

I'd like to welcome you to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's First Person program. First Person is a program that the museum puts on periodically throughout the year in which we have a conversation with a survivor. This week, as many of you know, we are commemorating the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the largest of the death camps.

And so all this week we've been having special First Person programs. And today, we are very privileged to have Manya Friedman who I'll introduce in just a minute, who is here as our guest who will talk about her experiences in the camps and so forth.

Just some housekeeping rules before we begin, you were given an evaluation when you walked in. Do all of you have an evaluation with a pencil of some sort? We appreciate, we welcome your feedback about the programs, and we encourage you that you fill that out and return it then at the end of the program as you leave. Also, we ask that you stay seated for the entire program.

Sometimes it gets disruptive when people get up and leave during the middle of the program, and it can disrupt and cause people to lose their train of thought when they're talking. If you do have passes for later on this afternoon, let's say for 1:30, your pass is good at 2:00 when the program is over. The program, it will last about an hour, 45 minutes or so we'll have a chance to hear Manya talk. And then the very last part will be a chance for you to ask questions of Manya.

So if you think of something as she's speaking, write that down. And you'll have an opportunity at the end to do that. Also please make sure your cell phones and your pagers are turned off. I think that's it for housekeeping.

We'd like to then introduce and put through a few maps and things, put Manya Friedman's story into context. Manya Friedman, as we'll talk about in just a second, is a volunteer here at the museum. She not only speaks to school groups and speaks about her experiences during the Holocaust, I know she was even here yesterday speaking with our new staff in part of new staff orientation. But she also volunteers in many other aspects.

Sometimes you'll see here, if you come, I believe it's on Wednesdays in her red blazer, which is what our visitor services staff wear. And she's taking tickets, working at the information desk. And then also she does translation for the museum, works in translating some historical documents, diaries, and things that the museum has. So Manya has been very active in the museum for many years now. And I understand that she was actually one of the first people in the First Person program when they were even testing it out years and years ago. So I'd like to put her story and her experiences in context of the larger Holocaust.

The Holocaust is the state sponsored and systematic murder and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. More than 6 million of them were murdered. Gypsies also known as Roma, persons with disabilities, and also the Poles were targeted for destruction and decimation for ethnic, for racial, and also for national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents were also targeted and suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

Here's a picture of Manya who was born in 1925. Manya, how old are you in this picture. Do you remember?

This was shortly after the war.

OK, so shortly after the war, so probably in your early 20s. And Manya was born and I'm going to massacre the name of her small village. It's Chmielnik. All right. She'll be able to say it for you later. But she says, I'm not the only one that has massacred it. So that's OK. Born in a small village in Poland.

You can see Poland there, and was born in 1925. Her father was in the furniture business and her mother took care of Manya and her two brothers. So there were five in their family. In 1938, right before the Germans invaded Poland, Manya and her family moved to another town a larger town called, Sosnowiec, Sosnowiec. And there then is where Manya was in September of 1939, when the German army invaded Poland.

And what they did and what's important about here in the map, is you can see is that area where she was living was actually annexed to Germany, and became part of Germany. She became part of the Third Reich the Germans there. And so Manya then in 1941 was forced, while living in Sosnowiec with her family, she was forced to work as a seamstress in a German military uniform factory.

In 1943, she was taken to another forced labor camp called Gleiwitz. Gleiwitz in 1943 was where she ended up working for a German company, a German factory, making soot. And she'll talk about this later on. Eventually though the SS took over Gleiwitz, and it became part of the Auschwitz camp system. There were many different subcamps around Auschwitz, and Gleiwitz was one of them, and where she worked was important for German industry.

She remained there until 1945, January of 1945, so 60 years ago. And as the Soviet army began invading from the East and getting closer to Auschwitz, the Germans, the Nazis evacuated the camps and moved the inmates further into Germany. We call this many times the death marches. And Manya was on those. She ended up at the women's camp of Ravensbruck and I've heard her at another time explain that this was really hell on Earth there.

She remained in Ravensbruck for the last couple of months of the war. And it was then from there that in 1945 she was rescued by the Swedish Red Cross and taken to Sweden.

This is a picture of Manya today. And now we are very grateful and very privileged to have Manya here to talk to us about her experiences. So Manya, I'd like to invite you up on stage.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

I don't think I have much to add. I think you already told everything about my experience.

Let me make sure that the microphone--

The microphone, can you hear me?

Yes.

OK. First of all, I would like to thank you for coming to the museum to learn about the Holocaust. And thank you, school, for teaching about the Holocaust. Well, I don't know. I have to repeat everything. We are commemorating now the 60th Anniversary of liberation of Auschwitz. But we cannot forget the millions of people, innocent people, that were murdered there. Among them were both my parents and two younger brothers.

It's really almost impossible to describe the Holocaust. No matter how many books have been written and how many stories we have told, you cannot relay the feeling what you felt when you were there. Because besides being hungry, and being dehumanized, and going through all that suffering, you had that hopelessness because you thought that the entire world has forgotten about you.

Well, I'm not here to teach you about the Holocaust. That would take more. And I'm not an educator. If you permit me, I can only tell you, share with you, my own life during that experience. And the war in Poland lasted almost six years.

I was born. I pronounce it right.

Thank you.

I was born in Central Poland in a small town called Chmielnik. I lived there with my parents, two younger brothers, grandparents, relatives, and especially since it was a small town everybody knew everybody. And it seems that almost everybody was related.

My mother didn't have to worry that I'll come home from school and nobody will be there to take care of me, because there was always somebody. Like in the morning when I was going to school, I was always stopped by somebody on the street, how I am. Sometimes I got a pinch in the cheek, which I tried to avoid. I knew already that person. I went to the other side of the street.

But that's I want to relate to you how life was. I think I had a normal life. I attended public school in the morning, and in the afternoon Hebrew school. Although sometimes I was jealous of the other kids that were outside playing and I had to go to Hebrew school, and I would argue with my father. I'm not going to marry a rabbi anyway. But in those days, he persisted because in those days you the prayer books were not translated like they are now that you can pray in English. So you had to know Hebrew.

And I lived there till about a year before the war started, in 1938. At that time, we moved. For some reason, my parents decided to move. I don't know if it was business or was it because of cultural reasons. They decided to move to a larger city and that was Sosnowiec. Which, as you saw on the map, was not far from the German border.

I think in Sosnowiec, I experienced the first time antisemitism because there were signs in front of the Jewish establishments not to buy from Jews. And we lived there only about a year. And as we know, on Friday, September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. It happened to be a beautiful day.

That evening, my parents and their friends got together to decide what to do. It was the impression that Hitler would never be allowed to get to Central Poland that he certainly would be stopped before reaching Central Poland. After all, they were counting on the mighty powers like England, France, Russia, and the United States to intervene.

But England, although England declared war on Germany but was incapable of doing much, and Russia as we know made a pact with Germany to divide Poland among themselves. And the United States at that time was not inclined to help a nation that was across the ocean, and they didn't.

So that evening, they decided, my parents and their friends decided, to send the wives and the children back to the small town in hope that Hitler won't reach us there. The men decided to stay back, because after all, you can't leave your businesses or shops and leave. And the next morning, we got up early, dressed up in our best clothing, and went to the railroad station. The place was mobbed, everybody trying to get out.

And we were worried that we would get separated from mother. But somehow, father managed to put us on the train. We traveled five miles, eight kilometers to the next town. And right in front of us, the railroad tracks were bombed. So you can imagine the commotion. Everybody getting off the train, not knowing what to do, being afraid that they might bomb the train.

And it was getting already dark, and we had the provisions with us. My mother was afraid to leave them just on the street because she decided that since it's only five miles, we should go back home.

Well finally, she convinced somebody to take the packages from us and we started to walk. As I mentioned, we put on our best clothing. We had our new shoes on. And by the time we got home, our feet were blistered. And we were happy. But we were happy to be home together with father, and back in our own beds. And at the time, we thought that that's probably the worst thing that could ever happen to us. Little did we realize what lay ahead.

Because from that day on, there was not a peaceful moment. We lived under constant fear. Since we were so close to the German border, the war started Friday. And Monday, the Germans already invaded our city.

When they came in, apparently some shots were fired. They took out the people from that building, and shot everybody, even the people from the bunker that were hiding in the bunker. And in the afternoon, they ordered everybody to step out from their houses in front of their houses. They selected the Jewish men, lined them up in rows of five, and marched them to the City Hall. They put them in the basement of the City Hall, a windowless, airless place, without food or water.

And they ordered the rabbi to step forward or 10 people will be shot. It so happened the rabbi was not among them. But an elderly Jew in order to save 10 people, he stepped forward. And he said that he was the rabbi. They took him outside, beat him up, pulled out half of his beard, and threw him back in, and ordered everybody to say the mourner's prayer because they're all going to die.

So you can imagine the expression on their faces when they heard that. And in the meantime, the German soldiers were filming them, taking pictures, and having fun. They spent the night in that place. In the morning they were marched to a factory nearby.

They sent home the barbers to get their equipment, and had everybody's hair shaved and beard cut. And for an Orthodox Jew to have his beard cut, especially in those days, it was very painful. They started selecting. The younger people they sent to work. The business people, they arrested and sent them to jail.

After a while, they got out for big bribes, some of them got out. The rest were executed. Some people they let go out, and we were waiting and waiting. And our father didn't come out yet. It was getting already dark. We had no idea what happened to father.

I remember vividly walking home behind with mother, behind mother, almost like walking at a funeral because we didn't know what happened to father. He did come home late that night. It seems that they retained a few people to build latrine. And from that day on, every day was something.

Once just any insignificant thing was a matter of life and death. I'll give you an example. Next to us was a tall building, fairly new. All the Jews had to move out from that building, and the Germans moved in. Once one of them stopped my father on the street that he needs flower boxes for his balcony. And two hours later he came in drunk with his gun drawn with the superintendent from the building, demanding that the boxes are not ready.

He was chasing father around the kitchen table with his gun drawn, and each one of us in another corner just waiting for that gun to go off. I don't know. It was a miracle that father somehow convinced him that the boxes will be made later. And it was almost a miracle every day, because when you got up in the morning in your own bed that was a miracle. You went out and you found out that your neighbors were taken during the night.

There was a Jewish committee that they formed with Jewish militia. But they were not there to help the Jews. They were doing the dirty work for the Germans. The Germans gave out orders, and the Jewish committee had to execute them.

The Jews were ordered to turn in all their valuables, even bicycles and radios. And you could not have anything. If they found-- and sometimes if they found that you had something, the verdict was just away they shot you.

All our life depended on the sadistic attitude of the Germans, of their soldiers, and the degree of their drunkenness. Then orders went out, yes, a few days later, the synagogue was burned down. At first, we thought it's just a single incident. But nothing with the Germans was just a single incident. Everything was very well thought out and executed.

Because later, we found out that the synagogues in the neighboring towns were also burned down the same day. Later, orders went out. Jewish children no longer can attend school. Well, it's probably different for you sometimes when you find out that there's a snow day or a teacher's day, or so you have the day off from school. But believe me, it's different when you are told that you are not allowed to attend school.

And as it was pointed out, since we were close to the German border, that area right away became annexed to Germany. We became part of Germany. And to get around was very hard because we needed special passports, special papers. There were a lot of people, especially young men, that when the war started ran away trying to get East, hoping to go to Russia and save themselves. But then they realized that they left families behind, or maybe some couldn't get through. And they wanted to come back.

But there was already a border to cross. They could not get in. Well, there were some people maybe that were making

false passports, false papers for them. One day, two Jews were hanged in the center of town. And whoever was on the street had to stop and watch.

A few days later, four Jews were hung, among them happened to be a father and a son. I think that evening in every Jewish home somebody lit a candle in their memory. Because we really didn't know why. They were accused of making false passports.

Then restrictions went out that Jews had to move out from the main street. They could only take with them whatever they could carry. The Germans would come in, take inventory. And if somebody was lucky enough to have a baby carriage or a cart, but otherwise you could not take anything but only what you could carry. And later, orders went out that not only did you have to move out from those streets, you were not even allowed to walk on those streets. And our city happened to consist of two parts. It was the old city and the city.

Also, orders went out at the time that Jews have to wear white armbands embroidered with the star, the blue Star of David. And there was a streetcar especially for Jews that was running on limited time, not like the regular one. My father happened to get a job in the other part of the city. And sometimes he was detained at work, and could not make that streetcar that was especially for Jews. So at great risk, he would remove that white armband and get on the streetcar that was for the general public. You can imagine how he felt.

And you can imagine how we felt every evening sitting and waiting until the entire family was home. Because when they imposed curfew, it so happens that my mother and a neighbor from across the street were standing in front of the house and talking. Two German soldiers went by and they arrested them, and they spent the night in jail. And of course, we had no idea what happened to them.

Then the deportation started. In the beginning, it was just young people. As a matter of fact, the Jewish committee even encouraged young people to volunteer. Because they said it's only going to be for six weeks. And this way they can save maybe the rest of the population. But like everything with the Germans, it was a lie.

By 1940, about half of the population of our city, including the Jews that they brought in from the smaller towns, this way it was easier for them to control them. Our city had 28,000 Jews. So end of 1940, about half of that population was already deported. The Jews started thinking of a way to be useful to the Germans, and yet to be able to remain at home.

They suggested that we open shops to make uniforms for the Germans, boots. At first they rejected. They didn't want to hear about it. But then they realized they could get big bribes, and maybe if they'll be needed here they won't be sent to the front.

So in March of 1941, the first shop opened. I happened to get employment as a seamstress. But my parents had to give a sewing machine for me to be accepted. To tell you the truth, I wasn't much of a seamstress. But I was lucky. I was sitting between two ladies that were professional seamstresses. And like with everything else with the Germans, there was a quota. There was a quota of people to be sent away. And if they didn't make the quota, they often took the people from the hospital, or the children from the orphanage to make up the number.

The same thing had to be a quota with whatever we were doing. We had to make so many pieces each day. Well, those two ladies sitting next to me, I guess they felt sorry for that little girl between them. And for them to make the quota was not a big deal. So they helped me out. I hate to admit, I became proficient enough later to do it myself.

Besides the uniforms for the Germans, we were also making those mustard colored shirts for the Hitler Youth.

Manya, can I stop you for a second?

I'm sorry. I keep talking. I didn't give you a chance.

We want to hear you. That's the point. But you had mentioned earlier you were talking about the importance of the work card. Can you just tell people about that?

Well, yes. You see, the employment, the pay was very minimal. You really couldn't survive with it. A lot of times girls would faint in the shop from a lack of food. The thing was that we got a card. The Germans called it a [GERMAN] card. We called it a way to life. Because right in the beginning, if they stopped you on the street for deportation, and if you showed that card, they let you go. So that was very important.

As a matter of fact, we had an elderly German, a gentlemanly German, that we called him grandpa even. He always was telling us how lucky we are, and how grateful we should be because we won't be deported. Unfortunately, that didn't last. But in the meantime, instead of the white armbands, the yellow star was replaced. And that had to be sewn on permanently to the garments.

And the ghetto was formed. From the ghetto, you could not go out without somebody to assist you. I mean either a militiaman or so on. And the same thing to go into the ghetto. The thing was before we got the ration card, it was very little. Could not survive. And Jews were not supposed to have any other staples in the house, except those rations, what was given on the ration card.

But when we were outside the ghetto, at great risk, people would buy what we call on the side. We call it the black market. But once in the ghetto, we couldn't do. I don't know. I think our mothers were performing miracles. They made soups practically from nothing. The thing was still as hungry we were, still we were all together. That was the only consolation.

And by 1944, the mass deportations started. And of course, they were promising that it's just resettlement to a different place. But as we found out, and they even told people how many kilograms of luggage they can take with them, blankets that can take. As it turned out the transport went away and all the luggage and everything was left behind. They promised they'd taken the people to Theresienstadt to a better place.

But as it turned out, from the engineers from the train that came back, told us that the transport went to Auschwitz. And as I mentioned, we had to wear the yellow star permanently sewn on. Every woman, Jewish woman, got an additional name, Sarah. Every man, Israel. And our passports were stamped with J for Jew.

And in 1943, March 1943, as our shift was about to leave and the other shift was down in a yard to come over and take over, the SS man surrounded the building, and we were all taken for deportation.

My parents and the two brothers were still at home at that time. They came to the place where they were holding us. They brought me a suitcase with my belongings. But we could not communicate. We were on the second floor. And of course, everybody was trying to talk. But I so vividly remember my parents standing there, and I think right in front of my eyes they aged maybe 20 years.

And I assume that we all had the same thought. Will we ever see each other again? And as it turned out, excuse me, that was the last time I saw my parents and my two brothers. From there, we were taken to Germany to a temporary camp where the buyers came to pick us out like cattle.

We were taken to a camp that was a fairly new camp. It was owned by a civilian company, a German company. So since it was a new camp, the conditions were still everything was clean. And it seems it wasn't too bad. We were producing, soot, carbon, which the Germans desperately needed. Because from that, they used this to make rubber, and from the rubber they used it to make tires, on which the German army was running on.

So we were treated fairly good. But soon, the SS took us over. And we became part a subcamp of Auschwitz. They installed the barbed wire. All our personal belongings were taken away. We got the striped dresses, the wooden shoes.

We had to go through showers. Our heads were shaved, heads were shaved. And our bodies were inspected. And naked, we had to walk in front of a bunch of SS men to have our arms tattooed. From that day on, we were not called anymore by our names, but by our numbers. But believe me, they took away much more than our names. Because until this day, I still remember that feeling.

We kept working in that factory till January 1945. That was when the Russian, the Soviet army, was coming close. And they decided to evacuate us to Central Germany.

The thing was I was working on the night shift at that time. I came home in the morning. There was a big commotion. We were going to be deported. We didn't know what to or where to. I had to make a very big decision. My best friend was in the infirmary. And I had to decide, should I leave her there or take her with me. She was incapable of walking on her own strength.

I was even thinking and talking with the girl, since the Russians are coming maybe I should leave her there, and they'll be there soon. But there was a rumor in camp that they were going to burn down the camp. So I convinced another girl, a friend, and between the two of us we took her. Of course, we had to give up some of our provisions in order to hold her up. We left the camp. We went to the railroad station.

There were no track. There were no cars. The tracks had been bombed. So they put us up for the night in a barn. The next morning, we went again to the railroad station. I don't know if you already have been up to the permanent exhibit. If you saw the car that they were transporting people. Well, we were not in a railroad car like this.

We were put in cars, in open cars, the type that you transport coal. And that was in the middle of January. And wherever we kept going, the tracks were bombed. We kept going back and forth, and back and forth. And later on, after the war, I found out that our destination was Northwest. And in the meantime, we wound up in Czechoslovakia. If you know geography, Czechoslovakia is to the South.

The Czech people were very nice. They came to the stations and brought us water, and brought water and bread. But the guards would not let them give it to us. They were even shooting at them. Sometimes the people went where there was an overpass, and threw down bread at us. And we can kept going back and forth. And I had to take my friend into a corner of that car to shield her, so she wouldn't be squashed. I had to hold on to that railing, and with my back push away the crowd.

In the next car happened to be the nurse from our camp. At one point at one station, she climbed up on the railing with a tin cup, begging the guard for some water because somebody had fainted. And instead, he pulled out a gun and shot her. She fell down between the two cars. And as I mentioned, that the cars kept going back and forth, and back and forth we saw her laying there, not knowing if she was still alive or dead. And we kept going in those cars for about 10 days.

The snow that fell on our blanket was the only thing that quenched our thirst. The last leg of the journey, I don't even remember completely, but we had to walk until we wound up in Ravensbruck. We came to Ravensbruck in the middle of the night. They could only put some of us in a barrack. The rest of us they put in the showers. And knowing what showers meant, you can imagine what we felt. I remember sitting with my friend and holding on to each other, and saying goodbyes.

And sometimes, for some reason I don't know, in circumstances like this I think your mind plays tricks on you too. Because I was convinced that I could smell gas, although it wasn't true. But I guess I was so anticipating that they were giving gas that I thought I smelled gas. Well luckily, we sat through the night. In the morning saw that dawn coming through the shades. We realized we survived the night. They put us in the barracks.

Ravensbruck was like hell. It was so crowded and so filthy, so many nationalities. And they didn't even have real work for you. Everything was so aimless, standing in lines for hours. I remember getting up. Of course, I didn't mention before that every morning we were awake, which called we called appells, you call it the roll calls. I remember in Ravensbruck in the morning, in the middle was like a fountain with dripping water. All we could do is just reach out a hand to catch a few drops of water to apply to our faces, to wake up. And then we'll run to the latrine. And then with a tin cup run to get that brown stuff which they called coffee.

Sometimes it tasted like the soup from the night before, because they didn't wash the kettle. But who cared. And from Ravensbruck, luckily I wasn't too long there. From there, we were sent to a smaller camp, a subcamp of Ravensbruck

called Rechlin. The sanitary conditions were terrible. Every free minute we had, we spent trying to eradicate the lice, which we were unsuccessful.

And one day, as we were standing in the morning to be counted, a kapo-- it's a German overseer and a military men walked up to our group, and pointed a finger at a dozen or so girls to step forward. I happened to be among them. I think I took a quick look around trying to figure out why me. How do I differ from the others? The thing was, one thing was in camp, a election never meant a better lot.

So they marched us to the gate, out from the camp, outside the gate was standing a white truck, a covered truck. And the kapo motioned to us to climb up on the truck. Although even the tailgate was down, but we just couldn't manage it. And all of a sudden, one of the kapos brought a crate for us to step on. I think we thought we were hallucinating. We just couldn't believe it. But later, we found out why.

And we were put on that white truck. We were given a care package each. We ripped it open. We didn't even know what it was. But it was food. It was powdered milk and cocoa, and sardines and crackers. We ate it all at once. We didn't even care if that was our last meal. It was food. Some of the girls got sick, not being used to that type of food. And we kept going in the truck and going. We even stopped talking to each other. I guess each one preoccupied with our own thought, where we are going, what the future is going to be, if there's going to be a future.

And we landed in Denmark. You see later, we find out those white trucks were from the Swedish Red Cross. There was at that time that the Swedish count who was the head of the Swedish Red Cross was negotiating with Himmler the release of Norwegian and Danish POWs. Because Denmark and Norway were under occupation.

But since it was already the end of April 1945, and Himmler realized that Germany had lost the war, Bernadotte insisted that he should release from Ravensbruck camp some of the inmates of Polish descent. And that's how that Mission Bernadotte's mission started. They called it later, the white buses. Because most of the people were transported in white buses. Since we were just a few of us, we were in that white truck.

The thing was, the truck had markings on the sides and on the roof. But we were not aware of it. And the reason the kapos, as I mentioned, were so nice to us, I think it was to show the personnel from the Swedish Red Cross that they treated us humanely. Well, we landed. The Danish people were very nice, although they were still under German occupation.

They provided for us a place to rest and food. And am I--

Nope. You're fine, right on time.

Well we have to go by the clock. And they provided food for us. And then we were put on a small boat, and we went to Sweden, to Malmo. That was a port in Southern Sweden, port of Sweden. When we arrived, there were all kinds of dignitaries-- a rabbi, priest, other clergies. I don't know if it was an orchestra or a band playing. And so many people were waiting for us. We just couldn't believe it that we are really free. We just couldn't believe it.

I remember like standing, like I was detached from that group. I just, like I was seeing it on a screen, like I wasn't involved in it. Because we just couldn't comprehend it. And then we were put up in a school. They gave us each a mattress. And every night when you open your eyes, there were always girls standing at the windows looking out to make sure that we're not in camp. Because we just couldn't believe it.

And a few days later, the students came running up the stairs. They are a very handsome uniforms in Sweden, and yelling and shouting, the war is over! The war is over! And we ran out in our underwear. We didn't have any pajamas, but we didn't care. We were hugging and kissing. The war was over. Later, there was a reception. And that night, nobody slept anymore.

Later, there was a reception down at the gym, and the band or the orchestra was playing everybody's national hymn, because there were so many national anthems, because there were so many different nationalities. And I think never



before or never since had the Polish anthem had such meaning for me, because it was a sign that finally the war is over, and our suffering is over. But most of all, hope since I survived the war, maybe somebody from the family did too.

But unfortunately, as it turned out, I was the only one that survived. And some of you may wonder why we do this and talk about this. It's not easy. Because every time we talk about the Holocaust, it's like reliving all the atrocities again. But we are the only ones that can bear witness. And unfortunately, our number is diminishing.

We are trying to convey to you what hate [AUDIO OUT]

--had his collaborators, but they were only-- they were also the bystanders. There's a saying that evil prevails when good people do nothing. We also, if you leave the second floor in the museum, there is engraved a poem by a German pastor which quotes, he didn't do anything when they came for the socialists, because he was not a socialist. He didn't get involved when they came for the Jews. He was not a Jew. And at the end when they came from for him, there was nobody to say anything.

But on the other hand, we also have walls of thousands of the Gentiles. It just goes to show you, we call them the Righteous Gentiles, people that risked their lives and the lives of their families to save some of the Jews. And this just goes to show you that people do have a chance to be good or evil. The thing is, our hope is, since I'm speaking now to you young people, especially there are some not so young ones too, but especially to you young people.

You see, you are the future of this country. You might not believe it. But some of you might even become president. And we live in such a wonderful democratic country, even with all its shortcomings. So do not 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, of their ethnic backgrounds, or even of their religious beliefs. Be tolerant.

And I have the same thing to you parents. Try to teach your children to be tolerant. Because children first before they go to school, learn at home. And don't be distracted by groups that promote hate and prejudice. We believe in you. So God bless you, and thank you for listening to me.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

I didn't give you a chance to [APPLAUSE AND BOTH TALKING]

No problem. We'll take some questions now from the audience.

OK.

We have an opportunity now that if you have questions that you would like to ask Manya, we'd like to take those now. And when you're called on if you could just stand up. I'll repeat the question so everyone can hear it who's in the audience. I'll let you call on people.

Yes, young lady.

I have a question about the extermination and concentration camps. Before people, when people were starting to get deported, I guess there were rumors going around in Europe. But did people actually believe that these camps existed, or did people just not believe it? And they just thought it was just a rumor, a bad rumor that was going around?

So let me repeat the question. The question was about the extermination camps and wanting to know if people actually believed. There were these rumors going on about the extermination camps. Did people know about them or actually believe these rumors?

Well in the beginning, we probably didn't believe it. But later on, as I mentioned before, when the engineers of the trains

came back and were telling where the people were taken to Auschwitz, later on, we already knew what Auschwitz meant.

You knew it was there?

Right. Anybody else? There are two of you. All right. The white sweater.

I was watching CNN yesterday and they had a survivor of the Holocaust as well. And she was talking about forgiveness, and forgiveness of those who did all these crimes. And she quoted, she said forgiveness is nothing more or nothing less than an act of self-healing. And I was just wondering what have you done to get through it. Because I know you've been through a tough time.

What I have done? Just like I did now, talking to you about being tolerant, about so. Not to hate, because they hate me about hating. Hate doesn't heal. All this what happened to us was because of hate. So that's what we are trying to convey to now to you in order to make it a better world to be tolerant. How can I preach about hate at the same time I'm preaching about tolerance?

I feel the same way. And especially like there are children of the Germans now, the younger generation, how can we blame them for what their parents did? As a matter of fact, I don't know if you have time. I could tell you a story. Last year, was it I saw there was a boarding school here came to listen to me speak. And among them, first of all, they were all-- I saw that group of young men. They all looked like football players. And I was thinking, yeah, are they going to listen to elderly lady telling them, you know?

Well, as it turned out, they were very attentive. And after I finished speaking, they all came up and gave me a hug. And I mentioned to one of them, gee it's so nice to be hugged by such young men. One wise guy said to me, we miss our mothers. That's the reason. It was a boarding school. But there was a young boy standing aside, and I could see he was on the side. He didn't know what to do.

And I asked later, the teacher told me that he was an exchange student from Germany. So I asked the teacher, may I please talk to him. He told me that he has that guilt of what his parents or grandparents did. And no matter how much people tell him that it isn't his fault, he still can't get rid of it. So I said to him, in order to get rid of at least some of that guilt, try to be a good person, try to teach others like you would like to be treated. And just be a good person. I mean, that's what-- we cannot go around and carry that hatred and that. Because that doesn't serve a purpose. Yes?

We learned that-- what has life been like since the war? I mean now they talked about how you're working here and you're giving this talks which are incredible. But how did you get from 1945 to now?

Oh, it wasn't easy.

Everyone hear the question? How did you get from 1945 to the present?

Well, I don't know. It's very hard probably for you to understand, to comprehend how it feels to be left. Although I was 19 years old because the war in Poland lasted almost six years, I was 19 years old when the war ended. And normally, this is a mature person already, 19 years old. But the years I spent during the war and camp, it left me with no experience of life. And so I came out after the war all alone. Where do I go? Where do I go? What do I do?

From my extended family, only one aunt and four cousins survived. And they were in Germany in a displaced person camp. So I had a very hard time until I got adjusted. But then, you have to go on. Life goes on, no matter what happens. I got a job, as a matter of fact, I was even sending my aunt to Germany every month a package.

And eventually, I came to the United States, although I had to wait. My father had some family here. So they sent an affidavit for me. But I had to wait for the Polish visa. But being in Sweden, I was not considered a displaced person, like the people in Germany. I was considered a Polish citizen. So I had to wait for the Polish quota. That took me 5 and 1/2 years to come to the United States.

And you go on with your life. You get married. You have children. But the Holocaust follows you around like a shadow, no matter even now 60 years after. I'll give you an example. When I got married, only one surviving cousin was at my wedding from my side of the family.

When my son was born, it so happened there was Hurricane Edna at that time. My husband was with me in the hospital. But the neighbors called up that the shingles are lifting up from the roof, and he had to go home. I was in a semi-private room. The other lady had so many people-- aunts, and uncles, and grandparents, and so on that her husband didn't have room there. He came over and he was sitting with me.

Then when my son got married, the bride's family took up the entire picture. There were grandparents, sisters, brothers, nieces. Then I remember the photographer sitting on the side of the table waiting for the groom's family to come. And all it showed up was myself and my daughter. By that time, unfortunately my husband had passed away too. So that's what I've got to show you that even after so many years, the Holocaust still follows us around.

And Manya, did you talk about your experiences right away or--

No. I couldn't talk. And I don't talk about it often. But I even had to go through counseling, not so much I couldn't talk about atrocities what happened in camp, how we were treated. But when it came to speak about my family, even to this day, I have a hard time to talk about it. But about six years ago, I decided to join the museum and to speak, mainly because I realized that our number is diminishing. Secondly, it was a time that there were several deniers that were saying the Holocaust did not exist.

And I guess I don't know. You come to a point that you have to do something. So I decided to speak. And if you excuse the expression, now I don't shut up.

[LAUGHTER]

We have time for one more question.

Yes, sir?

First of all, thank you very much for speaking to us.

Thank you.

I was wondering. You mentioned earlier about when I guess the Nazis first invaded Poland, how you couldn't believe that the rest of the world would let this happen. Did that thought prevail, or did that, as you were going through all these things, did you keep thinking that you were going to be saved, or did you just-- was there no hope?

Well, that was our life in camp. We were every morning getting up with the thought, I have to survive. I'm not going to let Hitler win, you know. But on the other hand, you realized that all that suffering you're going through, all the hunger, all that thing, and you felt like I think I mentioned it before, like the entire world had forgotten about you, like nobody cared.

Yes?

When you were mistreated and all these awful things happened due to the occupation by the Nazis, were these people that mistreated the Jews only the Germans or did the Poles--

Oh, no. They had in every country that they occupied they had collaborators.

They had help?

Yeah. It wasn't just the Nazis.

And then one more question. You were not a little child when the war broke out.

I was 13 years old.

You were 13.

Right.

Do you remember at all in your family life that they spoke about what was going on in Germany with the Jews?

Yes. We spoke. As a matter of fact, we had neighbors that came from Germany. They were evicted from Germany because they had Polish citizenship. And we had neighbors. There was a lady and her daughter that came from Germany. But nobody believed it. And nobody believed that Hitler will be allowed to accomplish what he did. I mean that's what all the time they talk about it. It was unbelievable.

By the time he invaded Poland it was too late.

Well, they gave-- to appease him, they gave him part of Czechoslovakia. And but it still didn't help.

Manya, just to bring it back to this week, as you look if you watch TV, CNN and things, you hear and see the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. What goes through your mind now when you see world leaders, people from all the heads of state gather in Auschwitz, and the United Nations has this conference? What goes through your mind?

I wish they would-- people like they-- they would have spoken up before, when the things was going on. I mean now, in a way, it's OK that they do it, that they do something. That the world accepted it that it really happened, because as I say they were the deniers that they didn't. But during the war, I don't know. We felt so helpless, I mean hopeless, and-- well it is a tribute. But it's too late.

OK. Well Manya, I want to thank you very much for taking this time and for sharing with the audience with us today about your experiences. So thank you very much.

Thank you. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]