

Good afternoon. My name is Tim Kaiser, and I'd like to welcome you to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's First Person program. This is a weekly program where we have a wonderful opportunity to listen to someone who survived the Holocaust and hear about their experiences. It's a weekly program at 1:00, and if you are around in future weeks, we also invite you to return for that, as well.

The 2005 season of First Person was made possible through generous support by the Louis and Doris Smith foundation, and we're privileged today to have Mr Louis Smith with us. I would like to acknowledge him at this time.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

The First Person program lasts about one hour, and we would ask that while you're here to stay here for the whole hour. Even if you have passes for the permanent exhibit that say 1:30 or 1:45, they are good after the time. So they're good after 2:00. And it becomes disruptive if people get up and leave, and we have a full house today. So we're asking that out of respect for the conversation that's going on that you do remain here for that time period.

Also out of respect, we ask that you turn off all your cell phones and your beepers because we can get reception down here and like you to do that. At the end of the program, I'll interview our first person today for about 45 minutes or so, and then the last half, or the last 15 minutes or so of the program are devoted to your questions. So if you have a question while we're talking, please write it down or think about it and we'd ask, then, that you will take that time at the end and you can ask her those questions. Also, your response are very important to us. If you have surveys, we ask that you fill those out and return them to us.

I'd like now to show you a few pictures. And to give you an overview of our first person and where we're going to go, we like to begin with, first of all, the definition of the Holocaust. Because we're going to be talking with one person, but that one person was caught up in a much larger situation.

So the Holocaust is the state sponsored and 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. Roma, also known as gypsies, people with disabilities, Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, were including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents all suffered grievous oppression or death under Nazi tyranny.

Our first person this morning-- or this afternoon, I apologize, is Elisabeta Lusthaus, who today we call Liz Strassburger. Liz was born in 1938 in Krakow, Poland, and you'll see here's a map of Poland. And here's an arrow there where we can show where Krakow is. So she was born there in 1938.

In 1939, September of '39, the German army invaded Poland and conquered it, but you should also remember that the Soviet army, as part of an agreement with Nazi Germany, invaded parts of Poland, as well. And so Liz's father Edmund Lusthaus, was drafted into the Polish Army. He was eventually, though, captured by the Soviets and sent to a prisoner of war camp in Siberia. Liz and her mother, then, some time after the German invasion, were forced by the Germans, as were Jews within Poland, into a ghetto. The ghetto that they went to was in Tarnow, as the arrow shows, again, in Southern Poland.

This is a picture of Liz and her mother right prior to them entering the ghetto of Tarnow. And then here is a picture of Liz in the ghetto-- in the Tarnow ghetto. Now, what happened was that Liz and her mother-- and we'll go through this, but I just want to lay out the framework for you-- is Liz and her mother were able through bribing to get some false papers and lived as, quote, "Aryans" or Catholics outside of the ghetto, of course, under the fear of death. This was in a small town outside of Warsaw, Poland where Liz and her mother then were passed as Catholics and not as Jews.

What we have here, just to show you, is Liz's report card. She went at that time, as she was called, her Christian name was Barbara Stachura, and this is her report card for her first year of school. She was in a school there. Following the war, then, Liz and her mother, after being liberated by the Soviet troops, after they defeated the Nazis, we'll tell the story, but they eventually make their way into Czechoslovakia, then on to Austria, and then finally into displaced person camps in Germany. In 1951, Liz comes to the United States.

So that's the basic overview of the story. And now, though, I would like to invite Liz Strassburger to the stage as our first person for today. Please welcome her.

[APPLAUSE]

Good afternoon.

Good afternoon.

So just double check the microphones. All right. Well Liz, thank you so much for agreeing to be first person today. You were born in 1938 in Poland. Can you tell us a little bit about your mother, father, family?

Sure. My father, as you mentioned, was a physician, and my mother was engaged to somebody else. And when she met my father, she just dumped the other guy and married my father. And they were married in '36, and I was born in '38.

Because there was no Jewish midwife in the little town called Iwonicz-Zdroj, which was a spa where people came to take the waters and get injections. And at that point, we didn't have any things to figure out if it was a boy or a girl. My parents decided to have me born in Krakow, which was a big city, and where there was a midwife. Because if I were a boy, they would have to have a bris.

And I came back to Iwonicz, and we had a lovely life. My parents loved each other, and my father had a good job. My mother stayed home. And then the war happened.

And that wasn't too much longer after you were born.

16 months.

All right, so the war began, then, September 1, 1939.

Right.

So you were under two years old.

Exactly.

Now, I know that's very early, but do you have any recollections?

No. Not at all.

So what did your parents do, then, when the war started?

Well, my father was conscripted into the army as a physician, and at that point, Poland was partitioned. There was the Russian side on the east, and there was the German side on the West. And my father went to say goodbye to his parents before he went to fight, and never came back. My mother looked for him, but nobody knew except that the Russians had him and he was probably in the Soviet Union in a camp-- in a work camp.

And so my mother, being-- I think my mother was 27 at that time, and she had a 16-month-old child. And she did what any other young woman who was a single mother and doesn't have a husband. She went to Tarnow where her own

mother was living. And my mother was an only child, and my grandmother obviously opened her arms, and we lived with her.

And my grandmother had a beautiful, beautiful apartment. And what I remember were the very, very fat, thick carpets. Because when I went into the ghetto, I didn't know I was in a ghetto. But when I started working here and I talked to my supervisor Theresa, she said, you were in a ghetto. That's a picture of the ghetto.

And the difference was that in my grandmother's house, there was beautiful carpeting. There were servants. There was wonderful food. I had my own room.

When we went into the other place, there were bare floors, and there were six people sleeping in one bed, not even just one room. And food was very scarce, and my mother would go away to work. She worked for the Germans as a slave laborer. You know, but we sort of survived.

And so from a child's point of view, the things that you remember are really the thick rug being there and then disappearing. And not rationalizing that now we're being shipped to a ghetto, but the fact that things obviously had changed.

Yes.

And you remember your grandmother?

Definitely I remember my grandmother.

Can you tell us about her?

Very big woman. Of course, I was little. She was a very big woman, very loving. Big bosom that when she hugged you, you knew you were being hugged. And she took care of me because my mother worked.

And both my mother and my grandmother had said-- there was a gazebo in this place. When they made ghettos, they just took an area and they put a wall around it, a barbed wire or whatever. That's where the Jews stayed.

So it wasn't like they built these things. They said to the Christians who lived there, go out and find yourself Jewish homes, and they'll be nicer. And we'll put all the Jews in here.

And there was a gazebo. And I used to play near it. And my grandmother would say, if you ever get scared or something bad is happening, I want you to go to this gazebo and go under the bench-- one of the stone benches. And I remember that. And I was maybe 3, 3 and 1/2.

And did that ever happen?

It happened because I was with my grandmother, and suddenly two German soldiers appeared. And my grandmother said, get under the bench. And I ran under the bench, and that was the last time I saw my grandmother.

And that was the second aktion. And aktions were laws where the Germans would say, OK, we need 1,500 Jews to take to Auschwitz, or we need 2,000, and this was the second one. And my grandmother went, and that was the last we saw of her.

And I stayed under the bench because I didn't know what else to do. So I just stood there. And then my mother came and, you know, she found out that her mother had been taken. And she started looking for me, and eventually she found me under the thing.

So your own mother was working as a slave laborer outside the ghetto?

Right.

Working for the Germans.

Yes, in a tailor shop.

OK. So when she came back, then, the aktion, your grandmother had been deported to Auschwitz. What, then, did your mother do?

Well, my mother had lived in Tarnow as a young woman, so she had friends. And so she bought Christian papers because she knew that I would be the next person to go to Auschwitz. And children were just exterminated immediately. There was no staying around because children were worthless. We couldn't work. We couldn't do anything.

So she knew that I would be on the next trip, so to speak. So she bought these papers, and then she found a friend outside who had friends in this little town called Milanowek, which is outside of Warsaw. And Milanowek is a little town. It's a very interesting town because it's a place where silk is made. And it's still very famous throughout Poland that this is where silk comes from. But of course, I didn't know any of that.

So you would probably be about 3 or--

3 or 4.

--4 right now?

Right.

And do you know-- I mean, getting false identity papers and living outside the ghetto because it was decreed that all Jews had to live in the ghetto. And if you were outside you could be shot, killed. I mean, when you think about it, that's a strong-- something for your mother to do this to take you out.

I had a very strong mother.

Sounds like it.

Very strong mother. At that point, everybody was moving because their homes were being bombed. And so we went to this place called Milanowek. And we stayed with a family called Vanderhof, and it was a mother and two daughters. And one was 12 or 13, and the other one was, I think, 16. And I really liked the younger one. Her name was Visha.

Did they know you were Jewish?

Oh, yes.

They did?

Yes. I didn't.

So you didn't know you were Jewish?

No, I didn't know I was Jewish. And also, the papers that my mother bought-- I was a year older in the papers. But I hadn't known how old I was before anyway, so it didn't matter. And so I went to school. And I went to a higher level of school than I should have by my age.

Did you have to learn a new name, though? I mean, do you remember--

No because I think I was called by a pet name. And you know, my mother said, you know, I didn't tell you, but your name is really Barbara. And you're not sweetie pie, or cutie, or whatever. Your name is Barbara. And I said, fine-- Basha, which is the diminutive of Barbara.

And one of the questions that I get asked is how come you did everything your mother said? Because in those days, that's what you did. Your mother said this is your name, this was your name. The Sisters of Saint Ursula said go there, you went.

You didn't say, oh, do I have to, sister? Or maybe I could go over there. No, you did it. I mean it's something my own children didn't quite do.

[LAUGHTER]

So now you're living in this town under false papers. You're NOW going to school. Do you remember your school experiences?

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. We went to school six days a week, five days plus half a day on Saturday. And on Sunday, we went to church. And I went to church every Sunday with the family.

My mother had bad knees, and they always worked on Sunday. They always were bad on Sunday. And you know, I didn't know. I mean, she was fine the other days, and on Sundays she had pains in her knees. So she couldn't go to church. But I went, and I loved church. There's something about mass, and there's something about the beliefs that's very warm and very calming.

And so it sounds in many ways, then, that this period, from your experiences, was a pretty normal childhood.

Yeah. And, you know, Jews were being shot, and who cared? And obviously, they had offended Jesus or someone that they were going to death. And we had our catechism in Latin, and everything was fine.

And got to the point that I was getting ready for my first communion, and I was very excited about that. And I played with the other children. There were tons of children that lived there. And I was-- and my friend Visha, who sort of took care of me when my mother was away, would always put mud on me-- make me dirty, and everybody made me dirty. Nobody cared. And later I found out what that meant.

What did that mean?

Well, that's my husband John and my friend Cindy and Chris. We went to Poland and we met Visha, but I'll tell you about it later.

OK. But what about the-- it was though-- all right, we'll get to that about the dirty face. All right. So now we're getting towards the end of the war's going on. The Soviets are coming from the east. The Germans are leaving. They're in defeat. Do you remember the end of the war, what happened?

Well, first of all, we heard the Warsaw ghetto, because we were close, when they bombed the ghetto. And we didn't quite understand what was happening because we were little, but we knew a lot of people were getting killed. But there were bombs all the time. And people were getting killed, and people were getting shot.

And in fact, the lady, Mrs. Vanderhof her husband was in a German prison. And mother said to me, when the Germans come and they ask you where your father is, you tell them that he's in Siberia, which is what I told them. And frequently when the Germans came to check the kennkartes, which were the passports or the ID cards, my mother would-- my mother was a pharmacist I should have said.

My mother would sprinkle carbolic acid. And they would come in, and they would sniff, and she would say [GERMAN], meaning that I was sick, and I had a kind of a [NON-ENGLISH] around my neck. And then they would

look, and then they would go away. They would just look-- perfunctory looking at the papers, and then they would go away.

And then when the war ended, my mother said, now, when the Soviets come, you can't tell them that your father is in Siberia. You have to tell the nice Russian people that he was in a concentration camp. But of course, we thought he was dead anyway. So it was kind of irrelevant what we said.

And so again, when they came, sometimes they would ask me, where is your father? And I would say, my father is in a concentration camp. And that seemed to work OK.

So this was right after the war in '45. We have the Soviets occupying now Poland. Now, you and your mother-- your mother decides to leave. Do you know--

Well, before she decided to leave, I just want to tell you kind of a silly story. We lived in this house which I'm not quite sure if Mrs. Vanderhof had the house, if it was her house, or if it was a house, but it was partitioned in a lot of places. And people came and they lived in a room. And we had-- my mother and I had a room.

And the Russians decided because this was a house that was on a hill, the Russians decided to make it their headquarters. So they were there all the time. And whoever came to the house stayed.

So nobody came except the lady who delivered milk. So she would come with these big big canisters of milk, and she would deposit them. And one time they wouldn't let her go. And of course, she had to go home to her own family and deliver milk. And I remember she tied sheets together in the bathroom and went down the sheets.

Now, after the Germans were defeated, I mean, was it OK then for people to know that you were Jewish?

No. Not at that point yet. My mother-- Mr Vanderhof was freed from jail, and he came home, and he took my mother. Because we were in northern Poland, and our family had been in southern Poland. And he took my mother to the southern Poland to look for relatives. And there was nobody.

And I should tell you that my grandmother was one of nine children. And if you extrapolate nine children, each maybe having two children, and each of those having two children, you have a considerable number of people that perished-- that were killed. And so my mother came back and she said, I have to tell-- Barbara, Basha, I want to tell you that you're not Catholic. That is not your name. You're Jewish, and your name is Elizabeth, or Elizbieta, and I got very, very upset.

You know, I was ready for my first communion. I had friends. I was very happy. I loved Jesus. I didn't want to be Jew.

They had horns. They killed people. I mean, they were awful. I didn't want to be. And she said, whether you like it or not, you are.

So I decided to talk to my priest. So I went to the priest in the church and I said, father, something terrible has happened, and please help me. And he said, my child-- and I remember this as if it were yesterday. My child, there is nothing that prayer can't take care of. And so we'll pray together, and then you'll tell me what the problem is, and it will disappear.

Well, it didn't disappear because I said to him, father, I'm Jewish. Can I still go to heaven? And he said, no. Get out of here. And that was really my first time that I was aware of how terrible it was to be Jewish. And there was antisemitism even in the Catholic Church.

And in school. In the Catholic school.

Right. And I came back and my mother said, we're going to leave here. And, you know, your daddy is dead, and we're going to go somewhere else.

And where is it that you decided to go?

She found someone that she could bribe, and we went in crates of china into Czechoslovakia.

So you were put into a-- so you meant like a crate?

Yeah, and they were actually barrels probably. We didn't have crates, we had barrels. And there would be china on the bottom, and then I would be there. And there would be another partition, and there would be stuff, and more china, you know. And I was sedated so that I wouldn't cry out or do anything.

And my mother was in another barrel, and I think there were several other people, also. And we got to Czechoslovakia, and we all got out of our barrels. And we walked in the fields and we ate raw potatoes, and then we wound up in Austria, in the Rothschild hospital, which was sort of a opening for us. This was the first DP camp that we went to.

And displaced persons camp were set up around Europe for people who were homeless-- survivors, others from the war. So you were in Austria.

We were in Austria.

For how long did you stay there?

Probably about six weeks in that one. And when I got there, and everybody was Jewish. And they all spoke different languages, but some children had mothers, and some children had fathers. And everybody was nice, and we got three meals a day. We had clean sheets.

All the women and the children were in one big room, and men were in another room. And it was like a wonderful, wonderful place. And then after six weeks, we went to another camp which was a sanitarium for children who were malnourished. And we were there maybe six months. And we stayed there.

And then we went to a third camp, and we were waiting for a ship to take us to Israel. And it was a camp of Jewish orphans, some with one parent, some with another, some with nobody. And we were waiting for a ship to come, but of course, there was the British blockade. And no ship came.

But I started going to school again. I started learning Hebrew. I had friends. My mother had friends. My mother was working as a pharmacist there, and we expected to go to Israel.

But you didn't end up in Israel.

No.

What happened?

A medical commission came through the camp, and my mother recognized one of the men who had been a friend of my father's. And he was just so shocked to see us. And she said, yes, I survived, and my daughter survived. But my father-- my husband perished.

And he said, no, no, no, no. He's in Italy. And he was in Italy. And what had happened with him was he had been in Soviet Union, and General Anders, who was a Polish general, was forming a brigade. And he wanted a Polish brigade, but he had to take Jews because some of them-- he needed doctors, and dentists, and nurses.

And so he took some of the Jews. And they went to North Africa, and they fought against Rommel in Egypt, and so on. And then they fought against Mussolini in Italy. And they were in Ancona, which is about here.

And it was a beautiful-- and probably maybe a day or two after my mother found this friend, an ambulance came. And I was telling you, one of the things that if I talk to children, they say, why an ambulance? And I always say, well, we

didn't have hummers, and we didn't have limos, but if you're a doctor you have ambulances.

So the ambulance came and we went. And I met my father. And I was eight years old. And I hadn't seen him for seven years.

And do you remember-- I mean, because really this would-- in many ways, you're rediscovering your father.

Not at all. My mother had always talked about him, and how wonderful he was, and how great he was. And he was just a man, you know? But he was a nice man.

And he had a doll for me, which was probably this big, which I still have. And which my granddaughter is eyeing, but she's not ready yet. [LAUGHTER] Not giving her my doll yet.

So now you have your mom and father are reunited, and you're there. And you're living in Italy.

Yes.

And then how did you end up in the United States?

What happened was my father was still in the army, and the army went to England. And we were in England for five years. And the army was demobilized, I guess, in 1948.

And my parents stayed in England, and then my mother discovered that she had an aunt-- one of my grandmother's sisters-- who was living in the United States. And they decided that they wanted to come to the United States. And so they came.

You said that was in 19--

'51. May of '51. And we lived in Newark, New Jersey. Anybody here from New Jersey? OK.

And then my father had to go back to school to be a doctor. And he had to pass the boards, and he had to have an internship. So he studied. My mother worked in a bakery, and I did all the housework, which I don't do now, right?

And eventually, you met your husband.

And eventually, I met my husband.

And do you have children?

I have two grown children. I have a son in San Diego, and I have a daughter who's local with two grandchildren. One almost 7, and one 4 and 1/2.

Now, did you-- when did you-- do you remember talking to your children about your experiences? Is that something you did early?

It was not a thing that you talked about. And I don't think I really sat down and told them. I think there was a movie that was-- I guess it was a TV movie that came out about Auschwitz.

Yeah, there was a miniseries.

Yeah, it was a miniseries. And I think at that time maybe I told them, and I wasn't sure that I could watch. And they said they would watch it for me. And I figured if they could, then I could.

And in 1990, we went to Poland. And we had-- while my mother was alive, she would send packages to the mother. Her



name was Dzidzia. And she would send her packages, but then my father died in 1960. He died nine years after we came here, I guess, because of the stress and everything. And so my mother was alone and she really couldn't afford to send packages.

And then Dzidzia died. And the two girls were young and they were married, so we felt like they could do it on their own. But when we went to Poland, I looked for her. I looked in the telephone book, of course, and she wasn't in the telephone book.

And we went to Krakow. And we looked around, and we went to Auschwitz. And leaving Auschwitz, we met a gentleman who was a professor of Jewish history from Oxford University. And I was telling him my story, and he said, you have to find her.

And I said, well, how do I find her? And he said, do you have an address? And I said, yeah. And he said, go and knock on the door.

So that's what we did. We went and we knocked on the door. And a voice said, who is it? And I said in Polish, I'm looking for Mrs. so-and-so. And she said, that's me. And I said, may I come up and talk to you? And she said, yes.

And I came up. And I must have been 52, I guess? Is that about right? No, older than that-- older than that? Just remember you're older than I am. So 1990, I guess I was, yeah, 52. And she's 61.

And I look at her, and I said, Visha, do you remember me? And she says, no. And I'm so crushed because, of course, I haven't changed from the time I was 8. You know, I'm-- it's the same person.

And I tell her who I am, and we start to cry, and we start to hug. And our two husbands are standing there sort of looking at us and, you know. And it's just such a wonderful, wonderful feeling because she saved me essentially. And then she told us that she had known that I was Jewish. It was her job to keep me dirty outside because all the other kids were blonde and blue eyed, and I was dark haired and dark eyed.

And so she would put mud on me so I would look more dark. And then she told us that there was another family on the same street that was sheltering Jews also, and they were found out. And they were all shot, which meant-- not just the Jews, but everybody in the house was shot.

And I said, how could your mother take such a chance? She was there alone with you two girls. And she said, my mother just felt everybody deserved a chance. And now I have a-- we send her money. We send her money every year because somebody from the museum goes to Poland. And they meet with her, and they take her out for coffee, and they hand her the money. And I feel very good about it.

That's wonderful.

Something important for me.

Wonderful. Now, you work-- and I have to say that one of the first times I met you, work in the education division. You do volunteer at the museum, but I remember one of the first times, at least, that I heard you speak to a group of schoolchildren you were going to tell them your story. And I remember you were very nervous about it.

And you had a sheet of paper, and you were somewhat nervous. And it must be not necessarily now you've told it a few times, but it probably brings back a lot of emotion to go back to this hard time. It's not the best time in your life. Why is it that you'll come here and talk to us, talk to the schoolchildren? What is it that you find that's important in doing that?

I think it's important that we don't forget. And it's important that we don't do it again. And when I talk to the children, I say, you're our future. And you have to make sure that it doesn't happen again, and yet it has. It's happened in Africa. It's happened in Asia. It's happened everywhere.

We haven't learned. I think we want to learn. I don't think we want to be involved in war. War is awful.

But I really feel that it's important for people not to forget. And you can't take out ads in the paper, so this is my opportunity.

I want to say thank you for doing that. Thank you very much.

You're welcome.

Appreciate that.

[APPLAUSE]

Well, we have some time for questions, and maybe it would be a good idea to let audience members ask you a question. If you do have a question, Liz will call on you. We'll ask you to just stand up so everyone can hear, and then I'll repeat the question because we don't have microphones out there. I think that would be the easiest way. So does anyone have questions?

Lady over here.

You said your mother knew that if you were found out to be Jewish she knew that you would be killed because you were a child and worthless to the Germans. This was pretty early in the war, right? How did she know that would happen?

Let me repeat that. It was asked that your mother knew that if other people found out that you were Jewish that you would be killed. And the question, then, was how did your mother, being that it was early in the war, know that this was the case?

Actually, we were in the ghetto, so everybody was Jewish. But you'd be surprised how the secret telephone goes back and forth. Everybody knew. Everybody knew about the camps. Everybody knew about people being shot in the street.

And children were dying because if they didn't die of malnutrition or hunger, they were just-- they were of no use. At least my mother could go out and work, but I was--

They were being killed there as well as if they were being shipped out-- the children were just being killed there, too?

Were children just being killed there in the ghetto, as well?

No, no, no. I mean the children that were dying in the ghetto were dying of malnutrition. But children were being shipped out with adults. They didn't say, whose child are you?

And I remember, we had an exhibition on hidden children here at the museum. And there's a poster in there that's printed by the Germans, but it's in Polish, telling the people-- it was put up around Warsaw-- saying that it's the death penalty for helping Jews who are found outside the ghetto. And also, then, to warn Jews that if you're found outside the ghetto, you'll be shot. So it was pretty common knowledge.

Young lady here.

How did you sort your faith? Did you become Catholic or Jewish?

The question was, how did you sort your faith? Did you become Catholic, or did you become Jewish?

Well, I was always Jewish. I pretended not to be Jewish, but I was Jewish. All my family had been Jewish. So as soon as we left Poland, I re-became Jewish.

You talked about your father being shipped off. Did he ever talk about his experience, and what could you tell us about that about his experience?

The question was, your father, did he ever talk about his experiences? And do you know, and can you tell us a little bit about your father's experiences?

Yes. It was better for him than for the regular people because he was a physician. And it was his job to keep the workers alive. So he would get more food, and he would get maybe better heavy clothing, but it was cold. He lost a lot of his toes to frostbite. He thought he'd lost his family. It was not good. I mean, at least they didn't kill you, but maybe you died on your own.

Lady back there.

I've heard that the Russians were almost as bad as the Germans. Did you have to experience any of their atrocities, or were you there when you were close to Auschwitz where the Germans-- weren't the Russians also in that area?

So the question was, we heard that the Germans-- or the Russians sometimes were as bad as the Germans. Did you ever experience that with the Russians, especially in the area because you were close to Auschwitz and things. Did you ever experience the atrocities of the Soviets?

No. The Russians liberated us. I was never really close to Auschwitz because I don't think Auschwitz had been formed at the time that-- I'm not sure. You would probably know, was it already up and going in '39?

By 1939, '40, was started off as a prisoner of war camp.

But no, as far as we were concerned, they were good people. They had killed my father, we thought, but-- there was no-- it wasn't as bad, in other words.

Are there some foods that you don't eat nowadays because it brings back, or you had some you had too much of it back then, or anything like that?

So the question was, are there certain foods that you may not eat these days because they remind you of something that maybe you ate too much of back then?

Not really. I don't eat meat, but that's because I choose to do that because I love animals. But I eat pretty much everything.

Any other questions?

Lady in the purple.

All four of my grandparents were born in Poland, and also, I have an ancestor that was a Polish general. And I'm trying to understand the hatred against the Polish people. They were a prime target. Why did the Nazis direct so much of their anger and hate towards Poland?

So the question is, all four of her grandparents are Polish, and has a Polish relative in the army, as well, served as a general. What is it about the Polish people, or why did the Germans hate the Poles so much?

I don't know. You might want to answer that.

I can talk a little about it. It's interesting that within, you have to think of Nazi ideology. You always hear about the Aryans up on top, the blonde haired, blue eyed. But underneath that, we had other people, for example, the Slavs, which would be the Poles, the Ukrainians. They were also in that racial hierarchy, but they were less than the Germans.

So when the Germans took over Poland, what they wanted to do is they wanted to get rid of all the Polish intelligentsia-- the intellectuals, anyone who was educated, and turn Poland into an agricultural kind of farm. And they'd have German landowners who would oversee, and the Polish people were supposed to be kept as poor and peasants.

And so that was part of the Nazi plan. And, of course, then also part of that, the Nazi ideology goes into Poland, which is their hatred of the Jews. Which in that situation, the Jews are even lower down on the scale down there, and they didn't even deserve to live. And so when, then, Germany takes over Poland, you have the Germans conquering the Poles, but also then bringing in this antisemitism, as well. So if you think about that all happening within the situation of Poland, in which Liz then would be caught up in as a Jew, and then also as a Pole within the country. So it's a strange combination of things.

Thanks.

Gentleman in the back.

To follow up on this particular discussion, for a long time I had some ill-informed ideas about the complicity of the Poles in helping and the logistics of rounding up the million and a half, I think, in Poland that ultimately were exterminated. How do you feel about that? The question really is, how complicit was the Polish population in general in helping to fulfill this ideology, the permanent solution?

So the question was, how complicit is the Polish population-- was the Polish population in this plan in helping the Nazis then round up the 1.5 million that were murdered?

Well, my dealings with the Poles on a personal level were very good. I mean, they hid me. I think we survived because we spoke good Polish, that we didn't have a Yiddish home, and there's still antisemitism in Poland. In fact, when we were in Poland in 1990, Visha said to us, now, you're not Jewish. You're Americans.

And my husband said, really? Still? And she said, yes, it's not a good thing. So we were Americans. And even if we looked sloppy, everybody knew we were Americans because we walk differently. We have a lot of--

But obviously, the Germans couldn't have killed as many as they did without complicity. But there were other people that were also in that same boat. Anything you want to add?

I would just say it's complicated. And I think your experience really shows that.

I have very positive feelings about Poland except for the priest.

[LAUGHTER]

And yet we'll have a survivor up here who will have negative feelings against Poland.

Exactly.

It just depends-- and that's the point of this program is, really, to show that each story is an individual story, and it should be seen in that regard.

Gentlemen here.

The papers that your mother bought for you as a child, how difficult would that have been for her to do? And were there other people around that were doing that?

So the question was, the papers that your mother bought for you as a child that let her pass, how difficult were they to purchase? And were there other people that were doing the same or similar thing as well?

Yes. In fact, we have another volunteer here who is a survivor who also was in the same situation. She had a father in Siberia. And if you had money, it was not a problem.

And we came from very, very well-to-do people. And when my mother went into the ghetto, she tried to take as much as she could. Because, in fact, I have a little silver tea set that was also in that--

The hidden children.

And it's teeny, tiny little silver thing that I had that my grandmother had made for me. If you had money, you could do anything because people were willing. And there was a black market. People got money, and they would make you papers.

And it wasn't that hard. You just had to have the wherewithal in your head to do it.

But the consequences were still the same if you were caught.

Exactly. So another question.

So your father rather passed about nine years after you all came here?

Yes.

How did your mother fare, and how was her adjustment to coming over here?

So the question was, your father passed away about nine years after coming to the United States. What about your mother? How did she fare, and her adjustment in the United States?

Well, it wasn't as good as it would have been if he had lived because we lived in a very nice house which came with his job. My father decided to drop dermatology, and he went into psychiatry. And we lived in a psychiatric hospital where we had a home, and we were together.

And then when he died, my mother had to leave the house within six months. I see people-- because it came with the job, and she moved to New Jersey. And she went back to the bakery. And then she moved to New York.

She had a very close friend in New York. The two of them had gone to kindergarten together. And she lived there, and then they came to live in Maryland to be near us. Because I was the only daughter, and I had the two only grandchildren. So my mother wanted to be with us. But it wasn't as good as it would have been. If you lose a husband who is the breadwinner, it's tough.

But it sounds like your mother was a strong woman.

Oh, yes.

Taking care of you. Well, one of the things we like to do at the end, and I forgot to tell you I was going to do this.

Oh shoot.

But the final words.

I'm leaving.

All right. I know you. So we like to always give our survivor the final words, the last sentence or two as kind of a message to go away with.

I think I said it before that you young people are our future. And I think we have to change. I was fortunate, but millions of people are less fortunate than I. And I would like to see my grandchildren live in a world where there's no war and everybody's happy, you know. And maybe that's silly, but I'd like to see some good come out in this world and people not hate each other, and fight with each other, and just be nice to each other. Can we do that?

Yeah. [APPLAUSE] Thank you very much. Thank you.

Yeah, he already turns it off.