

if many people address. The loneliness was physically painful. Many times, I risked my life to hear another human voice. It is something that I think humans need. And yet, when I realized that humans were my enemy, it's paradoxical. But still, I did crave human companionship, and I didn't have it.

So I don't know how else to describe it. But it was just as painful as being hungry and being thirsty.

Charlene, tell us how you finally were found and came out of the forest.

I was in one of my forests. And every time I entered a new forest was also a difficult thing because I didn't want to go around in circles, and I didn't have a compass. But somehow I learned the directions, and I hope I didn't go around in circles.

I was in one of the forests. And usually I would dig a little grave, and then camouflage it with leaves and whatever else there was to camouflage it with.

And there I was in this one forest. And I was very-- at that time I was very ill. I ate something that didn't agree with me, which was most of the time. But at this time, it really made me very physically very ill. And I was dying at that time.

As it happened, that was 1944. I didn't know. In my mind, there were only two ways to recognize the times of year. It was either very, very cold and snow, or it was very, very damp and it was summer. And I was dying in this little grave.

At that time, the Germans were being pushed back by the Soviet Union. And a group of soldiers-- actually, a battalion of Soviet Union soldiers-- were making their way through the forest where I was dying. And my luck, they actually literally-- a group of them-- stepped on me, and felt there was something soft. And they investigated. And to their credit, and my good luck, they cleaned me up, and they took me with them, put me-- and they put me in their field hospitals.

And they took me with them all along until they came to a city by the name of Luck-- L-U-C-K. And there they located a regular hospital, where they left me with a note pinned to my shirt. All this, I didn't know until later. I was told this story much later.

They pinned this note that said-- and I'm paraphrasing, because again, I never saw the note-- this is a child of the forests. Treat her gently, with great care.

And these people in the hospital in Luck took good care of me, and nursed me back to reasonable health. And when I was able to stand up on my own two feet, I was told the story how I ended up there.

And at that point, the war for the people in that area was over, because the Germans were pushed way, way back. But the war was really not over. But in our area, most of the surviving Jewish people congregated in Luck. That was a big city.

And that's where I found the other survivor from my hometown. There were only two survivors in our town-- from our town, of about 5,000 Jewish people.

Now this woman was older. She actually had a family before the war, but she lost her entire family. And so both she and I were all alone. At that time, we decided to go back to my hometown-- our hometown-- and hopefully we would find other survivors there. And so we set out to go from Luck.

And at that time, transportation, there was no formal transportation. And so we had to make our way hitchhiking and what have you. In a few days, we ended up in our hometown of Horochow.

Needless to say, we were happy to be there. But when we came in, the local people did not greet us with open arms. They were rather annoyed that we survived.

Why? Because to them, the possessions that became theirs after we had to leave and after we were herded into the ghetto, these possessions-- our possessions-- they appropriated them. Our houses, our furnishings, everything was theirs now. And they were worried that they would have to return these things.

Well, this was not in our mind at all. All we wanted is to learn that there were other survivors. Well, there were no other survivors, and we were not greeted, as I said, very cordially.

This was going on all over that area of Poland. People who survived would go back to their respective towns and would also be greeted rather coldly. And we did get the message that we were not welcome back in our home towns.

And so groups of us formed-- we formed groups. And the message was, at that time, to go to Germany-- of all the places, Germany. But Germany was the only safe place. Because at that time, Germany was occupied by the Soviet Union, the great-- Great Britain, France, and the United States. And that's why that would be one safe place for us.

I must add that it wasn't just safe because we weren't greeted with open arms in our home towns, but many pogroms took place at that time. And one of the most infamous pogroms took place a year after the war, in 1946, on a date very dear to us-- the 4th of July. The 4th of July 1946, there were 42 Jewish survivors in the city of Kielce-- K-I-E-L-C-E. That night, the local people got together and murdered the 42 Jewish survivors. And this is just an example how unsafe we were at that time in Poland.

Charlene, we're really at the end of the time. And I'm going to want to turn back. I hope you'll bear with us for just a couple more moments. I'm going to turn back to Charlene in a moment.

Obviously, there's so much more that we could have heard about the events to this point. Even though, as Charlene was just saying, she was liberated, making her way for-- to Germany, it would still be several years before she could make it to the United States, in displaced persons camps. So we've only gotten just a glimpse of what she went through during that time.

I'd like to ask Charlene one more question. Then I'm going to make just a couple of closing comments. And then Charlene will wrap up for us. So bear with us. And unfortunately there isn't time for questions. I regret that.

Charlene, I'm sure it's on everybody's minds here. Did you ever learn what happened to either your mother or your sister?

Well, I learned that my sister was betrayed, and she was denounced, and she was paraded naked in my hometown, and then she was murdered. Nobody knows anything about my mother.

And my father, there are two versions-- one, that he ended up in Dachau concentration camp, and the other version is that the 300 Jewish leaders were led outside my hometown of Horochow. They were forced to dig a mass grave, and they were shot there.

Next Wednesday, April 7, we will have another First Person. And our "first person" next Wednesday will be Mrs. Manya Friedman. Mrs. Friedman was in her early teens when Germany overran Poland. She and her family were forced into a ghetto after, which she then became a slave laborer at several notorious camps, including Gleiwitz and Ravensbrück. Just before the war ended, she was rescued by the Swedish Red Cross.

Before I turn back to Charlene, I would like to, again, urge you to see the special exhibit, "Life in Shadows-- Hidden Children in the Holocaust." And I do want to remind you that the museum's publication Echoes of Memory, which features writings by survivors, including Charlene, will be on sale after our program for \$9, and Charlene will be available to sign your books for you if you wish.

It's our tradition that our "first person" has the last word. And with that, I'd like to turn back to Charlene to close our program.

Yeah, I'm sorry that there won't be time for questions, but I tried to be as brief as possible. But apparently I wasn't. I'm sorry.

Just too much to say.

Yeah, well, I want to leave you with two messages-- one, what this institution means to me. It is a memorial to the millions who perished, a moral voice, an institution of higher learning. It stands as a powerful witness to genocide born of racial hatred. When the last survivor is no longer here, this institution will be a constant reminder and warning to those who tamper with human rights. It is a place of remembrance, reflection, and renewal.

On a more personal note, I get comfort from seeing the name of my town, Horochow, engraved on the fourth-floor glass crosswalk. This is a tangible connection with my past.

And now, I have a plea to you, my dear friends. Together, we must fight what I call the four evil I's-- the evils of indifference, ignorance, injustice, and intolerance. These evils are as pertinent today as they were 60 years ago. It seems we have not learned from our past.

And now, to you, our dear young people, you are our dearest treasure. Our nation is like a tapestry of many colors, different cultures together, all privileged to enjoy the same freedoms. You are our future and our hope. In your generation, we look forward to that tapestry to blend in perfectly, like a beautiful, colorful mosaic, in harmony and peace, free of hatred, bigotry, and prejudice. My ardent wish-- may your generation and our great country serve as an example and beacon for the entire world. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you. And I'm sorry that there are no times-- there's no time for questions. I'll stay behind, and if you have--