

We're going to begin. Welcome to First Person. Our First Person program is generously funded by the Woldenberg Foundation. Our speaker for today is Manya Friedman. What we're going to do is just give you some information about her. But before that, we're just going to give you a few rules and things just to remember.

Number one, if you have tickets for the permanent exhibition, and they have 1 o'clock, 2:00 or any date, any time period that is before we get out, those will be honored. So if it says, 2 o'clock, you can get in. If it says, 1:30, you can get in. All right? So sometimes people are concerned that they won't get in, because they have a specific time on those tickets. They are always honored on the time or like the previous time. So don't worry about that.

This program is an hour long. And we ask that you stay here the full time in honor of our survivor. Because they're doing something that's very, very special for all of us. And we want you to hear all of it. Also, we will have a question and answer period at the end of the program. So we ask that you hold all your questions then, because our survivor is more than willing to answer those questions.

Also, keep your questions down to just one question. Because there's lots of us in here. And we'd like to hear from as many people as possible. All right, once again, as I said, our program is featuring Manya Friedman. And we can begin the slides, Dwayne.

First off, we'd like to start off with the definition of a "Holocaust" to set the tone of our program. The Holocaust was the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry, by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. Six million were murdered, Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted, for destruction or decimation, for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners-of-war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

The experience that you will hear today is one among many different experiences. We cannot say that it is typical or atypical. We can only say that it is an experience that is unique to one person.

Manya Friedman was born in Chmielnik, Poland, in 1925. Her father owned a furniture shop. And her mother took care of the home. Manya had two younger brothers, David and Mordechai, and was surrounded by many close relatives.

In 1938, Manya's family moved to Sosnowiec, a larger city located near the German border. There she had her first experience with antisemitism. Signs were posted urging Polish citizens to boycott Jewish businesses. When German troops invaded Poland in 1939, Sosnowiec was occupied.

Under German occupation, Manya's parents experienced persecution, forced labor, and were arrested for curfew violations. In 1941, Manya was forced to work for a German company that produced military uniforms. In March of 1943, she was taken to Gogolin transit camp and, from there, to Gleiwitz forced labor camp. Manya never saw her family again. They were deported to Auschwitz.

In January 1945, as the Soviet Army approached, Manya and other prisoners were evacuated on a death march. They were transported to the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp. Later, Manya was taken to Rechlin camp, where she was rescued, by the Swedish Red Cross, in April 1945. In 1950, she emigrated from Sweden to the United States.

I would like to welcome Manya Friedman to the stage. Please welcome her with me.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you, Andrea. Well, first I would like to thank you all for coming to the museum and to learn about the Holocaust. We survivors are grateful to the United States government for erecting this museum, because it's a tribute to the millions that were murdered. And especially to us, survivors, this is a memorial, because we don't even know when to light a candle of the millions that perished.

But this museum is not just a building made of brick and stone, it's a learning center. It shows you what hate, discrimination, disregard for human lives can do. The Holocaust is the darkest period in the entire human history. And it didn't just happen. It was very methodically and systematically executed. And also, keep in mind, it didn't happen in the "Dark Ages" committed by uncivilized people. It happened in the 20th century, committed by one of the most cultural nations in Europe.

Hitler's aim was to exterminate all European Jews. But he also managed to murder millions of others, among them, as you saw, there were Poles and Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, the sick, the handicapped, their own people, anyone that didn't fit the superior race, including over one million children. They were murdered not because of what they have done but who they were.

If you permit me, I will share with you my own experience as a 13 year old girl during that horrible time. And some-60 years ago in Europe, a 13 year old girl was a child. Today, some 13 year old girls are sophisticated young ladies. Also keep in mind that the war in Poland lasted almost six years.

I did have a life before the Holocaust although it was a short one. I was born in a small town in central Poland. I lived there with my parents and two younger brothers and a host of friends and relatives. My mother never had to worry if she didn't-- she wasn't there when I came home from school. There was always somebody to take care of me.

I consider I lived a normal life. I attended elementary school in the morning, Hebrew school in the afternoon. Although sometimes I argued with my father when my friends were playing outside and I had to go to Hebrew school. I used to say, I'm not going to marry a rabbi anyway. Why do I have to go to Hebrew school? But it seems that father persisted. And he won.

For some reason, in 1938, one year before the war started, my family decided to move to a larger city. I don't know. It must have been for a business reason, maybe more cultural reason. And as we all know, on September 1st, 1939, Poland was invaded by the German Army. That evening, in our house, my father and his friends got together to decide what to do.

Should we leave, go back to that small town in central Poland and hope that Hitler won't reach us there? The other thing was that, at that time, nobody really believed that Hitler would be allowed to continue that far. They all believed in the mighty powers, like England and France, Russia, and the United States. Although England and France declared war on Germany, but they were helpless to do anything. And as we know, Russia and Germany made a pact among them to divide Poland among themselves. And the United States, at that time, was not inclined to fight somebody else's war across the ocean.

So that evening, they decided that they will send the wives and the children back home to that small town. And the men decided to stay behind. Because, after all, some of them had businesses and shops. How can you leave everything and walk away?

We got up early the next morning. We got dressed in our best clothing. In a way, we children were excited that we're going back to our hometown. We'll see our old friends. We started out to the railroad station. The place was mobbed-- everybody trying to get out. We were worried that we would be separated from mother. But somehow, father managed to put us on the train.

We traveled five miles, 8 kilometers to the next town. And the railroad tracks in front of us were bombed. Of course, we all got off the train, not knowing what to do, being afraid that they'll bomb the train. It was a lot of commotion. Mother decided we should walk back home, since it was only five miles. But we had our packages with us. What can we do? She was afraid to leave them in the street, being suspicious. And then she knocked, I remember, at somebody's door and asked them to take those things from us. I think they looked at her like crazy. But when she explained why, they accepted them.

And we walked back home. We got home, of course, wearing the new shoes. Our feet were blistered. But we were happy to be home in our own beds together with father. And at the time, we thought that that's the worst thing that could

have happened to us. Little did we realize what lay ahead.

As I mentioned, the war started on a Friday. Monday, September the 4th, the German Army already marched into our city. At first, you heard some shots fired. They took out the people from the entire building, even from people who were hiding in bunkers. And they shot them. The same thing was repeated in a neighboring city-- neighboring street.

Then they ordered, in the afternoon, all the men to step out in front of their buildings on the street. They selected all Jewish men, walked them to the city hall, put them in a basement, windowless, airless, without food or water. And after a while, they ask the rabbi should step forward or 10 people will be shot. It so happened the rabbi wasn't among them. But an elderly Jew, in order to save 10 people, stepped forward. He said he was the rabbi. They took him out, beat him up, pulled out half of his beard, and threw him back in.

And then they ordered the rest of the Jews to say the mourner's prayer, because they're all going to die. So you can imagine the situation there. And in the meantime, the German soldiers were filming them and having fun and then made them to sing. They spent the night in that building. In the morning, they were marched to one of the factories. On the way, the Germans ordered the barbers to go home, get their equipment.

And when they got to the factory, all their heads and beards were shaved. For an Orthodox Jew to have his beard shaved was, I assume, very painful. They were not giving any food or water. We brought food. But there was a tall wall around that building, and we could not give it to them. We just threw everything over the wall.

Over there, there were selections. They picked people to do labor, for labor. They picked out the merchants, by checking their hands, and put them in jail. Some of them-- some of them manage later, for bribes, to get out. The rest were executed. Others, they let out. And that lasted for the next day, all day.

We were waiting, in front of that gate, and some other families for our dear ones to come out. It was getting late already. And father-- I know all about this, because my father happened to be among them. Father didn't come out. And we had to leave. I remember walking behind my mother home. It was like walking at a funeral. Because we had no idea what happened to father.

He did come home later that night. It seems that they detained some people, some men, to build latrines. And from that day on, we lived under constant fear. Because not a day went by that something didn't happen. It so happened, next to us was a new, large building. All the Jews had to move out. And German personnel moved in. Once one of them stopped father, on the street, that he need flower boxes for his balcony.

And about two hours later, he came down, with the superintendent, from that building. He probably showed them where we lived. With his gun drawn, drunk, chasing father around the kitchen table and each one of us, in a corner, just waiting for that gun to go off. I don't know. It must have been a miracle that father managed to talk him out and promised him that the boxes will be ready.

And miracles like this happened almost every day. If you got up in the morning in your own bed, that was a miracle. Because when you went out, you found out that your neighbors were taken during the night. Of course, when they were in that building, in that factory building, at the time, they also selected a Jewish committee.

They decided that they can do the dirty work for them. So the Germans gave out the orders, and the Jewish committee had to execute those orders. Then orders were out that Jews had to turn over all their valuables, even their radios. And if sometimes they found something that was supposed to be turned over and it wasn't, you were executed at the spot.

Orders went out that Jewish children no longer can attend school. It's different. Here, when sometimes you have a day off, either snow day or teachers' meeting and there's no school. But it's different when you are told that you cannot attend school. A few days later, they burned down the synagogue. They wouldn't even let the neighbors go out to extinguish the fire.

And we found out, it was not a single incident. Because, in the same day, the synagogues were burned down in the

neighboring cities, also. And as I mentioned, that the city we lived in was close to the German border. So that area was, right away, annexed to Germany.

And it was very many restrictions. We could not move freely around. You had to have special papers. You had to have passports. People that had left, before, in hope to go to Russia and they left behind families, they wanted to come back. But they had a hard time to cross that border. They needed special papers.

There were also restrictions where the Jews had to move out from all the main streets and could only take with them what they could carry. Whoever had a baby carriage or a cart was lucky. They could take something. The Germans came in and took inventory. And you had to leave everything behind. Later, orders went out that Jews were not even allowed to walk on those streets. And that became very hard, a very hardship, because to get from one place to the other took so much longer. And especially, our city consisted of two parts. It was the old town, and it was the city.

Later, ration cards were given out. And there were only a few stores open, only a few days a week, where you could buy those provisions. Often, they ran out before it came to the end of the line. And often soldiers would walk by and, just for fun, pull out people that were standing in line, mostly all the Jews. And when they arrested somebody, for some reason, they would beat the person up and kick him. By the time they took him to the jail or the detention center-- by the time the person got there, he was already half dead.

You just can't imagine the sadistic attitude that they used. And our life depended on that, on this sadistic attitude of the soldiers and the degree of their drunkenness.

It started, at the time, deportation of young people. In the beginning, even the Jewish community encouraged young people to volunteer, because they said it's just going to be for six weeks. They will come back. And in the meantime, they could save the rest of the population. But of course, like everything else, it turned out it wasn't so.

Soon, there were orders that Jews have to wear white armbands embroidered with the Star of David. There were also a streetcar running in town, especially for Jews, which had limited hours. It so happened, my father had a job at the other end of the town. And sometimes, he was detained at work and could not get, in time, to that street car that was for Jews. So at great risk, he removed the armband and got on the streetcar that was for everybody else.

You can imagine how he felt, how scared he was of being recognized. And can you imagine of us, sitting at home, every evening, and waiting till everybody was safely home. We used to listen to every footstep, peek out through the curtains. And by the time everybody was home, it was torture.

The deportation keeps going on. They brought, also, in the Jews from the surrounding towns. It was easier this way to control them. Our city had 28,000 Jews plus the Jews that were brought in. By the end of 1940, half of the Jewish population was deported.

The Jews start to think of ways they could be useful to the Germans and still remain at home. They suggest that maybe if we could make military equipment, like uniforms or boots. At first the Germans rejected it. But then they realized that they can make big bribes. And they can also, if they be needed here, they won't be sent to the front, maybe.

So in the beginning, in March of 1941, the first shop opened. I was accepted to one of those shops. But my parents had to give a sewing machine. To tell you the truth, I wasn't much of a seamstress at that time. But I was lucky. I was sitting between two ladies that were real seamstresses. And I guess they felt sorry for that little girl sitting between them. And they were helping me out, because each one of us had to make a certain quota, so many pieces.

So for them to make this, it was not a big deal. So they were helping me out. Eventually, I became efficient enough that I could do it on my own. The pay in those shop was minimal. You really could not survive on it to live on it. The only thing was that you got the employment card. The Germans called it a Sonderkarte. We called it "a way to life," because, right at that time, if you were caught on the street for deportation and you had that employment card, they would let you go. But that was only for the time being.

We even had an elderly German that was in charge of that shop. And he always promised that we should be lucky that we work there, that we won't be sent away. We have it so good. Well, that lasted till March 1943. At that time, our shift was about to leave and the other shift was waiting downstairs, in the yard, to come up. The SS men surrounded the building. And we were all taken for deportation.

My parents found out. They were still at home and my two younger brothers. And they came, of the place, where they gathered us. They brought me a suitcase with my personal belongings. We could not communicate much, because everybody was trying to talk. Anyway, we were on the second floor. But I saw-- vividly still remember them standing there, just looking at each other.

And I think, at that moment, my parents aged maybe 20 years. And I assume we all had the same thought. Will we ever see each other again? As it turned out, that was the last time I saw my family.

From there, they took us to a temporary camp, to Gogolin. We stayed there only a few days. The buyers would come and select the merchandise. And from there, we were taken to a factory that was producing soot, carbon. They used it to make tires, tar, ammunition.

That factory was run, actually, by private people. So the first few weeks were still, considering, very well. But soon the SS men took us over. We became part of Auschwitz. We got the kapos. Those were the German overseers. All our personal things were taken away. We were given the striped dresses, one pair underwear, one pair wooden shoes. And we were marched every morning. We had to get up at dawn, line up.

We also had to go through showers, have our haircut, every part of our body inspected, if we are smuggling anything, and naked, at attention, walk in front of a group of SS men to have our arms tattooed. I don't know if you can imagine, for young girls, naive, having to walk in front of a group of SS men to have our arms tattooed. From that day on, we were not called any more by our names but by numbers. But believe me, they took away much more than our names.

And then there were daily Appells that were the roll calls. We were awakened early in the morning. And for some reason, they could never get the right numbers. We used to stay for hours and be counted and recounted. Some of the girls fainted for weakness and exhaustion. They had to be supported, because we had to stand at attention. Then it was-- and also, if you manage to rinse out your underwear the night before, it often was still damp in the morning. But still, you had to put it on, because you had no choice.

Then there were the rations. We got a piece of bread in the morning. And you had to make a decision, should I eat it now or maybe save it for later? The same thing was in the evening when it came to the soup. Should I try to get ahead in line to make sure that I get that watery soup or maybe try to wait till later and be lucky enough to find a piece of potato or turnip. But sometimes your luck ran out, because they ran out of soup.

And as I mentioned, our factory was producing soot. So you can imagine how we looked. I think the worst was for the people, for the girls that worked in the pack station. Not only was our outer appearance, but you can imagine how this infected our lungs. We continued that job till January 1945, exactly January 19, 1945.

By that time, the Soviet Army was marching toward us. And the Germans, the SS men, decided to evacuate us. I worked that night on the night shift. I came. We came home in the morning. And there was a big commotion. We are being evacuated. I had no idea what. We had no idea where to go or what.

We were each given a blanket and some provisions. The only problem with me was I had to make a very important decision. My best friend was on the infirmary. And I had to decide, should I leave without her or should I take her with me? She was very weak. She could not walk on her own. Somehow, I convinced another girl to help me. And between the two of us, we took her with us.

We walked to the railroad station. The tracks were bombed. There were no trains. They put us up for the night in a barn. We waited till the next morning. Again, we went to the trucks, to the railroad station. They put us on trucks. I don't know if some of you already saw the permanent exhibit. We were not put in trains, in trucks, like this. We were put in

open freight cars, the ones that you transport coal. And that was in the middle of January.

Later, we found out that our destination was supposed to be north west. But since wherever we went, the tracks were bombed. We kept going back and forth and back and forth. We wound up south in Czechoslovakia. The people were very nice. They came to the station with bread and water, tried to help us. But the guards would not let them. They even sometimes shoot at them.

It so happens, yes, when we got in those cars, I had to take my friend in a corner and, with my arms, was holding on to the railings and, with my back, trying to push away the crowd so that she won't be squashed. Because she could not defend herself. And it so happened, in the next car, happened to be the nurse from our camp.

At one of the stations, she climbed up on the railing, with the tin cup, asking the guard for some water. Somebody had fainted. Instead, he pulled out his gun and shoot her. She fell down between the two cars. And as I mentioned, the cars kept going back and forth. We could see her laying there, not knowing if she was dead or still alive.

And that journey continued for about 10 days, back and forth. To quench our thirst, we used the snow that fell on our blankets. The last leg of the journey, which we walked, from the train, to Ravensbrück, I only faintly recall. I just remember that we came to Ravensbrück in the middle of the night. And they could only put some of us in the barracks, because they would have to put on the lights. So the rest of us, they put in the showers.

And you can imagine our thoughts when they put us in the showers. Because we knew what showers meant. We were almost expecting, every minute, to smell the gas. I remember sitting with my friend, holding on to each other, and saying goodbye. But for some reason, we managed to survive the night. Because, at dawn, we noticed light coming through the cracks of the shades.

But life in Ravensbrück was hell. There were so many nationalities. There was-- oh, boy, I put out the light. I did it the other day, too.

[LAUGHTER]

Does somebody know how to do it? OK. I use my hands through my story.

It was hell. As I said, so many nationalities, it was so crowded. We were so many people sleeping on one bunk bed. The sanitary conditions were terrible. And of course, again, they woke us every dawn to get up for roll call.

I remember getting up. I remember in the middle was like a fountain with dripping water. All you managed to do is just put your hand, one hand under to get a few drops of water to apply to your face in hope to wake up. But in the meantime, you were stepping on corpses. Because people had expired during the night.

Luckily, I didn't stay too long, only a few weeks in that camp. From there, they sent us to a smaller camp, which was also part of Ravensbrück. The conditions there, again, were terrible. I think we spent every free moment of our time trying to eradicate the lice, which we didn't manage.

And one day-- it was a small camp. One day, as we were standing in the morning for the Appell, a kapo came with one military man. And they selected about a dozen or so girls. I happened to be among them. For a second, I looked around, why me? Why now, when it was hope that maybe that misery will end, because there were constant air raids? And one thing was a selection never meant a better lot.

But there was no use reasoning. There was no time to reason in camp. We were walked to the gate. Outside was waiting a white truck. There were some kapos mingling with soldiers having a good time, flirting. And they motioned to us to step on the truck. Although the tailgate was down, we still had a very hard time to climb up to the truck.

And all of a sudden, a crate appeared. The kapos brought us a crate, to step on this crate, and helped us to get onto the truck. I thought I was hallucinating. But then I also remembered that the Germans used all kinds of tricks to get people

to come to the camps-- I mean to the gathering places, using excuses-- they're going to stamp the passports, they're going to do this.

Anyway, we got on the truck. And we were given care packages. Those were packages, I think, supplied by the Canadian government. We ripped them open. It was food. We didn't even know what it was. We couldn't read. There were sardines. There was powdered milk. There was cocoa, crackers. We ate everything together. It was food. We didn't even think if this might be our last meal.

Some of the girls got sick, because they were not used-- we were not used. Our stomachs were not used to this. And we kept going in that the truck, hardly talking to each other. Everybody probably thinking of their own lot, what's going to be, if there's going to-- what the future will bring, if there will be a future.

And we landed in Denmark. Denmark was still under occupation, but the Danish people were very nice. They provided a place to rest and food for us. As it turned out, that white truck was for the Swedish Red Cross.

At that time, there was the Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte. He was the head of the Swedish Red Cross. And he was negotiating with Himmler, the head of the SS men, to release Norwegian and Danish POWs. But since that was already the end of April and Himmler realized that Germany lost the war, for some reason, he agreed to let out some women of Polish descent.

Later, I read about it. The word "Jewish" was never mentioned because of fear they probably wouldn't agree. And that's how it started, that rescue from the Swedish government, from the Red Cross. And it's called, actually, the bus, the White Buses, because most of the people were rescued by white buses from the larger camps. But since we were in that small camp, we were just in that white truck.

Of course, when we got to Sweden-- from Denmark, we went to Sweden. It was a big celebration. Everybody was waiting at the port. But we just could not comprehend that we are really free. I remember that whole scene, like seeing it through a sheer curtain, like I wasn't there, like I was detached, unbelievable. There were rabbis and clergymen. And there was-- I don't know if it was an orchestra or a band. I couldn't tell the difference at that time.

And so many people came to greet us. But we just didn't believe. We were frightened. And they greeted us, then they took us, the sick, right away to the hospital, the others for the [NON-ENGLISH]. We were scrubbed and disinfected and powdered and all kinds, and were given clean clothes donated by the Swedish people. It felt luxurious. First of all, we were given real soap to take a hot shower.

The next day, they made a big reception at the high school. And the band played everybody's anthem, because there were so many different nationalities. And believe me, ever before or ever since did that Polish anthem mean so much to me, not the words of it but just the idea that it meant that I'm free.

But it didn't-- it still didn't enter-- couldn't enter our mind. Because, at night, they put us up in schools. Each one got a mattress. And if you woke up at night, there were always girls at the windows looking out. Because we still didn't believe that we are not in camp any longer, until a few days later, during the middle of the night, the students, in their uniforms, came running up the stairs. The war is over. The war is over.

We ran out in our underwear. We didn't have any nightgowns or pajamas, and happy, hugging and kissing and jumping up and down, the war is over. And on the streets, there was so much commotion, everybody blowing the car horns. I don't think anybody slept that night. The war is over.

And then there appeared lists from all kinds of organizations, Jewish organization, the Red Cross, about survivors, looking for relatives. And since my parents were only in their 30s? And all along, while I was in camp, I hoped, since I survived, that maybe they would survive, too. It was my hope that maybe somebody survived.

But as it turned out, the war was over, and I was left all alone. Some of you may wonder, why we do this? After all, every time we talk about the Holocaust, it's like reliving the horrors of the past. But we are the only ones that can

witness, that can bear witness, no matter how painful it is. And our number is diminishing. Our aim is to show you what hate and discrimination and disregard for human lives and indifference can do.

And there still is so much atrocities going on. And we, in this country, unfortunately had our own unfortunate experience of September 11, what hate and disregard for human lives can do. There's a quote I think, I don't remember exactly, that evil prevails when good people do nothing. And there still exists so much evil.

Here, at the museum, if you notice, we have a wall with thousands of names, which we call the "Righteous Gentiles," people that risked their lives and their family's lives to save others. This shows that people do have a choice to be good or to be evil. Our hope is, after you learn about the Holocaust and listen to survivors testimonies, you will be more tolerant of others and make some commitment to help to prevent such atrocity to happen again.

Our hope is especially in the young people, because they are a hope for the future. We live in such a democratic country, the best country in the world even with all its shortcomings. So I'm saying, please don't take things for granted. Use your potential to make this country even better. And do not judge people by the color of their eyes or the shape of their nose, their ethnic backgrounds, or their religious beliefs. Be tolerant and do not get involved in groups that promote prejudice and hate. We believe in you.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you. I would like to add one thing, because I'm always asked about this. My friend survived, the one that was so sick. Because every time somebody asked me what happened to my friends. She lives in Israel. I visited her already about six times. She was here once. And we still keep in touch. Well, is there any questions? Yeah.