

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. Thank you for joining us. This is our seventh season of First Person our first person today is Mrs. Agi Geva, whom we shall meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust, who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust and World War II. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. Each Wednesday through August 30, we will have a First Person guest.

The museum's website provides a list of upcoming First Person guests. The website is at www.ushmm.org. That's www.ushmm.org. This 2006 series of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Dora Smith Foundation to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring this year's program.

Agi Geva 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 Agi some questions. Before you're introduced to her, however, I have a couple of requests of you. First, we ask that if at all possible, please stay seated throughout this one hour program. That will minimize any disruptions for Agi as she speaks.

Second, please make any questions you might have during the question and answer period as brief as you can. I will then repeat the question so all in the room, including Agi, here's the question before she responds to it. Finally, I ask that if you have any cell phones or pagers, that you turn those off. I'd also like to let those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition know that they are good for the balance of the afternoon. So again, you can stay seated till 2 o'clock and then be able to go to the permanent exhibition.

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 Agi Geva is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Agi's introduction. We begin with a portrait of Agi Geva, who was born Agnes Laszlo, and her younger sister, [? Shosha, ?] taken in 1934.

We first have a map of Europe, then a map of Hungary. The arrow on the map of Hungary shows Budapest, where Agi was born June 2, 1930. Here, we have portraits of Agi's parents, Rosalia and Zoltan Laszlo.

Agi spent the first six years of her life on a farm, where her father was the manager. In 1936, the family moved to a house in Miskolc in northern Hungary. Here, we have a photograph of the family home. The arrow on this map of Hungary points to Miskolc.

Agi's father died the day that German forces occupied Hungary in 1944. Shortly thereafter, Agi, her mother and her sister were moved from their home to the newly established ghetto in Miskolc. By May 1944, Hungarian authorities in coordination with the German security police began the systematic deportation of Hungarian Jews. Like thousands of other Jews, Agi and her family were sent to Auschwitz.

This arrow on this map of major Nazi camps in Europe points to the Plasza³w concentration camp, the first of many labor camps to which Agi and her family were sent. While in Plasza³w, they labored in a stone quarry. In 1944, they were sent to Rochlitz to learn to manufacture airplane parts. Once their training was complete, they were taken to Calw to work nights from 7:00 PM till 7:00 AM in an airplane factory.

In February 1945, they were forced on a 400-kilometer death march to Mauthausen. Fortunately, they arrived too late to meet the train, which was to take them to their execution. On April 28, 1945, Agi was liberated by American soldiers.

After the war, Agi and her family returned to Hungary. In 1949, Agi emigrated to Israel, where she lived until 2002 when she moved to the United States. This photograph of Agi is from 1950.

Today, Agi resides in the Washington, DC area. She moved to the United States just four years ago, after living in Israel since 1949, where she worked in the insurance field for 32 years. She has two children, a daughter Dorit, who lives here, and a son Joni, who lives in Israel. She has four grandchildren.

Agi speaks four languages fluently, Hebrew, Hungarian, German, and English. In addition to her participation with First Person, Agi has recently spoken on several occasions about her experience during the Holocaust. Just recently, she spoke at nearby George Mason University.

I'm pleased to let know that Agi's daughter Dorit is with us. Dorit, if you wouldn't mind waving. And accompanying her is a family friend, Hani, as well, who's in the front row as well. Welcome. And with that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Agi Geva.

[APPLAUSE]

OK. I hope it's OK.

It's OK. Just speak up a little bit.

Agi, welcome, and thank you for your willingness to be our First Person today. Thank you for joining us.

Thank you for choosing me.

Let's-- move in just a little bit-- Agi, why don't we start today with you telling us a little bit about your family, your community, and your life in the years before war broke out in Europe.

The first six years was on a farm. And the family came for vacations every summer, my mother's family, my father's family. We had the children. We had a very nice time.

But after the first six years, we moved to Miskolc, where we also had quite a normal family life and a normal childhood. And we had beautiful vacations with all our cousins present. And we heard about the war, and we heard about what's happening to the Jews in other countries. We never believed that this will happen to us.

Agi, before we start to talk about the outbreak of the war, tell us about your parents. Tell us about your father and what he did. And tell us a little bit about your mother and also your extended family, how large it was.

From my father's side, there were eight uncles and aunts. From my mother's side, there were nine uncles and aunts.

And lots of cousins.

And lots of cousins.

So a big family.

And we had a pension. It's a small hotel in Miskolc and really small. It was eight rooms. But it was mostly always occupied. And in summer, they kept it empty for the family actually who came to visit from Budapest and from other small towns.

What prompted your family to make the move to Miskolc?

On the farm, it was rather hard work also for my father. And he got sick. And he was not supposed to work so hard anymore. And also, the antisemitism wasn't very open for Jewish managers on this vicinity.

So your parents were experiencing antisemitism at that time?

We already felt it, yes. And my cousins felt that they were not accepted in the universities in Budapest anymore. So it was felt, but not that straight.

But enough to cause them to want to move to a new town and have your father start a new life?

Yes, and start a new life. And, yes.

Agi, the war began when Germany and Russia invaded Poland in September 1939. Yet your community did not feel the full impact of war for several years, until the Nazis occupied your town in 1944. For those years between 1939 and when the Germans came to Hungary and to your town in 1944, during those years, tell us a little bit about your life during that time. Obviously, it was very different than the pre-war years. But tell us what it was like and how it changed for you before things got even far worse.

It wasn't bad yet. But all what we saw and heard and-- I couldn't see some because there was no TV, so what we heard and read actually. And we tried to ignore it.

My father came with the idea that we should leave Hungary. He was very, very much concerned. But then because of the big family, my mother didn't want to leave behind her sisters and brothers. And he would have been ready to do it. But until they prepared it, until they thought of it, it was already '44 when the Germans occupied and there was no more possibility.

And too late at that point.

It was too late at that point.

At one point, your father presented the family with some options for what you might do. Tell us about that.

I was to go to Israel or to make a serious move out of Hungary if not to Israel. But it was not possible even to come to America. I mean there was the-- they didn't want-- my mother didn't want to move. And like today, people think that that's my home, that's my-- these are my carpets, my china, my jewels, my clothes. How can I just go out with one set of clothes and just leave-- close the door behind me and go?

Plus, leave other members of the family, as you mentioned.

People didn't think of upsetting their lives what will be worth all this. Many did it.

And many did it, yes.

Many did it.

And your father also talked to you about the prospect of converting to Christianity, did he not?

Yeah, he thought of many possibilities. He thought of many possibilities.

Is that one that the family considered?

They considered it. But it wasn't very-- it wasn't successful.

But again, trying to look for options on how to protect his family.

Yes. Many people changed their religions. And those men who were taken for forced labor, the difference was they

made a difference for them. Everybody had to wear a yellow armband. And those who were converted, they wore a white armband. So it's still not-- it didn't work as it was also--

So they could not be utterly invisible even though they had done that?

Yeah, yeah.

During that time from '39 to '44, do if your family was aware, truly aware, of what was happening to Jews elsewhere in Europe?

They read about it. They were aware. One family-- my mother's sister, she took the family and came to Palestine. There was no Israel yet. And they really moved, and they left. They said, they don't care for family. They don't care for leaving behind what they had. They just took a small luggage, and they left.

This was your mother's sister?

This was my mother's sister.

So they did leave.

They did leave. They were the only ones.

OK. Agi, March 19, 1944, in fact, just 62 years ago, 62 years ago just a couple of days ago, is a date of great significance for you. Can you tell us about that?

Yes, my father became ill a year before already. And he was really very ill for a long time in hospital. And then we brought him home. And he had even a private nurse with him because he was mostly unable to get out of bed anymore.

And on the 19th, he died without knowing what the big event it was also, besides this. And it was really tragic. In one way, it was good because we thought when things started to happen that it's good that he's not with us and good that he doesn't see this and he doesn't experience what started to happen.

Right. And of course, what happened is the Germans came in at that time.

The Germans came in. And immediately, they changed everything. Everything was changed immediately. There were leaflets everywhere. And you couldn't live your regular life anymore, whatever you had until now.

You had to-- teenagers, for instance, they couldn't keep pets anymore. We had to give it into the municipality. We couldn't keep a bicycle anymore.

Teenagers could not keep pets?

No, they told-- no, everybody brings in the dogs and their bicycles.

Pets and bicycles.

And we did it. And then we went still to school. But also, we were only two girls in the classroom, Jewish.

You were the only Jewish-- only kids in the classroom?

Yes. In other classrooms, there were three, four, maybe.

Right.

--or one. And they didn't want us anymore. They simply-- I think they were afraid. Everybody was afraid. Everybody was afraid of the Germans.

Do you have a sense, Agi, of what your mother and the other people in the community, in the Jewish community, thought would happen to them now that the Germans were here and things were changing so rapidly?

No one could imagine even what happened. No one would imagine. Some were maybe afraid of what will happen, and they tried to hide. In Budapest, it was possible. In the small towns, it was impossible because everybody knew everyone.

How big was Miskolc?

It wasn't big.

It was a small town.

It was a small town. It was a small town. But everybody knew the Jews actually. And who could manage to get on a train and go up to Budapest? But we were supposed to wear the yellow star. So if someone was caught without the yellow star [INAUDIBLE] was caught with the yellow star, it was not good either.

So with the yellow star was acknowledged. But without, and they'd show the papers and had no papers, or it came out that they were Jews, they were immediately sent either to Siberia or to-- we didn't know what deportation meant yet.

Just sent away at that point.

Just to be sent away. We have never seen them anymore.

Agi, your mother did try to save you by sending you to another village.

Yes.

Tell us a little bit about that.

It was only a couple of days after my father died. And we were wearing black, black stockings, shoes, black clothes. That was customary. And she sent us to a friend's house to a village.

But everybody knew in this village that two girls arrived there, and they imagined that we were Jewish. And we were afraid to go out, and we were so intimidated. And then we let my mother know that we want to come back.

And it wasn't simple to come back. We didn't have the yellow star. With the yellow star to get on a train, it was very dangerous. And without it, it was maybe more dangerous. But we took the chance.

So the nurse who was with my father until his passing came to pick us up. And she also came without a star. So she took us on the train. And every minute, some armed Germans were walking up and down and just pointing to some people to get off the train or to show their papers. And we, luckily, just got home.

But you had--

Luckily, I don't know whether it was luck.

But you had taken the stars off.

We had no stars on.

So at great risk to you and the nurse.

It was a very great risk, yeah. But we had to take it. With the star, I don't think we would have been able to do it.

So when we came home, then we couldn't stay more than two, three days again, because then they told all the Jews-- took actually. We had to really go out of the house and close the door behind us. And that is such a traumatic experience just to take the things that you could carry, and you didn't know when and where and if ever will be able to come back.

So literally lock the door and leave the house.

It was a pension, so we didn't have the private apartment. So the stuff stayed there. The cook stayed there. And the maid stayed there. And the guests, I suppose, stayed there. I can't remember, but I'm sure.

And then we were taken to a brick factory that had no-- well, it was summer. So maybe it would have been more dramatic had it been winter. It had no sides. It had just a roof.

And we were there for two, three days. I don't even remember on what we slept or how. There were benches only. And I know it was very uncomfortable.

And we knew that we are waiting for trains. But when the cattle cars came, this is something we were not expected. And we never imagined that that's what's going to happen.

And we were herded into these cattle carts as many people as what was possible, standing places.

Agi, before you continue to talk about what happened once you were boarded on the cattle trains, at this brick factory, somebody you knew, if I remember correctly, ran away. What happened to that person?

Some of our friends-- my mother, she told us, actually, look, we could just walk out somehow at night. We could risk it. But we are three. She said, one of you could make it, or I could make it. But the three of us, we can't make it.

And she reminded us that the only chance to stay alive-- or she didn't dare to tell us that way to stay together-- will be to stay together, just to see to it to stay together and not to--

Not separate.

Not to separate. But my friend-- we had a very good friend and she had two friends that we didn't see anymore. And later, after the war, it turned out that they just walked out somehow, of course without the star. They took big risks. But they--

They survived.

They survived, yeah. They got up on the train to Budapest. And the way we came up then, they were lucky that the Germans didn't point them out, didn't pick them up. And they survived.

And of course, you were starting to tell us about now the trains have come and you're crowded onto these cattle cars.

Yes, it is undescrivable how it was even imagine that people can be able to travel two, three days where there were only standing places. They had to put so many people in and close the door, lock the door, as if we were really cattle. And then somehow we found some space to sit down or something. But there were very mixed company also, men, women, old, young, babies, children. It's undescrivable.

And we had no light. We didn't know whether it's day or night. There was a very small window near the ceiling of this-- near the top of this car. And we didn't know which direction. We didn't know anything.

And now I heard when I was working here yesterday that some people threw out-- I don't know how they could write

even, on what paper, pen. This was also very rare. And they threw it out through the small window, and people found it. And I heard that somebody is collecting it here, this morning.

You just heard it--

I just heard it yesterday, yeah, from [PERSONAL NAME].

Little scraps of paper--

Yes.

--they were throwing out the window.

They could write on it something. And somebody wrote it, if you find this, give it to my father. That's the name. That's the address. And I'm the son taken to Auschwitz. That's all I heard yesterday. I can find out what happened with it later.

We didn't think of such things. We just breathed. And we were happy to stay alive.

For three days.

I suppose, but we didn't know.

No.

I suppose. I suppose.

Very long time--

With very little food us.

--in those conditions.

Very-- water, I don't even think we had.

And where did the train take you, Agi?

We didn't know where it took us. And when the doors opened, we heard German shoutings and German commandings. Los, los, raus, raus, that much everybody understood. And some people were really blinded by the light when they got off the trains. And there was a big chaos. And everywhere armed Germans.

We were much more. But I don't think that anybody could have thought of doing anything. We didn't know what's going to happen.

And then somehow we got into a line. And women were immediately on one side and men on the other side. And the line started to move slowly.

And then my mother got really scared. She didn't know what's going to happen, the beginning of the line. So she told us to stay put. And she went slowly, slowly somehow, really risking a lot, to the beginning of the line to see what's going to happen, what's happening there.

She kind crept up to the front of the line?

And then back. And then she told us that we shouldn't be family. We shouldn't mention that we are family. I should never say mother. I never should tell that my sister is my sister. And she told we have to be the same age, more or less,

because able-bodied people were going to on to one side where they can work.

And we saw that people who were with canes and unable to walk or having a child on the arm-- and it's very traumatic-- were sent all on one side. So she decided to stay together. She didn't think that at the time yet that it will save our lives eventually. She didn't think. But she only thought that it should be the three of us together. And she all the time warned us, just stay together.

And she told we have to be the same age. So how to do it? We shouldn't say that we were 13 and 14. My sister was 13. I was 14. And she was 42, I think. She thought she has to look much younger and we have to look much older. And that's the only way that the officers at the beginning of the lines will decide where to send us.

So she took three scarfs out. And she bound the scarves on our heads in a way that we should look older. And it looked like this. And it really makes one-- it really makes one look older. It makes me look even more older.

And then she took the scarf, her scarf, and she bound it upwards. And that really made her look younger. And so we could get away with the idea of being the same or similar ages. And so slowly, slowly when we got up to the beginning of the line, really without any discussions, they just sent us both to the right side.

That's amazing. So she had the presence of mind--

It's terrific, terrific.

This is astonishing. And to realize that they were separating those who looked like they could work and those who they couldn't and then put the scarves in different ways for each of you.

I suppose this had a dramatic effect, the way we looked. Everybody had the scarf more or less. It was--

So here are the three of you. You were able-- so far, you're still together. What happened then?

It was I think one of the worst nights I could say in my life because we were very, very-- it was a very degrading couple of hours. We had to put all our clothes in one heap. Shoes, clothes, everything we had to take off. And our heads were shaved. And hardly we could recognize each other. We looked horrible also.

And when we had to take a shower, we didn't think that those other people who went to the other side, their shower was the gas shower. We didn't know at that time yet. And after the shower, they sprayed us as if we were bugs.

And then we had to sit-- then we had to choose clothes from another heap of clothes and shoes and such things. We had no underwear. And everybody as quick as they could pick out their clothes, that's what we had on for the next weeks.

And shoes also, who cared what number or what how it looks or high heel-- no, it was sport shoes-- whatever we could pick up very quickly. So someone was standing near us and all the time telling us, quick, quick, quick, do it.

And then we had to sit on the hard tiled floors for hours until they come to take us to the barracks. So every time we thought that now it would be better, but every time everything got worse. So far everything got every minute worse and worse.

And in the barracks, at least there were three [? stories. ?] And we had to choose-- not to choose. As we came in in lines, everyone was assigned to one. And we had two blankets. And that's all.

And the next day, there came cars and loudspeakers telling that the girls under 16 should stand out of the lines because they will have better fate and better food. And I had my friend with me who was in my same class.

This is your friend Edith?

My friend Edith, whose mother was taken immediately away. And I think she was with her mother, with her grandmother. And she stayed with us. And when she heard this possibility, she wanted to go. And my mother begged her and told that we shall look after her and we shall take care of her and she should stay with us.

But the hope that she might see her mother and they will take her out of this area was bigger. And she left. And we never saw her anymore. So it was also a trick to get these girls out of the line.

And so the trick was to say any girl under 16--

Under 16, they didn't want--

--they'll give you something better.

They didn't want any children in these barracks, in this group.

But again, your mother said, no way, you stay with me.

Yes. And never say that we are her children and not to say that we are a family.

And that you're young.

And that we are young. And so we got away with it somehow, also without the scarves later. And food was actually can't even be called food. And she forced us to eat and drink whatever they gave us. She says, the only thing that you don't know when you get the next meal.

So it looked like small stones boiled with grass. That's how it looked. And that's how it tasted. But it was warm, and it was something. So she forced us--

But she forced you to eat it.

Yes. In those days, children listened to parents.

[LAUGHTER]

Then from there, that's when you were forced to go into labor, to do labor. Tell us where you went.

The worse was again the selections. Every day, there were selections. And here, where we still with the-- somehow could stay together. And we were sent again with the same cattle cars to a camp named Plasz³w because in Auschwitz there was no work that was only a transit camp and where they killed people actually.

But we didn't know. My mother found out. And she saw the smoke. And she saw-- she felt the smell. And she did everything in her power not to let us know, that we shouldn't know anything bad was happening. So she was taking really, really much care about it.

And when we came to Plasz³w that was a camp where really forced labor was going on. And stupid things, we had to carry stones from one place to another, the next day to bring it back. So we couldn't have the feeling even that we are doing some productive work.

Did you carry the stones literally from one spot--

Heavy stone.

--and them to them?

And they had to be a certain size. And it had to be the whole day. And my sister was still 13. She couldn't carry that big stone as most people could. So she was-- my mother told her, OK, take a smaller stone, so-- and when they found out, they really beat her up for it. She was sent back and take a much bigger stone than anybody else for that matter. But there we were also not very long.

Before you left there, I think you told me that at one point you thought actually you might be liberated.

We were very happy, yeah. We heard the cannon shots. And we thought that now the Russians are nearing. And now we are going to be liberated. And we really were very-- started to feel very good about it.

But on the end, it came exactly the contrary. They took us back to the wagons. And they shipped us out from there. And we didn't know where.

And when we found out where, when they opened the doors and we saw that we are back to Auschwitz, that was a real, real bad feeling. And I think that very, very few people were twice in Auschwitz. But I was in that group.

The three of you went back to Auschwitz?

All the three of us, yeah. And it was again a dramatic journey from Plaszew. And it was terribly hot and. And we were not in the best form when we arrived.

So my mother told this time it's again selection. So I'll go first she told and then my sister and then me because I looked the worst. And really she was sent to the right side and my sister also, and I to the left.

And a child-- I don't know, so I had this in me that what she told that we have to work and we have to go to the working side. And we still didn't know what's going on the other side. I only knew that my mother and sister were already on the right side.

So I told the officer who was standing in front of me that I did not know that was he, Dr. Mengele. This also I found out only much, much, much later, after the liberation. And I told him, no, no, I want to go to that side. So I suppose that he must have been surprised that anyone so far ever contradicted him.

That you were brash enough to say that to him?

I was afraid of my mother more I think.

Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

And he told, why? I told, because there people are working. He says, you don't look to me that you can still work. I told him, OK, I'll prove it.

So then he realized that we were talking German. And that was very strange for him. He told that you are in a Hungarian group. How do you speak German so well? So the minute the conversation took this point, he told, OK, OK, go wherever you want.

Agi, it's possible, you know, that a lot of folks here don't know who Mengele was. Maybe you might just say a word about that this was the man that--

He was a doctor--

--you were talking to.

He was a doctor who was very high German officer and he made experience--

Experiments.

Experiments-- thank you-- that I don't even want to know about.

No.

And he was very feared and very bad. It was very--

Very evil man. And--

Very, very, very, very.

And yet--

They could never catch him.

And--

They never found him after the war.

And yet, there you were saying, I want to go over there and because--

He let me. So what shall I tell you.

So now you're back together again.

Yes. My mother fainted when I got to the place where she was waiting. And then was the next dramatic story with the tattoo. We got numbers. Everybody got their number with the letter A, Auschwitz, and then the number. My mother and sister got the number more or less than mine was, five I think so, five numbers.

And it was very degrading because they thought you have no names from now on. They have nothing. You only have this number. So then I fainted.

Did you faint--

The first time in my life, yes, nothing else till the last.

And how long did you stay there?

Again, a couple of weeks because there were selections going on for-- they were looking for people to go to Germany for forced labor because all the men, most of the men, were in forced labor camps already. And then also in Germany, there were not many men around in the factories. So they took people from the concentration camps.

And they taught us how to make aeroplane spare parts. And we went to Germany, again, in cattle cars. But that was winter. And it was worse than ever before. And it got a little bit better when we got to this school where we studied how to make the spare parts.

But the train ride there was in--

It was horrible.

--deep winter.

It was horrible. And in Auschwitz still we had also very, very dramatic experience. They thought at one of the examinations that my mother might have some rash with some skin trouble. And they took her to quarantine.

And that's the first time we were really separated, but still in the same camp. And my mother found a way to get back to us. She found a girl whose sister was in our camp. So she told, let's exchange. We are only numbers. So they will not know who came from where.

And she arranged everything. And when the time came, the girl got afraid and she didn't join the other barrack. And my mother came out of the barrack already. So in our barracks there was one more. So--

Just to make sure we understand. So your mom had in effect arranged a switch.

A switch.

But then the girl became afraid so she didn't switch. So now there's now there's an extra person. And so when the count comes it's not going to add up.

Exactly.

OK.

Exactly. So we were one more. And they immediately brought more German armed officers to see what's happening here. And they threatened. And they told that someone from the barracks, from the sick barracks, came over and they might contaminate the whole barrack here. And they threatened with all sorts of ideas.

And they told that one who came should stand out or the one who knows who came in. And we were rather popular. We tried to help everyone, because people were stealing their bread from each other, and we did not. And so nobody told about it that it was my mother who joined the barracks.

But nobody else pointed you out--

Nobody--

--and said--

And they let us stand there half the night. They told that we shall all be shot if they will not tell who it was. And we took the-- they took the risk. The people took the risk. And I don't know how it ended-- I mean why it ended that way, that we were not shot. We were just sent back to the barracks. And next day, we were shipped out from there to Germany.

And where? And then that's when you went to the airplane factory?

And that when we went to the--

Yes.

It was a short course first. And then to the real airplane factory in Calw near Stuttgart. And there we worked the way you pointed out the whole night and the whole-- and they were hiding us actually. The town didn't know that there were Jews or there were prisoners or-- we were working at night from 7:00. And daytime, we were sleeping. And they locked all the shutters and everything. And nobody knew what was going on in the factory.

And in part probably to not let the Allies know at that point is you think that's why it was?

No, they didn't want the town to know.

They did not want the town to know you were there.

They didn't want the people in the town or the schools or anybody there to know.

And so somehow you were hidden from them?

Altogether.

Tell us about the work that you were forced to do.

It was a machine called Revolver-Drehbank. It makes aeroplane spare parts from aluminum. We learned how to do it from a sketch that we got. And my mother was at the machine that-- actually, it was a big stone that turned around. And if you press it too hard, it might explode.

And she took these small screws, and she had to check them. And the first time that the machine-- that the stone exploded, she didn't think of the significance that the whole factory has to stand actually because they couldn't stand out the spare parts. So when she found out, she did it several times.

[LAUGHTER]

And then she fainted--

At immense risk.

And then she fainted. And we girls didn't know. She never let us know that it was not genuine. So--

So she did her own acts of sabotage.

So she did her own small one-- one drop in--

At tremendous risk, of course.

At tremendous risk.

Yes.

That's why she was afraid that we shouldn't know it either.

Right. How long were you there?

I think two months.

Two months.

I think so. Then there was a typhus. And one person got the sickness. And she died. And somehow nobody else got it. It was such a miracle.

About 200 of you, is that right?

We were 200 women. 180 Hungarians and 20 Poles.

And one died.

And one died.

OK. Now, it gets even worse for you.

Yeah. We always thought that it can't be worse. And then we had to leave the factory because the Allies were nearing. And this time, we had no more wagons. I don't know whether we were not thinking of it several times that maybe it would have been better. We had to walk.

Walk at night. Sleep in the daytime in barns. And no food, no water, only what one of the Germans was-- I don't know how-- he also didn't want to know that we are there. He also immediately when we arrived to some small village got us into the barn and then went out and tried to find for us water and bread and whatever foodstuff he could find for 199 people. So it wasn't very--

So it was 199 women.

Yes.

And with some German guards and--

Four German guards.

Four guards, marching, and it was 400 kilometers that you covered.

Yes. Four officers, and there were two or three soldiers actually. And we kept on walking at night. It was terribly cold. And the terrain was very bad. It wasn't on a road. It was through the forests and through creeks and through stones and--

This was, I think, February 1945.

Yes.

And, of course, that was an extraordinarily brutal winter. Out of cold winters normally, an especially brutal winter.

We had no coats. We had no scarves. We had no shoes.

Any sense of--

Some people still had-- yeah.

Any sense of where you were going?

Three of us knew Germans. So one of the women who knew German, she came and told us. And she was anyhow a very pessimistic person that we are going to be executed, she told. But nobody believed her.

But we believed that we have to get to a railway station to continue by train. We didn't know where to. But we didn't care anymore, just to sit on a train. So it was already much better than to keep on this walk.

And what happened when you got to the train?

When we neared the station, I just give up. I thought I can't-- I really-- personally I can't anymore. I had no more shoes. And there were rags bound around my feet. And they got wet. And they were cold. And I just sat down. I told, that's it.

And this group, they didn't shoot us when we sat down and didn't continue. Many other people, we read about it and heard about it that when they were on this march that's why it was called death march. They were simply shot. And I took even this risk. I told, I don't care anymore.

And then I should have-- it should have been suspicious that one of the German officers, a woman, she came and personally helped me, almost carried me. She told, you have to. We are not far from the station. Come on, I help you.

And they really helped me. And I was crying all the way. And when we got to the station, the train left. And the people were angry with me. Says, you see, because of you, we have to keep on walking and we can't continue by train. And they didn't know that we were saved actually because the trains that were supposed to bring the arms to execute us with, the arms they couldn't leave. But they left the papers for the officers to flee to Switzerland. So this we found out later.

So they got some envelopes. And orders to execute us, of course, wasn't relevant anymore. This we also found out later. And they simply took us back to the forest, and we kept on walking. And everybody was mad at me. And OK--

Because they thought they missed the train.

Because they thought that now we have to go walking, can't go up on the train. And then suddenly, one of us told that, look, there are no more guards around us. And we looked better. There were no more Germans around us.

Just the 199--

Just the 199-- women.

The 20 Poles and the 179 Hungarians. And then one of the Poles, the Lageralteste she was called, she was the responsible for us, she knew. And she told us in a very slow German language that we are free from the 28th of April, 1945. But the word free, she told it so slowly. And so we couldn't believe it. We just couldn't believe it.

So here you are in the middle of the woods being told you're free.

Left nowhere, we had no idea where.

Yeah.

So people sit down and eat all the food they had in their bags because it was all portioned. And many people got very ill because of it. And my mother, of course, didn't let us do such things.

[LAUGHTER]

And they started arguments, what to do, where to go. Everybody told her the different opinion. So 20 people, approximately 20, 22, were of the same opinion that we walk in a certain direction. And luckily, after a couple of hours, we saw soldiers coming opposite us. And we were afraid what will happen, but they surely never saw such people, so funny looking people the way we were in rags and then no hair and dirty and--

So we found some white underwear and a stick. And we lifted it. And we showed them that we are peaceful.

Put it up, put the underwear on a stick and waved it.

Yes. And these were American soldiers. And they were so nice to us. And they heard our story. And they took us to their headquarters. And it was wonderful later.

Tell us what happened then. They took you to their headquarters. And--

It was in a hotel actually. And they-- and really, we looked awful. And he told us to bath, and we can use the curtains for clothes. And some people could sew. And they sewed clothes from it.

And they went into town. And they told everybody can have a request. We were 22. So some people wanted

Wienerschnitzel. Some people wanted a jacket. Everybody wanted something else. And they brought everybody what they wanted. And I can't ever find these soldiers to--

Have never been able to connect with them.

No. No. I don't even know how to start finding. I wanted lipstick. That's all I wanted.

You wanted lipstick.

Only lipstick.

Did they find that?

They found that.

They found that.

[LAUGHTER]

Because I looked awful. The first time I looked in the mirror, I thought, no, no, no, that's not me. It can't be. So lipstick helped a little.

And you hadn't looked in a mirror in a very long time.

No, never ever.

Never.

No. That's also a point that we never thought of it.

Right. Right. Agi, there's so much more that we could talk about. And of course, your ordeal has in some ways just begun now that you're liberated. And it's time to look for family and get reestablished. But if you don't mind, I'd like to turn to our audience and ask them if they have some questions to ask of you. Could we do that?

Yes, right, right.

So if you have a question, don't be bashful. And I will repeat it so that everybody hears it. And then Agi will respond to your question. So, yes, young lady right there.

Hi. How did religion influence you after you left your home?

The question is, how did religion influence you after you left your home in Miskolc and all that you went through?

It couldn't influence me. Those times, we were all Jewish, only Jewish people in our groups. Later when we were in Auschwitz and then Italians came and gypsies came and people who were not Jewish anymore, we saw that actually you can't even say anymore that it happened because we were Jewish. I mean it started out that way. It was hard to comprehend what they wanted, the Germans.

You told me once that-- or you told me earlier today that once you were asked, how would people even know if there was a Jewish holiday because you had no sense of time?

Yes. Yes, that was very-- we didn't know the day. We didn't know the dates. We didn't know anything. But somehow, the religious Jewish people who were with us, they knew it. Somehow they knew it. They knew when was Saturday, when was Friday night, when was Rosh Hashanah when we had-- they knew it. So they saw to it that we also found out.

OK. All right. Do we have another question? Yes, sir.

Did your mother and sister go with you to Israel?

Question is, did your mother and sister go with you to Israel?

Yes, we all the three-- no, no, I almost forgot. We went back to Miskolc. We went back to our hometown. And my mother got back the pension. But the people actually took away, and she went to the municipality. And they were OK about it. And we got it back. And we lived there for another five years.

And then the communism started. And I told my sister that I want to leave, I want to go to Israel. And she also wanted to come with me. And my mother could not. And here we separated. It was rather dramatic. And--

Why could she not?

They didn't let people out anymore, those days. There were no more groups.

The communists were now running--

They didn't let anybody out. We left only the two of us to Paris and from there to Marseilles. And there, we waited for a ship. No more groups were there. I remember, too late. My mother wouldn't have let us go anyhow. She wouldn't have let us go. But when she saw that the situation gets worse, she told, OK.

And then there was-- actually, it wasn't a rule that mothers, parents could come to kids and kids to go out to parents. I mean no other way. So she stayed. And she came-- in 1956, she came after us to Israel.

So you were able to get her to come Israel?

Yes, yes, yes, she came. She married in between.

That was seven years after you had left.

Yes. Yes, it was a long time. But she came. And she lived to the age of 97 and a half on a kibbutz in Israel, had a very nice life. Until her last day, she knew everything and she remembered everything. And she knew all the telephone numbers, all her grandchildren, and great grandchildren. She was great till the end.

And she died in 2000, is that right? Or--

She didn't get to 2000.

She did not get to 2000.

1999.

I really wish, and I imagine everybody in this room feels what I feel, like we would like to have met your mother, what a remarkable--

Yes, she was great.

Remarkable woman.

She was a great in every way.

OK, do we have some other questions? Young lady in blue.

And I was wondering if you could speak to the fact do you feel forgiveness towards those who did those things to you? And what it's like, if so, to come to these things again. Does it conjure up some of these emotions that you felt as a child?

Question, two parts really to it. The first is, what have you felt in the way of forgiveness or what has that felt like for you to those who did all those horrible things to you and so many others? And the second part is, when you come to the museum, what feelings does it evoke to see all that is represented here?

I try not to see everything. The first time I came with my grandson. And he told, look, I'm going in front of you, and you just look at what I tell you you can look at. And he really didn't let me look at many things. And I suppose it was right. And I still-- I work here as a volunteer. But I will not look at many things that I can't do.

Right.

But forgiveness you can't-- that's a very big word, to forgive, to forget. I had to go back to Germany at some point. And they kept on telling myself, this is not the same generation. That's the third generation that has nothing to do with it. And the generation that had to do with it, it's hard to forget and hard to forgive. But life goes on. And they tried to-- no, they couldn't. Actually, they couldn't.

If we have time, you might share with us the remarkable time when you did go back to Germany. 30 years later, right?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Let's see if we have some other questions.

But-- just-- OK.

OK.

OK.

Ma'am.

First of all, thank you very much for sharing with us what must have been a horrific, horrific time in your life. And [INAUDIBLE].

Thank you.

My question is, were you able to reconnect with your extended family when you went back.

The question is, were you able to reconnect with that very large extended family?

Yes, we were very, very lucky. My mother-- we stayed in Austria actually for nine months. And we couldn't decide what to do. She couldn't decide. And we wanted-- we didn't want to go back. We wanted to go to Palestine actually. And there was no Israel those days. And my mother told me, she has to go back and see who remained alive from the family.

So we went back. And luckily, really, we didn't lose everybody. We lost two uncles who went to forced labor. And we never found out what happened to him from my father's side and from my mother's side another uncle who we also don't

actually know what happened to him. So two people were lost from the big family. We were really very lucky in that way also.

But about Germany, forget and forgive, my kids wouldn't drive a German car. And they wouldn't buy a German product. I already would, I mean, but they can't get over it.

Agi, you were invited back to Calw, Germany, 30 years later. Tell us a little bit about that for you.

When we were in those barns, sleeping, and one of us had--

On the death march, right?

On the death march, one of us had an idea by curving-- carving?

Carving.

Into the wall her name, address, and telephone number in Budapest. But that was in '45. And after 30 years, this barn was sold. And the woman who kept the barn had to empty it. And then she saw this carving. And she called the schoolteacher from the same little town, Calw.

And he saw it, and he copied it. And I want to tell it very short because there is much more to it. And they visited her in Budapest and taped her whole story. That was my story actually.

And they didn't believe that they had in their town prisoners of war or Jews or-- they never believed it. And this was the proof. And they told they want to make good what happened to us.

And they invited all the 199 people actually to Calw, but only 8 came. Either they didn't want to, or they-- I don't know what. From the 8, there was my mother and sister and me. But my mother, we didn't want her to come. So my sister and me went.

And they tried everything to find out from us what happened and why it happened and to compensate us and told us that they will take us-- they took us to the factory where we were working those days and everywhere where we were marching. And they took us back to the school where we were studying the aeroplane spare parts, planes actually.

And the mayor of the little town-- we were on the first page in the Frankfurt newspaper. They took pictures, and all our stories were advertised. So they tried to explain and to repair whatever could be done.

You were telling me-- tell us what you told me about that one moment you had with all these young German adolescents.

By the school. They asked us to talk to the school children. So every one of us went to a different classroom. I went alone. Some of them went with interpreters. And I don't really why I went alone without anybody else.

And when I was standing there on the podium and looked at all the schoolchildren, for a moment, I forgot where I was and what happened. And I just could see Hitlerjugend. That we have seen so many years and we were so afraid of. And for a moment, I thought they never saw anybody Jew. And I am here, a Jewish girl alone in front of so many Hitlerjugend kids. And then I-- it was hard to get over this feeling.

And then I didn't know how to break the ice. And I told them, OK, have you ever seen a tattoo? What was done to us, that we were only numbers. We were not people. And then I lifted my sleeve and went around in the classroom and showed them the number.

And they were very shocked. And millions of questions asked. And they didn't want to let me go. And they came to the hotel. And they stayed till 2:00, 3:00 at night and kept on asking questions and telling us, sorry, sorry, sorry. But I know

whose grandfather was who, I mean who was in the German army those days. So it was very dramatic, this meeting.

Agi, we're almost at a close. And like everybody here, we wish we had a whole lot more time with you. And certainly, I want to thank our audience for being here. And mostly, Agi, to thank you, of course, for being willing to come here and to share such painful and such deep, deep memories.

Before I turn back to Agi to close our program, I'd like to remind you that we have a First Person program every Wednesday at 1:00 until August 30. So next week on March 29, we will have another First Person program. And our guest will be Mr. Fritz Gluckstein, who is from Germany and, Fritz, who survived the Holocaust by managing to stay in Berlin throughout the war despite several arrests and other close calls. So I hope you can come back and join us next Wednesday. And if not, at some other Wednesday between now and the end of August.

It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. And with that, I'd like to turn back to Agi to offer her closing thoughts for us today.

I just want to add to the story that I was very, very lucky, and very few people were that lucky to come out of it also alive and also together with the family and also without seeing so many atrocities what were happening. I was really very lucky. And I still hear many people don't believe that the Holocaust happened. I can still read and hear about it a lot. And I make it a mission that I should tell my own personal story and try to be convincing. And those who didn't believe, or still don't believe, that they should see that it has happened, and it should be always less people who refuse to believe that it really happened. And you can't prove it, I mean, in many ways. But--

You're--

So I made it a mission, as hard as it is to talk and tell it again. And one wants to forget it. And for the first 50 years, we never spoke about it. And everyone tried to forget. And the next 50 years, actually, I try to remember. And I do everything to keep on remembering that I tried to forget because I want that people should believe that it happened, and it should never happen again, not only to Jews, to any other group of people.

Agi, would you be willing to stay for a few extra minutes in case anybody wants to come over to the side and chat with you?

Yes, of course.

So Agi will be over here by the side of the podium. Agi, thank you so much.

I thank you.

[APPLAUSE]