

Q. AND WHAT WAS YOUR FATHER'S NAME?

A. My father's name was Liosha, and that's Louis in English. And my mother's name was Helen and Helona. And my maiden name is Elefant, E-l-e-f-a-n-t.

I was very embarrassed by that name because as a little girl, I became a ballerina. I had two sisters and my parents wanted a son and I came along, so somehow I always felt that my two sisters were so talented and so beautiful. And I never introduced myself by my name. I would say I'm Clara's sister. Clara was a child prodigy in violin. She played the Mendelssohn violin concerto

when she was about five, six years old. Today she is in Sydney, Australia, and she is still a concert violinist. And my other sister, Magda, used to accompany her on the piano. So many people didn't know I existed. And so my mother, very sensitive, beautiful woman, took me to a ballet school when I was four years old. And I suppose that training helped me a great deal when I was taken to Auschwitz May 1944.

I almost died when I was three years old. I had some epidemic at the time that was called -- I remember my mother referred to me as Spanish fever. The upshot was that they put a needle in my ear and took it out another and I was rendered cross-eyed. So I was a cross-eyed little girl, feeling very much like an ugly duckling, kind of like an outsider, never saying anyone my name. I would just say I'm Clara's sister, that I was someone else's extension.

And little did I know that that really was my preparation for what was to come because I spent a lot of time alone and I began to rely more and more on how to be depending on my inner resources, which I believed was very crucial in Auschwitz.

Today I tell people, I do a lot of parenting

training, and I tell parents please don't spoil your children because spoiled children don't master anything on their own. And I could see in Auschwitz, I became a kind of a little owl on a tree, watching, observing as a child. And I did the same thing in Auschwitz, I was able to develop a bird of my own that no Nazi could break my spirits. I'm beginning to really wonder what made the difference.

And when I came to America in 1949, I didn't tell anyone I was in Auschwitz because I didn't know how. I didn't have words for it like I do now. And I didn't want you to feel sorry for me. And I was afraid that if I tell you my story, then maybe you would think that I may capitalize on that, that you owe me something. So what I decided is just go underground completely and try to assimilate and try to speak English without an accent. And not until close to 30 years later, I began to face that part of my past.

So I wanted to be a real Yankee Doodle Dandy like you because I felt like a weirdo, I felt like I was an outsider again. I looked at the TV set, I saw "Leave It To Beaver" and I saw this wonderful

family. And I felt why couldn't I have had such a life? Yet I became a chameleon of sorts. You know, you asked me who I am and I would say well, who do you want me to be, you know, because I learned to rise to the occasion.

Q. GOING BACK TO WHAT YOU WERE WHEN YOU WERE BORN --

A. Yes.

Q. -- THE LITTLEST SISTER, WHAT WAS THE AGE SPAN?

A. Well, the age span was not so big. My oldest sister, Magda, is five years older than I am and Clara is three years older than I am.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR FATHER'S BUSINESS OR OCCUPATION?

A. My father was a dress designer, a tailor. And my two sisters were very lovely but since I was the ballerina, my father used to tell me that when you grow up, you're going to be the best dressed gal in town. And today, I many times feel when I dress that I want to say Papa, watch me fly, that he would be proud of me.

Q. WHERE WAS HE FROM?

A. He was from Czechoslovakia. We were all

Hungarians, really, we spoke Hungarian and I grew up in a Hungarian home. And in 1939, when the Hungarians occupied my city, I welcomed Horthy with a Hungarian dance and I became a very flag-waving nationalist Hungarian.

Q. YOUR FATHER'S MOTHER AND FATHER, WHERE WERE THEY FROM?

A. My parents' -- my father's parents came from Czechoslovakia, a little place called (Terabesh), (Terabesh) in Hungarian.

And my mother's family was pretty tragic the way my mother told me. My mother told me when she was nine years old, they were very poor and she slept with her mother and then when she woke up in the morning, her mother didn't move and they buried her that afternoon. And my mother had this notion that maybe her mother was buried alive. And she had a picture above the piano and she would sometimes talk to her mother. And she told me that story how when she was nine years old, she was the oldest girl and she had to take care of her sister, little sister and a brother, and that she became a little mother at the age of nine and that she was never a child.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME?

A. My mother's maiden name was Klein, Klein, K-l-e-i-n.

Q. AND HER MOTHER AND FATHER --

A. Her mother died -- their name?

Q. YES.

A. Well, yeah, I --

Q. DID YOU KNOW YOUR MOTHER'S FATHER?

A. I knew my mother's father, yes. And he remarried, so those were my grandparents.

And my father's father lived until 1940, I believe, when he died, a streetcar ran over him. And I remember my parents didn't allow me to go to the funeral.

Q. GETTING BACK TO YOUR MOTHER'S FAMILY, SHE WAS THE ELDEST OF THREE CHILDREN?

A. My mother was the eldest of three children.

Q. THEY WERE VERY POOR, BUT WHAT DID YOUR GRANDFATHER DO?

A. The grandfather was -- I was told that he owned the horse and buggy carriage that carries people, called the (feahker), that's what he did. Now, I don't know whether he owned one of those or -- I don't know. I don't know.

Q. WERE THEY ALSO IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA?

A. Yes, yes.

My mother's father, we're talking about?

Q. YES.

A. I'm sorry. My mother's father was working for Singer Sewing Machine Company. I'm talking to you now about my father's father. But my mother's father was working for the Singer Sewing Machine Company. And he told us every day, he was retired and he was waiting for the Singer Sewing Machine Company to give him the pension that he -- that was coming to him.

And the sad story was that when we came home from the concentration camp, there was a letter from the Singer Sewing Company that he is eligible to get his pension.

Q. YOU SAY THAT YOUR MOTHER SLEPT WITH HER MOTHER, IN THE SAME BED.

A. Yes.

Q. YES. DO YOU KNOW HOW LARGE THE PLACE THEY LIVED WAS?

A. No.

Q. WHETHER IT WAS ONE ROOM, TWO ROOMS?

A. I really don't know the details of it.

Q. DID YOUR MOTHER TELL YOU ANYTHING OTHER THAN -- EVER DESCRIBE HER EARLY LIFE TO YOU OTHER THAN THIS STORY?

A. Somehow my mother was the same way I was. I never told my children that I was in Auschwitz. I kind of just wanted to concentrate on today and tomorrow and the future. And I did not tell my children.

And now that you're talking to me, I know very little of that. My mother did not talk to me about that except that she had to become the big girl and the responsible one and she -- she was the responsible woman all the time. Because before Auschwitz, my father was taken to a labor camp and she had to get ahold of all of us and run the household. So there was a lot of suffering going on before we went to Auschwitz. And that's how I remember my mother.

I also remember my mother as someone who was kind of a melancholy woman, who read a great deal, and who went to the opera. And one day she read "Gone With the Wind" and she began to tell me about America. And I listened to her with such hungry eyes. What is America all about? And so I imagined

America through the "Gone With the Wind."

And I was able to go to Georgia and see Tara and I'm doing lecturing now at the military base in Atlanta. And I had such wonderful fond memories, my time with my mother, who was a loner, just like I am, and how she was able to put her feelings into the books and into music, into the arts.

Q. WERE YOU WITH HER AT TIMES WHEN SHE SPOKE TO THIS PHOTOGRAPH OF HER MOTHER?

A. Mm-hmm. I spent a lot of time alone with my mother.

My sister Clara was the only Jewish girl who was accepted at the music academy in Budapest, so she left, she left, and she would come home on vacations. And I remember when she came home one time, I always wanted to impress her that I am a big girl now, that I'm not that little runt anymore. So one time she was coming home and I took my father's socks and I put it in my bosoms to show her that I'm a big girl now. So, you know, we had that kind of a competition going on.

But Magda, the oldest sister, who came with me to Auschwitz, was five years older, so somehow she went out with her friends and I was left with my

mother.

I remember spending a lot of time with my mother. And she was reading one of the books that she also was telling me about was something that I was never allowed to read, was Emile Zola's "Nana." So I remember when my mother was not home, my girlfriend gave me the book "Nana" and I took to it the bathroom and I tried to read "Nana." I didn't understand what was in it but I did something that wasn't allowed. It was about the life of a prostitute. I didn't even know what a prostitute was. I didn't know anything about sex.

I remember my girlfriend's mother gave birth to a little baby. And I came home and I asked my mother, I was 14, I said how, how do babies come? My mother's answer was your stomach opens up. So I went to bed that night and with my infinite wisdom, you know, I figured out that babies must come from your bellybutton. I had no idea. I didn't get any kind of education in that area and so I was totally unaware of my own anatomy.

Q. DO YOU KNOW HOW YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER MET?

A. The story goes that my mother was very sophisticated and she worked for the Ministry of

Hungary. And my father wanted to go to medical school but supposedly his father didn't want him to do that because -- this is what my aunt tells me in New York and that's the only thing I can go by -- that the father was threatened that his son may know more than he does. And so he became the best tailor, who got a gold medal for his designs, and met my mother.

And my understanding was that somehow my mother sometimes felt, you know, that you marry down or marry up, that she married someone who may have not been in the same social class as her. But my father became this very sophisticated, wonderful ladies' man. I remember him with the top hat, you know, and the cane sometimes, and walking down Main Street, kind of a bon vivant type of a man.

I think their marriage, as I look back now, I do a lot of marriage and family therapy, it's very hard for me to be giving you anything objective, but I think my father -- my mother and father may have not had too much in common. I saw my father leaving the house, playing billiards and cards with his cronies, and my mother spent a lot of time alone at home.

Q. WHAT ABOUT YOUR FATHER'S SIBLINGS, HOW MANY DID HE HAVE?

A. My father had three sisters who came to America. And Aunt Matilda, who is now 92, still alive and well, is a remarkable woman, a true survivor, who when she found out that we survived, after the war sent us packages and that's what we really lived on. We lived off the wonderful help that the American Jewish community gave us.

I remember we got Crisco and I didn't know what to do with that. We didn't know what it was. Then we got the tea bags. Remember watching the movie "Stalag 17"? Well, that's what we did with the tea bag, you know, it went just, you know, we used one bag for about a hundred teas. And it was amazing.

America was something to us of a dream that was never going to be a possibility. So coming to America to me was a miraculous, wonderful happening. I'm a very grateful American citizen.

Q. WHO ARE THE OTHER SISTERS?

A. The other sisters were Esther and Helen. And Aunt Esther came to live with us in the early '80s because she had throat cancer. And her

daughter, her only daughter was a very brilliant computer genius, who was married to someone equally talented, and they were very busy. And so my aunt came to visit us, guess who came to dinner, and she stayed like a year and a half with us. And I learned a great deal from her about that family and about the kind of life that she led.

She was a feminist. She fought, she was on the street marching about the Vietnam war and she fought for the rights of women. She was an unbelievable spirit. I guess, I guess I got some of hers too.

Q. AND HELEN?

A. Aunt Helen was a married woman in upstate New York. I met her only a couple of times in my life, so I don't know much about her. She was -- I know that she was very beautiful, very beautiful. And she is dead now.

So the only one who is alive is my father's sister, Aunt Matilda, and her name is Spitzer, Matilda Spitzer, and she lives in New York. I saw her, I was asked to keynote a conference for hospice. I do a great deal of work with death and dying, which is about life and living, you know.

And so she came and she sat in the first row and she was so proud of me. It felt wonderful.

Q. DID YOUR FATHER EVER SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT HAVING WANTED TO GO TO MEDICAL SCHOOL?

A. Yeah. Well, I had long walks with my father. I guess I already did what I'm doing now, I just didn't have my shingle out. But he used to talk to me and I became his confidant. Because my two older sisters don't remember any of that. And he told me how after two girls he had really wanted a son and he was not happy to find that he had another daughter. But then he said you're the one that I can talk to more openly, and he would tell me many things about his marriage to my mother.

Q. WHAT DID HE TELL YOU?

A. And what he told me, that he never thought that he was good enough, that he was supposed to be maybe something more. And he was telling me when I was, you know, a little girl, I was maybe 12 years old. And he told me that many times he goes out with his friends because my mother doesn't understand him well.

And, you know, I'd like to be as open and honest today as possible and I would like to tell

you that I had this very loving, intact, beautiful family and that someone picked me up and told me that I'm so happy that you are a little girl. They called me Ditzo. My grandchildren today call me Grandma Ditzo. And I love to be a grandma, I mean that's my best part, really.

But when I look back in my family, I see that I was a very lonely little girl. And it's not that I'm saying that in a negative way. I'm just trying to take a camera now and zero in and look at the family that I grew up in. But I grew up in very difficult times, too, you see.

Even before the war, we lived in Czechoslovakia. My father had a beautiful clientele of Czechoslovakian upper-class women. Then in 1938, after the Munich, you know, we became Hungary and all these people left. And we lived in a beautiful place in Kassa, K-a-s-s-a, and we lived in the middle of Main Street.

My father became a very high achiever, just like I became a very high achiever because I didn't think I deserved to survive. And I thought if I get a doctorate, if I go to school and I graduate with honors, then maybe I will deserve that I survived.

I graduated with honors from the University of Texas but I never went to my graduation because I thought well, maybe that's for young people. I always felt I was playing catchup.

So when the Hungarians came, the Hungarian Nazi party, the (nelash), occupied the apartment below us, and then we were evacuated and thrown out. So the Hungary that my mother dreamed about and waited for didn't turn out to be the Hungarian people that we expected. They became more Roman, you know, they became more Roman than the Pope, as the saying goes. From one day to the next, people didn't talk to me. And we began to experience what was to come, we just weren't aware of what was going on. I believed in a kind of make-believe.

I was gymnast. When I was watching the Olympics now, I mean I was crying, crying crocodile tears because that's when my first tragic moment was, when I was prepared for the Olympics and I was the gymnast. And then one day my trainer told me that I have to train someone else because I'm not qualified. And I remember I looked at her in the eye, and you know what I said, I'm not Jewish.

But, you see, it's not what I said. But I

denied that because I want it so much. That was my whole life. I was exercising five hours a day. That was my whole life. And to be told that I am not qualified because I'm Jewish? That was my first shock. I must say that was the dream that was crushed.

That's when I began to feel the tremendous pressure. That's when things began to get worse and worse until March 1944, when the Germans marched into my hometown. And that's when the Hungarians joined Hitler. They bombed my city, Kassa, and they lied, they said it was the Russians. The Germans bombed.

And then two weeks later, there was a knock on my door and they took us into a brick factory. And in the brick factory we were until May and then we were told that we're going to work in Hungary, that we are going to work in a camp and we're going to work on the fields. So we didn't know where we were heading when I was in the boxcar already.

Right away I have flashbacks all the time, you see, every day. I was enjoying my two beautiful grandchildren of my middle daughter, Audrey, just this weekend, and I was in the pool and we were

having a wonderful time and little David, who is three years old, says Grandma Ditzo, you going to be, you going to be the engine and I'm going to be the boxcar. And I startled and there I was back in a boxcar, picturing my mother sitting on the little bench telling me things like I don't know where we're going, you know, but everything can be taken away from you except what you put in your mind.

And you know, those words carried me and haunted me for 40 years, until I returned to Auschwitz 40 years later and thank her that she was right, you know, because that's what I did, I came to America and I went back to school. And my name is today Dr. Edith Eva Eger. And so going back to Auschwitz to me was my Jewish way to honor my parents.

And I recommend very much to the survivors to revisit the places where they've been and to relive the experience just one more time. And then I forgave myself that I survived. So I wasn't free until I returned to that lion's den and looked at the lion in the face and I reclaimed my innocence and I assigned the shame and guilt to the perpetrator. And I felt like Popeye, that I don't

have to lie to you anymore, I don't have to deny, you know.

And I'm really crying from joy, you know, that I'm here telling you about it.

Q. IT SOUNDS AS IF YOU HAD A VERY -- GOING BACK, IF WE MAY, TO YOUR PARENTS, YOUR EARLY LIFE, YOU HAD A VERY UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP WITH BOTH YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR FATHER.

A. Separately, I really did. I cherish my time alone with them. The family times I cherish too.

My mother urged my father to go to the temple and be more part of that religious community. But my father was in World War I and he became a Russian prisoner. So he did not, in our home, we didn't grow up with the wonderful parts of Judaism.

I remember when we had Passover, we had a lovely time and my father used to gather us and we were doing the praying of the Sefirah, you know. I didn't speak Yiddish, you know, Hungarian Jews were more assimilated into the Hungarian culture, so we were always Hungarian. And I would put my finger into the wine, and my sister Magda, you know, and we were trying to, you know, joke around and we were scolded a little bit that that's really

inappropriate and that's not good manners.

So I also have a wonderful memory, last year I revisited the Kosice, Kassa, now it's part of Czechoslovakia again, and I walked on the same path that my parents took us picnicking. And it felt so wonderful that I was able to return to the place. But it took me that many years to be able to do that. It took me 40 years to be able to just face and return and begin to put the loose ends together that I completely denied and ran away from when I came to America.

Q. DID YOUR FATHER TALK TO YOU ABOUT HIS TIME IN WORLD WAR I?

A. Yes. And I loved it.

Q. WHAT DID HE TELL YOU?

A. Oh, I loved the war stories. He was telling me about the camaraderie.

And, you know, that's what we had in Auschwitz too. All we had was each other. I know I remember we came up with the rules right away who is going to sleep where and how are we going to sleep and who's going to turn around when, how, you know.

And I felt in Auschwitz that, gee, I began to picture how my father was as a prisoner himself.

And I believe that what I did in Auschwitz, I created my own world and I began to reminisce the times that I had with my father when he sent me to a private school, I went to a girls' school, a Gymnasium, which was a wonderful school. I really received a wonderful classical European education.

I remember one year I had five subjects and it was German, Hungarian, and French and Latin, you know, just languages. Not English, English was not allowed because I went to school under Hitler, so I didn't speak a word of English when I came to America.

And I remember my father gave me money to pay for the tuition. And on my way to school, I was doing my little choreography with the Blue Danube and I lost the money. And I came home. I've never seen my father more angry than then, than that time. He was so angry at me, he just, you know, shook me up, how could I lose the money? I believe it was a lot of money, and I believe it was very hard for them to pay for my education, and I lost it. And I felt such guilt, such sorrow, that how could I let him down by losing the money and being so irresponsible?

And I was a very carefree little girl, you know, a little dancer, a little ballerina who was very much into what was going on with the world but not really outside of my little world. My little world was very protected and very small. I didn't know about world events.

Q. WHEN YOUR FATHER SPOKE TO YOU ABOUT THE CAMARADERIE IN THE PRISON CAMP, DO YOU THINK NOW THAT PERHAPS THAT'S WHERE HE GAINED HIS PREDILECTION TO GO OUT WITH THE GUYS?

A. Uh-huh, I think so. I think so. I think so. He also worked with women, you know, so he was very charming, had beautiful social skills, a very polished man.

Unfortunately, after the war, I looked for my father everywhere. See, we didn't know. The way I found out that Clara, my sister, is alive -- her story is her story. But she was already in camp in Budapest. She went up to the German consulate and wanted to know where her parents went and they threw her in a camp. And her Christian professor put on a uniform and smuggled her out and hid her until the end of the war.

And when I came back from the concentration

camp, I was liberated in Gunskirchen, May 4th, 1945, I was taken out of Auschwitz and we carried ammunition on the train. And just lots of things happened in between. But when I came home, in Prague, I noticed advertisement of my beautiful sister Clara with her blond hair holding the violin, advertising that she's giving a concert. Can you imagine what it meant?

And when I came home to Kosice, she was waiting for us, Magda and I. She didn't know who was going to come home. And she decided that she will be my mother. And even today, when I go to Australia to visit her, she introduces me as "my little one." We go to the airport and she kind of pushes me aside and she goes and takes care of the ticket and everything. Even though I'm 64 and I have three children and four grandchildren, it doesn't matter, Clara is my mother, and a beautiful, wonderful human being that I cherish and I'm very sorry that we are so far away from one another.

Q. WHO WAS AT THESE PASSOVER SEDERS THAT YOU MENTIONED, YOUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY?

A. My immediate family. I don't remember really having extended family. I don't remember

having a lot of aunts and uncles. I don't ever remember anybody picking me up and really hugging me.

Q. DID YOUR MOTHER?

A. My mother did. But she was a lot of time in the field. Perhaps that's why I chose to go to the field to try to make some sense out of suffering. I see that my mother probably suffered from what I could help her now, unresolved grief.

Q. OVER THE DEATH OF HER MOTHER?

A. That's right. And the guilt that she wasn't really dead because she was next to her, that she wasn't dead.

And the survivor guilt that I had because I never could understand why me, how come that I survived? I was the ugly duckling. When I came home to my hometown, some people looked at me and said: "You survived? I thought you would be the first one to die, you were that scrawny little kid, you were so weak." And so I felt tremendous guilt that I made it.

Q. CAN YOU REMEMBER SPECIFIC THINGS THAT YOUR MOTHER SAID WHEN SPEAKING TO THE PHOTOGRAPH OF HER MOTHER? WHAT WOULD SHE SAY?

A. She was crying and she was asking her for strength. It's like she became her guardian angel, talking to her was, to her, to enrich herself with her mother's strength and guidance. I believe it was a very positive time for her, even though I saw her crying and I saw her being sad. I don't think my mother gave herself permission to have joy and passion because we lived in a very pressured, difficult times, that we never knew what's going to happen next.

Q. WHAT IS THE EARLIEST MEMORY YOU HAVE OF YOUR MOTHER?

A. My earliest memory was that we took beautiful walks together on Main Street with my sisters. And Magda was the one who always wanted to have Napoleons, she wanted to go to the bakery, to the patisserie on Main Street. And my mother had a fight with her that she shouldn't have that and Magda kind of threw a temper tantrum.

And Clara was the good girl and I was a very good girl. I mean I, I was just the good girl. I don't remember me being stubborn or throwing temper tantrums. I just kind of looked at Magda and I said uh-uh, that's not what I want to be, you know. So I

became very obedient. I remember myself as kind of blending in with the woodwork, never causing any trouble to anyone, kind of like I didn't exist, kind of like I wanted to be not seen. And I think in Auschwitz that came pretty handy.

Q. WHERE DID IT COME FROM, WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE GIRL, THIS FEELING THAT YOU WANTED TO BLEND IN AND NOT BE SEEN? IS THERE AN INCIDENT, NOT AS A PSYCHOLOGIST, AN INCIDENT THAT YOU CAN RECALL?

A. Well, I guess I'm going to be as honest as I can. I remember my parents having a dinner party and they asked me to go and get a glass of water. I guess they wanted to say something. But I listened in. And I heard them say we could have saved that one. I somehow felt that I wasn't supposed to be in that family, that Clara was the superstar and Magda was accompanying her, that I was a real little runt. I am sure I wasn't but I perceived myself as such.

And when my sister sang songs about me when I was cross-eyed, I made up my mind when I go on the street, I will always look down so you wouldn't be shocked of looking at my ugly face. Because my perception of myself was that I'm so ugly that I mustn't really show up for you to see me.

But that has changed because at the age of ten, my mother took me up to Budapest to the Jewish hospital where a Dr. Klein was doing the first operation without anesthetics. And my operation was a success. I think about 30 people held me down because the pain was so severe. But they didn't use anesthetic, I don't know why, so my eyes would be open.

Dr. Klein became very famous, my understanding was that he was in London, that he fled Hungary and lived in London. I wish I could meet him or look for him and tell him hey, you did it well. Because my sense of myself after that just began -- I began to just shine after that. I became a very happy teenager.

Q. YOU HAD NO ANESTHETIC, NOT EVEN SOME ALCOHOL?

A. No. My uncle was a physician who was allowed to come to the operating room. My mother took me up to Budapest to have that done. And I remember having wonderful, beautiful talks with my mother as we were walking up the steps to the palace, and telling me about the history of Budapest, about her life. And my time with my

mother was a very special time. But she actually saved me from totally withering away and feeling that I was just a nonperson.

Q. WHEN YOUR PARENTS SAID TO EACH OTHER WE COULD HAVE SAVED THAT ONE --

A. Right. I really didn't want to tell you that because, you know.

Q. I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

A. I believed that, that I wasn't supposed to be born or wasn't supposed to be -- I understood that I was supposed to be a boy and that I was not good enough. And I began to have a very negative image of myself.

And that was reinforced, of course, in Auschwitz because we were told in Auschwitz the only way you will get out of here is as a corpse, so don't even allow yourselves to think about that you're going to get out of here.

But the positive part of that was that I began to depend much more on myself and my inner resources. And that helped me to rise to the occasion and take care of Magda when we were in Auschwitz and dance for Dr. Mengele. And when I danced for Dr. Mengele and he gave me a piece of

bread, I shared it with others.

And then when we were walking from Mauthausen to Gunskirchen, when things were very bad and cannibalism broke out, that's when I see how the worst brings out the best in us. Because I shared myself with them. And then, when you stopped, you were shot right away. I revisited that place, actually, this year, and I looked at the ditches, how people fell. And my friends formed a chair with their arms and they put me on it so I wouldn't be shot.

I can truly tell you that people who don't go through an experience, not like Auschwitz, you don't have to necessarily, but if people run away from suffering when suffering is feeling, I don't think they ever really lived. I see now that made me the person I am today. I have far more compassion than I did as a little ballerina then. And I became the person that I am today.

And I'm very sorry to tell you that my parents died and my aunts and uncle and everybody died, so I can be here today telling you that. And to be comfortable with that, to tell you that, because this is the hardest thing I'm doing now. It

is much easier for me to give lectures on the psychology of this and that. But to recall my pieces of my life, it's a wonderful opportunity that you are giving me to do this. I appreciate this.

Q. IT'S YOU WHO ARE GIVING US A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY.

A. Of course, I ran away and I didn't want ever anybody to know that, but that was not the good thinking, that's what I resorted to.

Q. WHAT DID YOUR MOTHER LOOK LIKE?

A. My mother was very beautiful. She had blue eyes and beautiful cheekbones and very artistic, very refined. I remember her as being very ambitious for her children, as I have become very ambitious for my children.

When I came to America, my little girl was two years old. And I put money aside that someday I'm going to send her to Harvard. Guess what? I did.

We all had children right away. See, when we came home, we grabbed one another. I met my husband in a TB hospital in Czechoslovakia. We were like shipwrecked lonely people. People asked me did you love your husband? I mean how did you meet or

how were the dates? I said you know, I was like a little animal. I didn't know how to write. I didn't know how to walk. I don't know how much I weighed.

But they put me in a TB hospital because they thought I had TB. I had five kinds of typhoid fever. I had pleurisy. I had pneumonia. And I lost all my hair. We just celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary and we were kidding around that when he met me, I was bald and he had hair and now he's bald and I have hair.

But you see, we didn't have dates but we wanted to give life. I remember when I became pregnant with Miriam, the doctor said I cannot allow you to have this child because you are not strong enough. And I looked at the doctor and I said I'm going to give life. I don't want to take away life. Thank God I didn't listen to my doctor. I had a little girl who was a ten pounder and I could have had a horse doctor.

Q. WHAT DID YOUR FATHER LOOK LIKE?

A. My father was very handsome, had a little mustache, kind of a strawberry blond hair. I remember him being very prudish. I never seen my

father in the nude. I didn't know how a man looks like.

I hate to tell you this, but in the concentration camp, I said to myself I know I'm going to survive but in case something happens, I want to know how a man looks like. And in Mauthausen, all those dead bodies were around and I remember I wanted to see how a man looks like. It's not like my husband now, you know, and the way we are with the children. I remember my father being very neat, very clean, very well-dressed, and very artistic.

Q. SO THERE WAS THIS ARTISTIC BENT FROM BOTH SIDES?

A. Both sides. My father sang beautifully operas and my mother also was very musically -- I grew up in a very musical family and very artistic family.

Q. WAS THERE MUSIC IN HER FAMILY?

A. In her family, I don't think so. I don't think so. The appreciation of music but playing an instrument, no. My mother did play the piano and my father sang and we had chamber music in our home. And I remember having very happy times when people

came and my sister had to perform, she played something from the Mendelssohn violin concerto, usually I remember that. Every part of the Mendelssohn violin concerto is my favorite. And then Magda was playing the piano. And then I was called out to dance, so I put on my little ballerina costume and I was double-jointed and I did the splits. So I remember performing, performing, performing.

Q. WHAT KINDS OF CELEBRATIONS, OTHER RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS DID YOU HAVE OTHER THAN THE PASSOVER SEDERS?

A. Well, I became the dancer for the Jewish community. Every time they had something going on, I was the one who was doing something. And I had this accompanist and he would -- I would say well, what are you going to play, what are you going to do? He says never mind, you just dance and then I'll play. Just do whatever. I said well, tell me what you're going -- we usually played things like the Blue Danube. And I remember the routine very well.

Q. DO YOU KNOW HOW CLARA'S TALENT WAS DISCOVERED, WHY, HOW SHE STARTED WITH THE VIOLIN?

A. The story, that she can tell you better, that someone came from America, I believe Misha Almond came from America and wanted to take my sister with her, she was such an extraordinary talent. And then when I was about ten years old, Janos Starker, who is now a world famous cellist, came to my house and gave a beautiful concert with my sister.

He came to San Diego to play with the symphony and I invited him for a Hungarian meal. And he told me how I was that little girl that no one really paid much attention to and he so happy to see that I grow up to be this woman of today. And it was wonderful for me to meet someone who knew me at that time.

Q. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE HOUSE YOU LIVED IN?

A. I remember we moved. The house that I was born in is no longer there. It was somewhere in the outskirts. I remember a big, big, big place with a kind of veranda and I remember playing there with my friends, playing dolls.

I don't have a vivid memory, you know. I appreciate you asking me these questions because I

wiped out -- it's like became a wipeout for me and I completely dove into the American way of life and what can I do to make a living. We were very poor when we came to America. And my husband's TB flared up, so he ended up in a TB hospital. I worked in a factory in Baltimore doing piecework and I got seven cents per dozen, so I worked very fast. I didn't even go to the bathroom because I didn't want to lose the time. And my hands were shaking when I came home.

And Miriam was in a day-care center and I felt very guilty as a European traditional mother that my child goes to a day-care center. But little did I know that that was the best thing for her because she was a very exceptional child and she -- the woman told me, who took care of the children, that when a child is crying, then Miriam comes to mind that child and tells her how not to be sad.

Later on, I wrote a whole theory around that. And what I was saying, that children who experience calamitous events do not necessarily grow up to be maladjusted human beings. On the contrary, if they survive, they became stronger for it. And that's where I stand today.

But I didn't have those words then. So I was just too busy making a living in America, where I was hungry. And if not for you and if not for the Jewish community, who gave us milk, they gave us milk every day, so I made a lot of chocolate pudding and we ate and drank a lot of milk.

But I had very hard times. We lived in a little room in the back of a home and we didn't have lights on after we put Miriam down to sleep, so we sat in the dark. So, you see, I didn't have time to think about Auschwitz. I had to tend for the livelihood and the life that I had.

And the little girl who went to this child center, Mrs. Bower was a beautiful woman who took care of her free. And Miriam would bring home the little books and that's how I learned English. See, we parentized our children. Miriam was a little parent to me because she taught me how to speak English.

I remember one of the books she gave me was called "Chicken Little." So I was trying to read and the pictures, and I would say chicken little, goosey loosey, ducky lucky, turkey lurkey, and then she would correct me because I didn't know lurkey

from turkey or goosey from loosey.

And so today I talk about, and I work with second generation of survivors, how they had to become many times rise to the occasion to go to grocery store and read the labels because we didn't know, we didn't read well.

But today the second generation tells me that when they -- I'm quoting one of the patients that I have, that when he went to school, the children had the white bread and it was mayonnaise in it and then one slice of bologna. Not him, he had a kaiser roll with roast beef. And it was terrible to be different. And how he wished he would be like them. So he kind of had to lead a double life, to go home and speak the language of the parents and then to go to school and trying to blend.

Many thing I remember. I also went to a Jewish school.

Q. I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU ABOUT THAT.

A. Yeah, I went to a Jewish school. But, you see, I will tell you that off camera. My family was --

Q. WELL, JUST --

A. I'm shaking. It's all right.

Q. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE CHAMBER MUSIC, THE EVENINGS AT YOUR HOME?

A. I have a wonderful memory that my mother was the best cook. I became a very good cook too. And she made things like French salads and then that was followed by wonderful veal, something with veal she made. She would make her own noodles. And in the kitchen I was watching my mother how she made her own noodles. And we didn't have any of the gadgets that we have now. And she made everything from scratch.

She even fed geese, so we had the goose liver from that. I was amazed to be in the kitchen with my mother. How she made the goose and what she did with one goose and how far it went and how we had so many parts this way and that way and the other way cooked.

But the way she made the noodles, she would put one hand and then she would cut it, cut it, cut it, cut it, cut, and she did it so fast and I was so afraid that she's going to cut her fingers off. But she knew how to move just so.

And then she made the strudel. And when she

made the strudel, she cleaned the dining room table. And then she put a white, beautiful tablecloth on it. And then she put I think bread crumbs or something like that. But the way she was doing the dough, that she would blow under it, she would blow under it and then the dough became, I mean, like better than the phyllo dough now.

And then she would do her -- I mean it was so artistic, she took that dough and she kept pulling it to her. It became like a symphony to me. So I would just sit there and watch my mother in action. It was so touching. That face of hers and her eyes, you know, just reaching for the dough. And showing me how someday I'm going to be able to do that.

So my lessons from my mother is still with me. I still have yet to master what she did with the strudel but I make the seven layer (toboshto), the chocolate cake, and I make the veal.

And then I remember when we were sick, in the morning, sometimes she made a soup. And the soup was made out of caraway seeds. And she would take some butter and put the caraway seeds.

My husband was sick, his TB came back, and

my husband is ill now, he has pus in his lung. Today he is in the hospital while I'm here, so I'm kind of rushing to go back to him. And I called my sister in Australia and I asked her how do you make the caraway soup that Mother did because that would be, you know, a good, good remedy.

So I remember my mother putting in the caraway seeds and butter and flour, but then put some water, and then she took the caraway seeds and mashed it in some way, so we didn't really eat the caraway seeds by itself.

I was very skinny and Magda seemed to have some weight problems. So my mother would dish out the meals to me and I would say to my mother, you know, enough, enough. And Magda would push me and say take it, I'll eat it. You know, in Auschwitz, Magda eat the bread and eat the soup, that's what we got at the end of the day. I ate the soup and saved the bread. Because Magda suffered much more from hunger than I did.

But that was a beautiful way that I remember my mother in the kitchen, that was the most beautiful memory I carried with me.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE FOOD THAT SHE MADE?

A. My favorite food was fried chicken. And when I had my operation in Budapest when I was ten years old, my mother asked me what would I like to eat. And I said fried chicken. And she said I'll give you as much fried chicken as you can eat, no limits.

Q. HOW DID SHE MAKE THE FRIED CHICKEN?

A. The way she made the fried chicken is the way I make it now. I would use flour and eggs and bread crumbs. And my grandchildren love my fried chicken now and I tell them that it's from my mommy.

Q. YOU MENTIONED A FRENCH SALAD THAT SHE MADE. WHAT WAS THAT?

A. Yes. The French salad was deviled eggs that you take out the yellow part and then you mix it with mayonnaise and whatnot and then green peas were surrounded around the eggs. So I'm picturing that salad that had the deviled eggs, kind of whipped up, and the green peas around it and some red little peppers. It was beautiful.

Q. IT SOUNDS VERY ARTISTIC.

A. Very artistic and very much part of my mother's perfectionism that she was concentrating on the detail, everything had to be just so, the

ambience and the way she presented that, the beauty of the way she presented the food.

To me, my father used to say, you know, it doesn't matter, you know, what you serve to Ditzo -- my name was Ditzo -- it's the way it is presented. And then the family would make jokes out of me that I pick up the cup like aristocrat and I dangled this little foot -- excuse me, little finger, I'm so excited. And they would mimic me. So every time I picked up a cup, I would put this finger down so they wouldn't joke around me. I mean, it was done in a loving way but I was the finicky one.

And my grandfather would come and tell my mother don't feed her with spinach because if she eats spinach, she's going to be greener than she is already. Because I was very pale all the time. And my mother -- I still have low blood pressure. And my mother was giving me cod liver oil and spinach. And so I remember kind of being fed with certain foods so I would be well nourished.

But my sister Magda was not encouraged to eat, so my grandparents would sneak some pastries in to her. And my mother was very upset that my grandparents do that while she was trying to help my

sister. So my grandparents would spoil her.

And I'm doing the same thing now, I'm spoiling my grandchildren. My daughter tells me don't buy my, you know, don't buy my granddaughter any sweets. And we go to the sweet shop and she can have anything she wants. And then she comes home and says to mommy, Grandpa told me not to tell you but I had this and this and this and that, so.

Q. DID YOU HELP YOUR MOTHER COOK?

A. I helped my mother cook and I -- I'm so glad that you asked me this because I somehow -- when I revisited the place last year, I went to the same kitchen, people who live there now allowed me to come.

And so I pictured, I'm very visual, I pictured my mother at the fireplace, we had this very beautiful fireplace from ceramics, it's kind of like a piece of furniture in the room, and I remember picturing my mother getting herself warmed up around the fireplace in the bedroom. And I went to the kitchen and I remembered how my mother had to do everything the hard way, that they put firewood and how the stove was just right for the amount of heat that it needed.

I enjoyed going to the market with my mother. And people were there from Bulgaria, so she called them the Bulgars. And she would fuss with them about the radishes, about the tomatoes. And today I go to the farmer's market and I'm doing kind of the same thing. I kind of have a relationship with those people and they tell me how the corn is. And going to the farmer's market is my best time that I do now in San Diego every Saturday morning, if I can.

So food was a very important part of our family. Food was love. And even today, there is no way I ever leave any food on my plate. In fact, I eat everybody's leftovers before I eat my own. Because when I came to America, I put food on my husband's plate, on my little girl's plate, and none on my plate because I thought that's what good wives do and that's what good mothers do, that I come last.

Q. IS THAT WHAT YOUR MOTHER DID?

A. And I think that's what she did. Because the certain pieces of the goose and the certain pieces of the chicken went to my father and then my father would put it back on my mother's plate. And

I remember them throwing food from one plate to another that you should have it, you should have it, you should have it, you should have it.

And somehow always that you come first was modeled for me, that other people come first. And that's how I began my life here too, that my husband came first and my little girl came first. And my husband went back to school and then I went back to school. We somehow raised each other. So our history is very different.

And my grandson asked me the other day did you go steady. And I played dumb, you know, because I want him to talk to me more. So I said no, I don't know what it is, going steady. But he tells me what it means to go steady. And then he says to me yeah, I know, maybe you did go steady but he died, didn't he? Because any story that he asks me to tell him, somehow it ends that I did have a boyfriend and he died a day before liberation.

So my stories, when I begin to tell my grandchildren now, they're very, very interested in knowing what really happened. And today, I don't lie to them anymore. I just say what happened. I don't say what happened, I continue and say what I

have done with that and how they live because somehow my parents live in them, that the continuation, that we are not victims to be felt sorry for, that that was yesterday. And today I was able to not only survive but to prevail, I like that word, that that is a triumph, that is a celebration of life, that that's how I want to be remembered by my grandchildren.

Q. JUST GOING BACK TO THE FOOD, THAT STRUDEL --

A. That strudel was made with cherries and then it was made with apples, and the favorite one I had was made with cheese, kind of like cottage cheese but not really, kind of like cream cheese. That was the best.

And I remember my mother told me that the Hungarian style is different from the Polish style. That the Polish people put raisins in it but the Hungarians don't put raisins in it. So even today, I don't like anything with raisins in it. When you give me the strudel with raisins in it, I pick out the raisins.

Then my mother made stuffed cabbage. And the way the Hungarian stuffed cabbage is made, the way I made it, she told me that the Polish people

make it differently, they make it sweet. And today when I talk to women who cook that way, they say yeah, we use brown sugar in it. I don't. I put the caraway seeds and I put the sauerkraut, the way my mother did, and the cabbage together.

And one of my favorite dishes was also the stuffed peppers that my mother made. And today when I make it, my children don't like it. So I don't make it. My husband loves it.

Q. HOW DID SHE MAKE IT?

A. She made it with the ground beef. So when I came to America, I would cook the way I cook at home. But my little girl at the time, you see, in 1949, it really wasn't fashionable to be a foreigner. They called us greenhorns. So I did everything in my power that my little girl wouldn't be different.

And sure enough, she would come home and she would say I want American hamburgers. But my hamburgers had eggs in it and garlic in it. And my mother would soak bread and mix it with it and then she would roll it in bread crumbs and then she would fry it. And then she would make with it, it's like Brussels sprouts but it's big, and then she would

cut it up and she would put -- mix it with potatoes and caraway seeds. And then she fried those little hamburgers. Then the grease from that, she mixed it with that beautiful green potato mixture. And that was one of our favorite meals. I make it now for my husband and he loves it. But what I do is substitute it with the brussel sprouts. And it's quite good, quite good.

Q. WHAT ABOUT PASSOVER, WHAT FOODS DO YOU REMEMBER?

A. Passover, I remember the soup, the chicken soup was heavenly, with the noodles that my mother made herself. The chicken soup that she made had all kinds of wonderful vegetables in it. So today I'm always looking for the best recipe for the chicken soup. And I think she put the carrots. And I don't remember celery in Hungary, I don't remember that vegetable. But I remember she would grow parsley and there was parsley put in the soup. But then she would take it out, it wasn't served, so she would strain the vegetables. And so it was the clear, beautiful chicken soup with the noodles.

And then we had to boil chicken and then she would make beets. Beets would be mixed with

horseradish and that's what we ate with the boiled chicken and potatoes, that was the next meal. And then came the strudel.

And then my mother also made from boiled potatoes little dumplings and that was called the angel's -- (angelbedera). Actually it's the angel's little penis, it was called. So here again, my mother does this wonderful potato, boiling of the potato and then making this wonderful rolls and then cut it again to small pieces and throw it into hot water and then she threw that into butter and bread crumbs. And then she made dumplings with it and put plums in there with the bread crumbs. It was fabulous. I haven't eaten it since.

I have to learn how to make that. I'm sure my sister knows how. Yes, she does, she does. She makes it for us when we go to Sydney. When we go to Sydney, my husband is so happy to come, because then he really gets the food that my sister is fabulously treating my husband. And so my husband can't wait. We are going in November to eat my sister's food, which is my mother's food.

Q. DID YOUR MOTHER HAVE A GARDEN?

A. My mother didn't have a garden. We didn't

live in a home with a back yard. We lived in a three story home and we lived in the second home and there were stores downstairs. The (anderashi) palace where we lived, and I remember growing up, had a coffeehouse. And I remembered with my friend, we would look out the window and try to throw down spits of the grapes and see whether it land in someone else's coffee. We would have that kind of a mischievous game that we played.

So there was a coffeehouse where I remember growing up and there was a window from which I could see the whole Main Street going down, you could see the opera house, you could see the theater, you could see the beautiful parks with the water fountains. It was a lovely, lovely city.

And my father's favorite food was going into a restaurant and order the Hungarian (saka) goulash, which I make now, and that is made with sauerkraut. And that was his favorite dish that he went to -- on a Sunday morning to have, he called it a (zona), he had a little bit of a goulash with the beer.

Q. FOR BREAKFAST?

A. For kind of like brunch type, yeah, Sunday, so that was his ritual.

Q. DID HE TAKE ANYONE WITH HIM?

A. Sometimes. And what he did, when he played billiards, they got these little petits fours that they got, they didn't play money, I guess, the petits fours came as a reward, and many times he would come home and give it to me, not to Magda, because I was the skinny one, and not to Clara. I was the one who was the skinny one, so I was fed all the time so I would become stronger. So I remember him feeding me with those little precious petits fours.

Nice memories, you know. The food was very important for my father to also kind of examine what my mother put on his plate. I've never seen my father in the kitchen. I never seen my father cooking anything. I suppose he was a traditional man in that sense. He didn't show up with his souffle as some of the men do now.

Q. DID HE MAKE YOUR CLOTHES?

A. He did not. He did not, all of it. But when I was 16, he did. When I began -- in fact, I have a picture somewhere, with my boyfriend, in a little silk dress that she made for me with the belt that was suede. And that was my favorite. And I

had a very good waistline. And that's when he said that out of the three girls, I will be the one that he can really dress up. He never was given that chance, unfortunately.

Q. AT WHAT AGE DID YOUR MOTHER SEND YOU TO BALLET SCHOOL?

A. I was four years old. I had a wonderful ballet master. I began to really develop my inner strength when he told us in a very serious way that God built us in such a magnificent way that all my strength and all the ecstasy and when I dance, everything has to come from inside out. And not to allow anything artificial to come to my body. So I don't smoke or drink. I still follow those messages from my ballet master.

And I do that kind of work, I work at drug and alcohol centers, and I work with suicidal teenagers and I show them that there is another way, that look for the inner life. And so I use my childhood and the experience that I had in a way that I can heal or empower others so they would look at life more from inside out rather than from outside in.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE GIRL, WHAT WERE YOUR

THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT YOU WOULD DO WHEN YOU GREW UP?

A. I had a dream that someday I will be accepted in the Budapest Ballet Academy and that I will dance Romeo and Juliet.

And when I arrived in Auschwitz and when we stood at the end of the line and Dr. Mengele pointed my mother to go to the left and my sister to go to the right, I followed my mother. And Dr. Mengele said you're going to see your mother very soon, she's just going to take a shower, and threw me on the other side, which meant life. So that's why, you see, I never understand.

And then that night, he came to the barracks and wanted to be entertained. And my friends threw me right in front of Dr. Mengele. So as I was dancing for Dr. Mengele, I remember I closed my eyes and I took myself away from Auschwitz and I took myself to the Budapest opera house and the music was Tchaikovsky and I was dancing to Romeo and Juliet. This is the first skill that I remember using, that somehow I was not able to allow Dr. Mengele to murderer my spirits. And so the orchestra was playing.

The saddest part was that I didn't know what

will happen to me. Because he pointed nonchalantly to certain people and told the assistant to take them to the gas chamber, which was just across from us. So when I asked where my parents was, the inmates who were there longer said you better talk about your parents in past tense, they're burning there. So there was no help from the outside, you see. And I didn't know whether I'm going to be the next. So I did anything, anything he wanted me to do. And so I danced. I was entertaining.

Q. WHEN YOU ARRIVED AND YOU SAW MENGELE AND YOUR MOTHER WENT --

A. I didn't know he was Mengele. I was just told, you know, I didn't know who was who. All I knew that we had -- we were detrained and there was a lot of chaos and inmates who were there kind of cleaning up the luggages and separating the father -- my father was separated from us. So Magda and I, and my mother was in the middle, then we approach.

And then we were finally getting to the barracks and then we were told that everybody under 40 and everybody under 14 automatically went to the left, which meant the gas chamber. And then I said

to my sister why did we cling to my mother? We had tremendous guilt that if -- we had this what if, what if, you know, what if I would have left her alone, she looked so young, maybe she would have made it. Because there were some people who did. But my mother had gray hair and she looked older then than I look now. And I suppose it's not the age but they also wanted to separate, separate members of the family.

Q. YOU WERE TOLD THIS AFTER YOU HAD GONE INTO A BARRACKS?

A. After we were gone to the barracks. So Mother wasn't there.

Q. DID YOU KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO HER?

A. No, no, no.

Q. WHAT DID MENGELE LOOK LIKE?

A. I remember a very stern, rigid eyes of a man who was skinny, sort of. I don't remember a big man.

Later on when there was the news that he was in Paraguay, I had the fantasy that I would go to Paraguay and interview him as a sophisticated American journalist and then tell him in the end

that I was the girl who danced for him. That never happened. And I don't know whether he is alive or dead. I don't think I could recognize him even if I would see him.

Q. SO YOU WERE SEPARATED FROM YOUR MOTHER AND THEN --

A. And then we were put in a big hall. And Magda was a beautiful -- she still is very beautiful, I don't want to say Zsa Zsa Gabor, but she was quite well beautifully. She was the beauty. In fact, she was always the sexy one.

My mother told me when I was ten that it's good that I have brains because I have no looks. So my image of myself was that I was a little egghead. And I formed my own book club. And I remember reading the interpretation of Freud when I was 14. And that was my life, the books and being kind of a little good student.

And so Magda, when we were shaved completely, this is the first time -- later on when I read Viktor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning," I was able to somehow make sense of what really happened. And he helped me very much. And later on when I met him, and I did a keynote address for him

in Toronto, we exchanged how we survived. And he and I used the same skills.

He says when he was tortured, he closed his eyes and he imagined himself in a Vienna lecture hall lecturing about the psychology of the concentration camp. Viktor Frankl is now 86 or 87. I was 16. So you see, there was a 22 years difference between us. But I used the same skill.

Today I work with sexually abused women who were abused sexually and physically and emotionally, and they tell me the same things, how they closed their eyes and pretended that it happened to somebody else, that they would dissociate. I have tremendous compassion to these women because I knew who was the enemy in Auschwitz but they had no place to run.

So to tell you about Magda, when we were saved and put into this big hall, the inmates took care of us. And I had a little earring from -- a Hungarian little girl, when she is born, she gets a little earring. So I had the little earring there for 16 years. She tore it out. I was bleeding. I said why do you do that? I would give it to you. She says because while you were going to the

theater, I was here. She was a girl who was from Poland and she was there from 1942. I was part of the Final Solution. I came May 1944. So you see, she somehow took it out on me the frustrations. And I felt -- I told her I would have given it to you. Why do you do this to me?

And then we were stripped completely, then we were shaven. And I remember the first humorous thing that happened, Magda looked at me and said how do I look?

Q. AND WHAT DID YOU SAY?

A. She told me a while ago when she came to visit me, she says remember what you told me in Auschwitz, how you pointed out to me what I had rather than what I didn't have, that you could have told me that I looked like a naked dog, because I did, but instead you told me Magda, you have beautiful eyes.

So today, my sister and I are able to look at that part of our lives. Because when I went back to Auschwitz 40 years later, I asked her to come with me and she said no way, no how, I'm not a masochist. So that's why, you know, I can only speak for myself because Magda did it Magda's way

and I tell you. But I was a dancer and I needed to go back to that place one more time and feel and smell the place. Because when I was there, the smell was terrible. I never saw birds there flying. I never saw a sunset. And now when I go back, I see that the air is very different.

Q. ON THAT DAY THAT YOU ARRIVED AND THAT YOU WENT INTO SEPARATE LINES, AFTER YOUR HEAD WAS SHAVED, THEN WHAT?

A. Then we went to the barracks. We were given striped uniforms and it had a number on it. And kind of like clogs. We weren't barefoot, we had these wooden shoes. And we were put in this barracks. I saw it when I returned to Auschwitz. It had a fireplace in the middle. And it had three-layer cots. And I got the one on the top. As I remember. I have to check it out with Magda. She may remember something else.

And so the six of us had to sleep one foot, one head, one foot, one head. So if one person wanted to turn around, all six of us had to go one, two, three and turn around. So we had to come up with very quick rules right away to be able to get along with one another.

And I remember Magda pointing to the gas chamber and said to me, you know, Mom and Dad are not dead because the soul never dies. And somehow she kept saying that over and over again, that they really are not dead.

Q. NOW, AT WHAT POINT DID MENGELE COME?

A. That evening, that evening. That evening came and he was interested in the arts. He was interested in the orchestra, he was interested in music.

Later on, in El Paso, I treated one of the twins that he experimented on. And oddly enough, he told me that Dr. Mengele was very kind to him, very good to him, that he really loved children. It's amazing, you know, how he was able to do what he did.

Q. DID HE WALK INTO YOUR BARRACKS?

A. Yeah, he walked in and wanted to know the newcomers, like who is who.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT HE SAID SPECIFICALLY?

A. Well, he wanted to know who knows how to, you know, what talents do we have. And so my friends, my schoolmates said we know, we know a dancer, we know of somebody who knows how to stand

on her head, we know how she knows how to do the splits. And so...

Q. AND SO?

A. And he asked me to dance.

Q. WHAT DID HE SAY?

A. He said it in, you know, tanzen, in English -- not English, in German, in German for me to dance. And then he came back again and then the orchestra was playing and I was dancing.

Q. HE CAME BACK WHERE?

A. To the barracks. And then one time he took me with him and I didn't know where he was taking me. And so I was so scared. And then one time he came to the showers, we were taking showers, and we were -- we had lice, so we were sprayed with all kinds of stuff, and he came and looked at the bodies, you know, the nude bodies.

And he recognized me and asked me to come in a room with him. And then the phone rang and I ran out. I got so scared and I was just terrified, terrified, terrified. I was 16, remember, I didn't know anything about anything.

Q. THAT FIRST TIME HE CAME, WHERE DID YOU GO TO PERFORM?

A. In the barracks, right there. There was a place where the lageraltester, the person who kind of took care of us, stayed. And there was a place before that fireplace. It was an open space there. That's where I danced.

Q. WAS IT A SEPARATE ROOM?

A. No, not then, not then.

And everybody was watching me. When I was in Australia, someone called me and said I remember seeing you in Auschwitz dancing.

Q. WHERE DID MENGELE SIT?

A. And I had a -- well, he was standing. He didn't sit. No, he didn't sit.

Q. YOU HAD A --

A. I used that talent later on. I used that talent later on when we stood in line to get the tattoo, that was months later, months later, I never got the tattoo. And then we stood in line to get the tattoo and what I remember, that somehow everybody got the tattoo until it came to my turn, then I didn't get the tattoo. And I said why don't you give me the tattoo? And she said because you're going to the gas chambers. I don't want to waste the ink on you now.

And on the way what I thought was the gas chamber, I noticed that Magda was in another part somewhere. And I knew that Magda and I need each other, that I have to get to Magda. But I didn't tell the guards that she is my sister and I want to get to her. Because we were very smart by that time, never tell, never stay behind the barracks, you know, when you're ill, don't stand there and say you're ill because they take you to the gas chamber even though they tell you they take you to the hospital. So when you stood in the appell, in the morning we had to hold onto each other so God forbid they would know that we are not well. So we became very smart very quick.

And so I looked at the guard again and I began to do the cartwheels, I entertained the guard, and I ended up next to my sister. I went there but I didn't walk there, I did it with my cartwheels and my splits and I ended up next to my sister. And I bet that guard knew but he let me do it. I bet. I wish I could meet that person now. That's how I ended up with my sister.

But they did, they took us out of Auschwitz and they put us on the top of a train to carry

ammunition for the Germans so the English wouldn't bomb. And they put the striped uniforms on us. But they bombed anyway. And I remember like seven people died around me. One girl was from Yugoslavia and how she dreamed about going back to Yugoslavia.

And so we had to jump because the train stopped. And I jumped like an acrobat and I ran into the forest in the middle of the bombing. No Magda. In the middle of the bombing, I came back. And it's the first time that we have seen men. See, I wasn't in Auschwitz, I was in Birkenau, where the women were, so we didn't see men. It was the first time that we saw men.

And I took a risk. So you see, you don't care. I wanted to know where Magda was. I ran back and Magda jumped too but she hurt herself. So there she was with her lip was swollen up and she was bleeding. And you know what she tells me that I told her? She said that I told her that now that you have to look pretty and sexy, this is the way you look now. Because I wanted her to look nice for the men so maybe we would get a little more food. Because they were political prisoners.

So you see, we had our label in our family

that Magda was the pretty one and she was the sexy one. And Clara was the superstar. And I was what I was.

Q. THE BRAINY ONE?

A. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So we had -- and today when I do family therapy, I'm very interested in the labels and try to move away from labels.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE DANCING FOR MENGELE, YOU MENTIONED AN ORCHESTRA.

A. Outside.

Q. OUTSIDE?

A. Alma, Alma Rose was, I believe, the name of the conductor. Alma Rose, I think that was the name that I remember being said. Needs to be checked out. My memory is not very good.

But I remember saying to someone well, who is, you know, playing in the orchestra or what's going on? And they had a beautiful orchestra. So when I arrived in Auschwitz, we didn't know what was going on because the orchestra was playing.

I was so sad when I heard David Duke saying that Auschwitz was designed and the orchestra was there to entertain the prisoners. I was so sad about such a lie. And how would people in Louisiana

know? And I'm so scared how do you think of a lie and then you repeat it until people believe it? It so saddened me that even if I would talk to David Duke today, would he believe me?

You see, the most well-used defense mechanism is denial. I have yet to meet anybody, even though I was in Poland and I went to Auschwitz and I went to the village and I asked people around about the smells. They've never seen or heard anything. It's amazing. And that's when I began to talk. So I didn't say anything to anyone.

I remember lecturing at the University of Texas in El Paso in a psychology class about the psychology of a battering relationship. I've done a lot of work with battered wives. And then when I was done, Dr. Barrientos, who was on my committee, said Dr. Eger is also a survivor of Auschwitz. How many of you heard of Auschwitz? And four hands went up.

And that's when I came home and that's when I had a talk with myself and that's when I began to really recognize that I owe it to my parents. And today there is not one lecture that I give that I don't talk about what happened, to know that my

parents didn't die in vain. And so that's when I began to tell my story, come out of hiding. Because I kept my secret and then my secret had me. I didn't realize it takes much more energy to hold things in and keep the seams, you know, than letting it out.

So part of that was that I was invited to give a keynote address in Berchtesgaden to the U.S. Army chaplains. And I didn't want to go back. And I got the letter and I read the letter and my husband was standing there and I shook and I said I don't think I can go back to Germany. And my husband, who was a partisan and a ghetto fighter in the Czechoslovakian, you know, mountains, looked at me and said if you don't go and you don't accept that, then Hitler won the war.

So I went back and I sat on a first class train. And some elderly German people were across from me. And I thought to myself would you believe if I would tell you that in 1945 I was sitting on the top of this maybe very train carrying ammunition? I never did check it out either. But those were the thoughts.

And then I arrived in Berchtesgaden. And

then I was told that I slept in a VIP Gestapo room, I slept in Goebbels' room. And then the lecture was given in a place called now the General Walker Hotel and downstairs is Hitler's bunker. And I saw the stables. And then I gave the keynote address.

So somehow, I felt that Anne Frank, who didn't make it, that I was able to somehow believe in some justice and, as she says, that people are basically good. And today I am glad I did that. And that's when I decided that I got to go back to Auschwitz. So I moved then slowly towards Poland and going back to Auschwitz, which I believe was the time when I truly liberated myself and I forgave myself that I survived.

And I made up my mind that I don't have to be ashamed of me, that I don't have to speak English without an accent. I spent three years at the university trying to get rid of my accent so I would sound like you. A very sensitive professor I remember told me Edie, your English is fine, I'm beginning to speak with a Hungarian accent, get out of here. But I tried so hard to run away from that part of my life. I tried so hard to be like you.

And I feel very good now that I can sit here

and tell you that yes, that's what happened. And if -- (?) said, you know, if not now, when? If I'm not going to do it, who will? I'm one of the youngest survivors but, you see, I'm going to be 65 too. So the time is going and I'm very grateful to you that you're doing this.

So I am very invested to be the grandmother who does something to prevent this from happening again. I'm very invested in doing something that my children and grandchildren would remember of a grandmother who came out of hiding and didn't seek the sympathy but owed it to her parents to tell the story.

Q. I WANT TO GO BACK TO THE DANCE THAT YOU PERFORMED FOR MENGELE.

A. Yes, yes, yes.

Q. WHAT DID THE ORCHESTRA PLAY?

A. The Blue Danube.

Q. HAD YOU DANCED TO THAT?

A. I knew exactly the things to do. I still can remember, first I pick up my feet and then I twirl around and then I go down in a split. And I did all that. I combined ballet with acrobatics, classical ballet with acrobatics.

So it was -- first of all, people asked me did you cry in Auschwitz or did you worry, were you angry in Auschwitz? You know, I don't remember crying. I remember entertaining Dr. Mengele and being void of feelings. I don't remember crying. I don't remember. I think partially because the soup that they gave us had a lot of little pills in it floating.

Q. PILLS?

A. Pills. I think we were zonked out.

Q. DID YOU LOOK AT MENGELE WHILE YOU WERE DANCING OR DID YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES?

A. I closed my eyes. So I don't know, but I did look at my eyes before and after. It's almost like am I going to live, did I do okay? But the first time I didn't know what was happening. I was in a kind of a disbelief. I didn't know where I was. I didn't know what was going on.

I didn't even know that I was in Auschwitz. I saw the sign "Arbeit Macht Frei" but I didn't know where I was. I didn't even know I was in Poland. Because we were told, I was operating on the assumption that we're going to Hungary, you see, so I didn't have it together to even think. Everything

was a shock, a shock.

And then is this really happening to me? Just the realization, yes, it is happening, and yes, your hair is shaved, and yes, you're not getting food, and yes, you may go tomorrow and you're going to have to collect hair. And then -- but I didn't, I never was assigned to do that.

But the people who were came back. And then we had these double rules, so if you stole something from them, then you were a hero, but if you stole a little crumb of bread from your inmate, you were silenced. So we had the real double rules right away that if you could be smart enough to get something from them, you were smart. So we learned to do the best we could with the little that we had. So I remember some people came with a little piece of bacon and they want to trade it to something else. There were these little things going on there.

And I remember some people were able to hoard a picture of themselves that they kept. The one girl came to me every day showing herself to me with hair, that that's the way, it was so important for her how she looked.

So I remember Magda, my sister, later on, when we were taken out of Auschwitz, you know, in the wintertime, somewhere else, in another camp, they brought us coats. And I got a warm coat with a little gray fur on it, it was kind of reddish, and so I was very happy with it. My sister got a warm coat too. And I said isn't this wonderful? She says yes. But later on, I see my sister talking to another girl, exchanging coats because the other was more modern and looked better on her. But it wasn't as warm and she didn't care because looks were so important to her. So people were kind of exchanging the coats that we got. And so Magda was relying on me and I was relying on her.

And then in the Gunskirchen, the American Red Cross came, that's where the cannibalism broke out, and they gave us a little can of sardines. And remember, I'm the sister who always thought about the tomorrow. She was the one who gobbled up her food, I was the one who saved it for tomorrow. So even in Gunskirchen, I didn't let her open up the sardine can. And then we were liberated and the GIs came. And she still doesn't forgive me that I didn't allow her to open up the sardines. And even

today, I'm always somehow in the future, saving money, saving for the future.

Q. HAVE YOU ANY IDEA OF HOW LONG A PERIOD OF TIME YOU DANCED FOR MENGELE, TWO MINUTES, TEN MINUTES?

A. I don't. I wish I could tell you. I took myself into another world in another way. And when I was done, I don't know how long I danced but I know I danced very well.

Q. HOW DO YOU KNOW?

A. I simply put my heart and soul in it because I thought I can save my sister that way too. I had a tremendous determination to do it right, to do it well. I didn't do it out of hatred. I began to please.

Q. WHEN YOU OPENED YOUR EYES, WHAT DID YOU SEE AFTER YOU FINISHED DANCING?

A. I saw a piece of bread, an extra ration of bread, and I was very grateful --

Q. FROM MENGELE?

A. No. From the hand to the hand. He gave it to the kapo and she gave it to me.

Q. HE GAVE IT TO WHAT KAPO?

A. The woman who was in charge of the barracks,

barrack that we were, I think that's how we called those people. I think other survivors have maybe more vivid memories of the names but I remember a kapo and I remember a lageraltester.

I also remember being beaten very severely with a dog leash, when I snuck out and I wanted to go to the bathroom, by one of them. So we were very much afraid of them.

Q. DID MENGELE SAY ANYTHING TO YOU WHEN IT WAS OVER?

A. No. No. I didn't hear thank you or anything like that. But I heard something like (schirm), nice, (schirm), (schirm), (schirma), (schirma), (schirma matian), something like that.

So last year, I was asked to do some helping in San Diego with a theater production called (Shana Madel). And it's a wonderful, wonderful opportunity for me to get in touch with that girl who ends up in a concentration camp and then comes to America and pulls the family together, that she is the strong one, even though she looks like the little greenhorn. And in the end, she manages to tell her sister to face the father, who was pretty authoritarian, and to be able to, you know, buy

herself the coat that she deserved and so on. And it was a wonderful play. I would like people to see that, to see the strength that we developed there, the inner strength, the perseverance, the tremendous desperate way to stay alive.

Q. AT THE TIME OF THIS DANCE, THIS PERFORMANCE, DID YOU KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO YOUR PARENTS?

A. Yes. Because when I was shaved and when I asked when will I see my mother, that's when I was told in that hall, before we went to the barracks, pointed to that chimney, and that's when I was told that they're burning there and that you better talk about your parents in past tense. That sentence I never forget.

Q. AND YOUR THOUGHTS AT THAT TIME WHEN YOU WERE TOLD THAT?

A. I really didn't think. There was not much time. Something, everything happened right after the other, you know, you stand in line to get your dress, you stand in line to get yourself shaved, you stand -- you know, I was just kind of pushed around, pushed around, pushed around.

So finally when we got into the barracks, we knew that we are alive, that somehow that first

hurdle we got through. But we didn't know what was going to happen next, we didn't know what was going to happen tomorrow. And then we were told what time to get up and they, you know, they woke us up, we didn't have clocks or we didn't have anything. And we had to stand outside and they were counting heads. It was called the appell.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE PERFORMING AND YOU WERE IMAGINING YOURSELF IN THE OPERA HOUSE, CAN YOU RECALL ANYTHING SPECIFIC? WERE YOU ALONE ON THE STAGE? WAS THERE A LARGE CROWD?

A. I was on the stage and I was surrounded with the chorus and I was the prima ballerina and I was dancing with Romeo. And then when I did the split, then he picked me up and carried me out.

And when I came to Baltimore and I worked in a factory, because I didn't speak a word of English, at night, I would dream again of me being the ballerina. I am a kind of a frustrated dancer.

So the therapy I do is couples therapy and I'm always wondering about the rhythm of the couple, that who is the fast one and who is the slow one, who is the rabbit and who is the turtle, and how the fast one wants to, you know, speed up the slow one,

and how the slow one wants to, you know, slow down the speedy one.

And so I am still a dancer. I will always be a dancer. I'm just doing now different kinds of choreography. I'm still a dancer. I'm an artist. I'm not a scientist.

Q. PRIOR TO THIS DANCE FOR MENGELE, HAD YOU EVER HAD THIS FANTASY OR REVERIE BEFORE ABOUT PERFORMING, DANCING ROMEO AND JULIET?

A. Yes. That was my dream, that -- in fact, my boyfriend, we planned how we're going to go to Budapest and he's going to become the scientist. He was a very active member of the Jewish organization that later on became the Haganah. And he was quite militant and he wanted to go to Palestine and he was telling me about Zionism. I was not part of that at the time. And how we're going to plan our future and how we're going to get married.

And when we were together in the brick factory and when the boxcars came to pick us up and I was on one, he found me through the cracks and he said whatever happens, I will never forget your eyes and I will never forget your hands.

And believe me, in Auschwitz, I kept going

and asking people what about my eyes? What about my hands? And that fantasy that someday we're going to reunite again, I was always in the future. I would say things when I get out of here, when I get out of here.

I remember they took my blood as often as twice a week. And today I talk about the skills that I discovered there, but today I have words for it, like visualization and guided imagery and self-dialogue. So I remember when they took my blood, I asked him why are you taking my blood? You know what he said? He said we take your blood so we would help the German soldiers. And even though I couldn't yank my arm away, I wouldn't be here telling you about it, I said to myself, I was a ballerina as a child, I never harmed anyone, I bet with my blood you're never going to win the war. And I developed my own little humor that I'm still triumphing over you, I'm still prevailing, even though you can take my blood, but you cannot take away my soul.

So lots of things happened there that we --

(tape interrupted)

Very few people came back. I don't know the

numbers.

Q. DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY WERE JEWISH BEFORE THE WAR?

A. A large population was Jewish. Again, I have a hard time with numbers. I think, I think they said something about 15,000 Jews were there and 70 came back. But I am not -- I'm quite hesitant to give you these numbers. These are the numbers that I recall. We had a very large Jewish community but it was separated Orthodox Jews and Reform Jews.

Q. WERE THERE MANY TEMPLE -- SHULS?

A. There were about three or four, three or four. We were members of the most modern Reform temple.

Q. DO YOU RECALL WHETHER ANY OF YOUR GRANDPARENTS WERE RELIGIOUS, VERY RELIGIOUS JEWS?

A. Yes. Yes, yes, they were. They were. My mother's father and my father's father were always telling my father that he should give us more Judaism and be more involved. I remember that conversation.

Q. DID THEY SPEAK TO YOU, YOUR GRANDFATHERS?

A. They spoke to me. I thought Magda was the -- Magdalena she calls herself now, she was the

favorite. She was the favorite.

I -- my grandfather was hard of hearing. And in his daily life, the routine was, for him, kind of a ritual, that he came to visit us. And when he came to visit us, he was hard of hearing and he had this black contraption that he put in his ear and we would have to talk into that.

So one day, he didn't realize that everyone can hear him because he spoke very loud and he thought he was whispering to my sister's ear and said don't tell your parents that Ditzo is at my house now because she is, you know, cutting school. And the whole, everybody heard it. So when I came home, my father says where were you today? And boy did I know, did I know. I tried to lie. I became pretty manipulative, you know.

My father was very charming and he would go to the coffeehouse to play cards. And when I needed money, I knew if I go to the coffeehouse when my father is in front of his friends, he's always going to be a very gallant gentleman and I got the money from him all the time. And then I go to the kitchen in the morning and ask my mother for money. So, you know, I kind of learned to play -- become, as most

young children become charming manipulators, I think I was one of those.

Q. HOW DID YOU TRY TO MANIPULATE OUT OF THIS SITUATION?

A. Well, you know, I'm telling you that I did everything in my power.

What I was going to tell you, that when we were getting out of Auschwitz and as we were going from one city to another, children were spitting at us. And I said to myself someday, children, I come home and I will come back here and I will tell you that you don't have to hate me. And the wonderful part about it is that I take care of German families and the little girl comes in and sits on my lap and call me Oma.

So I'm very invested in somehow opening up communications and to find out as to concentrating on what you and I can do together so we would unite each other rather than create an "us" and "them" and a separation. So I did cross-cultural seminars in Hungary with Karl Rogers many years ago and we brought the east and the west together then. And I see a lot of powerful hopefulness.

I think what I have learned in Auschwitz,

never to give up hope, to find hope in hopelessness. Kind of perhaps seeing myself as the merchant of hope. Because I came so close to death. And given a second chance at life, every moment is so precious. I'm very invested in life. I'm very invested in showing people there are other choices, that suicide is not a choice. And I think that education came from Auschwitz, not from the university and not from the medical school and not from my internship, that's the best education that I cherish.

Q. WHAT ABOUT FROM YOUR FAMILY, YOUR ABILITY TO MANIPULATE, ISN'T THAT ALSO AN ABILITY TO COMPROMISE?

A. Yeah. And negotiate, negotiate, negotiate.

Yes. I bring families together. I do work like writing up constitutions for the family that there is no freedom without responsibility, (?). You know, I get into the freedom part and acknowledging that freedom without responsibility is anarchy. So I get the families together.

I don't believe in coming to my office and talking about your toxic parents. I don't find that good therapy. I want people to talk to each other.

Now that I'm talking to you, I'm very much invested in people not to talk about someone who is not there. Because I know the stuff of which the enemy is made of I am made of too.

I go back to Nuremberg, I know where the trial was. And believe me, what I can think of is that I could have been the German child, I could have been told that today Germany and tomorrow the whole world, and I could have been brainwashed that Jews are cancer to society. So I don't see the German, the Nazis as monsters. I see them as ordinary people who grew up in families who were unfortunately trained to blindly adhere authority, the children who were not allowed to express their feelings, the children who had to do the way they were told, and no one ever negotiated with the child when the rules were rigid and nonnegotiable. These are the things I'm looking into. Hitler would have had a real hard time maybe in Belgium or somewhere else or in America. But that was easy when you blindly adhered to authority simply because that way you don't have to take responsibility for your life.

And as much as people want to have freedom, they really are not taking it into their hands.

Children blame. So do victims. And they always will look for the victimizer. So I want to be sure that I do everything in my power that people would stop blaming and take their lives into their hands and play the adult game not with baby rules.

Q. HOW DO YOU SEE HITLER?

A. Well, what I read about Hitler, and the description of Alice Miller, who writes about "The Drama of the Gifted Child" and "Thou Shalt Not Be Aware" and "For Your Own Good" and she writes about the German authoritarian family, including Hitler, and how Hitler was beaten so severely by his father all the time that he never could really get even with his father, so he had to take it out on someone else. I don't know how much I adhere to that explanation. I know there were many children who were beaten and they didn't grow up to be mass murderers.

I can tell you that I'm hoping to create a family within every individual, that they would be able to be more self-reliant, that they would not depend on a benevolent dictator or a malevolent dictator like Hitler, that people would grow up and not to depend on someone else to make them happy.

I'm very strong in self-responsibility. I hold people's hand for a while but then I'm moving on to some practicalities as to how can you stand and be grounded on this in this world, rather than telling me that I can't live without someone. So I am pretty strong in advocating that dependency breeds depression.

But I believe in healthy dependency. I believe in interdependency. I believe in me being me and you being you and then together we are very strong. I believe in that interdependency. And I think in the '90s that's where I stand.

So I don't have to be like you. I tried that for a long, long time. I like to enhance each other with our differences so we can live together in harmony rather than kicking into submission. I believe that's the beginning of the end of democracy. I cherish democracy.

But Thomas Jefferson said all men are created equal. That doesn't mean we are the same. I'm not the same as you are. I'm not the same as my child is. I insist on the generation gap. I don't like their music but I don't lie to them that I do. I don't have to like it.

And I think at this time in my life, I am now liberated that I can be me and connect with the part in me and grieve over the little girl that didn't have a childhood, grieving over not what happened but what didn't happen, what could have happened.

So I created a whole theory on grief and I borrow from Elizabeth (Kobrolow) the shock, the denial, the anger, but then I'm moving beyond the anger. People ask me are you angry? I said I moved beyond the anger. When I move beyond the anger, then things get worse because then you really feel the pain. I had the pain, I had the hurt. And then finally I accepted the reality. And that's the work I do that leads to restructuring your own life and giving birth to the real you.

So that's where I stand today for myself. You asked me maybe am I angry, am I crying for justice? I believe in justice. I also believe to go on and free myself and not allowing the Nazis to take residence in my body. So forgiveness doesn't mean to me that I forgive you for what you did to me, it means that I'm forgiving myself finally and I don't carry the pain, that I release and let go.

I don't forget the past. I don't live in Auschwitz. If I would hate today, I would still be a prisoner. I have no time to hate. But you see, that took me 40 some years to tell you that. So don't think it happened overnight. And I'm not covering up the garlic with chocolate. Many people do that, you know, just bygone is bygone. No. I did that too. I ran away altogether. You know, remember, I have told you, I wanted to become the first class Yankee doodle dandy.

But I wasn't free until I was able to face that part of my life that I ran away from, that actually was the richest part, my roots, my past, and finally making peace. So when I went back to Auschwitz, I remember when I came out, I saw a soldier. And all of a sudden I thought I was back in the camp and I was facing the Nazi. But you know, the realization that I had a blue American passport in my pocket, that I became like Popeye that I am what I am, for me that was the final liberation, 40 years later, when I was able to return.

Q. AND YOUR ROOTS AS YOU DEFINE THEM TODAY ARE?

A. I'm me. I'm me. Anything I do today is who

So the strength that I received in Auschwitz helps me to look at the situation and stay and go through it, rather than fight or to flee, what I've done, that's what I did, I fought the past and I ran away from the past. I did that.

Q. YOU MENTIONED THE GIFTS THAT YOUR PARENTS GAVE TO YOU.

A. Yes.

Q. WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

A. The gifts were the perseverance, to concentrate on life. The way my mother was really telling me that life is hard, that life is not easy, that suffering is feeling, and without feelings, that not to really try to avoid the pain and anesthetize the pain.

The gifts my mother and father gave me, that I have the richness within me to withstand, to be able to go through that shadow of the valley and not to get stuck in there, to go beyond. I cherish my experience with my parents now and I can see how my mother and father were able to make a life for us and for themselves, even though they came from difficult backgrounds. So in some sense, I guess we're all victims of victims.

I am. Anything I am has to do with what -- not just what happened to me but who I was then. And to know that it's not about me and I don't have to carry the guilt anymore, that what was happened to me, that yes, I was a victim. And today, I'm a survivor.

I was able to, many years, many years later, to wonder about, when I already was getting my doctorate, I began to wonder what can I give to the world that I survived? What are some of the gifts that my parents gave me that I can hand it to my children and grandchildren?

I remember when my granddaughter was in a very special class, she was -- she is a very gifted child but somehow the teacher used to call her my caboose. And I was very hurt why the teacher is calling her caboose. She was like 152 IQ child put into this, you know, among the geniuses. And I could see that my little grandchild was kind of becoming the name that the teacher gave her.

And not that I told my granddaughter about my Auschwitz experience, I just told her that she can prevail, that she can survive, that all problems are temporary and she can survive that teacher, that she mustn't drop out and to stay in.

I have no room for blaming. I think only children blame. And adults need to look at the situation and make some decisions. The more choices we have, the more choices I was able to create, the less likely I felt like a victim.

I developed a very spiritual connectedness with God. I remember talking to God September 29th, 1945 -- '44. And I was very angry at God because I saw a child being put on a tree and a Nazi was aiming at the eye and the limb, and a woman who was pregnant, he tied her legs, I mean terrible atrocities that I was witnessing.

But, you know, I was able to change hatred to pity and I was able to look at the guards and say to myself that you are more in prison than I was. And I felt some inner peace and some connectedness. That inner resource I never thought I had. So I think in Auschwitz we were able to develop traits we never thought was possible.

And yes, I saw people running into the barbed wires and gotten electrocuted. I saw that. And when I came back this year consulting, I met one of the girls whose father did the same thing and she tells me how proud she is of her father that he ran

into the gas chamber -- into the barbed wires because he took responsibility for the decision of his life. So this is one way of looking at things.

That's why I'm saying I can only speak for the 16-year-old girl who never considered that as an option. I clung to life no matter what. My option was not running into the barbed wires. And maybe I was a coward.

And I'm here today and I have three children and four grandchildren, and that's the best revenge to Hitler, that I lead a very productive life.

After two girls, God gave me a son who was born with cerebral palsy. Believe me, my schooling in Auschwitz helped me a great deal to help my son with special needs, took -- taking my son for occupational therapy, speech therapy.

I took him to Johns Hopkins for a second opinion and the man said your son is going to be, Mother, what you make of him. And he may do everything what everybody else does but it's going to take him longer to get there.

And I dropped out of school and I went home and I took that little son and he graduated as a top ten student from the University of Texas, even

though five doctors told me he may not even make it to high school.

See, I don't give up, I don't give in. If I can't get in the front door, believe me, I'm going to try the side window. And if that doesn't work, I'm going to look for the chimney. I'm always looking for practical solution, to be moving and not to sit and waiting for somebody come to rescue me.

That's what I tell parents today, don't spoil your children, don't do the child what the child can do for themselves. Don't kiss the boo-boo so fast. Don't medicate the pain so fast.

And my two girls felt that somehow I spent so much time with John that they didn't get the attention. So my big daughter became the little mother to my middle child. And the two of them had this dynamic duo, you know, how they're going to not like John.

So, you know, people think of me, maybe I want them to think of me as this ordinary woman who had the same problems with the jealousy, with the sibling rivalry, with the same thing. There is nothing exceptional here. I tried very hard to fit in and be what I'm not. And I feel very good now

that I can finally show you the real me rather than the mask that I put on and the chameleon that I have become, that getting the doctorate was really just so I would think that I deserved to survive. And now, I don't have to perform in order to be loved.

And that's what I tell parents, to love your child for what the child is, not what the child does. Because each of us are God's special, very special, unique, one of a kind little treasures. And it's okay for me to be me.

That's all I can give you.

Q. ALL RIGHT. IT'S BEEN AN INCREDIBLE TIME THAT YOU'VE SHARED WITH US AND WE'RE NOT FINISHED.

A. Thank you for taking your time out and volunteering and giving. Now it's us together that are going to do something together. And it takes you to ask me and it takes me to give you what I know. And I really respect you and honor you for what you're doing.

Q. YOU'RE THE ONE WE RESPECT FOR BEING HERE.

MS. PROZAN: Marci, you've been sitting patiently. Is there anything you would like to ask Ms. Eger?

DR. EGER: Sure.

BY MS. JENKINS:

Q. I WAS JUST GOING TO ASK YOU ONE THING. YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT YOUR FATHER EARLIER.

A. Yes.

Q. AND I THINK YOU HAD A VERY SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FATHER.

A. Yes.

Q. WERE THERE ANY THINGS THAT HE TAUGHT YOU IN TERMS OF TO FEEL GOOD FOR YOURSELF AND TO SURVIVE SPECIFICALLY?

A. Mm-hmm. My negative image of myself was helped tremendously when my father looked at me and said, told me that I have something to be proud of, I have a posture, I have my femininity in the best sense of the word, that I'm going to be the best dressed gal. And somehow it gave me a shine that I didn't have to look down anymore and become a nonperson, I could come out of the woodwork, that I could say c'est moi, that's me. So I think my father was kind of like Mr. Higgins, like by God, she's got it. And I trusted my father and I believed in my father. And when I dress today, I know he would be saying gee, wow, I gave you that oomph, that little extra.

So he gave me an image of myself from the outside. My mother gave me a tremendous strength from the inside. And the two together, that the external, but mostly the internal, the two together is what I carry with me. The strength that I can make it in spite of or because of and never give up and never to give in, I think both my father had that, my father who was a prisoner himself and look what he did, he kind of came from the ashes to fly like a Phoenix. That's what I -- I was given that gift and I carried that torch. And I give it to the children and the grandchildren.

It's so wonderful to cry from joy, you know, that I am here. And I am here and I live in the present and that my children can look at me and children who I speak to in a classroom, they look at me and they say someday I want to be like you. And I feel so honored that I can be a model to them, that no matter what happens to you, stay with it. The sunshine is there and out of darkness comes light and out of prison comes freedom. But I was not free, you see, until I didn't deny what happened to me.

So I highly encourage for you to find the

other survivors, encourage the families to tell their stories, and see how the families could get together, that the children and the grandchildren would not have to carry the pain of their parents and the grief that were unexpressed.

So I'm very much invested in uniting the families, especially Holocaust survivors' children and grandchildren, so they can finally feel that what happened to them is not something to be ashamed of or run away from.

MS. JENKINS: Thank you.

MS. PROZAN: Thank you.

That ends part one.