

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. We are in our ninth season of First Person. Our First Person today is Mr. Herman Taube. We shall meet Mr. Taube 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. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. With few exceptions, we will have a First Person program each Wednesday through August 27. We will also have First Person programs on Tuesdays in June and July. The museum's website, at [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)-- that's [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)-- provides a list of upcoming First Person guests. When you go to the website, just click on First Person and it'll take you there.

This 2008 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Dora Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring First Person.

Herman Taube will share with us his First Person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, you will have an opportunity to ask Herman some questions.

Before you are introduced to him. I have several requests of you, and a couple of announcements. First, if possible, please stay seated with us through the one-hour program. That will minimize any disruptions for Herman as he speaks.

Second, if we do have a question and answer period, and you have a question, I ask that you try to make it as brief as you can. I will repeat the question so everyone in the room hears the question, as well as Herman, and then he'll respond to your question.

I'd like to ask those of you who may have a cell phone or a pager that's not yet been turned off, if you wouldn't mind doing so now. And I'd also like to let those of you who may have passes for the permanent exhibition this afternoon know that they are good for the entire afternoon. So you can stay comfortably with us until 2 o'clock and then go to the permanent exhibition.

In January, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum announced that it began providing information to Holocaust survivors and their families from the International Tracing Service, or ITS, archive. Located in Germany, the archive was the largest closed Holocaust archive in the world, containing information on approximately 17.5 million victims of the Nazis, both Jews and non-Jews. After years of effort, the archive has been opened to the museum. The ITS material is being transferred in digital form in several installments, the first of which arrived in August 2007. More information on the ITS collection can be found on the museum's website, or by visiting the museum's Benjamin and Vladka Meed Registry of Holocaust Survivors that is located on the second floor of this building in the Wexner Learning Center.

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 Herman Taube is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with the introduction of Herman Taube.

And we begin with this photograph of Herman Taube. On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Poland, and on this map of Poland. The arrow points to Łódź, where Herman was raised by his grandparents.

As a young man, Herman worked in a hospital in Łódź to help his grandparents make ends meet. A typical day consisted of working at the hospital, going to school, returning to the hospital, and finally going home to do homework.

When his interest in the medical field became more serious, someone advised him to volunteer for the Polish

army, which might give him the opportunity to study at a medical school. Just a month later, on August-- excuse me-- on August 4, 1939, he was accepted into the army. But just a month later, in September, German and Soviet troops invaded Poland. Herman's division was captured by the Soviets and he was sent to Siberia.

In this photo, refugees board a deportation train for labor camps in Siberia. Herman worked as a medic in Siberia, and was sent from camp to camp. When German troops attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, Herman was freed by the Soviets and went to Uzbekistan, where he worked as a medic in a malaria station. The arrow on this map indicates the approximate location of Uzbekistan. Later, Herman received his papers to rejoin the Polish army, and fought in the front lines until the war ended.

In 1947-- in fact, April 18, 1947, just two days from now-- will be the anniversary of Herman's immigration to the United States. In this photograph, we see Herman with his wife Susan and two of their four children in their store in Baltimore, Maryland. And we close with this photograph of Herman Taube taken when he was a young man, at war's end, in 1945.

Since his arrival in the United States in 1947, Herman has established himself as an accomplished and respected poet, author, and newspaper man. Until last year, he wrote regularly for the Jewish newspaper the Jewish Forward, for 60 years, 1947 to 2007. And he still contributes periodically to that newspaper. In fact, just last week, it published one of his poems.

He has published eight novels, 13 volumes of poetry, and two works of non-fiction, including his most recent work, published in 2007, entitled *Surviving Despair-- a Story About Perseverance*. It is his 23rd book.

I just have to mention that our First Person program plays a role in *Surviving Despair*. We're delighted to let you know that Herman will be available after today's program to sign copies of *Surviving Despair*, which will be available for purchase after our program today. The book is also available in the museum's bookstore. I might also mention that *Surviving Despair* has been published in Japan under a different title.

Herman and his wife Susan lived for many years in Baltimore before moving to the Washington, DC area about 36 years ago. They have four children, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. And I wish we had time to tell you a lot more about what he has done over these intervening years since war's end. We may touch on a wee bit of it, but maybe that's for another time.

Herman continues to volunteer here at the museum for the archives, where he translates documents from a variety of languages, including Polish, German, Yiddish, and Hebrew; and for good measure, he occasionally translates things written in Russian. He is translating memorial books that memorialize entire communities that were destroyed during the Holocaust.

And with that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. Herman Taube.

[APPLAUSE]

Good announcement.

[BACKGROUND NOISES]

Thank you.

Herman, welcome to First Person, and thank you for your willingness to be our First Person today.

My pleasure to come back again.

Herman, before the German and Soviet invasion of Poland, you were a young man, both supporting yourself by working in a hospital in Łódź, as well as establishing yourself in the community as a poet. Let's begin with you telling us about that time before war began, about what your life was like as a young-- very young man, trying to get established, and what your family life was like in your community in those pre-war years.

Thank you. I lived in the second-largest Jewish community in Poland, in Łódź. Łódź was the second-largest city in Poland. 750,000 people lived there. 230,000 of them were Jewish.

My parents died-- my father died when I was four. My mother died when I was nine. And I was raised by my grandparents-- very religious people. And they hoped to make a rabbi out of me and send me to a ultra-Orthodox yeshiva, or school. First a cheder, and then I see what this means, a regular school, then a high school.

But my mind was set on other things. So I find-- I found the job in a hospital cleaning instrument, cooking the instrument in the clinic, and going to school. I went to Katzenelson's Gymnasium for a while. I went to public school. And then, in the afternoon, I went to a Hebrew school, and then to a gymnasium, and working, still working in a hospital.

While working in that hospital, and advancing a little bit-- so the director of that Poznanski Hospital was Jewish. He said, nobody will work on me on Saturdays. No Jew will allowed to work on me on Saturday.

The nurses, yes. Most of the nurses in Polish hospitals were nuns, and even the Jewish hospital. So he said he didn't want me there.

So a priest, Father Jagla, of blessed memory, he helped me get a job in a military hospital close to Łódź, 8 kilometers from Łódź, called in Aleksandrów. So I worked there.

But he always ask me what I want to be. I said, I'd like to be a med feldsher, or I dreamed to be a doctor. He said, no Jewish boy in Poland from a poor family will be able to study medicine. It's too great an expense. And there was also a numerus clausus, that only so many of a certain faith could go and study medicine. So he advised me, if you want to go in this field, join the Polish army.

So to make it short, he helped me with a nice letter of recommendation. I registered. In the 3rd of August 1938, I was called up to service, in the 4th Pólk in Łódź. And God knows better. On September 1, 1939, Poland was attacked by Germany, and World War II started.

Herman, before we continue from that point, let me ask you just a couple of questions, if I might. Obviously, what has been important to your life and certainly your post-war life has been poetry. You started writing poems very young. Tell us a little bit about that.

I started writing poetry. First of all, I started writing on the wall. I had a room without windows in my grandparents' home. So I started writing on the wall letters to my mother. Why did you leave me? Oh God, why did you-- took away my mother? This was the first poems.

And mine aunts discovered that I'm writing on the wall and tried to erase this, and made a mess. So they gave me a nice copybook, and I started to write other poems.

Then I belonged to a student organization. And they started printing my poems. So this was mine career of poetry.

At the age of 15, they honored me on one of my birthdays with a booklet of poems that I wrote, and to old music. And they presented me as a gift, 48 pages.

And after the war, I found it. I found it, a copy of it, at a aunt's, at an aunt of mine who went to Palestine. So this was the only surviving copy.

Do you still have it?

No, I don't have it anymore. I loaned it to a Mr. Friedman. I mention his name. He was the editor of the Jewish Weekly in Washington. I lend it to him.

And I also lend him a picture of Martin Buber and myself. Professor Martin Buber, the leader of German Jewry came to Poland. And he had a sister there who was principal of a school. And I was elected by the students who go around with him. And I was so proud to have a picture. I sent the picture to my aunt. And my aunt, after all, gave it back to me.

And I loaned it to Mr. Friedman, the editor of The Washington Jewish Week where I used to write a column. And he never returned to me. And I mention him now. I forgive him the sin. I really would like to have that.

Now that it's publicly acclaimed, we might be able to track it down. Herman, you, as you said earlier, you were raised by your grandparents.

That's right.

The wages that you earned in the hospital were really important to helping your grandparents, weren't they?

Yes, I used to take out only the streetcar money. And sometime I used to come home, and grandmother ask, are you going to eat? I said, no, I ate already. And actually, I took a glass of tea with this.

We had the little squares of sugar, the [NON-ENGLISH]. They used to take a [INAUDIBLE]. And this was my dinner, because it was a very tough situation at my grandfather's home at that time. He didn't have anything to live on.

And one daughter passed away, and another daughter went to Palestine as a Pioneer. So I was the support. I supported my grandparents as long as I could.

And then--

Unfortunately, the war started. And I left the last time. This was the last time I saw my grandfather. He walked down from the fourth floor apartment, walked down the steps with me, and he said, I know that-- I don't know when I will see you again. But please remember us. Stay where you are.

And that was when you joined the Polish army?

Oh, yeah, this was the last time I saw them.

And as you were saying, Herman, that was, of course, in August 1939. Then the Soviets and the Germans attacked in September.

On September 17, the Soviet army stabbed the Polish people in the back. On September 1, the war started. They said they came announcing we liberated you. [RUSSIAN]. We liberated you.

In fact, right the first day they stepped in, they arrested the Polish priests, rabbis, people who even worked as a sextant in a synagogue was arrested for religious propaganda. And they disappeared. People who had nice home were told they had to leave in 48 hours. Sometimes they gave them 24 hours, because they needed them for their people, for their army.

And a few days later, they took all the officers, all Polish officers, and sent them to Minsk and to Katyn. And many of you maybe read the books what they did in Katyn. They killed the cream of Polish army. 15,000 officers were killed.

The small fry like us, they put on trains and cattle trains, not such fancy like you just saw. This was fancy already. Real long cattle trains. The smell, you could smell a mile away. And they send us to Siberia.

And in Siberia, we were slaves almost.

Tell us about going to Siberia. That was a long, long train ride.

Yes, there was a-- because we had to stop on the way to let other trains go by.

That were going west towards the front, right?

That's right. We went east. So it was weeks of, really-- the food they gave us wasn't-- we ate up some time the [NON-ENGLISH], the food they gave us. We ate it up in one day, and it was supposed to last for three.

Now you're going people. We hoped maybe on the way we will stop on stations and we can buy something. There was nothing at the stations. There was just imitation loaves of bread made from plastic or from something there. And in the-- it was in the window. It was nice. But when we got there, there was nothing to buy.

In fact--

And sometimes the trains--

--you had bread card, right, but there was no bread.

A bread card, and there was no bread. We had-- we had talon for soup. And all we had is kipyatok, hot water from the trains. And we lived. So we-- when we arrived, there were trucks waiting for us.

Herman, one more interruption.

Yeah.

Tell us about the canned meat that you got.

Oh, yeah, the canned meat that we got later.

Was that later? OK. With the message?

We received-- on May 1, it was a Soviet holiday. It's an international labor day. So we got gifts, canned, like Spam. So cans our gift, from the great father of the Soviet people, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. So when we opened up the can, there was a little teeny, like in Chinese, in Chinese cookies, "A gift from America," from the trade unions of America, AF of L, CIO. So this was the gift from great Stalin.

Actually, they didn't want to tell us that this was a gift from America, because America was already then-- this was the later, when Russia was already attacked by the Germans in the war, partners in the war.

Herman, you said that one of the difficulties you faced-- you told me this-- under the Germans-- I mean, under the Russians-- excuse me-- was that they thought of your name as a German name. And you spoke German.

I didn't speak German. I speak Yiddish. But Yiddish sounded like German. But my name was-- Taube is strictly German.

So but the problem was not my name, nor my long tongue. I worked as a medic. And after-- let me go back a minute. After being in the camps, in the gulags. So Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, '41.

So three days before that, we were called. I wouldn't repeat it here. Too many ladies and too many children. Then Poles, and vermin, and the worstest thing I can repeat here.

But three days later, after an attack overnight, we were called "our dear Slavic brothers."

And then came the Sikorski government, the Polish government in exile in London, pressed on Vyshinsky, the procurator of the Soviet Union, to allow all Polish prisoners leave the gulags, the camps. Many of them were dead already by the time from cold, and from hunger, and from starvation, and from insult.

So the ones who were left went to [PLACE NAME] and to other-- in a certain towns, gathered there, and joined General Anders. But they didn't want to fight for the Russians, the Poles. So they were allowed to leave. And they left for Persia-- for Iran, and from Iran to Palestine, and from Palestine to Europe, where they were fighting heroically on the side of the Allies.

But us, the place where I was sent in Uzbekistan, I originally wanted to go to Tashkent. They said, Tashkent is the city of bread. There was a book-- Tashkent-- the City of Bread. And we were hungry. And they said that the oranges are growing on trees. You just go out and take them off the trees, and eat the plums and the oranges.

So when I arrived in Tashkent, they didn't allow me in, because I was Polish citizen. So they sent us to Fergana, from Fergana to Andijan. In Andijan, a woman, she saw my Red Cross badge on my arm. She ask me who I am traveling around this city. I said, I'm looking for a place where to buy something to eat. I'm starved.

So she gave me some watermelon, arbuz. She gave me some watermelon, and said, come with me. So she worked in the health department there.

And fortunately, she was Polish. So she said, we need some medics. They opened up a malaria station in Kyzyl Kishlak, in a village on the border of Afghanistan, close to Afghanistan.

And she said, the people are dying there from malaria, because the great Stalin decided he needed khlopok. Khlopok means cotton. So what did he do? He built canals. You need a lot of water for to raise the cotton. So when you have canals, you have malaria. So half of the population was sick.

Then the Russians kept sending transport of Poles, Ukrainians, White Russians, Lithuanians from the Soviet Union to Uzbekistan, to those places, to evacuate them from the frontlines. And those people were starved, suffered from not only from malaria, and from typhus, and scabies, and all everything you want.

They slept on the streets. They slept on the chayhanas. Chayhanas are tea houses. And with no others. So I had a big mouth, and I went to the--

Herman I'm going to jump in one more time. Before you continue telling us about Uzbekistan, and what you were doing there, let's go back to the gulag for just a moment. Once you were sent to the gulag, to Siberia, tell us what you were made-- what you did there.

I was a medic.

Because you'd worked in a hospital.

Yeah. It's not a hospital.

No, no back in Poland.

In Poland.

Yes.

This may be the luckiest side of it. But a field medic, I could go in to the med station, to the ambulatorium. When I arrived there, at 7:15 or 7:30, people were standing in the line outside. The minute before 8:00, you opened the door. The climate, 25, 30, 40 below zero, was a mild day. Listen careful. It was a mild day.

And people were standing with rags on their legs, no shoes. And the valenki were rotten. I mean, the cotton shoes were rotten.

And they were begging, let us in, inside. The guard, not before 8 o'clock, to the minutes. And most of the

people who came there from the nearby camps, they were-- had frozen limbs. They were sick. They had temperature.

No pity. Not at all. And we want to give them help. I were not allowed to give them a day rest, even if they had temperature. One of the chief doctors had to do that. And they-- sometime they gave them help, they bandaged an arm, they send them back to the forest to chop the trees. So this was going on all those months.

And you became really a very seasoned medic in that time.

Yeah, the experience I wish I wouldn't have, but I had to do a lot of things that now probably would be court martialed, even-- when you have to do it, you have to do it. I was a dentist, and I was a surgeon, and I was cleaning wounds, and-- because we had no help.

We had a few nurses we had. They themselves, one of them was ill, and she needed help. And she was afraid we-- that she will report. She will lose her job. And this was going on till, like I said before, till the Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and they allowed us out from there.

And Uzbekistan, I consider myself lucky to have a job, because I had my food every day. I used to also be in charge of cleaning the barrels where they cooked the soup. So I always had a piece of bread saved up from the day before. And when you cook soup, the fat sets up on the top around it. So I used to go around when nobody saw and pushed my bread around that fat. And it saved me.

Another thing, with typhus, you don't touch the food of people who are in a hospital with typhus. But I didn't care. If they left some bread, they couldn't eat it, I swallow it, and I ate it. And it saved me in a while.

But what didn't save me is my big mouth. They send us rotten cabbage. And rotten-- the potatoes they send us were sweet. They were frozen, because frozen potatoes taste sweet after you warm them up. And we couldn't use them.

So I went to the Secretary, made a mistake. I went to the city hall. And they said, we are the city hall. We are Uzbeks. But the people who are running the show are Russians, the Communist Party.

So I went to the Secretary of the Communist Party and report. They said, they're stealing our food. And the [NON-ENGLISH], the [NON-ENGLISH], it was the raion, city, they send us-- that they send out the food. And what all we got is rotten barley.

So he said, you accusing me, you with the name of Taube, with a German name, accusing me, a representative of the great Stalin, that we steal your food? I said, I didn't say that you steal it. I just say that our people are starving. The people in that hospital have sons and daughters fighting a war. They're not just refugees from Poland, and not by Volga Germans, that you treat like something. But they are good Soviet citizens, and you let them die.

So he called in a militia near to arrest me for insulting the great Stalin. So the doctors that I worked with-- it's in another book of mine you have. So came that they need me to let me go. He said, I'll let them go under one condition, that he don't show his face here anymore, that he leaves and goes to the mines in upstate Tashkent.

If you show yourself again, you'll be sent to the mines.

Yeah, yeah. No, not to the [INAUDIBLE] I said. He said, no, he don't want to see me there underground.

So my doctor called me in, Dr. Khaidarov, a very decent man, an Uzbek, a strong-- a believing Muslim at that time. You know that for believing in that time, you could get 10 years extra. So they were anti-religious. Religion was opium for the people.

And so he called me in aside. He said, first, get rid of the overnight. I accumulated a lot of lice in the room

where I was arrested. So he gave me fresh clothes. He said, Herman, you don't have to go to no mines. I have a letter here for the last six months from the Urząd Polskich Patriotów, from the Union of Polish Patriots. They call on you to come to the army in Saratov, to the second Polish army. And he gave me money. His wife, a ardent communist who always, was fighting with me.

I insisted they had an empty building to give us for the refugees. I said, if the refugees will have an address, so their children, who are fighting the war, can send them some help, send a check, or whatever, or letters, and if they live in chayhanas, they live on the streets, they have no place where to go.

But she said, no, because she needs that building for the local people in summer for sports and for other things, because they will leave if they don't have a place where to go.

But this time, when I had to leave, she baked me some cookies. I mentioned it to you. And the oil was dripping from the cookies. And wished me good luck. And I went to Andijan, and from Andijan by train to Saratov. And I rejoined the Polish army, and sent to Voronezh.

And I participated in one of the bloodiest, bloodiest fights between the Soviet Union and Germany, the Kursk Offensive. The ones of you who studied history are familiar. And it was right after Stalingrad. And this made a change in the war.

I was with them till June the 12th, 1944--

Herman, lets--

--when mine ambulance stepped on a mine.

Before you talk about that, just a moment more on Kursk. I don't know, for most of you, I had never heard of the Battle of Kursk. It's not one that we studied. And Herman explained that it was such a profoundly important battle. And a couple of points, one I want to ask you about. Several years ago, the Soviets, Russians lost a submarine, and it was The Kursk.

This has nothing to do with that.

No, no, just--

This was just named after the Kursk Offensive.

Right, named after the Kursk Offensive, which none of us had heard of. But tell us--

The Kursk Offensive made the difference between the war right after Stalingrad. So the Germans called it "orderly retreat." Orderly retreat. And it made the-- the Soviet army did not stop.

First of all, the Soviet army then was joined by Polish units, by Lithuanian units, by a Czech unit. The first Polish Legion was-- the Germans found out that there is a Polish Legion. So they bombed and killed half of the people there. 7,000 people died. Over 7,000 people--

From the Polish--

From the Polish division, the first one, the Kosciuszko division. But then the second one was participating. They attached us. They didn't care. They especially, the ambulances, they attached to the Russian army. And we marched all over the Ukraine, up to Poland, up to Brest-Litovsk, Brzesc nad Bugiem. And there, mine-- mine ambulance stepped on a mine.

We were not allowed to use the main roads, because the main roads were used by tanks, and by those really, really big trucks who has those reflectors to look for planes, the real big ones. So we were forced to take side roads.



So we went on a side road, and my ambulance stepped on a mine and killed a nurse, and killed-- and killed the driver.

And severely injured you.

Well, I heard it. Jezus, Maria, help me, help me, help me. And all I remembered, crawling toward him, and losing my consciousness, and I woke up in a lazarette, in a hospital. I was there for a long time.

But as soon as I could move around. So even with the crutches. I was medic again. I was crawling from bed to bed. This one covered up. They kick off. For some of them it's too hot, and for them it's too cold. And some of them need a bedpan and some of them need other help. So I was walking back, until they--

Tell us about the-- I think it was a woman doctor who gave you a hard time.

When I was wounded, I lost my hearing. I lost part of my teeth. And so they put me in a tube here. I still have it. A love mark. A tube. The kind of tube that you steal gasoline with in Europe. You would know. It's a real long tube.

So in the-- but I didn't move my legs. So the doctor came in one day, and she said, if you will not move your leg, we will amputate. This is not the Hilton Hotel, your American Hilton. This is not the Polish this and this hotel. This is not the Polonia. We have so many people laying on the floors without help. What do you think? It's a [NON-ENGLISH]. I mean, it's a summer camp here?

So and she cursed me with real-- even woman in Russia, doctors, has a vocabulary that I will not repeat here.

[LAUGHTER]

You see, it's army. But a few days later, one of the nurses came in, and she saw me moving my fingers. So she called her in. And she came in and said, [RUSSIAN]. God Almighty.

This was the mean doctor saying it.

Yeah, the same doctor, the same mean doctor. And she was wearing a white-- white uniform. And the tears were running down her face. He said, he saved. He is saved. So never judge somebody just by language and by-- yeah.

And the-- later, when I was already able to walk with a cane, not with the crutches anymore, and I was sent back to my unit, my unit was in Lublin, in Poland, in Majdanek. Majdanek was a concentration camp. But part of the concentration camp was taken over by the Second Polish Army as headquarters. And I was sent from Moscow, from Mogilev to Moscow, and from Moscow to Lublin, and from Lublin to Majdanek.

When I arrived there, so the doctor looked at me and said, my God, I need doctors and medics. And they sent me patients, because I was still bleeding.

And I want to tell you, the moment I went up-- I walked up two slide of iron steps in the building, in that hospital building, to say goodbye to that doctor. She said, why do you have to drag yourself? There is ice on the side. This was January, January 1945. The war was still going on. And he said, why do you come up here?

And also again, damn it, so and so, you stupid man, you could have fallen on the ice. And I said, no, I came to thank you and to say goodbye. So she took me in her arms and wished me well and looked on both side.

She said, God be with you. In Russia, for this alone, you can get 10 years. You can get stuck here [? '48. ?] So, God be with you. I never forgot that. We shared it with-- shared it with my family.

So I came to Lublin. And they ask me. Father Jagla of blessed memory was still alive. And I found him there,

and we were happy to see each other. He was also in Siberia and in another place. And the--

So he said-- they asked me what I want to do. They want to give you my papers, discharge. I said, I have nowhere to go. My friend-- he told me that Łódź was liberated on the 19th of January, a few days earlier. And there are no Jews left. From the 235,000 Jews, only 800 survived, because the German, Hans Biebow of the Gauleiter, of the Łódź Ghetto, decided to clean up the ghetto.

So he kept 800 people. The rest of them, he sent to Auschwitz and Treblinka to the death camps. And 800 people, he kept there.

So as the Russians came close, so the 800 people hide-- were hiding in a Christian cemetery. Not at a Jewish cemetery. No, the Christian cemetery. And they are the only ones who survived. And most of them were young people who actually came from other cities to Łódź Ghetto.

So Father Jagla said, there are no, none of your relatives. There is no use going back there. You will just break your heart.

So they asked me what I want to do. I said, I want to go to the front. He said, you cannot fight. I say, you'll find something to do.

So they sent me to Pomerania. Pomerania is called, in Polish Pomorze, Pomorze Zachodnie, near between Stettin and Danzig. If you hear that, you learn.

And the-- I came to Greifenberg, to the headquarters. And the same thing I had what I had in Lublin. And he was cussing. He said, what did they do? I need medical people. I have typhus here. I have scabies here. People laying dead in the streets.

And he used to send me-- I was still bleeding from my wounds. In fact, I was bleeding with my wounds until I reached Baltimore, and a doctor from Johns Hopkins, Joseph Kemler, of blessed memory, operated on me and stopped the bleeding, because I was still bleeding.

So he said, my God, you're speaking to me, and you're bleeding, and you want me to send you-- send you to do anything. I said, you know what? You can send me to the town Plathe. It was called that. And now it's called Płoty. Now at that time it was called Płaty. Near, [PLACE NAME].

And I said, I will clean up the town. So this was my next step. I came to Plathe. I took some people, Polish former prisoners, slave laborers, not prisoners. They were slave laborers from farms. They didn't go home yet, because the war was still going on. Some elderly Germans, because the young ones were in the-- were away on the front fighting. And some women. And we went from house to house and took the dead. And we just talked about it. And we buried them.

I will maybe read later, a poem or two of mine. We buried them. If you go to Poland if you go to Plathe, at the railroad station they were supposed to build something. And there was an opening. So we buried all the dead Germans, and Poles, and Tajiks, and Uzbeks, and all the other ones, Latvians who were fighting there, buried them in a mass grave. And I put a sign, for you in our freedom. And put on one side a Soviet flag and the other one a Polish flag.

And years later, people tell me that this was still there, this monument.

I built a hospital there. How did I build a hospital? I took four cottages next to each other. They cleaned them out. There were plenty of empty houses that we got beds. And we took a guard, a Polish guard, from one of those people, from the former slave laborers, to stay there day and night, because the women were unsafe. There was rape, from six to 80--

Women patients?

Yeah, [? they had ton. ?] Regardless if you're a patient, if you were sick, if you're old, or if you're young, you

were in danger, especially when the soldiers got drunk. Vodka was cheap. They cooked it themselves. It's called samogon.

So I had a guard there. Day and night I had guards. And had an isolator for the people with high temperature. And then we had a lot of people was traveling back from-- as the war went forward, the ones who were there as slave labor used to-- started to go home.

So I organized a PUR, Polski Urząd Repatriacyjny, repatriation center, where people can come, wash up, clean up from the lice and from other things that bother them. We gave them clothes. We had enough, so we took fresh clothes. And we gave them some food, and send them forward another day.

Herman this hospital that you built, if I remember right, that was the first civilian hospital in Pomerania.

This was the first hospital for civilians in the liberated territories in Pomerania. I still have the letters of thanks that-- I have a letter of thanks, and I have also a letter that the Kommandant of the city is asking the high command to-- of all the people, I was the only Jew in Plathe.

In the entire city.

Yeah, but with a German name, Taube. So he said, we cannot leave a hospital without care. And even so, Taube is probably German. Please allow him to run that hospital until we find a Polish doctor. I have this document. I still have it.

Herman, one of the challenges of the many you had there was getting medications. And so what did-- tell us about that.

As the war ended on May 8, May 8, the war, in 1945, the war ended. And every day, more people, kept-- wanted to go home, and traveling and coming to the clinic for help. And we run out of medications.

So I found out that in a town of Koszalin-- Koslin in German, Koszalin in Polish. So there is a warehouse of Ciba. Ciba is like Bayer-- Bayer aspirin.

Ciba-Geigy, right. Yeah.

Very great warehouse. And they have a lot of medications. So I persuaded the Kommandant, Dr. Martin-- Major Martinow to take me there on a Saturday afternoon. Maybe we can pick up some medications. People-- no use having a hospital and don't have the medications.

So I went there. And the first thing he and the Kommandant of Koslin went to get a drink to acquaint with each other. They find vodka somewhere. I wasn't interested, so I had to find a place where to stay overnight to go Sunday morning to the warehouse.

So I met a soldier, a Russian soldier who was originally from Romania. His picture is in one of my books here. And he said to me, you speak with an accent. Are you Jewish? I said, yes.

He said, we have some people here who survived the Holocaust, the survivors of Stutthof. You know, Vilna Ghetto. Vilna is in Lithuania. So would you like to meet him? I said, yes. I have nothing to do anyhow, and I need a place where to sleep overnight.

So he said, wait. I get off at 9 o'clock, so I go with you. I waited, and we went out.

And I met some men, young men. And they were all working. The Russian, after liberating the camps, took all those people, men and women, and they said to them, we gave up our blood for you, and you work for the German? Now you better come and work for us.

And they took him all to another camp, to a Russian camp, and forced him to go to dismantle the homes. Everything movable from doors and windows they dismantled and sent to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union

lost 18 million people in the war, and they lost their homes, and communities. So they worked there.

So while I was standing with those people, a young woman comes in, tapped me on the shoulder. He looked at my Red Cross. He said, are you a doctor? And he said, no, but what can I help you with?

She said, we have here, in one of those houses, live six girls. One of them has very high temperature. We don't know what to do. Our feldsher this means our doctor-- is out drinking. It's Saturday night. And we don't know if she comes back Sunday morning or she will come back Monday morning.

In the meantime, she is burning up, but we have nothing. I say, you know what? Let me go and see it.

I followed her. We went up on the fifth floor of that building. And there was a girl burning up, really. Her face burning up with scarlet fever. And the other girls sitting on her bed.

First, I chased them out and told them to sponge- to sponge the girl, bring down the temperature. I said, who will go with me to the warehouse now?

To get your medications.

Some medications. The girl said, I will. So we walked up to the warehouse. The guard didn't want, in the beginning, to let me in. And when they saw my Red Cross, and I told him who I am. And he allowed me in. And I gave her some [NON-ENGLISH], some powder like aspirin, and some other medication I could find.

And then I said to myself, I cannot let a young girl-- she looked to me like 18, 19-- I didn't ask her her age-- or 20. I said, I cannot let her go now and during the night, Saturday night, with so many drunken soldiers on the road, to go back to her camp.

So I walked with her back. And on the way, she told me that she was in a concentration camp in Stutthof, and that she was in Riga, in Latvia, in concentration camp, in Kaiserwald and in Riga Ghetto. She lost her mother, her-- a younger sister, and her grandmother.

And now she says she's the-- the Russians don't let him go home. The Russians want to send him to Russia.

So I said to her, is there anything you'd like me to help you with? She said, you can do only thin-- take me out of here. I'd do anything, because the Russians plan to send us to work in Russia.

So anyhow, after I-- the next morning, I went back there to the camp. And I was a hero. The temperature came down. And all the girls, they are around me. So I become like part of them.

So I gave him some more medications. And I went in the afternoon. I went to the Kommandant of the city of [NON-ENGLISH], a little drinking party. And with my Kommandant I said, I need a favor from you. There is one of the girls that I could use as a nurse in my hospital. Would you let her go?

He said, no, I got to have permission. And then, he said, you know what? If you come here and help me to translate into Cyrillic-- the German medicines were written with Latin and the Russians write in Cyrillic. He said, if you transfer me, some of them-- translate me that some of the medications, I let her go.

I said, I cannot do it now. I got to go back to the hospital. I will come next Sunday. He said, any time, I will prepare papers to release you.

I came back the next Sunday. He wasn't even there, the Kommandant. So I did. I did translations. Left him a note.

Following Sunday, I came again, and I started talking to the girl. She told me her life story. And the-- and I really wanted to help her, because I got ambitious already to. He promised me, and I did it what he wanted. Then he was there.

So the first thing he saw, that I wear the watch, chasy. And it was very important. And he said, oh, he always wanted a watch like that. And he said, here here's the watch.

So can she go already? He said, one more week or two, and then the papers got to go through and so on.

To make it short, on the 7th-- on the 16th of July that year, we had an order to leave [NON-ENGLISH] I mean [NON-ENGLISH], and transfer everything to Polish to the Poles to Poland. And the-- and we have to leave to Halle-Merseburg. Halle-Merseburg is in East Germany.

So I hired a Jeep, a army Jeep, some vodka and some kielbasas.

You hired him kielbasa and vodka, yes.

And we went-- a little after 7 o'clock in the morning, we went to Koslin. I am in my white uniform in a folding bed. And we were now-- the guard keep screaming, [RUSSIAN]. Permit, permit. And I said, get away. We have a typhus case here.

I went upstairs, and the girl was sitting, eating breakfast-- rice with milk. Milk and rice [? over the other. ?] So I grabbed her, and she had already a few schmattas from where who think she had with the--

I say, come on, let's go. And another girl, a friend of hers, also in the picture here, helped her down. And we took her to the Jeep. And by the time he was screaming, the guard, [INAUDIBLE] phone, he wanted to call upstairs, tell him to get away. We took off.

In the same day, we left Plathe for Germany, for East Germany. And we stepped-- and we stopped overnight in Potsdam.

In Potsdam that day, who was there? The great Stalin and President Truman. And Churchill was there for a day. And he-- and he resigned. And Attlee came in. It was the Potsdam Conference. So they didn't allow us in in the city. So we slept on a cemetery.

And the reason it's worth mentioning in the cemetery is something that I make a point of always mentioning it. We saw graves. There was a Jewish cemetery of people, Jewish people who died in '44, in the beginning of '45. This means the Jewish people were still there, protected. The husbands were Nazis or high officers. And they protected their wives.

The cemetery was kept nicely. The men came over to us. And he said he is paid by local Germans to keep those graves with flowers, and clean, and watered. So it shows we cannot judge-- you cannot judge a whole people what a part of them did.

So from there we went to Halle-Merseburg. I transferred the ambulance to them. And I decided to go back to Poland. And the girl was with me. I said, now you're free to go. You can go home to Germany.

So while I was waiting for the train to go back to Poland, who is coming on the railroad tracks? The girl with her schmattas, with her little bag, and another boy, also that we found here in the camps. Comes with her. He said, I want to come with you. Want to come to Poland.

So she went with me to Poland. I gave her a uniform as a assistant nurse. And later married her. And she is my wife, the mother of my children, and the grandmother of my children and the great-grandmother of my children.

And she'll be a First Person guest on June 26.

She is seeing that from the day they opened that museum, she is here a volunteer. And we ask her why, same thing that I say. We survived. Sometimes we have a guilt feeling. Why did we survive and our families perished? So many millions of people perished.

I just talked to my friend here, Bill. I said, I saw people dying on the fields of Europe. And I learned the word mama, Mamma Mia, Mutter, Mamusia. In so many languages. Why do those young people had to die. Why did we need it, that war. And we didn't learn nothing from it. There's still wars goes on.

So the only thing is to pray for a better world, for a world of peace, for all of us. For all of you. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Before-- [APPLAUSE]. Before we wrap up our program-- and we're going to turn back to Herman in just a couple of moments, I'd like to say a couple of comments to close, if I might do that.

And first, of course, it's to thank all of you for joining us today, and to thank Herman for his willingness to be our First Person. And I think, as you could tell, we could spend the entire afternoon, and learn so much more, and hear so much more, and only begin to scratch the surface of his life.

I'd like to remind you that we have a First Person program most every Wednesdays. The next two Wednesdays are an exception. With Passover holiday coming up, and then followed by the Days of Remembrance the following week, we will not have another First Person program until Wednesday, May the 7th. That'll be our next First Person program.

And our First Person will be Mr. Martin Weiss. Mr. Weiss, who is from Czechoslovakia, survived the Munkacs Ghetto, the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, and the Mauthausen concentration camp. So we hope that perhaps you could come back on May 7, and if not, some other Wednesday between now and the end of May. And then possibly-- excuse me, the end of August. And then on Tuesdays in June and July.

It's our tradition that the First Person, our First Person, has the last word. And so I'm going to turn back to Herman in just a moment.

I'd also like to let you-- remind you that we will have Herman outside the doors there up the stairs, where he will be signing his books, if you care to purchase one of his books. And there are several of them there, including his most recent, Surviving Despair-- a Story About Perseverance. This is Surviving Despair. This book. Plus there's one of his books of poetry, Looking Back, Going Forward. A remarkable person.

And so with that, I'd like, Herman, for you to say whatever you'd like to say to end today's First Person program.

I would rather read a poem.

Absolutely. Would you like me to get it for you?

No.

No? OK.

[INAUDIBLE]

First I read you a note about I mentioned before, Plathe railroad station.

When you visit Poland, go to Pomerania, [INAUDIBLE] to the picturesque town of Płoty, powiad [POLISH]. There, at the railroad station, you will see a mass grave with a monument inscribed in Polish-- "For you and our freedom."

In March 1945, I was digging a common grave for Russian, Poles, Jews, Lithuanians, and Kyrgyzsians who had been killed on the road to Stettin and Koszalin.

There, in the railroad station, we placed the corpses in a row. We dug a grave and laid them out without prayers. Just total silence.

Major Martinow, military commander of Plathe, himself severely wounded in the war, worked beside me after the burial. I hope, when peace comes one day, we will not forget all those young men.

It's a note. It's not-- I don't call it a poem. It's a poetic note.

And then I want to read to you-- we commemorate this week the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, April 19, 1945, the first night of Passover. So the Gauleiter of Warsaw decided to give Adolf Hitler a gift, April 20, to his birthday, to give him Warsaw, the largest Jewish community in the world. 365,000 Jews. He will give him a city judenrein-- without Jews.

But what happened in that day, young boys and girls from the high schools and from all religious persuasion, from the Orthodox, from the socialists, from the Zionists, greeted the German army, who came to liquidate the ghetto, with Molotov cocktails and with guns provided by the Polish Underground.

And they resisted from April 19 till May 16, longer than the defense of the Maginot Line in French. And after there was no more ammunition, then the Germans had the city on fire, they jumped from the windows shouting, Shema Yisrael, Hear, O Israel, and they died in the flames. And we Jews who commemorate Passover-- and we do it every year, and don't-- those of you who want more details can come over to me and I will give it to you. I reproduced an article for you about the uprising in the ghetto.

We commemorate when we celebrate the Exodus of Egypt, we also celebrate that night, the resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto. That people, we will learn from it. People should not be quiet. People should not take everything silently. And when you see in your life starts out with Polish jokes, or other jokes about minorities, about Black people, about other people, this is where all this starts, when all this starts. Hatred. And I hope that we learn something from it.

First of all, to speak up when we see evil, and secondly, the hope and pray-- pray to God-- for peace, peace among all people. And I thank you for coming.

[APPLAUSE]