TRACK 01 – INTRO TO RECORDING

Today is Thursday, the 22nd of October 2015. This recording is of Holocaust survivor Kathy Preston, who was born in Transylvania in 1939. It is being made in the studio of CedarHouse Sound & Mastering, North Sutton, New Hampshire. This recording is a production of Story Preservation Initiative.

TRACK 02 – LITTLE BUDAPEST

My name is Kathy Preston. The reason I speak—recently, I've started speaking a lot, because there are less and less people alive from the period that I was from. The more people die, the less availability there is to connect with the past. I speak for the people who can't speak for themselves. I speak to kids, who have never heard about it. I speak because I think it's very important to speak so it doesn't happen again, and because the world is still not healed. The world needs healing. I speak at all kinds of places. I've even spoken in churches, Masonic halls, different celebrations, synagogues, but my favorite are still the children, because I want to reach them, because I think there is so much that they need to hear and so much that they're interested in listening to.

I come from Transylvania. Transylvania is a little area between Hungary and Rumania, which was, when I was being persecuted, it was Hungary, and then it became Rumania. It is still Rumania now. I come from a small town call Nagyvarad, which is a Hungarian name, and it is now called Oradea. It was a very nice little town. It was relatively civilized. You know, it was like—the "Little Budapest," they used to call it. There were synagogues and churches, and we even had an opera house, and cinemas, cafes. It was quite a vibrant little community. It had a very large Jewish community. Not particularly religious, but it was sort of the hub of Transylvania.

My parents, in those days, were unusual, inasmuch as my father was Jewish, and my mother was Catholic, which, in itself, didn't happen very often. My father's parents came from Russia, from the Pale of Settlement, and they were survivors of a pogrom, which is when they used to ride into a small village and kill everybody—all the Jewish people.

You know, it was a small Jewish village. My grandparents were found in separate houses. My grandfather was still trying to nurse his mother, who was dead, and my grandmother was a tiny, little baby in some hay in a haystack. The people who saved them brought them over to Hungary, and the Jewish community took them in, and, obviously, they educated the men. The women didn't get educated. These two people married each other. Although they were from the same village, they were not related, and they got married. My grandmother had nine children, two pairs of twins. When Grandpa was about forty-five years old, he fell through some ice and climbed out and managed to get home and had pneumonia and died. Grandma raised the nine children. Every single one of them went to school. She was very poor, but at night she would wash and iron their clothes dry, so they could go to school in clean clothes the next day. Mercifully, she died before the Holocaust. She did not see all her children destroyed, which was a good thing.

We had a very large Jewish family. I remember, when they would come to dinner, there was like two very long tables pushed together, and there was like twenty-eight members of the family all sitting there. You know, with the usual family things going on, people not talking to each other, this one was angry with that one, and that one didn't like who the other one married, but it was a normal, nice, big, loud Jewish family. I'm the only person who survived out of that whole family. So my parents were relatively old when I was born. My mother was thirty and my father was forty, which was late for those days to have children. My mother converted to Judaism to please my father's big Jewish family, but neither of them was very religious. My mother had a big dressmaking business. In those days, people used to buy cloth and go to a dressmaker. There were no ready-made clothes. She had forty girls working for her. It was a big business. My father had a wholesale fishery. In the river that went through the town, he had big cages of carp. They were swimming in these big, big, big cages, and he would wholesale them. I remember as a child there was always a carp in the bath, because we had a lot of carp. I used to walk up to this carp and talk to it and apologize for eating them. You know, they look like old peasants, with long whiskers. I would apologize to this carp and say I'm so sorry, we're going to eat you, but you know, you're going to taste very good.

I had a golden childhood, because my parents were very well off for those days. I mean, they used to go abroad every year, which was unheard of. We had servants, and maid, and gardeners. No car. Nobody had a car. We did have a phone, which was a big deal. I had everything. I was a spoiled, spoiled little girl. I was so loved. I thought I was a princess. I had the most beautiful bedroom, with silk hangings on the walls, and my bed was like a palace. I had every toy imaginable. I was cherished, and loved, and everybody always told me how beautiful and clever I was, and I fully believed it. I was a princess. I remember, every Christmas, because my parents didn't want to deprive me of the excitement of Christmas, although my mother had converted, we had a Christmas tree. We had a very, very tall Christmas tree. They used to have little candles on it, with little clips on it, and every Christmas we had a fire. It was the Christmas fire. They always had a big bucket of water that they would pour on the tree, but this was just one of the things that happened at Christmas. One day, one of the maids took me to the local church to look at the nativity scene, and I stole Baby Jesus. I stuck him under my little coat and came home. My mother finds Baby Jesus under my coat, and she says, oh, my God! They're going to say the Jews stole Jesus. What's going to happen now? So I was made to go back and confess to the priest, who was a very tall, very skinny-looking man with a long, long bony finger poking at me and telling me I was going to Hell, because I was a thief and I stole Jesus. I was crying, and I had to say all kinds of prayers, and I was terrified. I thought, this is it, I'm going to Hell. I sort of associated Hell with the Catholic Church, because nobody ever told me about Hell before.

Anyway, so after I stole Baby Jesus, my parents decided that they had a four-and-a-half-year-old out of control on their hands, and they had to do something about this child, who was a total, total out-of-control person. So they brought Fraulein. Fraulein was a governess. She was actually also Austrian, and she was a very, very strict-looking lady. She was tall and skinny, with a bun on her head, and she really, really was very good at what she did, because in a mere four or five months, she taught me to read and write and speak German, which was a big deal for a little kid. But she really led me a terrible life, because she—I wasn't allowed to eat on the street. I wasn't allowed out without gloves and a hat. I wasn't allowed to play with the kids in the street anymore, because they were not the right sort of children, and good girls from good families didn't do that. I wasn't allowed to run around and make noise, and I had to finish everything on my plate. I had to wash my hands all the time. I had to sleep in curlers, so that my hair would be perfect. I was only allowed to play with rich children. There was one little boy that I used to be allowed to play with, and that was great. His name was Istvanka. He was a sweet little boy, with blonde curls, big blue eyes. His daddy was a doctor, and his mother was a stay-at-home mom. I was allowed to play with him, because they were rich and they lived down the street. I remember being very envious, because he had a bust made of his head, and it was on their mantelpiece, and I thought this was the most glamorous thing I've ever seen. I loved Istvanka. We used to go and play together, and we had a game where we used to run up and down in front of the opera house. There was a circular driveway, and we used to run up and down this driveway. The game was that if I caught him, I kissed him, and I kissed him a lot, and I ran a lot, and he hated it. Lovely little kid. Unfortunately, he didn't come back either.

You know, I was my daddy's little girl. Anybody who has had a daddy and the relationship like mine would understand that incredible safety—that incredible peace, and love, and safety that you feel in your daddy's arms is something that you never recapture. I've looked for it all my life and it never came back to me, because that is gone forever. I absolutely adored my daddy. He was the center of my universe. He was a very kind man. When I went for walks with Fraulein, he always gave me money, and he told me to give it to the poor, and I said, oh, what if the poor don't want it? He said, well, it's not up to you to judge or to question. If somebody's begging, you give them the money, because you are fortunate that you have what you have. You're no better than those people, and you have to help everybody. Then he'd check to make sure that I didn't steal any of the coins and put them in my pocket when we came home.

TRACK 03 – HUNGARIAN NAZIS

Life was good in those days. We had everything. We had wonderful food, and lots of music, and my parents would go out at night. They were very glamorous. I remember them in eveningwear, and they would come and kiss me goodnight, and they smelled so good. I still remember my daddy, who was tall and very dark, and he had a big laugh, and he had a big, silk scarf around his neck, which I still have. That's the only thing I have of him. He would throw his head back and laugh. He was a happy, happy man.

Around this time, they decided that perhaps they should let me know a little bit about my Jewish heritage, so they sent me to kindergarten, a Jewish kindergarten, two days a week. Istvanka went there too. We sang little songs, and they told us some stories. It didn't make much of an impression on me, because religion was not part of our life, very much. It was fun. I remember there were fifty-two children in this kindergarten, and only two were alive after that war. Eventually, I met the other person, years and years later.

And then things started changing. My golden childhood started becoming different. People would stop talking when I came into a room. My mother had red eyes from crying. There were whispers going on. People always talk about the Holocaust. They think it suddenly happened. It didn't. It was in small increments. Small rights were taken away from you. First, the Jews couldn't go to university, and then they couldn't go to high school. Then the kids could only go to Jewish school. Jewish doctors weren't allowed to treat non-Jews. Jews were not allowed to employ any female under the age of forty-five. So a lot of the people that my mother and father had employed had gone. They were not there. There was an unease. You know, children feel these things, and there was a sort of doom and gloom around. My parents weren't laughing anymore. Then, Fraulein, who used to read horrible stories to me—the Grimm Brothers, who should be banned, because I think they hated children—those horrible, horrible, scary stories—Fraulein was scaring me with these stories. One day she was gone, and I was so happy. I didn't wash my hands for three days. I was delighted Fraulein was gone. It was the best day of my life, and I was able to run around in the streets again. I was very happy.

Still, things weren't right. Then my mother came to see me and she says, listen, I have something for you. I have a present for you. She brought out this beautiful yellow star, made of very shiny gold material. She put it on my little blue coat, and she sewed it on, and she says, look at this beautiful star. You're going to be wearing this star now. We went to have some pastries. She took me by the hand, and we were walking down the street. I was very proud of my star. Little girls love shiny things. A man came opposite, and I sort of looked at him, sort of expecting him to say something nice about my star—he's going to like my star—and he spat in my face. The spit was running down my face, onto my star, and I was horrified. How can a man not like stars? Never occurred to me that it was me he hated. I looked at my mother, who was always a very feisty woman, and I expected her to do something, and she said nothing. She sort of shushed me and took me by the hand and started pulling me home. I said, but, but, but—she said, just come home, we'll talk it about it at home. Don't say anything, just come. We went back, and I was horrified, because this was my mother, who did not protect me. I thought if that had been my dad, this wouldn't have happened. I mean, a man spat on my star.

Then things started getting worse. The Hungarians, who, by the way, were all the persecutors in our town—I've never met a German Nazi, I've only met Hungarian Nazis. They were very, very efficient, very gleeful collaborators. They took a couple of blocks in a poor part of town. They put a big, big brick fence around it, and all the Jews had to go there. I remember looking out the window and seeing people being put on trucks and on carts. They were sort of bullying them onto these. They had little suitcases, and they were pushed and they were screamed at, and all these poor people had to go away. It was so sudden that they had no time to take care of their pets, and there were dogs and cats running around, without food. That really upset me more than anything, as a kid. I felt bad for the dogs, and I would go downstairs and feed the dogs. Then the dogcatcher came and they were gone, too. Then my father had to go to the ghetto. I remember my parents standing next to each other, holding each other. He had a little suitcase and they were sobbing, holding each other. I sort of climbed between them, and we all cried, and I said, where is Daddy going? My mom said, well, he has to go away for a while, but he'll be back. I wasn't worried, because my dad always came back. Daddy wouldn't leave me. Obviously, everybody went to the ghetto. I was supposed to go, because if you even had one grandparent who was Jewish, you had to go, let alone me, being half Jewish. But my mother kept me home. She hid me under a bed. Every time anybody came to the house, I was supposed to scoot under the bed. I wasn't supposed to go near the window. I wasn't supposed to be seen or heard. I didn't exist. So my mother was very worried, but she would not let me go to the ghetto and tried to hide the fact that I was there, which was illegal.

During this time, a woman came to see her. She used to bring our milk. She used to come with a horse and cart, with a big vat of milk, and people would go downstairs with dishes and buy the milk there. This woman, who was delivering our milk, had been an orphan, and my mother made her a wedding dress when she got married. This simple peasant, simple, Hungarian peasant woman, decent woman, came to see my mother and said, I heard they're taking the Jews and I know you have a child. Let me take your child. I will take her to my farm and she'll be safe there. Have you still got your child here? My mother said yes, and she quickly put me on that cart, and I remember being so excited going to the country, and I'll be able to play outside. I hopped on this cart, and on this bench, and she even let me hold the reins for a while. I was very happy we were going to the country.

I remember, it was on the hillside, when we got there, and the house was straight across from the road. She didn't take me to her house. She took me to the barn, which was to the left. She had a small barn with two stalls, one for the cow and one for the horse. She said to me, no, you're not going to the house. And I said, but I don't want to go to the barn. She says, no, no, you don't understand, you have to go to the barn. You have to hide here, because otherwise they're going to kill you. You know, this whole concept of 'kill me'—I mean, killing is a very abstract thing. I mean, I'm seventy-six and I still have a hard time understanding death now, which I'm close to. But when you're a child, you can't understand that. I was very upset, so she took me up on these rickety stairs to this little attic area that was full of hay. She told me that if anybody came, I had to scooch under the eaves and not say a word, not breathe. I don't exist, because if people find me, they will kill me. It was very hard for me to understand, and I was very upset. I was crying for my mommy and for my daddy, and it was dark. I was not yet five years old, and I was scared. There were big, black spiders there. You know, after a while, you get used to it and you stop crying. I cried, cried, cried, and then she came and brought me food.

Sometimes she would smuggle me out to her kitchen and give me a bath and give me warm soup, and so on.

I got used to being in the attic. I stopped crying, and I even made friends with one of the spiders. I tied a piece of cotton thread onto his leg and he was my friend. But then his leg came off. Anyway, you get used to things. I was there for three months—three whole months, on my own, as a little kid. I remember she told me, no matter what, no noise if anybody comes. I remember one morning, very early, I looked through the cracks in the barn in the attic, and I see these three soldiers. They were wearing green uniforms and they had black rooster feathers in their hats. They had guns with bayonets, and they were slapping her around. They were slapping Elizabeth. Her name was Erzsebet - but Elizabeth—they were slapping her around. Where is the Jew bastard? Where is the Jew bastard? She says, there is no Jew here. Go look in my house, there's no Jew. So they went to look in the house, and, of course, I wasn't there. They were on the way out when one of them had the bright idea to come and look in the barn.

TRACK 04 – THE RUSSIAN ARMY

So they came up these stairs, and I did what I was told, and I scooched under the eaves and pulled the hay over me, and I made myself very, very small and very quiet. I wasn't even breathing. They started poking the bayonets in the hay, to make sure there was nobody there. All three of them were poking the hay with the bayonets, and one of the bayonets landed about an inch from my face and got stuck in the wood. As he pulled it out, I remember the twang it made, and I think I grew up that day. I think I realized what it meant to die. Basically, it means that somebody is going to stick a bayonet in you, so that's what dying means, and that's what these people were trying to do to me. So then I started being afraid of death, because I thought, uh-oh, that must hurt. Because it hurt the wood, it must have hurt the person much more.

Then, my mother was arrested, because somebody realized that I wasn't in the ghetto, and they tortured her. She never told me what they did to her, because she said it was far too humiliating and she wouldn't let me know about it. She managed to smuggle my father out of the ghetto. She wanted him to escape to Rumania, because they weren't rounding up the people yet in Rumania, and she thought that she could save him. She bribed some people with some gold Napoleon coins and told him that he had to leave. He said, listen, before I go, I've got to go and see the kid, because I don't want her to feel that I'm abandoning her. It might be years before I see her. I want her to know that I'm coming back, that I'm her daddy and that I love her, and that I'm not leaving her, so I have to go and say goodbye to her. He was on the road to this village, walking at night, when they caught him. They deported him the next day to Auschwitz, and I never saw him again. You know, to this day, I have tremendous guilt about this, because I feel that perhaps if he hadn't loved me so much, he wouldn't have come. I mean, obviously, you know, it's stupid, but guilt is like love—it comes unbidden. You don't have a choice about these feelings that come to you.

I remember at that point I was very happy, because the war broke out. You wouldn't believe how happy we were, when the war came, because the Russians are coming and the Germans are leaving, and the Hungarians are giving up, and nobody's going to kill us anymore, and it's going to be wonderful. My mother came and got me and took me home. This was wonderful. The bombs were falling, and it was very exciting, because when you're a kid you don't expect the bomb to be for you. It's a bit more abstract. There was only one problem: we had nothing to eat. Literally nothing to eat. There were some potatoes in the basement—you have no idea how many ways you can cook a potato. I still like potatoes, though. The bombs were falling, and there was some sort of a casino nearby, and it took a direct hit, and there were playing cards raining down all over the street. I still remember that. I was scared, but I wasn't scared. At the same time, I was quite excited, because things were happening, and I was with my mother. We were cold and we had no food, and I remember looking out the window. After a while, we stopped even going down to the shelter, because the bombs were just falling all over the place. I was looking out the window, and there was a horse and a cart, with somebody's pathetic belongings on it, and the horse dropped dead in front of our house. It was quite cold, and I remember, within minutes, doors opened and people ran out with dishes and knives, and they started skinning this horse. As they pulled off the skin, I remember it was steaming.

Within minutes, that horse was pretty much stripped. Even the bones were taken for soup. There was nothing left of that horse. Everybody was eating that horse. The whole street was eating horsemeat. Horse and potatoes. You know, when you're hungry, you eat. You eat anything.

The war was going on. There was a frozen river opposite our house, and the Russians were coming across the frozen river, linking arms and singing. They were singing and singing, and coming up the bank, and they were being machine-gunned, and another load came singing, they came up the bank, they were shot again. They must have been drunk, because nobody is that brave. They were coming and coming, until the corpses built up to a huge sort of berm, and the last load that came over the top were not shot, because people had run out of bullets, and we were under Russian occupation. Now that, in itself, was not fun, but they didn't persecute children. They didn't hurt me. They were raping the women, and my mother made a false wall in our bathroom, and all the women from the area lived in that little hidey-hole. Everybody was scared, and the women were hiding from the rapists. There was a lot of shooting, and screaming, and yelling.

At that point, my mother decided to do something about it. So she put some white flour in her hair, or chalk, whatever it was, put a scarf on her head, put a big pillow on her back, pretending to be a hunchback, wore some rags, and painted some black on her face. She blacked out her teeth, and she pretended to be an old hag. She found someone to translate for her and went to see the commander of the town. She said something had to be done, so she was going to fix it. She went to see the commander. To her surprise, it was a woman, a young woman. By this time, the Russians had lost so many people that young people and young men and women were taking very important roles. My mother said to this woman, through the interpreter, come to my house. I'm a very good dressmaker and I can make you look beautiful. I mean, you shouldn't be looking like that. Your hair is all wrong. Come and I'll make you pretty. She came and my mother fixed her hair, and she yanked one of the drapes off the window and draped it around this woman and made her a pretty dress. This woman was delighted. Then other Russian ladies came, and we had food. We had so much food. We had ham, and butter, and cheese. And all the women behind the false wall were busy unpicking cloth, because there was no cloth to be had, so they were unpicking old dresses to make enough cloth for my mother to make dresses for all these Russian women. We even got a guard outside our house, and nobody was being raped, and it was really quite fun.

Then the Russian commander decided to give us our own special guard, and Ivan came. Ivan was about seventeen. He was a captain. By this time, he had been promoted again, because there were so many losses. He was a very pretty boy, and he had a sidekick, an old man who was playing the accordion. Ivan and his sidekick were constantly drunk. I mean, they drank, and drank, and drank. They drank cologne, they drank anything they could get their hands on. But I wasn’t afraid of him, because he was very nice to me, and he was always singing, and I was dancing, and I loved Ivan. You know, one day Ivan brought us a goose liver, which was a big delicacy. They took this goose liver and it had a bit of blood on it, so he decided to wash it in the toilet, because he’d never had a toilet where he came from. He stuck it in the toilet and pulled the chain, and the goose liver went away, and he shot the toilet. That was the kind of person he was. They would take pot shots at the moldings in the ceiling, and they would shoot at things. When we ran out of fuel, they would break up the antique furniture and burn it. All this time, they were singing and playing with me. We had such fun, Ivan and I. Ivan told me that when I was seventeen, he would come back for me and marry me. Well, God knows what happened to the poor man. I remember, I was sick and he brought me an orange. You have no idea what an orange means to a child who had been hungry. He brought me this orange and it was wrapped in this crinkly white paper. I remember opening the paper and seeing this orange. It was like the sun rising out of the night. It was amazing. The smell of it was amazing. My mother gave me pieces of it to eat, and then she candied the peels. I was only allowed to eat orange when I was sick, and I wanted to be sick all the time, so I could have more orange peels. That orange meant more to me than anything. I still marvel every time I see an orange.

TRACK 05 – THE END OF THE WAR

Then I don't know what happened. Ivan was gone. I don't use historical dates, because I want to keep my memory, that of a child, completely clear of any other influence, because the more you learn about history and dates, you incorporate it, and then your own memory gets tainted by it. I just remember that they were gone. Ivan was gone. My mother came to see me, and she says, I think Daddy's coming home tonight. She dressed me, and she washed me and did my hair. She got all dressed up, and we went to the local station, because there were people coming back from the camps, apparently. We had a picture of my father, which we held up when the train came in, and we waited for all the people who came off the train, and my daddy wasn't there, so my mother and I went home crying. We did this several nights, and the people who came off the trains looked terrible. They scared me. They were shuffling, and they were bent over, and they had no hair. You couldn't tell if they were men or women. They were in rags. They were ghosts. They were shuffling, scary ghosts. My mother took them home to our house, and she would bathe them and give them her clothes, if they were women, and men's clothes, if they were men. They would tell stories and I would hide behind the sofa, because I wasn't supposed to hear this. They were telling us horrible, horrible stories about what happened to them and what happened to their families. It was heartbreaking and very scary, because it was horrible. There was one young girl who my mother brought home. She had a big tattoo on her chest, and it said "field whore" on it in German. So basically, they would take some of these beautiful young girls and turn them out into the battlefields for the soldiers to use, and then they would kill them when they were used up. This girl escaped and joined the partisans somewhere. She had this huge tattoo, and my mother made her a dress that would cover that. I remember her very distinctly.

One of the times when we went to the train, one of the last times, a man came off the train, came up to my mother, and said to her, don't wait for him, he's not coming back. She says, well, who are you? He says, don't you remember me? You and your husband used to come and play cards at my casino every Saturday night. He's not coming back. He's dead. I saw him. So she says, what, he was ill? What happened? He said, never mind, he's not coming back. He died. She brought this poor man home to us. He had been the owner of this huge hotel-casino. He was also a musician. He was a violinist, and his hands were crippled, because when the guards found out he was a violinist, they broke all his fingers and they never set it, so he had hands like claws. I was scared of him at that point. He looked terrible. He had a wife and a little daughter. When they got to Auschwitz on the train, the wife and the daughter were sent to one side and he was sent to the other. He said to a guard, where are they going? What's happening to them? The guard pointed to a chimney and said, up there. He didn't understand at that point. Her name was Dita, short for Judith. She was eleven years old, and a lovely little girl. I didn't know her personally. She used to play the piano, and she was a dancer. She wanted to be an actress when she grew up. She was a happy little girl, and she died in the gas chamber. I think of her often, because I have a photograph of her. When I speak in schools, I show it to the kids, because they relate better to a child. I explain to them that this little girl, once I'm dead, nobody will remember her, because there won't be anyone to remember her. One of the classes decided to make that a project, an eighth-grade project, and they printed five hundred copies of her photograph, with her story on the back, and they sent it to five hundred middle schools. The project is "Remember Dita." I still get letters from schools all over. I got a letter from an American school in Guam saying we're not going to let Dita die again by forgetting her. I was very touched by that.

Then this poor man went to see his family's housekeeper, where they left everything. He knocked on her door, and she opened the door wearing his wife's dress. She looked at him and says, ah, so they didn't kill all of you—anyway, the Russians took everything, and she slammed the door in his face. He came back to my mother and he kind of stayed. Out of two broken families, we cobbled together one. He became my stepfather. I always felt guilty because I took Dita's dad, because life somewhat—it wasn't fair that I had all that and she didn't, because she was dead and here I am alive. Her father is my father. I think about her a lot.

TRACK 06 – REMEMBER DITTA

Eventually, he brought his mother from Romania. She was an old Jewish lady. She came and lived with us. My mother's Catholic mother came too. These two women, who hated each other, fought for my soul. My grandmother, the Catholic one, would take me to church every Sunday, and I had to pray for my mother, because she kept marrying Jews, and she was going to Hell. My Jewish grandmother dragged me off to the synagogue every Saturday. I preferred the church, because it smelled better. At the synagogue, I had to sit upstairs with the women, whereas in the church, I was allowed to be with everybody else. To tell you the truth, I had so much religion thrown at me that I don't do any of it anymore.

Then, one day, my stepfather, who was a very good stepfather—he was not a nice man, but to me he was wonderful. You know, we always judge people by how they are to yourself. He wasn't a particularly nice man. He was a victim, but that doesn't sanctify you. He was a very good stepfather to me. He sat me down, when I was about twelve, and told me how my father died. We never told my mother, because there was no need for her to know this. My father and another friend from our town stole a piece of bread, and they caught them. They were made an example of. This was like early spring. It was cold, and they stripped them naked and beat them half to death, and put each of them in a dog cage, in the big area where—the *appelplatz,* where people would have to line up every morning to be counted—as an example. It took him two days and a night to die.

One of the reasons I speak is because I don't want anybody else's father or, as a matter of fact, I don't want anybody else to die like that, because the cruelty to these people was unimaginable. It is one thing if you just kill somebody, but to reduce human beings to nothing, to take away their dignity to this extent, to have a man shivering, naked, half dead in a dog cage, dying slowly, is wrong. You know, I have no grave. I have nowhere to go and connect with my father at all. There is nothing. You know, he's gone. Dita is gone, my father is gone, my whole family is gone. There is nothing of them. Nothing left. No grave, no closure. I sometimes look up at the sky and look at the stars, and I remember how he used to hold me on his lap and tell me all about the constellations. I still know all of them in Hungarian. When I look up at the stars, I have this feeling of closeness. I still feel there is some kind of a presence, but that's all I have. You know, I feel safe in a barn. I have a barn at home, and there is hay in it. When I feel insecure, I go in there and I breathe in the hay, and it gives me a feeling of security, because the hay saved my life. The problem is that when my stepfather was dying, he had Alzheimer's, and he didn't realize that I was not his daughter. He kept calling me Dita. I was holding his hand while he was dying, and he was talking to me as if I was Dita. I never corrected him. I was so happy to be able to give him the feeling that his daughter was still alive.

You know, I always think about *The Merchant of Venice*, for some reason, which is considered very much an anti-Semitic play, which it isn't, really. It's very much a play of those times. You know that wonderful speech about 'am I not a man?' You know, I have same feelings as you. Don't I bleed when you hurt me, don't I feel the same cold, the same heat as you? And what people don't realize is that when you persecute a whole group of people, they are just like you. They hurt the same way as you. They suffer the same way. This is what I keep telling children—that bullying is the same as what happened there, and it didn't happen overnight. It was a slow progression. By hating somebody sitting next to you, because they smell different, or they eat different food, or they are of a different color, or pushing them, that's the beginning. The Holocaust was bullying on steroids. That's what it was. I talk to the kids and I explain to them that it's terribly corrosive. Words hurt. Actions hurt. Terrible things can happen if you don't make sure that you don't do this to another human being.

It took me fifty years to get over my hatred. Because when I was a child, I was full of hatred. I was so full of hatred I wanted to kill the people who killed my father. I had these fantasies about how I would flay them alive and eviscerate them, and kill them slowly. It was very sick, and it took me fifty years to get over it. I realize that as long as my soul is full of hatred, there is no room for anything else. I slowly emptied my soul of hatred. No, I don't forgive, because it is not for me to forgive. I can only forgive my own debts, not somebody else's. I still have a lot of sorrow, but there is no more hatred. I have embraced love as a religion, if you like. I'm a very happy person now, because I don't hate. I don't hate. People say to me, well, what do you do for revenge? And I said, well, I live. Every time I gave birth to a Jewish child, it was giving the finger to Hitler. I have four sons, and I have four granddaughters, and I have a very multicultural family. My eldest son married a girl whose father was in the Wehrmacht. When they first told me that, I sort of swallowed, and I said, well, yeah, the sins of the fathers we don't visit on the children. When they had a baby, I went over—they live in Canada—and I was holding this beautiful baby. This is the baby, the child of a perpetrator and a victim, and the tears were running down my face, and I was thinking, oh, my God, this is perfect. This is how it should be. We have to go forward. We cannot go back. We cannot change things, but we can make things better for the future. This beautiful child closed the circle for me. It was such a healing experience. I'll never forget that.

I speak for the dead, because they cannot speak for themselves. Unfortunately, ten percent of people are pretty evil, and ten percent are wonderful. There are wonderful people in the world. Eighty percent are sheep. I'm afraid of the sheep, because it's the sheep who are the dangerous ones. The sheep will follow either one or the other. It's much easier to follow the evil, because all you have to do is stand behind the evil person and giggle and not do anything. If you follow the good people, you have to actually do something. You have to perhaps stand up for someone. You have to speak out. You have to take some kind of action. You have to be counted. The danger is the sheep. I always tell the children. If you cannot find yourself to be the ten percent either way, make sure to follow the right shepherd, because boy, is that a danger. And stand up and be counted, because if you don't this could happen again. There is genocide going on the whole time. People looked away. It's not so much people who perpetrated everything, but the people who looked away—the look-away people, and that is a terrible thing to do. I always ask, just remember, remember Dita.