

Good afternoon, and welcome to our First Person. The 2005 First Person series has been made available by the generous support from the Louis and Doris Smith Foundation. And it's our great privilege and honor that Louis Smith is joining us today, and we want to acknowledge him and thank him for his support of the program.

[APPLAUSE]

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. 6 million were murdered. Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, and 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.

Starting with a photograph of Poland, and the other arrow, it's going to come up, it's going to point to Vilna where our first person, Tania Rozmaryn was born in 1928. Tania was born in Vilna and grew up nearby in Smorgon, a Polish town where Jews constituted more than half of the population.

This is the engagement photograph of Yaakov Marcus and Cyla Danishevski, Tania's parents. Yaakov Marcus was a successful businessman who sold farming equipment and purchased flax for export. And here is a photograph of the extended Danishevski family, Tania's mother's relatives.

Tania's pictured in this photograph with her Jewish kindergarten class in Smorgon. Tania's family took part in Smorgon's vibrant Jewish culture, attended the theater, and hosted discussions about art in their home. On September 1, 1939, German troops invaded Poland, triggering World War II. 16 days later, Soviet armies drove in from the east and occupied Smorgon.

In the second photograph, German and Soviet military officers signed the agreement by which Poland was partitioned between Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. By 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union and occupied Smorgon. Tania's family tried to escape, but were captured. Her family was forced to move into a ghetto in the Smorgon town, and then were later transported to the Kovno ghetto. We can see with the arrow.

Here in this first photograph, we see Jewish women returning to the Kovno ghetto after forced labor outside of the ghetto boundaries. They line up to be searched by German and Lithuanian guards. The second photograph shows the deportation of Jews from the Kovno ghetto.

Tania, her mother, and older sister were evacuated from Kovno to the Stutthof concentration camp, and were sent on a death march in January 1945. The arrow points to the Stutthof concentration camp. They were later liberated by the Soviet Army.

After the war, Tania became a Hebrew teacher in several Jewish displaced persons camps in Germany, and later emigrated to the United States in 1950. In this photograph, Tania joins her students in a Friday night celebration in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp. Tania is pictured on the left. And it's now my great pleasure to introduce Tania Rozmaryn.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you very much, Judy. It's a real honor to be here. And welcome to all of you.

Tania, what I was hoping that we can start is by a very short description of what your life was like in Smorgon before the war. What was the Jewish community like? What type of schools did you attend? What was your family life like?

I will be very happy with it. But if you don't mind, I would like to just to express a few words about the current situation, and why we are here, and why it's important to remember. It's 60 years after liberation. Next Wednesday, March the 23rd, will be 60 years that I was liberated.

My husband and I are invited to a ceremony to the 60th liberation commemoration in Bergen-Belsen on April the 14th, which is going to be a very, very special event. Yesterday and today in the Washington Post, we see pictures that there was a commemoration in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. They added a large, large wing to Yad Vashem which is the Israeli Holocaust Memorial. And I'm happy to say they mentioned in the article that they researched and they copied many, many, many facts, many aspects, and many programs that we have here at the Holocaust Museum.

At one point we ask a question, it's 60 years. There are so many things that happened 60 years ago. Somehow this is, of course, the Holocaust where 6 million Jews and many others were annihilated. It's an important event. There were also many, many important events, but somehow they pale to what we are talking about now.

Because we are talking about evil. Even though it's 60 years, we see that evil prevails all over. You cannot open the television, you cannot open a newspaper without seeing that evil is being perpetrated, whether it's in Rwanda, or in the Sudan, or in-- all over the world. And I was liberated by the Russians, but the Russians were supported by the United States.

And I'm always grateful to the United States Armed forces because without those who made sacrifices so many years ago, they gave their life and they fought in order to not only instill democracy, first to liberate those people. As a matter of fact, I have my friend here that came to give me moral support, Sarah Butler, and she was a member of the WAACs during World War II. She's right here.

[APPLAUSE]

So I am always, always grateful what the United States stands for, what our soldiers fight for, what they give their life for. And especially now, two years ago at this point, at this day, my husband and I were invited to Ramstein. It's an air base in Germany. It's the biggest hospital. You probably see it on television that the Iraqi wounded are being transported there.

And they took us around the camp, and the medevacs-- and we looked around, and I looked at the soldiers. And I said, look, of course, your grandparents or great grandparents deserve so much credit because they gave their lives to liberate others and to annihilate evil. But you are volunteers.

You volunteer for the cause that you believe in to liberate and to annihilate evil, and this is something that, as an introduction, I just wanted to share with you because it's important now as it was then, and maybe more important now, to remember what evil did and what evil can do. And while you are walking around the Holocaust museum, you see what evil did. And this is the lesson for us, to try to avoid oppression and evil from the world.

Now, I will go to my personal story, which I'll be very happy to share with you. And your first question was how was life before the war? Well, life before the war was very nice because my father happened to be-- he was a wealthy businessman. He had a place where the farmers used to-- they used to grow flax, and they would bring it to my father's place. And there were people sorting and shipping, and there was a rail from the railroad station.

And they would press it, and it would go to many, many countries. And he also had a business of farming equipment. So we were quite wealthy. We had a beautiful house, and my father was a wonderful father. And I must say, I had a good life.

But the life was like inside my cocoon and outside. Inside the cocoon, the Jewish community, it was a small shtetl. Like if you have heard like many, many other little shtetls, because it goes back to the 13 and 14th century.

Can I just interrupt one minute to explain the shtetl for those who don't know, it's a small village.

That's what I want to explain. In the 13th and 14th century, Eastern Europe like Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, they were peasants. And they didn't-- they were very poor, and then they realized that something is going on in Western Europe-- commerce. And people are learning professions, and they're getting wealthy, and everything is blooming.

And so they invited the Jewish people to come, and they were very welcome. And they formed these little shtetlach. A little shtetl was a little more than a village because in my little shtetl they were like 6,000 or 7,000 inhabitants, and half of them were Jewish.

So the Jewish people lived in these little shtetlach, in these little towns, and they had freedom. They could do commerce. And of course, the government was getting all the benefits. But there were ups and downs.

If it was a good king, a good ruler, he was nice to the Jewish community. If he wasn't, he decreed pogroms and killing of the Jews or chasing them out. But there were hundreds and hundreds of these little towns.

So we lived in a little town like this. And like I mentioned, inside or outside the cocoon. Inside the cocoon was the Jewish community. There was a Hebrew school for the Jewish children and all kinds of organizations from kindergarten, to nursing, homes and the Jewish hospital, and other Zionist organizations. However, on the outside of the cocoon, it was very bad because the population at that time-- and at that time they were indoctrinated by Rome, which the Pope has rescinded it since then.

And they felt that the Jewish people are, especially before Passover, that the Jewish people, in order to celebrate Passover and to bake matzos, they have to kill a non-Jewish child and to take the blood to mix with the flour. And otherwise, they cannot celebrate Passover. So what they did, sometimes they would kill their own child and throw it in front of a Jewish home. And then in the morning, all the inhabitants and the farmers from all around, they would come, and each other they would share the good news that here they found a non-Jewish child because it's close to Passover. And the Jewish people need the blood to bake the matzos, and then they started killing Jewish people.

As for myself and my sister, we lived in a beautiful house. And we would go down-- there was a brook. We would go down to play, to swim in the summer. So of course, the non-Jewish population, they would come and shower us with dirt, and rocks, and we ran away.

And winter time, the same. It would freeze over, and it was such a pleasure to go skating there. But then they attacked us and took away our skates. And how many times I remember as a little child I was petrified there were rocks coming through the windows.

So we were hated, and antisemitism was rampant. But we had no place to go, so this is where we were. And this is how we tried to make the best of it.

Until September 1, 1939, when the Soviet Union and Germany made a pact. The Soviet Union thought it was for good, but the Germans knew that they were eventually going to invade Russia. And they divided Poland into two.

The western part of Poland, where we lived, became under the Russian occupation. And, of course, the eastern part was Germany. And between the years of 1939 and '41, we were under the Russian occupation. Of course, there was no threat of genocide, but they took away my father's businesses and all the money that we had. And they sent my father to menial work every day, and they were going to send us to Siberia because my father was considered a Bourgeois.

Until the 22nd of June, 1941, we heard planes roaring. And we walked outside, and we saw the German Messerschmitts coming over the town. And they were shooting just into the street, into the people just to show that they are coming. They are rare. They are occupying.

And of course, life was never the same. In winter time, my father would take me skiing, and he would hire a farmer with a sleigh. And he would take my sister, I had a brother, and we would go on a sleigh ride, and that was all gone.

What was the reaction of the population around after the German invasion of the non-Jewish population?

OK, the German invasion, the Jewish population, of course, we saw it was bad. So my father immediately-- we packed up food, and we started running east towards the Russian border, hoping that we could beat the German machine and save ourselves in Russia. But the non-Jewish population were absolutely elated. They treated the Germans with flowers

and with applause.

And then we found out that there were-- even in our small town, there were people sent from Germany that were spying to see what was going on and to indoctrinate the population about the incoming German Nazi machine.

And how far away did you get? You were running east.

We were running east, and we only made 40, 50 miles because we were walking. And the only thing my father still had was a bicycle. And everything else was taken away. My grandfather was the only one in our town who had, I remember, it came a big Chevy blue truck, and he was the only one in town. And everybody came to look at it.

And he had this special chauffeur who took care of it, and he would drive 30 miles for gasoline because there wasn't even a gasoline station. So of course, they confiscated it all, and we were running.

And you must have seen this many times where refugees run with the backpacks, and running on the road. And then the planes would come down very low, and we would run into the fields of corn and hide until they passed over. And then we would go on.

So we were running, and we came to a small town, Lebedev. And we found there were some relatives of ours. And we said, oh, there is no point in running because the German tanks came and they took over the whole town.

So did you stay in Lebedev, or did you return?

So we stayed there for a week, And then it was my father, my mother, my older sister, and a younger brother. And my mother said to my father, you know what? The Germans are here. They are also occupied our town. There's no point in sitting here.

We'll go home. You stay here with the little boy. And my mother, my sister, and myself started walking back to our town. And we would hitch a ride with some farmers. We came to our town, we came to our house, and the house was empty.

All our Gentile neighbors, they came and they took everything out-- beds, mattresses, everything. And we were on the floor. And then my mother decided that she would go back and bring my father and my brother home because it was the same torture, the same occupation. And on the way there, she found out that the Germans have gathered all of their men in their 30s and 40s. They were 400 or 500, my father among them. And they took him out of town and they killed him.

And that was in '41. And I remember when my mother came home with my brother my devastation because I loved my father so dearly. I felt that my heart was ripped out. And we knew that everything was lost.

And then they took us in to a ghetto. And everybody had to go to work. Especially dignitaries-- rabbis and Jewish dignitaries, they would send. They had cobblestones. It was a small village, and between the cobblestones, the cracks, there was grass. They would send rabbis with knives to sit there in the middle of the street just to degrade them to pull the grass. And we were there, and every time they surrounded the ghetto, and they would take people.

In 1942, they surrounded the ghetto, and they took over 400 people they said to a labor camp. I was among them that was sent, and an older cousin of mine. And I remember my mother walking with me next to me to the train station, and we were at that time escorted not by SS, but by logistic-- there were a logistic company to build the infrastructure.

So I remember-- my mother had a pass. She could go out of the ghetto because she worked as a slave laborer to the German army. And she walked with this head of the person, we called him the chief, and she pointed to me. And she gave him gold, or I don't know exactly, she bribed him. And she begged him he should take special care of me because I was just a little girl. And of course, at that time, everybody called me kleine.

About how old were you then?

Well, I was 11 years old, 12. And we came there to [? Ziezmariiai, ?] and we came with a train. And as we came, there were trucks waiting for us. And they put us on trucks.

And as we were winding through those little streets, we saw places and the houses. The Jewish people have a mezuzah on the right side. And they were ripped off, and we knew that it was also like a shtetl. And everybody was killed there.

They brought us to a place. It was an old wooden synagogue. It was surrounded with barbed wire, and they had bunks. And they put us like sardine.

I was on the third tier. I was a young kid, so on the third tier. And then they had one for men separate.

And then the next morning, they lined us up. And they asked us, is there anyone here that you feel that you're too young, or too sick, or you cannot work? Because we're going to build a highway. Because Hitler and his henchmen, they were crazy about building the Autobahn. And 20 some people stepped forward, and they took them away. And a half an hour later, we heard machine gun fire. And we knew that they killed them right there and then.

And we went every morning, we went to build a highway. I became an expert how to build a highway. They wanted to connect Kovno, where you showed on the map, all the way to Vilna. So every day, we would proceed.

And food, they would give us a tiny, tiny piece of bread like this. And everybody had a red bowl, an enamel. If you've been to the museum, you saw it. And in the morning, they would give us a little water sort of with coffee, and without coffee, or whatever it was, and a piece of bread for the day.

And then at night, they would cook us a very special meal-- potato peels, because for the Germans, they had the kitchen where they would cook potatoes and all kinds of stuff. So they would cook the peels, and they would throw in some-- it was like poison ivy something. But when it was cooked, it was not poisonous. And they would put a little bit of flour, and that was the dinner.

And in the meantime, they brought another transport, and my older sister came. In December, the chief, and he was always-- he walked over to me. How are you, kleine? How are you, little girl? And one day he came. It was in December '42. He says, we are going back to the ghetto.

And meantime, the ghetto where my mother was, my younger brother, my grandfather, grandmother, they were transferred to another, bigger ghetto. And that was liquidated. So he says to me, we are going to visit your mother. You want to come with us? You can see your mother, and you'll come back tomorrow.

And I was afraid. He said, don't worry. We're not going to kill you. I promise you. Come with us.

So I went. It was December, and I was sitting in the back. And we got there.

He called my mother. My mother was so happy to see me. And the following morning, I had 103 fever tonsillitis. I couldn't go. So they found a girl that had assisted there. She was an orphan, and she went in my place. And that was '42 in the winter.

In the spring of '43, I was walking the streets in the ghetto, and all of a sudden I see this chief. And he comes over to me. He says, kleine, come here. I want to tell you something. Yes? He says, go home. Tell your mother to pick up because tomorrow morning I want you to be at the gate of the ghetto. I am taking you back with your mother and your grandfather, everybody, to that labor camp.

And he didn't say what. He says, you must do it. I went and I told my mother, and we packed up. And the following morning, we were waiting at the gate. And there were horses with farmers came with the wagons, and everybody put their stuff in. And they were taking us 20 miles to a little town.

And there was the train that was taking us. And we got on that-- the cart. My mother and my sister wasn't there because she was in the camp. My brother, my grandfather, and grandmother, we were all going. All of a sudden, the farmer that was taking us, he was going through his little town and his farm, and he deviated. And he goes into his farm in the courtyard.

And all his family came out with pitchforks and with axes. They were going to kill us and to take everything-- our possessions. And my mother was such a brave woman. She lived to be 95 years old. She passed away seven years ago.

She was so brave. If it wasn't for my mother, neither my sister or I would be alive today. So she jumped off the cart, and she ran into the town. And there were two Nazi policemen walking.

And if they didn't have the order to kill you, maybe they showed sometime human kindness. And my mother told him that this farmer supposed to take us to the train station, and they stopped here. And they are going to kill us. And they take everything away.

They came with my mother. They drew their guns, and they told the farmers to put everything back and to take us to the train station. They said they were going to kill them because there wasn't much love between the Germans and those primitive farmers.

So we survived again. As we came, we got into freight-- to cattle cars. And before we got to the cattle cars, the chief came over to me. He says, you know why I told you to go tell your mother to come here? Because within the next two weeks, all these little ghettos, they will be liquidated. So I felt I want-- you were once there. I wanted to save your lives.

We got into the cattle cars, and we were going for over an hour. And then they stopped in the middle of a forest. They opened the doors, but nobody was supposed to go out. And we waited, and we saw they were transactions going on. And an hour and a half later, they closed the doors, and we went on.

Now, we found out later that they wanted us killed right there and then. The place was called Ponary, where about 80,000-- over 80,000 Jews were killed in that forest. And many of them were-- most of my relatives lived in Vilna, and they were all killed there. And they wanted to take the people off the train and kill them right there.

And this chef, he saved our lives. He told them, look, I have to build a highway. I need people. So somehow, he managed to save us.

And he brought us back to that [Ziezmariiai, ?] and we stayed there until the beginning of '43. 1943, the Russians were attacking, and the counteroffensive of the Germans. And so they started liquidating all these labor camps. And actually, the chef, he saved our lives. Every morning there was a truck with people. They came in with the table, and they would say, sign up. We are taking you someplace.

And he always told my mother-- my mother kept on-- she still had something to bribe him with. He said, no, don't go. Don't go. And then one day he says, today, go out and sign up.

And we go outside, and we saw trucks. And from the trucks came out young men with uniforms, and they had white armbands with a blue Star of David. And we didn't know who they were. So they told us they are from the Kovno ghetto, and they came to take us to the Kovno ghetto.

So we signed up. They brought us to the Kovno ghetto, and they put us in-- some of us in a synagogue. They got it everything. There were mattresses, one next to the other, two mattresses for a family. And there was a movie house which they emptied, and they were very, very nice to us.

The people in Kovno, they brought us food. And they were very hospitable. We had to go to work, so they made sure, since I was a little girl, they sent me to a place to work where it was warm. They were making galoshes and all kinds of-- so it was indoors.

And we were there a few weeks. And then all of a sudden, one day a Jewish policeman came in with a list. And he said, I'm looking for a family, Marcus and [? Yablonovitch. ?] My maiden name was Marcus, and there was two sisters [? Yablonovitch. ?]

And my mother, when she says, what have I done? What is it? Why are you-- what do you want from us? And he says, don't worry. Come with me.

We have a room for you and the other family. There was an old lady with a son who had two rooms. He said, we took away one of her rooms, and we didn't know why he picked us. We were over 500 people.

Why did he pick-- we never asked for anybody. We didn't know anybody there. It was just random. We came to that house, and the lady gave us a room. And we were there, and we still-- every morning we went to work and came back at night.

Four weeks after that, we got up in the morning the ghetto was surrounded with Germans with the dogs and the guns drawn, and the gates were open. The gates were open for people to come in, but we weren't allowed to go out.

And we saw that the Germans, they fanned out in the streets. And they were collecting people. So this lady said to us-- if you saw Schindler's List, that's exactly what happened.

She said to us, I have a basement, a cellar. And let's go down to the cellar, and in the kitchen I have a trapdoor. And the trapdoor is covered with a rug. If we'll go down to the basement, and we'll close the trapdoor, we'll hold on to the straps. Nobody will know we're there.

So we went down, and we heard the Germans come to the house. And they were looking around. And they said, there are packages. Where are the people? But they left.

The following morning, we got up and we found out that they took over 5,000 people. And they took them to Auschwitz and to concentration camps in Riga in Latvia. And from the whole group of the [? Ziezmari-- ?] I had uncle, and aunts, and cousins-- just my mother, my sister, my brother, and the other family [? Yablonovitch, ?] we were saved from the whole group that came from [? Ziezmari. ?]

And we continued-- we continued to go to work until the spring of '43. Again, we saw the ghetto was surrounded, and it was-- really, we saw something bad is coming. But they told us, everybody go to work. We went to work, and we saw, again, with the dogs, the dobermans, and the clubs, and all.

And we went to work. And as we were sitting there, around noontime somebody came and said that they went into the ghetto, they surrounded every house, and they took out the young children and old people. And they took him out of the ghetto. There was a fortress-- fortress number nine, I still remember, and they killed them.

And when we came home from work, and my brother was gone. And the neighbors were telling us he was nine years old, how he was begging for his life. And he was such a good child. Whatever food we had, he always prepared for us when we came from work to have something to eat. And our dear brother was killed.

And we cried, and we cried. And the following morning, they told us nobody is going out. And I was a little girl. They said, everybody sit in your room.

And at that time, they had transferred us to a big room in sort of-- it was a big apartment house, two story. And we had a room with three or four families in one room. And we were there looking out the window, and my mother was so afraid because they came to mop up to see if they have left any children or old people behind.

And my mother put-- she took off her shoes with high heels. She let me wear them, and she put blush on my cheeks. She puffed up my hair and put lipstick, and we were waiting for them to come. Because not only I was young in age, but I was very-- I was skinny. And I was pale and small.

And they were coming in the entrance where our apartment was. And all of a sudden, they heard from another door children cry. So they left our door alone. They went into that apartment, and there was a hole, like a bunker that several parents put their children in.

And they put a-- they camouflaged it with a armoire. And they pushed away the armoire and they grabbed the children. And that was on the second floor. They grabbed the children by their legs, dragging them down the steps with the scalp cracking and their brains scattered.

And then we looked out the window. We saw that they went with their bayonets and sticking into the children that they found, and in other places. And throwing them into the truck.

And that's when we lost our brother. And we still went on until August. And then they decided that was it. In August, they decided, again, to try to eliminate as many as they could. And we survived until 1944.

In '44, in the summer, they decided to liquidate the ghetto. And they put us all-- some of the people they put in trains. Us they put in barges. And we were floating-- there was a river, Neman from Kovno all the way where I showed on the map to East Prussia where Stutthof was.

And here, we were like sardines lying there. And it was hot, and we had no food and no drinks. And I would look out because it was an open barge. I looked out, and I saw families having a picnic, and the children, and playing with the dog. And I would say to myself, oh God, what have I done? What have we done that we are deprived, and we are being annihilated and decimated?

After a week, the barges came to Stutthof. And we got out. They put us in trucks, and we didn't know where we were going. We came to a place.

Before we saw anything, we smelled. We smelled burning flesh. And when we got close to the place, we saw crematorium-- a big chimney. And there were flakes-- ash flakes coming out the chimney. And we saw-- and rows and rows of barracks.

We saw that this is the end. That's the concentration camp, and this is the crematorium. And they chased us into a very, very big place, and they took everything what we had away. And they gave us the uniforms.

And so many, many people had come in that they didn't have a chance to do tattoo, the numbers. So they just wrote numbers, and they sewed it on or they pinned on what we wore. And everybody, all night people were kissing, and hugging, and saying goodbye because we knew that this was the end. I remember I still had a picture of my father, my family. So before we got into that place, I made a little hole in the ground and I buried the picture there.

The following day, they said, well, you're going to go into a shower because we have to disinfect you. Yeah, they took us into a room, like 25 people at a time. It was a small room. I'm looking at the audience if they are not-- there's not small ladies or young men there.

So there were SS, and there was a gynological chair. And every woman had to get up, and the Nazis were probing in her private parts and to see, to find if they had anything-- any valuables hidden. And to me, I was so sheltered. It was such a shock that I was crying. I could never forget that scene.

And from there, they sent us into a bigger room. There were like 100 people. They were showerheads, and we were waiting, and waiting, and waiting. About an hour and a half later, a few sprinkles of water came from the showerheads. And then they opened a few big doors, and they said, run outside. There are piles of clothes and piles of shoes, and grab something to wear.

So we went out, and a big woman grabbed something tiny. So we exchanged, and they shipped us into barracks. And then we realized that the place that we were, because I saw the aluminum on the walls, and aluminum-- we didn't know

what it was.

Actually, what we found out that we were in the gas chamber. But they had so many people, such a backlog, that they couldn't cremate us. They couldn't gas us, so they gave us a few sprinkles of water and saying that we'll get to you. We'll find you.

And they put us in barracks on the floor. And every day, there was roll call. And we had to be five in a row. We were standing-- my mother would pile up a pile of dirt and put me on top of it so that my head should be leveled with everybody else, that they shouldn't pick me out as the little girl.

We were there like two weeks. And every day, I don't know if you have visited the museum or not. If you haven't, when you start on the fourth floor, when you get out of the elevator, there is a mural there of half-burned logs, half-burned skeletons, and the American army officers and soldiers standing there and watching.

And that's what they did. When the crematorium was full, they would just line up the people, give them a log, have them lie down. Another row, people with the log, and then sprinkle with gasoline and put them on fire. And we were there for several weeks, and then they said, everybody out. We need 3,000 or 4,000 people to work in trenches, and anti-tank trenches against the Russians.

And we had to go to the gates. And everybody had to line up five in a row and pass the gate. And in front of the gate was the head of the concentration camp and all the kapos, and he was there with his doberman, and his guns, and the clubs.

And he was looking as you passed by five. If you didn't like you, there was a pile where they threw the children and the old people there. Immediately, they were taken to the gas chamber. And here, we approached the gate-- my mother, my sister, myself, two of my mother's friends.

And as many times as I talk about it or write about it, I still cannot comprehend what happened. Because you couldn't fight for your life. You couldn't be smart enough or rich enough. It was just a matter of luck. And I say somehow, God wanted me to survive.

And here I was. We were coming to the gate, and he grabbed me, pulled me out, the head of the camp, and he threw me on the pile with the other children and the old people. And I don't know what happened to me. And I said, God wanted me to survive. And the angel took me by my hand.

And I got up, and I walked over straight without thinking of rules or consequences. And I looked at the head of the concentration camp. I'll never forget his face. He was tall, redhead, freckles. And I looked up at him, he looked down at me, and I spoke German well.

And I said, I'm not a little girl. I worked already. I'm strong. And there is my mother and my sister, and I can work. And I'm older than I look.

And as I was looking at him, I saw a flicker in his eyes. And he grabbed me by my neck, he pushed me through the gate, yelling in German, [GERMAN]. OK, little girl, run to your mother.

And when I came to the other side, you can just imagine that my mother and my sister, they all-- they saw I came from the other world. And then they sent us to labor camps. Until December '44, we were digging ditches. And every night, we slept in circular barracks that they made for horses. And every morning, we got up. There were people frozen, and they were taken out until January 1945.

January 1845, they told us, everybody out. Going back to the concentration camp. And we started marching for two weeks.

It was cold. It was freezing, and we were wearing wooden shoes. And the snow would stick to it. And at night, either in

a school or a barn that they would keep us there. And in the morning, so many people would die. They would freeze to death.

And my mother and my sister-- my mother made us spoon at night so that we shouldn't freeze. And one night, nobody died because they put us in a barn with cows. And we were warming our bodies with the cows.

Until they said they cannot take us to Stutthof because it's overwhelmed, and they even had-- in Stutthof they had boats where they filled up with people and they drown them in the Baltic Sea. And they took us to a camp. It was a mock airport, I think. But anyway, it was a very, very, very big-- like a big barn.

And we walked in, and people were-- they're have alive and half dead, and on straw. And there were lice. And every morning, people would die. And they had an open pit, and they would add every day and then sprinkle with chlorine.

And then-- and my mother said, she said, let me find a place where there is no lice. So she found it was a shower room, or a washroom. It was like a [? drawer. ?] And they were showerheads, but there was no water.

So she put me there, my sister, and then I became sick with typhus. And I lost consciousness completely. I was unconscious. I didn't know what was happening to me.

Later on, I remember once I woke up and I couldn't catch my breath. And they were birds flying. And as the birds were flying, my mother covered me with her body. And then I lost consciousness again.

And all during, I want to go back for a minute when we were marching the two weeks. We were marching on the roadsides on the right-- and it was snowing. Right and left, they were bodies of bloodstains. And whoever was left at the end was killed. And even-- I saw a house on a mountainside, and I saw the smoke coming out of the chimney. I would visualize how nice, how warm it is.

And then my mother would run wherever we passed through a village, and there was a garbage can, everybody would run to that garbage can to see if we can find something. And once she found a bone, and she gave first to my sister. My sister was very fragile.

She broke down, and she's-- as a matter of fact, as I speak now, she just couldn't get over the trauma. She is now in a hospital for two months already. She's getting shock treatment for depression. All her life since the liberation, she suffered from depression.

So she said to us, I don't want to live anymore. And she went back to the forest, stood against a tree, and she said, let him shoot me. And I don't know, a miracle happened. The German-- the last one that he was supposed to kill whoever was back, he looks at her. She was young and pretty. He said, what's the matter with you?

She says, kill me. I can't walk anymore. And so-- but your sister, your mother. Said, we're not going. Kill us all.

So he looked at her. He took out from his pocket an apple and a piece of cake. He gave it to her, and he clobbered her over her back with the butt of his rifle. He said, go on now, and she snapped out of her hysteria.

So here we are. I'm unconscious, and I don't know. I probably would not have survived. But there was a Jewish woman that worked for the Germans, and she begged them. She says, look, they were going. They were like 1,500 women. And she said, you are going to put dynamite and explode the whole thing. They didn't want to leave witnesses.

So she said, open the gate like 10 minutes before and tell them, whoever can save themselves and run, let them run. So this is-- so they listen to her, and this is where my mother and my sister dragged me and I was unconscious.

And one day, I woke up, and I touched my head-- no hair. I was in a bed, sheets, pillowcases. And I started to scream. And my mother came in, and she said, well, you've passed the crisis of typhus. And we're liberated. And that was March 23, 1945.

I think it's important to note that the day of your liberation was almost to the day the first anniversary of your brother's murder. So it was-- and now it's March again. So it's almost--

Next Wednesday, it will be 60 years, right.

We're running out of time. But I think before we open up to a couple of questions, I just want to ask you, once you came to the United States, you devoted your life to teaching in Jewish schools. And I just want to ask if just very, very briefly you can say what was the connection between what you experienced 60 years ago and your career choice once you came here.

Well, when I came here, I was 20 years old. And I didn't speak the language, and we didn't have money. I didn't have anything. And the HIAS, the Hebrew immigration organization, brought us here. They found a sponsor.

And they found a room for us, and they sent me to work. I worked in a shop \$35 a week. I was sewing patches. And still I remember, since I was a child, I always wanted to be a teacher. Whenever I played with my friends, I said, let's play school. I'll be the teacher. And here I was working in the shop, and I said, either I kill myself or I do something with me.

And I found out-- of course, I started going to evening classes. I started learning English, and I found out-- I was in New York-- that there is a teachers Institute by the Yeshiva University. If you've heard, it's a very famous university in New York.

And I made an appointment with the principal of the Teachers Institute for Women, and I came. Rabbi [PERSONAL NAME] asked me, what can I do for you? I said, I want to enroll in the teachers program.

He said, yeah, fine. Wonderful. Do you have a high school diploma? I said, no. You have a grade school diploma? I said, no. I was in the fourth grade when the war broke out.

So he started-- he said, so what do you want here? I said, just give me a chance. I want to be a teacher. I want so badly, I'll do anything.

He said, look, it's your money. It's your time. And I worked very, very, very hard. I bought books, and I sat day and night. Three years later I graduated summa cum laude. And then I immediately got a job as a teacher, but I needed six credits in psychology and education in a secular college.

So I went to Queens College, and I took the courses. And then I said, oh my God, it's wonderful. I always wanted an education. So I enrolled, and I got my teacher's degree in Queens College.

And a few years later, I was honored by Yeshiva University. They have picked me for-- I got the Teacher of the Year Award. And I went on, and then I said, well, being a teacher, it's nice and wonderful, but I want something more. So I enrolled in a master's in marriage and family counseling, and I got my degree in marriage and family counseling.

But my son always-- my oldest son always, when he introduces me, he said, this is my mother. She's a teacher. She's a marriage and family counselor. But my youngest son says, meet my mother. She's the only person I know that went from the fourth grade straight to college.

[LAUGHTER]

And have time for, I think, just about TWO or three questions. Does anybody here have a question for Tania? Anyone? That's unusual. Yes, in the back.

Did you ever find out what happened during the time that you were unconscious?

During the time that I was--

You was unconscious. What happened to you?

No, that-- we were liberated by the Russians, and then they dragged-- they took us into a certain house that the Germans lived that they threw them out. And they took us in. There were 23 people, 24 people that survived out of this 1,500 that could run.

Yes, over here.

You talked about your mother and the fact that she rolled a little mound for you.

Yes.

Could you say a little more about the power that your mother had through this whole thing?

She was absolutely, absolutely amazing. She would share whatever little food she had. At night, like I said, she would spoon with us, and in the morning she made us strip and rub the bodies with snow to start to have the proper circulation. And I heard when I was sick, she would cover her yellow star, and she would run out of the camp and go to the German there. They had their ambulances there, and get aspirin, but I never knew about it.

She was an extremely, an extremely-- all her life for others. Even after liberation, she worked until she was 75 years old. She would take the metro twice, an hour-- she worked in a place in New York near Yankee Stadium. Every day, she was-- she was such a tough lady. And we all remember her for it.

And she lived to see grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and great great grandchildren.

Did you mention the name of your latest?

Of course. Now I became a [? Gigi. ?] [LAUGHS]

And the name of the baby?

And the name of the baby is after my mother, Cyla. If there are no other questions-- yeah?

The Russians, obviously, were the first ones to take over your area in Poland, and then they were the ones to liberate you. How did you feel about the Russians when they actually came? Did you trust them?

No. They put us-- actually, they put us in a camp with barbed wire, and they promised us they will take us back home, which of course, we didn't want to go because everybody was killed and everything was taken away. So they were Jewish soldiers in the Polish army. They came one night, and they said, we'll take you out of here.

They cut the barbed wire. They took us to a train station, and it was winter. And when the train came, they want us to go to Lodz to a city in Poland. When the train came, there was-- people were hanging by their-- holding on to the steps.

They said, you're going. They pushed us all the way on top of the roof. And all night, we were-- my mother, my sister, and myself-- we were flat lying on the roof of the train and holding onto that little ventilating chimney. And it was snowing, and it was so cold. And we made it in the morning to a town in Poland where they were Jewish organizations.

If you would allow me one more minute, I know I should have maybe shortened to give an opportunity for more questions. Because when I meet my audience, especially high schools-- a few weeks ago, I was in Wootton High School. And the seniors, they have magnificent questions.

But there is one thing that I want to point out. People ask me, first of all, they ask me, how do you feel about the Germans now? And how did you survive? And many things.

But the basic thing is people say, do you still believe in God? After what happened, do you still believe, is there a God? And if people ask the question, I usually, of course, this is the most important answer to me. But I would like to give my feeling about it.

Many survivors after the war, and most of them in Europe, came from Orthodox families. They threw away everything, every shred of religion. They said, if this is it, if this is what God did to us, 6 million, we don't want nothing. We don't want a thing to do with Judaism, and many of them converted.

And many of them didn't tell their children that they are Jewish, nothing. They want nothing to do with Judaism. And I was tempted. I said to myself, even when I came to the United States, what happened?

And then I said to myself, no. It was not God that killed six million and others. These are evil people that did it.

Because we are very lucky that God invested us with freedom of choice. We can decide whether we want to kill, or whether we want to help, or we want to heal, or we want to support. So I said, don't blame God. God gave us the choice. And the people that were killed, the millions, they were killed by the other-- by the Nazis and other people.

So I exonerate God. And then to remain religious, so it was easy for me. It was easy for me. I decided, of course, I have to be religious and bring up my children. I know it's in the United States and all over it's a democracy, and people intermarry, and I've seen many good marriages. And it's fine. I condone it.

But when I visualize my little kids, they'll grow up, and then they'll intermarry. And then the third generation will not even know-- they won't remember that they're Jewish, or the great grandmother was a Holocaust survivor. I said, as a Holocaust survivor, I don't know how I would feel if I would be born here and raised here. As a Holocaust survivor, I said, I cannot let it happen.

Because if I will do it, eventually the family, the branch of my family will be annihilated. And I will give Hitler posthumously a gift because he wanted to annihilate the Jews and uproot them forever. And if I will do it, I will give him a gift.

And then I decided, no. I said, no, I will lead the religious life. I will send my children to religious schools. And in turn, my grandchildren are also educated in the Jewish religion.

Thank you very, very much

Thank you very much for coming.

[APPLAUSE]

And want to thank everyone for coming. One thing I neglected to say earlier, anyone who has a past that's stamped for a time that was during this presentation, it will be honored now. There's no problem. You can just use the pass for whatever time and proceed to the permanent exhibit. And thank you for coming.