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Good afternoon, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson, and I am the host of the museum's public program, First Person. This is our sixth season of First Person, and our first person today is Mrs. Manya Friedman, whom we shall meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand experiences associated with the Holocaust. Each first person guest presently serves as a volunteer here in the museum. Each Wednesday through August 24, we will present a new First Person guest. The museum's website at www.ushmm.org-- that's www.ushmm.org-- provides a listing of upcoming First Person guests.

This 2005 season of first person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Doris Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for sponsoring this year's program. Manya Friedman will share her first person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 40 minutes. We will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask Manya some questions.

Before you are introduced to her, I have a couple of requests for you. First, if possible, please stay seated throughout the one-hour program. That will minimize any disruptions while Manya is speaking.

And second, if you have a question during the question and answer period, and we sure hope that you will, please make the question as brief as you can. I will repeat the question, and then Manya will respond to it. That way we ensure that everybody in the room, including Manya, hears the question. I'd also like to let those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition today know that they are good for the balance of the afternoon. So no need to fear that you will miss it if you stay till the end of the program.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. 6 million were murdered. Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

What you are about to hear from Manya Friedman is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Manya's introduction. Her experience is one among many different experiences from the Holocaust. We cannot say that it is typical or atypical. We can only say that it is an experience unique to this one person.

Manya Moszkowicz was born in Chmielnik, Poland in 1925. We begin with a map of Europe in 1933 with the arrow showing Poland. Her father owned a furniture shop, and her mother took care of the home. Manya had two younger brothers, David and Mordechai, and was surrounded by many close relatives.

In 1938, Manya's family moved to Sosnowiec. The arrow shows its location in Poland. Sosnowiec was a larger city located near the German border. There, she had her first experience with antisemitism. Signs were posted urging Polish citizens to boycott Jewish businesses.

When German troops invaded Poland in 1939, Sosnowiec was occupied. Under German occupation, Manya's parents experienced persecution, forced labor, and were arrested for curfew violation. In 1941, Manya was forced to work for a German company that produced military uniforms. In March of 1943, she was taken to the Gogolin transit camp, and from there, to the Gleiwitz forced labor camp.

Manya never saw her family again. They were deported to Auschwitz. The arrow points to the location of Auschwitz in occupied Poland.

In January 1945, as the Soviet army approached, Manya and other prisoners were evacuated on a death march. They were transported to the Ravensbruck concentration camp identified here in this map of major Nazi camps in 1943 and 1944. Later, Manya was taken to the Rechlin camp where she was rescued by the Swedish Red Cross in April 1945.

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In 1950, Manya emigrated from Sweden to the United States. Today, Manya resides in the Washington, DC area. She has two children, a son and a daughter, and a 17-year-old grandson, Joey.

Manya volunteers here at the museum with visitor services and as a translator. Manya also speaks frequently on behalf of the museum about her experiences during the Holocaust at various locations across this country, and certainly here in the local community, including to children's groups.

She spoke at an event last year at the Newseum about genocide sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars that aired on the television station C-Span. And in January of this year, Manya spoke at a special event here at the museum on genocide in Sudan. After today's program, the museum is offering for sale its publication, Echoes of Memory, which is a collection of writings by survivors associated with this museum. Manya is a contributor to this outstanding book. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mrs. Manya Friedman.

[APPLAUSE]

Manya, thank you so much for joining us.

Well, I want to thank you for the introduction, and I want to thank you all for coming to visit the museum and to learn about the Holocaust. You see, to us survivors, the museum is not just a museum and a learning center. To us, it's a memorial to the millions that perished. And when we speak about millions, we think of a number with a lot of zeros, but please think that those millions consisted of individuals-- fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, husbands, wife, and more than a million children.

They all were murdered not because of what they have done, but because of who they were. Sorry, I got carried away.

No, no. Thank you very much, Manya, for that. Manya, you spent most of your early years in Chmielnik where you were born, but moved to Sosnowiec in 1938, the year before the German invasion. Perhaps we could begin today with you telling us about your early years, what life was like for you and your family and your community before the Germans came.

Well, I was 13 years old when Germany invaded Poland. But I did have a life before that, though it was a short one. I was born in central Poland in a small town. I lived there with my parents, and two younger brothers, and grandparents, and host of relatives. Even people that were not related to me treated me somehow like a relative because it was a small town. Everybody knew everybody.

I think I led a normal life. I attended public school in the morning and Hebrew school in the afternoon. Although sometimes I argued with my father because my friends were outside playing and I had to go to Hebrew school. My excuse was, I'm not going to marry a rabbi anyway.

But somehow, he persisted, and life continued, as Mr Benson mentioned, until 1938, one year before the war started. For some reason, I don't know if it was business or maybe cultural reason, my parents decided to move to a large city which happened to be not far from the German border.

Manya, tell us a little bit about your siblings.

Well they were two young kids. At that time when the war started, Jewish children no longer were allowed to go to school. For some of you students here when there's a snow day or day off from school, you probably very happy about it. But it is different when you are told that you are not allowed to go to school.

And they were younger than I. My brother was only 12 years old when he was already employed by the Germans. And the younger one was constantly on the lookout during the war, I mean, when they were giving something. He was always a mile ahead in line. He was a big organizer.

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You see, during the war, to get something we used to say to organize it. And of course, often our parents were worried because he sometimes left the house when the curfew was still on. But he usually managed to bring something home. He was a streetwise kid, the youngest one. Very different than the rest of us.

We may return to that. What is your first remembered experience with antisemitism?

Well, as I say, when I lived in that small town in central Poland, I think it was predominantly was Jewish. I didn't encounter any antisemitism. Like I went to school with kids that came from the farms. I remember I used to bring my sweet rolls for lunch, and they brought their black bread with this fresh made butter. And we gladly exchange our lunches because we preferred the black bread, and the farm kids preferred-- that was the attitude.

I remember like for Christmas, my father had a friend. He used to be invited for Christmas. So I didn't feel in the small town any antisemitism.

But when we moved to the large city, there were signs in front of the Jewish establishment by Poles, and they walk in front of the Jewish establishment not to buy from the Jewish establishment-- not to support the Jewish establishment.

Manya, the Germans invaded Poland on a Friday in September 1939. By Monday, your town had been occupied. Tell us--

The thing was, Friday we heard that Germany entered Poland. It was unbelievable that our brave army, you know, what we learned in school, we were very patriotic about it, that defended during the years stood up for so many enemies. And here, they invaded Poland, and that evening, my parents and their friends got together to decide what to do.

They believed that Hitler certainly will be stopped and not allowed to continue. After all, the mighty powers like England, France, Russia, and the United States will stop them. So they decided since it was a small town and in central Poland that they'll send the wives and the children back to that small town. On the other hand, they figured that a small town, nobody will bother us there.

Well, the next morning-- but the men decided to stay back because after all, how can you leave and leave everything behind like shops or businesses? So the next morning, we got up, got dressed in our best clothing, and in a way, I must say that we children were very excited about going back to our hometown because we'll meet our friends and our relatives.

So we got to the railroad station. The place was mobbed, everybody trying to get out. We were worried that we'll 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 the railroad tracks in front of us were bombed. So you can imagine the commotion.

We all got off the train, being afraid that they may bomb the train. And in the meantime, we had provisions with us. We didn't know what to do. Mother was afraid to leave it in the street because mother decided since it's only five miles from home that we should walk back.

So finally, somebody took those things from us, and we started walking back. As I mentioned, we wore our best clothing and our new shoes. By the time we got home, our feet were blistered, but we were happy to be back home together with father and in our own beds.

And at the time, we thought that's the worst thing that could ever happen to us. Well, little did we realize what lay ahead. Because on Friday, the Nazi Germans invaded Poland, and Monday they were already in our city.

At first, some shots were heard, and the Germans took out everybody from that house and shot everybody-- even the people that were hiding in a bunker. The same thing was repeated on a neighboring street. And in the afternoon, they ordered everybody to step out from their houses. They selected the Jewish men and marched them to the City Hall.

They put them in an airless windowless basement without food or water. Later, they demanded that the rabbi should step

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

So you can't imagine the expression on their faces. And in the meantime, the Germans were filming them and making fun of them, asking them to sing. The reason I know all this because my father happened to be among them. In the morning, they marched them to one of the factories in the area. We brought bread and stuff for them, but we couldn't give it to them because there was a tall wall around that building. We just threw it over that wall.

And they started a selection. They selected people for work. They selected the businessmen and put them in jail. Later, they got out for big bribes, some of them. The others were executed.

Some they let out. They also selected people to be in the Jewish committee. And it was already getting dark, evening. Some of us were still standing at the gate and waiting for our dear ones to come out. We had no idea what happened, but we had to leave.

So I remember walking behind my mother like you walk at a funeral because we had no idea what happened to father. Then late in the evening, he did come home. It seems they detained some people to build latrines, but of course, we had no idea what happened. And from that day on, there was not a peaceful moment. Any insignificant thing meant life or death.

I'll give you an example. Next to us happened to be a new building. The Jews had to move out, and the Germans moved in. Once one of them stopped father that he needs flower boxes for his balcony, and about two hours later he came in with his superintendent from that building demanding that the flower boxes were not ready. He was drunk and with his gun drawn. I remember how he was chasing around father the kitchen table, and each one of us in a different corner just waiting for that gun to go off. It was a miracle that father talked him out and promised him that the boxes will be made later.

And almost every day was a miracle. If you got up in the morning in your own bed, it was almost a miracle. Because you got outside and you heard that your neighbors were taken during the night.

And after then, soon curfew was imposed. My mother with a neighbor from across the street happened to be standing in front of the house and just saying goodbye. Two soldiers went by, and arrested them, and put them in jail for the night. Of course, we again had no idea what happened to them if we'll ever see them again.

Orders went out. Jews had to wear white armbands. And there was a streetcar assigned just for Jews which ran on limited hours. Our city consisted of two parts, the new city and the old city. Father happened to get a job in that old city, and sometimes he was detained at work and could not make that streetcar that was for Jews. So at great risk, he removed that white armband and got on the streetcar that was for the others-- for the--

But you can imagine how he felt being afraid that somebody might recognize him, and how we felt every night sitting and waiting until everybody from the family is home. It's really hard to describe this. No matter how many books have been written and how many historians have talked about it, you cannot really describe it, the feeling-- that uncertainty every night.

Orders went out that the Jews had to move out from the main street. They could only take with them whatever they could carry. The Germans came in to inventory, and you had to leave everything behind. Later, orders went out that Jews were not even allowed to walk on those streets. Orders went out that Jews had to turn in all their valuables, even bicycles and radios, and constantly were some restrictions.

Jews could not buy from stores run by non-Jews, and the same thing was the other way. The Jewish businesses were taken over either by Germans or Poles that they assign to it, and the owners of the businesses worked there just as employees. There were only a few stores assigned where Jews could buy their provisions. There were ration cards given.

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And Jews were not allowed to have in the house anything else but what was allowed on those ration cards. Sometimes, women would be stopped in the street and their handbags inspected if they had something that was not on the ration cards. And I don't know. Our entire life depended on the attitude of the soldiers, either SS men or Gestapo, or their degree of drunkenness.

Even if they arrested somebody, they would kick you and hit you by the time they took you to jail that by the time you got there, you were already at half alive anyway. It's almost impossible to describe the situation. I'm sorry I keep going without letting you ask me a question.

I'm just going to ask a few here and there. You told me about you going into a building that hadn't been finished and how significant that was.

Well, that actually was with my little brother. He was roaming-- next to us was an unfinished building. They interrupted the construction when the war started. And my little brother would roam around that building looking for a place to hide. He even convinced father that we could make a place to hide.

But of course, he didn't realize that to survive, you need more than just a hiding place. That you need supplies to survive. That was my little brother. He always--

And even I myself, wherever we went, we always look for some place, gee, maybe we could hide there. We were all kids still-- very naive.

Eventually, Manya, of course, then you're forced to move into the ghetto. Can you tell us about that?

Well actually, the ghetto was much later in our city. But before that, like about-- they started sending away if you don't mind, you know.

No, please.

They started sending away young people for deportation. As a matter of fact, you see, I mentioned before, they formed a Jewish committee. But the Jewish committee did not work for the Jews. They did the dirty work for the Germans. The Germans gave out the orders, and the Jewish committee had to execute them.

They started at first deporting young people. And as a matter of fact, the Jewish committee sometimes encouraged young people to volunteer because they said it's only going to be for six weeks and they'll come back. And this way, they can save the rest of the population. But of course, like everything else with the Germans, it was a lie.

I didn't mention that shortly after they took over, the synagogue was burned down. And the neighbors were not allowed to go out to extinguish the fire. At first, we thought that it was just a coincidence, but then we found out that the synagogues in the neighboring towns were also burned down. With the Germans, nothing was a coincidence. Everything was systematically and methodically executed.

I'm moving you forward only just because I know you have so much to tell us and the limited time we have.

OK.

So tell us about--

What do you want me?

Tell us--

Yeah, by the end of 1940, about half of our population-- our city had 28,000 Jews. Beside it, they brought in the Jews

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from the small towns. This way was easier for the Germans to control them. So by end of 1940, about half of the Jewish population was already deported. Jews started to think of ways that they could be useful to the Germans and be able to stay back home. They suggested that we make military uniforms, boots, and so on.

But previous to that, the Jews, all the orders went out. You see, being interrupted with other questions, I lost my thoughts sometimes. So you have to forgive me.

Jews had to wear a yellow star. The white band could be removed. The yellow star had to be permanently sewed on. And at first, when we suggested about the shops, the Germans refused it. They didn't want to hear about it.

But later, they realized that probably they could get big bribes. Or if they'll be needed here, they won't be sent to on the front, so they decided. So in 1941 in March, the first shops were opened. I happened to get employment in one of those shops, but my parents had to give a sewing machine for me to be accepted.

To tell you the truth, I was not much of a seamstress. But I was lucky. I sat between two ladies that were professional seamstresses. And like with the Germans, with everything else, it had to be a quota. We had to make so many pieces. There was a quota how many people to send away. And if they didn't make the quota, they would take people from the hospital or the children from the orphanages to make up that number.

Well, those two ladies, for them to make the quota was not a big deal. So they helped me to make the quota. I hate to say eventually, I became proficient enough that I could do it.

The pay in those shops were minimal. You could not survive on it. As a matter of fact, some of the girls fainted at work from lack of nourishment. The only thing was we got the employment card. The Germans call it a [GERMAN] card. We called it a way to life. Because right in the beginning when they caught us on the street, and you could provide that employment card, they would let you go. But that was just in the beginning.

We had an elderly gentleman-- a German gentleman-- that we called him grandpa. Because he was so nice to us and always telling us how lucky that we are employed, and we won't be sent away. Unfortunately, in March 1943, as our shift was about to leave and the other shift was ready to come up, the SS surrounded the building and we were all taken for deportation. Grandpa was not around at that time.

And we were taken to a point where they kept us. My parents and my two brothers were still at home. They came-- they brought me a suitcase with my personal belongings, but we could not communicate because there was so much commotion. We were on the second floor, everybody trying to talk.

But I so vividly remember my parents standing there, and I think right in front of me they aged maybe 20 years. And I assume that each one of us had the same thought, will we ever see each other again? And as it turned out, that was the last time I saw my parents and my two brothers.

From there, we were taken to a temporary camp where the buyers came to look us over and select us. And then we were taken to-- it happened to be a brand new camp which actually was run by private Germans. We were producing soot, carbon, which the Germans desperately needed because that was used to make rubber. And from the rubber, they made tires on which the military ran.

At the beginning, it wasn't too bad because it was a brand new camp. Everything was nice and clean. But soon, the SS men took us over. We became a subcamp of Auschwitz.

We had to go through showers. Our heads were shaved. We had to go through inspection, every part of our body, we're not hiding something. And naked in front of a bunch of SS men, we had to walk by to have our arms tattooed. To this day, I cannot forget that feeling.

Don't forget that that was so many years ago. A young girl was not like now young girls that age are a more sophisticated young lady. We were like children. I don't think I even got undressed to take a shower in front of my

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mother. And here naked we had to go in front of the Nazis to have our arms tattooed. And of course, from that day on, we were not called by our names, but by our numbers. But believe me, they took away much more than our numbers-- than our names.

Well, we continued working in that camp. We got the striped dresses, and wooden shoes, and a pair of underwear. If sometimes by chance you rinsed out your underwear the night before, it often was still damp in the morning. But you still had to wear it. And every morning, we had to stand, which you call a roll call, we called appell.

And for some reason, they could never get the numbers right. They kept counting over and over. Sometimes girls fainted from exhaustion. They had to be supported.

And that continued till January 1945. Is there something you want ask me?

No, no, no, no, no. I'm listening intently here.

Well, in 1945, in January 1945, the Russians were coming closer. And they decided to evacuate us. I was working that time on the night shift. I came home in the morning, and there was a commotion in camp. We are being evacuated. Nobody knew where to or what or so.

They gave us each a blanket and some provisions, but I had to make a very important decision. My best friend was in the infirmary, and I had to decide, should I leave her there or take her with me? At first, I thought maybe since the Russians are coming she might be liberated soon, but there was a rumor in camp that they were going to burn down the camp not to leave any trace.

So I convinced another girl, and between the two of us we took her because she could not walk on her own strength. Of course, we had to give up some of the provisions we had. We went to the railroad station, but the tracks were 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 saw the permanent exhibit, but they have here a car which they transported people to Auschwitz or other destinations. We were not put in a car like this. We were put in an open car, the kind that you transport coal. And that was in the middle of January.

And no matter where we went, the tracks were bombed. We kept going back, and forth, and back, and forth. Later on, we found out that our destination was northwest from where we were. But we wound up in Czechoslovakia. And if you know geography, Czechoslovakia is to the south.

The people were nice, some of them. They came to the railroad station, brought bread and water. But the guards would not let them give it to us. They were even shooting at them. Some went where there was an overpass to throw down some bread to us.

And we were going back and forth in those trains. The snow that fell on our blanket served to quench our thirst. At one of the-- yes, I had to take my friend in a corner of the car with my hands holding onto the rails, and with my back trying to push away the people so she won't be squashed.

We kept going back and forth in those cars. At one of the stations in our next car happened to be the nurse from our camp. She climbed up on that railing with her tin cup and begged one of the guards if she could have some water because somebody fainted. Instead, he pulled out his gun and shot her.

She fell down between the two cars. And as the cars were going back and forth, we could see her there not knowing if she was still alive or dead. And we kept traveling like this for about 10 days.

The last leg of that trip I can't even recall. I know that at night we wound up in Ravensbruck. Only some of us they put in the barracks because it was night. The rest of us to put in barracks they would have to put on the lights. So they put us in the showers. And knowing what showers meant, you can imagine how we felt.

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I remember sitting with my friend, and holding on to each other, and saying goodbye. That that will probably be the end. Luckily, we survived the night. At daybreak, we saw the lights coming through the shade. And we realized that we survived the night. Then they put us in barracks.

As I mentioned before, Ravensbruck was like hell. There were so many-- I think there were more than 20 different nationalities. It was so crowded. It was-- the sanitary conditions, undescribable.

I remember sleeping on a cot. We were sleeping on some of the cots, head and-- you know. And if you had something, you put it under your head. And in the morning, it disappeared.

I remember getting up in the morning at dawn because we were awakened every day, and in the center was a fountain with dripping water. All you could do is reach out your hand to catch a few drops of water to apply it to your face to wake up, and then run to the latrine, and stay in line again, and then run to get some of those that brew which they called coffee, but sometimes it tasted like the soup from the night before. And in the meantime, you stepped on corpses-- people that expired during the night.

One thing I vividly remember from Ravensbruck, Ravensbruck had a crematorium, but at that time I think they only were burning corpses. And as we were standing in line, there were wheeling by carts with corpses. Only the skin was holding those bones together. Here arms would fall off, or a leg sometimes. A corpse would fall off or two. They just picked it up and threw it on top of the heap.

And I said to myself, no, I'm not going to wind up like that. Because many times in camp, you gave up. You just didn't care how it will end. You just wanted it to end. And that's what it was very important in camp to have a friend because whenever you gave up, the friend would support you and tell, we have to survive. We have to live through this.

So this cart with the corpses doesn't get out of my mind. That's when I said, no, I'm not going to wind up like this. From there, I wasn't there long. Maybe a couple of months. They sent us to a smaller camp, which was part of Ravensbruck.

Over there, the conditions, again, sanitary conditions were absolutely unbelievable. We spent most of our free time trying to eradicate the lice which we were unsuccessful. Well, one day while standing in the morning to be counted, a kapo and a German soldier walked up to the line and selected about a dozen or so girls to step forward. I happened to be among them.

For a second or so, I looked around. Tried to figure out why me? How am I different from the others? Where to? Because one thing was certain, a selection in camp never meant a better lot.

Well, they marched us to the gate. Outside was standing a white truck-- covered truck. And there were kapos and soldiers mingling. They motioned to us to climb up on the truck. Although the tailgate was down, but we were not capable even climbing up. And all of a sudden, one of the kapos brought a crate for us to step on in order to get into the truck.

We thought we are hallucinating. We never expected a gesture like this from a kapo, a German overseer. Well anyway, we got in the truck. They gave us packages-- care packages. I think they were provided by the Canadian government.

We ripped those packages open. It was food. We didn't care what it was. It was powdered milk, and cocoa, and sardines, and crackers. And we ate it all at once together, not even knowing what we ate. Not even caring if that was our last meal. It was food.

Some girls got sick because our stomach not used to such food. And we kept going in the truck, not knowing where to, what the future will be, if there will be a future. And we didn't even talk to each other. I guess each one of us was preoccupied with our own thoughts.

And we landed in Denmark. Although Denmark was still under German occupation, the people were very nice. They

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provided a place for us to rest and food. And from there, we went to Sweden.

There was-- you see, that white truck was from the Swedish Red Cross. This is a not very well known story because this happened while the war was still going on. There was a Swedish count, Folke Bernadotte, who was in charge of the Swedish Red Cross. And he was negotiating with Himmler, the head of the Gestapo, the release of Norwegian and Danish POWs.

But that was already the end of April, 1945, and Himmler realized that Germany had lost the war. So Bernadotte for some reason managed to convince him to release some prisoners from the Ravensbruck camps-- prisoners of Polish descent. Of course, the word Jewish was never mentioned. And that's how I managed to get to Sweden.

Of course, in Sweden, there was a big reception when we arrived. There were clergymen, rabbis, and priests, and I don't know if there was an orchestra or it was a band playing. And there were so many people-- dignitaries greeting us. But somehow, I had the feeling that I'm not there. I had a feeling that I'm standing aside and just watching all this, that I wasn't involved because we just couldn't comprehend that we're really free.

By the way, the gesture of the kapo that provided the crate for us was because she wanted to show the personnel from the Swedish Red Cross that they treated us so humanely. Well, they put us up in a school. Each one got a mattress. But when you woke up at night, there was always somebody at the window looking out to see-- to make sure that we're not in camp anymore.

A few days later, the students came running up yelling, and the war was over. And we jumped out. It was the middle of the night. We were wearing just underwear. We didn't have any pajamas or gowns, but we didn't care.

We hugged and kissed and jumped. The war's over. And later, of course, that night nobody slept. There was so much commotion. And everybody was blowing their horns on the street.

And later, lists appeared during the Jewish organizations and the Red Cross of people that survived and people that are looking for people. And since I had survived and my parents were still very young, of course, I hoped that some of them survived. But as it turned out, the war was over, and I was left all alone.

Do I still have time?

A couple more minutes. Then we're going to turn to the audience for some questions.

OK. Can I say something?

Yes, absolutely.

Well, some of you may wonder why we do this. Because every time we speak, no matter how many times we speak about the Holocaust, it's almost like reliving those 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, when you go through the museum here, to show you what hate, discrimination, prejudice, and disregard for human lives can do.

After all, the Holocaust didn't happen in the dark ages committed by uncivilized people. It happened in the 20th century committed by the most cultural nation in Europe. Our hope is when you go through the Holocaust, you'll make some commitment to try to prevent such atrocity to happen again, although there are so many atrocities still going on.

We speak often to young people. We try to teach them to be tolerant. And the same thing we can say to you parents, teach your children to be tolerant. Because children are not born to hate.

Don't judge people by the color of their skin, or the shape of their nose, or the ethnic background, or even their religious belief. Try to be tolerant, and maybe we can make this country even better than it is. God bless you, and thank you for listening.

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[APPLAUSE]

We'll turn it on for some questions. After you've had a chance to ask a few questions of Manya, then Manya will also have some brief concluding remarks to make at the end of the program. Before I turn to you, I'm going to ask one or two questions.

And Manya, I don't know if you remember this or not, but at one point you told me that when you were in the camps that, in fact, there were many decisions that you had to make in light of the notion that maybe all decision making was taken away from you. Do you remember what you told me about that?

I don't remember, but the decisions we had to make in camp, most decisions were made for us. Decisions we had to make when you got that piece of portion of bread to decide, should I eat it now, or maybe save it for later? Or a decision like when it came to the soup, should I try to get ahead in line, make sure I get a bowl of that watery soup, or maybe be lucky enough if I wait for later and be lucky to get a piece of potato or a piece of turnip. But sometimes, your luck ran out because they ran out of soup.

Another decision which was almost undescribable. When I was laying next to my friend, she was burning up with fever. And I had to decide, should I leave her like this, or should I take her to the infirmary? Because if I take her to the infirmary, the doctor will have to report it. And they might send her away. And to leave her like this, she might die. And that was-- it's undescribable for a young girl to have to make a decision like this.

That was it. I was very struck when you said that to me, the gravity of the decisions that you had to make on a daily basis in many cases along those lines. Let's turn to our audience.

And if you could make your question brief, I will repeat it so that Manya hears it as well as everybody in the room, and then Manya will answer your question. So who would like to start us off? Yes ma'am, over here.

Manya, what has your relationship to God been through your experience?

The question is, what has been your relationship to God through your experiences?

I had big discussions with God. I'm telling-- but it was only one sided. [LAUGHTER] When they were taking-- especially when you SAW taking babies, pulling them out from the mother's arms and throwing them on a heap, and why? Because sometimes we say the grown ups suffer because they have sinned. But what have those children done?

So there were discussions like this. But of course, after the war we survived. No matter what, we still believe in God. Whenever we are in trouble, we always turn to God. God, please God, help me.

OK. Ma'am, over here.

How long were you in Sweden, and where did you go from there?

The question is, how long were you in Sweden, and where did you go from there?

Well, being in Sweden, I was not-- you see, people that remained in Germany were considered displaced persons. And they had priority about coming to the United States. Being in Sweden, I was considered a Polish citizen, and I had to wait for the Polish quota. It took me 5 and 1/2 years to come to the United States-- to get a visa to the United States.

So it would be 1950 before you arrived?

In 1950, I arrived in the United States.

OK. Back there.

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What happened to the friend?

Oh, thank you.

Yeah, the question is, what happened to your friend?

I was so anxious to answer it even before you repeated it because that question is always-- and I sometimes-- I make a point to tell at the end that my friend survived. Because at every meeting that question comes up.

She survived. She lives in Israel. I have visited her six times. She was here once, and every time I want to make sure that I'm right, I'll call her up and we go through.

But besides this, there is a couple here that works at the museum that volunteers that were together with me in camp, too. And I also have a friend in New York that was in-- we were in the same camp.

The friend in Israel is Lola?

Lola, yeah.

Tell us what you gave to Lola as you left for Sweden, if I remember correctly. You gave her something you considered very precious to you. Your pajama top, as I remember? Part of your pajama--

Oh, well, I had a top, a pajama top. That was a big deal in camp, you know. When they were taking me, I gave it to her. But I didn't want her to know that they were sending me away because at that time I didn't know that I'm going to Sweden. I thought we are going-- that is going to be the end of us.

OK. Yes, sir.

We've heard that you were married and had your own family. How difficult was it to adjust to a normal family life after the war's experience?

The question, Manya, is, how difficult was it for you to adjust to normal family life after what you experienced when you became-- when you got married and raised a family?

Well, as parents, we are different. Very protective. We had to know every minute, every second where our children were. We didn't let them go out.

We didn't let them waste anything. But as far as getting married, you see, my husband was also a survivor. So at least we had a lot in common. He lost his family, too.

Can you tell us a little bit about how you met him, then?

Oh no, I met him here in the United States. But our families knew-- his aunt was a very good friend of my mother's, you know. And she said-- when we met, she said, if things work out, remember I introduced you. But if not, don't blame me.

[LAUGHTER]

Jill.

Manya, I've been privileged to know what volunteering at the museum has meant to you. Is there anything that you'd be willing to share with the people here about what that's meant, and especially about speaking, what happened before you came to the museum.

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Well, I actually didn't start to speak till about 6, 7 years ago. Not that I couldn't talk about the atrocities that went out in camp. I just-- to this day, I just couldn't talk when it came to talk about my family. Because you can't describe that feeling after the war when everybody was so excited it was over and all that, and you're left all alone not knowing what to do.

Although I was 19 years-- the war lasted almost six years. I was 19 years old. Considering a mature person. But I just didn't know where to go, where to turn, what to do.

It so happened my father had a sister in the United States. She was the oldest one, and my father was the youngest. She used to take care of him. And she used to write such lovely letters. So I figured that maybe I find here some solace after the war coming here. Unfortunately, in those five years as I was waiting for the visa, she passed away.

And I really couldn't talk. Many times, when they first opened the museum, I used to get so many company visitors from all over. Many times, I couldn't even go up and go through those-- watch those pictures up there. I even took a course to be a guide, but I still cannot remove myself from those pictures up here.

But lately, I started talking. You see, I started actually talking, I realized, as I mentioned, that our number is diminishing. The other thing was when I heard that people deny that the Holocaust existed, and that's what really makes me speak up. And if you excuse the expression, I didn't talk, and now I don't shut up.

[LAUGHTER]

OK. Yes, sir?

What was the last memory that you remember of your parents?

Question is, what is the last memory you have of your parents?

Well, just standing there when they came to the point where they took us for deportation. That's how I see them. That scene is etched into my mind-- my parents standing there, and my brothers-- one of the brothers trying to climb up on the fence to talk to me. I think I had at that time like, I don't remember, 20 zlotys or $20 sewn on in one of the coats. And he was trying to show it to me that it is sewn on the little-- the little brother that was such a streetwise, you know.

But that's the picture I see of my parents. Of course, I had memories from-- because I wrote in one of those books. I think in the books here at the end, I wrote because my parents died in Auschwitz, and I wrote, you see, my parents married because they were in love.

Although they had many obstacles, too, because they came from different backgrounds. And this I remember from home about my parents. But you ask about the last picture. The last pictures what I remember standing there and saying goodbye.

We have time for one more question if there's another one. Right here in the front row.

Have you been able to forgive them? And if you have, how have you been able to do it?

The question is, have you been able to forgive them? And how have you been able to do that?

Ma'am, living with hate and this, it doesn't ease your pain. Can I-- is it just answered with two words? I mean, you have to let go. I don't forgive-- I'm speaking of this, telling the story about this. I'm telling about them what they did to us. But still, we're trying to teach people about tolerance and about this. You can't go around and hate. That doesn't help.

Manya, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to be with us and to be our first person. Before I turn back to Manya to conclude today's program, I want to let that we do have a First Person every Wednesday. Our next one, which is next Wednesday, March 30, at 1:00 we will have as our first person Mr. Fritz Gluckstein. Mr. Gluckstein, who is from

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Germany, survived the Holocaust by managing to stay in Berlin throughout the war despite several arrests and other close calls. So we hope you can come back next week or any Wednesday until August 24.

It's our tradition at First Person that our first person has the last word. And with that, I'm going to turn back to Manya for her to offer us any final thoughts that she may wish to share with us. I will also say that when she's finished, she will leave the stage to go out through those doors there to be able to sign books if any of you are interested in purchasing a copy of Echoes of Memory, which among the writers in there, Manya is one of the contributors. Manya?

Well, I see quite a few young people here. May I speak to them? Because you may not realize it. You are the future of this country. Some of you may even be president.

So don't take things for granted. Do your best to make this country even better because we live in the best country in the world, even with all its shortcomings. So do your best and don't get divert by things like joining groups that promote.

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