

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 year of the First Person program.

Our "First Person" today is Mrs. Helen Goldkind, whom you shall meet shortly. First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand experiences associated with the Holocaust. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum.

With few exceptions, we will have a First Person program each Wednesday through August 27. We are also having 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 the upcoming First Person guests. 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.

Helen Goldkind will share with us her First Person account of her experience during the Holocaust and World War II for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have a question and answer period when she finishes her presentation.

Before you're introduced to her, I have several requests of you, and a couple of announcements. First, if possible, we ask that you stay seated with us throughout the one-hour program. That will minimize any disruptions for Helen as she speaks. If we do have a question and answer period, I ask that you make your question as brief as you can. I will repeat it so all in the room hear it, including Helen, and then she'll respond to your question. If you have a cell phone or a pager that has not yet been turned off, we ask that you do that now.

I'd also like to let those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition for this afternoon know they are good for the entire afternoon. So you can stay with us through our one-hour program.

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 to the museum in a series of installments, the first of which arrived last August-- 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's located in the Wexner Learning Center on the second floor.

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

And we begin with this portrait of Helen Lebowitz Goldkind. Helen was born in 1928 in Volosyanka, Czechoslovakia. Helen was one of seven children born to a close-knit Jewish family. On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Czechoslovakia.

Helen's father owned a shoe store in their home town of Volosyanka. When Hungarians closed her family's synagogue, her grandfather, fearing for the safety of the synagogue's Torah scroll, secretly brought it home.

In 1944, Germans occupied her family's town. Hungarian officials ordered that the Jewish star be worn, and rounded up Jews, sending them to the Uzhgorod Ghetto. On this map of Czechoslovakia, the arrow points to Uzhgorod.

Helen's family was deported to Auschwitz. The arrow on this map of major Nazi camps shows the location of Auschwitz. Helen was sent to work on a forced-labor brigade in a Nazi munitions factory at another camp.

Toward the end of the war, Helen was sent to the Bergen-Belsen camp. The arrow on this map points to Bergen-Belsen. And here we see a photo of Bergen-Belsen.

Helen was liberated from Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1945. Here we see a photo of liberated survivors.

Helen emigrated to the United States in 1946. We close with this photo of Helen at her wedding to Abe Goldkind in 1947.

Helen came to the United States in 1946, and as we just saw, she married her husband, Abe, in 1947. They would move from Richmond, Virginia to Baltimore soon after their marriage. Helen and Abe had three children. One daughter is a microbiologist with the United States Navy, and their other daughter is a psychologist. Their son is a gastroenterologist and is also with the US Navy.

Helen and Abe would eventually move to Florida, but Helen moved back to the Washington, DC area in 2000 after Abe passed away so that she could be close to her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Helen has nine grandchildren, ranging in ages from 13 to 31, and she has seven great-grandchildren.

Helen volunteers at the membership and donor desk, where you will find her here on Thursdays. She also speaks frequently to groups here at the museum as well as in other settings. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Helen Goldkind.

[APPLAUSE]

[SIDE CONVERSATIONS]

And I think that will work right there. Get mine going.

Helen, thank you for joining us, and for your willingness to be our "first person" today. It's good to see you.

Good to see you too.

Helen, when Czechoslovakia was partitioned and then occupied by Hungary, you were living in your hometown of Volosyanka. Your family had lived there for several generations. Tell us what you can about your early life in Volosyanka, what your family life was like, what your town was like, and a little bit about you before the war came.

OK. I come from a family of seven children, and grandparents, and uncles, and aunts. And it was just wonderful. My uncle was a Czech officer. I was going to school with everybody else.

And my life, actually, as a young person, was very good, because we all lived together. My grandparents lived next door. And I remember running to her. And every time I would come, she would say, oh, I'm so glad to see you. And that was every day.

[LAUGHTER]

So my memory of my childhood is very good-- while it lasted. But then, of course, it changed.

Helen, before we talk about that, one of the things you described to me was a beautiful synagogue in your hometown. Will you tell us a little bit about that?

Yes. It was a small Jewish community, but we had a beautiful, beautiful synagogue. Most of the happy things were

surrounded around the synagogue-- weddings and, of course, people went to pray. They were religious. And I remember Saturdays were happy days.

And people were free to worship. They used to go to churches, to synagogues. Nobody bothered anybody.

We saw in the slides a photograph of your father's shoe store. So that was his business, operating a shoe store for Volosyanka.

Mm-hmm. They called it a Bata store. And the Bata store was a franchise. A matter of fact, when I came here to the United States, I saw the factory-- Bata. It says, Bata. And I says, oh, my God. And my father made a very good living at it. And we had a good life.

And of course--

But then also everything changed.

All that changed. When Hungary occupied your community, your family and your community, your neighbors, would live under Hungarian rule for several years. Tell us what changes took place when the Hungarians took over your part of Czechoslovakia, and how your life changed under the Hungarians.

Well, first that I remember is, if we would go to school, and there were the same teachers, the Jews had to sit in the back. And they were never called on. And my friends that were friends, we used to play together, sort of kept on pulling away. And so we felt terrible about it.

So my father decided that he will get a teacher, a Jew that was fired from his job. And in no time, the whole community, the kids from the whole community, came to our house. And that became a school. Our house became a school.

And the synagogues were closed. We couldn't go and worship. And so my grandfather was very, very religious. And they somehow managed to sneak out a Torah scroll. And that was in his house.

And the older people-- the younger people were afraid to go because the Jews couldn't gather. So they would gather in my grandfather's house. And that would be a house of worship.

What happened to your father's business under the Hungarians?

They took it away.

They took it away.

Because it was a franchise. And we used to-- I was a child. And if we would ask our father what happened, he would say, well, it didn't do so well. So sort of I gave up.

But he didn't give it up. I think our parents would try to protect us from this tyranny, because we had such a free good life. And so then they had to do-- he had to do small things.

Yeah, what would he do to make ends meet after that?

OK, as I said, my grandfather and grandmother was living next door to us. And they had cows, and horses, and goats. So they were sort of supporting us in some way.

Providing you with food goods and--

Yeah, yeah. Bread and milk. I don't remember having fruit.

No. But you were getting by somewhat at that point--

Getting by.

And for our audience, of course, if they're surprised to hear it was the Hungarians had occupied your community, they were Allies of the Germans. And so--

Yeah.

--with the Germans' blessing, they had taken over where you lived.

Exactly. So they had to do what the Germans ordered them, actually. And that's what they did.

But eventually, of course, then the Germans would end up occupying the part of Czechoslovakia that the Hungarians had occupied, including your hometown. You're now, when this happened you're an early teenager, things would even get worse. So now the Germans, the Nazis are there. Tell us what happened when they came in, and how things changed even to be far worse than they were under the Hungarians.

Well, the Hungarians were there, at least the families were together. And it was hard, but we were together. We were supporting each other.

But when the Germans came in, they, in no time-- I don't even remember-- I know it was a short time. And they told all the Jews-- well, first of all, they made us put a Star of David on our house. And--

So on your house.

On our house. And then we had to wear the stars on our hands. In no time, they said that Germany occupied most of Europe, and they need people to work on the farms, and we should gather in the square. All the Jews have to come, and to take one suitcase. So everybody tried to put on a few-- a few sweaters because in Europe it's cold, especially where I was. And so my--

So with one suitcase, you tried to pile on as many layers as you could of clothing.

Exactly. But my grandfather worried over his Torah scroll. So I remember my grandmother wrapped up his Torah scrolls in a white sheet, and he was-- he had it. And he was happy with it. He figured he goes on a farm, and people will want to pray. How do you live without any religion, without Ten Commandments that God gave us-- you shall not kill?

And we never thought that we're going to the slaughterhouse. Because actually, that never happened before. I mean that wasn't in history, that you go to a place where they gas you, and especially children, innocent children.

So as far as you knew you were going to work on a farm somewhere.

Yes.

Before you tell us more about that, tell us of that-- that you told me about an incident when you went to a little store that you had been to many, many times to get ice cream.

[LAUGHS] Well, there wasn't too much money. So I knew the storekeeper, and the storekeeper knew me, because I used to play with his children. So my uncle gave me a quarter, and I take the quarter. And I run to that store. And I want ice cream.

And the storekeeper says to me, I can't give you ice cream, because you're a Jewish child. Of course, I went home crying. It wasn't a big deal, but to me it was a big deal because I couldn't understand why I am so different.

And you'd always been able to get it there in the past.

All the time-- if I had a quarter. The problem was the quarter.

Right. Right.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah. So Helen, they've gathered you all in the square with your suitcase. And what happened then?

And then they took us to the capital city of Carpathia is Uzhgorod. And they put us in a ghetto. When they put us in a ghetto, of course, we didn't-- the ghetto was-- had a roof, and it had no walls. And we thought we'll stay there until they take us to the farm.

And we stayed there for a long time. And-- not too long actually. Not too long. A few weeks.

Under this, basically what was-- it had been, what? A factory or something?

It was a brick factory.

A brick factory. But it was open air and just covered with a roof.

With a roof, yes. (SOBBING) But I remember a horrible thing that happened. I'm so sorry. I'm not-- you shouldn't ask me to do this.

[LAUGHTER]

Just take your time.

One day, (SOBBING) they told the old people should come to the square. And most Jews, they wore a beard. And so my mother went with my grandfather, and-- to that square. And then they started cutting his beard. And they were beating him up.

And my mother had to face this. And she couldn't help him, because probably if she would go over there, they would beat him more or beat her up. So then finally, finally they were finished with these old men. My grandfather was 86 years old.

And after that-- they were done with that, with these Jews, with these old Jews, they went back. My mother picked up my grandfather. And he was just quiet. He was bleeding. But my mother brought him home. And he-- she washed him from the blood. And he was sitting on the bare floor there. And we were all crying.

I have never never seen my father cry. And believe me, we went through plenty of difficulties. And that night, I remember him crying.

But still, my grandfather wouldn't talk. I think he was in a shock.

And your mother had been forced to witness that.

It's just, he was in a shock. He couldn't talk. But he heard what we were saying. We thought he is in pain. And excuse me. I'm sorry.

But two days went. And my mother took a [? kerchie, ?] and wrapped his face up, and put his hat on. And all of a sudden, he says to my mother, I know you all thought that I cry from pain, which I had, but the humiliation, that I couldn't deal with. And that was it.

And then a few days later, they put us in railroad-- in cattle cars, and they took us to Auschwitz.

If you can, Helen, tell us about the trip to Auschwitz, what that trip was like, and then what happened once you got there.

Well, they gave us a bucket of water. And there were lots of people in that cattle car. I don't know how many, because I didn't count them, but--

But it was bucket of water for the car.

One bucket of water. And there were old people. Children were crying. And all the people were fainting. There was hardly a place to sit down. So it was chaotic.

And my grandparents were coming with us in the same cattle car, and my mother worried over her parents. So she would say to my older sister that she should, when we'll get on the farm, she should take care of him. Everybody had a job to do. And we should take care of each other. That was my mother's wish.

And so I don't know how many days it was. We finally got to Auschwitz. And it was still daylight. And they didn't open up these cattle cars. But we wanted to get out of them because it was chaotic. People were-- well, everything was a mess.

Then it got darker. But as soon as we stopped with these cattle cars, we smelled a terrible smell. We figured, that smell shouldn't be on a farm. It smelled like they were burning flesh. But we figured, OK, they'll open up the doors, we'll look around, and we'll see what's happening.

So as they opened up the doors, and they say, raus, raus. They were screaming get out, get out. And we had to take whatever, this little suitcase, and throw it in a ditch. And so we did that.

And my grandfather came with his Torah scrolls. And he wouldn't think of parting with the Torah scrolls, because first of all, it's a sin to throw it down. And my mother looked around. And all of a sudden, she sees that they're beating him up. They were telling him to throw the Torah scrolls in the ditch.

Under the pile of the luggage in the ditch.

Yes. And he said to my mother, they don't understand what I'm trying to tell them, that it's a sin. It's a sin. Well, these monsters, he didn't want to throw the Torah scrolls down. And he was holding on to them. And so these monsters were beating him. He fell with the Torah scrolls. [CRYING]

And Helen, you were there. You saw this.

I saw this with my eyes. That's why it's so difficult for me. And they were screaming. My mother looked fairly young, but she was holding on. I had a six-year-old brother. And I don't know. Accidentally, or whatever it was, I wanted to know what was happening to him. And he was already on the ground, and they were still hitting him there. My heart cried out. And I-- [SOB] somebody help him. This is my grandfather. And nobody came to-- nobody came.

And then-- (SOBBING) well, I'm so sorry.

No, Helen. Everybody understands. So after the--

My mother was still holding on to my brother. And he loved books. And we weren't rich, so if we ever got a present, that was a book. And he was holding on to one book.

And my mother saw what happened to my grandfather. She was afraid that they're going to also beat him up. So she was

begging him to throw that book into the ditch. He wouldn't do that. And she was negotiating it with him. Finally, he took the book and gave it to my mother. And he was watching my mother throwing that book into that ditch. And she cried.

And then, all of a sudden, one of those monsters came, and they pulled my brother away from my mother. And he cried. And my mother heard him.

And she ran after him. And she was telling those monsters that he's only six years old. He will not survive without me.

And they were beating her up. And she fell. And they kicked her around with those big boots.

And finally, when they saw she had difficulties getting up, she-- they pushed her to the left, and she went with my brother. And many times, when I think about it, I say, maybe if she wouldn't run after him, maybe she would survive, because she was fairly young.

On the other hand, I say to myself, my little brother didn't go to his death crying.

She was there with him.

She was there with him. And knowing my mother, she probably comforted all of these kids that were crying. So. [CRYING]

And then, that was the last I saw of my mother. And then, when they were finished making these selections, [SIGHS] they took us. And I remember walking.

So on both sides it was so planned that even the people that were going through the showers, or going to the gas chamber, and they would never think there is a gas chamber, because they had flowerbeds and trees. Little did we know that they were burning my family there. My people.

And behind these flowers and the trees there were the gas chambers.

And you had no idea.

I had no idea. I had no idea.

And then, in the back, I heard music, but I didn't see them. But I heard music.

And finally, we got to a place where they shaved our heads. And they gave us showers. I was in a group where they gave us showers. And they gave me one striped dress, and a wooden clog, and a little red bow. It took a long time, because we were so many girls.

And finally we got-- finally they were finished with us, and they marched us to a barrack. And it just so happened that I was on the third floor sort of the bunk bed.

Third level of the bunk bed?

Yes. And I couldn't sleep. And I looked out. There was a crack.

So I say to my sister, listen. This is not a farm. Look at this. People were hanging from the electric fences. I didn't know. We didn't know.

So my sister says, well, maybe in the morning we'll figure this out. And then, in the morning, they took us to Zahlappell. It was 5 o'clock. And-- I think it was 5:00. We didn't have no watches. And they let us stay there for an hour. And we saw there were a lot of people hanging on these fences.

And this is when you're lined up in the morning, for Appell?

Yes, for Zahlappell. They called it Zahlappell. And they were just hanging.

I think they-- what the Germans did, he-- they didn't take them off right away, because they were telling people, you're not going no place.

So these were people that are on electric fences and had been electrocuted?

Yeah. Yeah. And so after a while a group came with pitchforks. And they were pulling these people off. And that's what it was. Nobody got out of there. Nobody got out of there.

We were in Auschwitz not too long-- maybe six weeks. But I'm not so sure. When you don't know, you don't have time. So. [SIGHS]

They made selections every day. There was always a truck on the platform. And in case Mengele made a mistake, let through an older person or a sickly-looking person, they would pull them out and they would put them on the truck. And this truck took the people to the gas chamber.

So this was happening each day of the week that you were there.

Each day. Each day. So finally, I remember, my sister used to-- if I couldn't stand up, she would hit me in the back to stand up, because she was afraid they're going to take me away.

And so it wasn't long. All of a sudden, they lined us up, and they take us to the train again. And the train, they put us again in cattle cars.

And the only thing, in these cattle cars they gave us some bread, and again, a bucket of water.

And this is you and your sister Sylvia?

Sylvia.

Just the two of you.

So, yeah. So we figured, this is better, because they gave us a slice of bread. I remember it was a piece of bread. And they locked us up.

All of a sudden, while we were waiting for the train to go, all of a sudden, we heard noise. Ooh. Ooh! Like their bombing. The bombs are falling.

We were kind of glad when the bombs were falling, because we were-- we thought that they were going to bomb the tracks, or bomb us. It didn't matter. But I still have a lot of relatives there. We were all-- we were 89 people. And we didn't all go with one transport to Auschwitz. So we were hoping this is what's going to happen.

But we stayed there for 45, maybe an hour. I don't know. And all of a sudden, the trains left. So nothing happened to the railroads. Nothing happened.

So we got into Germany. And they took us first to the factory. They took us to that factory. And they told us, everybody a station. I was at a station where I had to fill the bombs.

So this was a bomb-making factory, munitions factory.



Yes. Believe me, it wasn't my choice. Believe me. Because I knew already that this is to kill innocent people.

So I had to pick up from this wagon the empty shell, which was OK, and put it under that machine, and had to fill it in with spring stuff. The Germans called it spring stuff. It was yellow. It was very hot. And then I filled it in. And I had to carry it with my whole body and put it--

This filled bomb.

This filled-- yeah. I couldn't just manage it with my hand. And that's what I did. It was a very hard job for me.

And then you hardly got anything to eat. In the morning, soup with a slice of bread. At night, we got a soup that was made out of potato peels. Occasionally, occasionally there was a potato [INAUDIBLE].

And so I got-- and it was cold. And we had to march. Somehow-- I don't know why, but the barrack was away from this factory. So we had to march through the snow and the cold.

To get to the place where they made you do your labor.

Right.

And Helen, you mentioned that the spring stuff burned, and you would get burned from it because it would spill on you.

Absolutely. My hands were all burnt because I had to fill them up.

And you told me that it was better to be on the day shift than the night shift.

Sure.

Say a little bit about that.

OK. Well, we had a night shift and a day shift. So one week we worked during the day, which is OK, because they kept the windows open. And there was some circulation. But at night, they closed the windows so they shouldn't be seen from your enemies. And so there was no circulation.

And you had the fumes and the heat.

And I was working on top of it. So our eyes got yellow, and we had a little bit of hair already by that time. And it got orangey. And the girls were fainting left and right. They got poisoned from that poison.

And of course, when you're hungry, and cold, and don't get enough to eat, you don't last that long. And work hard. So that's what happened.

So we worked there in that factory for some times. [SIGHS] I don't remember for how long. But one of these days I just didn't think I can make this, going to that factory. I was just so weak, and I was so cold, and I gave up.

When these people went to their death, they were telling, if somebody is going to survive, tell the world, because they felt nobody knew what was happening. Because how can the world know what was happening when they're killing people? They're gassing people?

So my sister kept this in her mind. And emotionally, she was fighting. And so I couldn't do it.

So what happened was, these girls that couldn't make it to go to the factory, they stayed in the barrack. And by the time we came home, they weren't there anymore. I don't know what they did with them, but they weren't there.

And I said to myself, I don't know how to kill myself, and I'm not dying. And I just can't do it.

So I was laying there in the morning, and I didn't go out. And my sister was looking for me. And I'm not there.

So she ran into the barrack, and she saw me laying there. And she was so-- I think-- I don't know. But she lifted me up, and she shook me, and she was crying that she's-- I'm not leaving her alone here. I'm not-- we're not going to leave him alone.

I looked at her, and I says, oh my God, she got crazy, and I'm dying. So.

[LAUGHTER]

And that's what it was.

But she forced you to get up and--

She pulled me out, and she says to me, and we both cried. And she says, I know you're hungry. I know you're cold. I'm going to give you a piece of my bread. And she was bribing me I should just live.

And so I-- I took her a few times. But then I was afraid she's going to die. Like she would tell me in the morning, save a piece of bread. And I said, Sylvia, I already ate it, and I'm so hungry. They gave us nothing for lunch. And working that hard all day without a letdown, without a break.

So then I wasn't taking it, because I was afraid she's going to die. But at night, when-- if somebody's got a potato, which was seldom, we did share it.

And so after a while, after a while, the factory was bombed. The factory was bombed. And the SS left the place. And--

Helen, before you go on about that, I'd like to just ask you about one thing that you told me that I'd like you to share, and that was, the SS lived there at the camp. And you describe seeing there where they lived. Would you say a little bit about that. They had children there.

That was in Auschwitz.

That was Auschwitz. Will you say something about that?

[LAUGHS] A lot of people don't know that in Auschwitz, the SS people, the SS people had their families there. And after they were done with their jobs, they went home and played with their own kids.

And I'll tell you how it came out. Do I have--

Please, yes.

I'll make it very short. A lady came in. And I spoke to children. And I only spoke maybe eight, 10 minutes I spoke about my little brother. And I really didn't tell such horrible things to children. And that lady came in. She was a chaperone, but she was also a mother for these children.

And she says to me, my father was an SS man, and he never told me such horrible stories. I says, oh, really? Well, he told me he was taking care of some people there, whatever.

So I said to her-- I pulled her over, because I didn't want her children to hear what I have to say, and I didn't have enough time. I says to her, did you ever ask your father what his job was. I was in Auschwitz, and these SS were taking children like yours to the gas chamber. And then they went to play with their own children.

(SOBBING) She got taken back. And she says, oh, I'll never forget you. I says, good. If you'll ever see children life being threatened, you'd better speak up, because your father didn't. And of course they left. So that's what it was.

I don't blame her father for not telling her. But I was kind of glad that she came forward with it, and so I could really tell her what an SS man did, what their jobs were. So I'm hoping she speaks up for some children if their life is threatened.

Glad you had that opportunity to talk to her.

I really do. I mean, I have nothing against her. It's just that a lot of people are not informed.

So Helen, after, the Allies were dancing. And they move you out of the munitions factory where you were a slave laborer. Then where do they take you?

So the civilians came with a--

Because the SS are gone now.

Yes.

OK.

They came with an open truck. I don't know how to call. A little open truck. We were 2,000 girls maybe they were left, 400. I don't know how many that there were left. And they put us on this truck and they took us to Bergen-Belsen.

In Bergen-Belsen, it was, like, almost the end of the war, and they didn't open up the barracks there for the people that were in the barracks. So there were a lot-- there were a lot of people. And if they open up the barracks, and they let us in there, we didn't even have where to sit because the people, everything happened in these barracks. Some of them were dead. Some of them were crazy.

So I looked at my sister. And she says, there are some dead people near this wall. Let's make like a little wall, and we're going to be sitting there near the wall.

And that's what we did. We sat down near the wall. And we were waiting for our death to come or whatever will come first. But the lice and the insects were so big that whatever there was on the dead people came to us, and they were eating us up alive there.

And it wasn't that long. I mean, I don't remember exactly to say how many days or weeks. It wasn't weeks. The English came in and occupied Bergen-Belsen.

So when they opened up these barracks, they have never seen a thing like that. They didn't know what it was. Was it a crazy house? What is it was?

So you're locked in these barracks.

We were locked in these barracks. We couldn't go out any more. So they went and called Eisenhower, because I remember Eisenhower came. And whenever Eisenhower comes, the newsmen run after him. And they took these pictures to show what was there.

Some of what we saw on the slide show.

Yeah. So anyway, my sister got sick first. And she was wanting to live, and she got sick first.

So now you're liberated. Now she becomes very ill.

Very ill. And so the English took her away. And I thought they took her away. She'll be away for a day or two and she'll come back. And all of a sudden she's not back.

So I went to look for her. I thought I'll find her. Because there was a lot of dead people.

Matter of fact, I remember walking. And I saw, like, a mountains moving, a little mountain. And I knew that a mountain doesn't move. So I went closer to this place. And I saw the lice and the insects were moving. And I was already sick by that time. And so it wasn't that the mountain was moving, but the insects and the lice were moving. And it made me think that the mountain was moving.

So I fell. I must have fallen. And I just-- I just didn't know.

Just collapsed.

But-- I don't know how much time I have. I have--

Can you tell about your cousin?

Yes. I was going to let them out.

No, no. Please.

Because I talk so.

No, no, no. Please, please share that with us.

While I'm looking for my sister, I look down on the ground, and I saw an SS was pulling, like, a body by his ankles with a string. And it looked like my cousin. And he like scared me. And I screamed, Freddy. And he opened up his eyes. He opened up his eyes.

And this German got scared or something. So he pulled off the ropes from his ankles.

And this, just to interrupt for a second, the German was-- the American, the British were forcing them to now clean--

The streets.

--remove bodies and bury them, and clean things up. And so he was pulling away this body. And then you realize it's your cousin.

That was my cousin. So I remember, he was so skinny. But I remember his long big ears. So. So [LAUGHTER] the SS left, and he was left. And evidently, shortly after this, I must have fainted there somewhere on the street. I looked like a skeleton, but I had a heartbeat in me. My heart wouldn't give up.

So the English evidently took me to a makeshift hospital. They were going around. And if they saw somebody is maybe moving their hand or whatever, that they're still alive. So they took me to this makeshift hospital. I was very, very sick. And they kept me there. And then the Swedish Red Cross came and took out 600 kids.

But while I was in Bergen-Belsen, I was looking for my sister's face. When I could lift my head up, with the help of my elbows, I looked around and I looked around, and I didn't see my sister's face. And I just cried.

The nurse comes over to me and says, why are you crying? You're feeling better. They thought I'm crying to feel better. And I says, no, no. My sister, I know she came here, and she died.

She says, how do you know she died? I said, because she's not here. And she-- I says my life is not worth living. I just

wanted to give up again. I'm alone in this world.

So she says, what's her name? So I told her what her name. So they ran around asking if there is a name or something like that. And they found her, actually. About two days later, she came to tell me they found her, but she's very ill, and they couldn't move us.

So I looked at her, and I says, ooh, she's not telling me a story. I couldn't believe that she would say a thing like that to me. And then, about two weeks later, they brought her.

And you were reunited.

We were reunited.

So I told her the story about Freddy. She says, oh, she says, you were probably delirious. She made me think that--

And you thought-- and you thought that was probably true.

Yeah. But he did survive, but he doesn't remember anything. He just doesn't remember either.

But you found each other later.

Later. And it caused a problem, because we didn't want to get separated. So he took our name, Lebowitz.

To make that story short, his name was Milbauer. And they found him. And he had an uncle here. And his name was Lebowitz. So he could come to the United States because he was Lebowitz.

Because he took your name.

Because he took our name. So he had to stay in Sweden an extra year until this whole thing.

So the Red Cross from Sweden actually took you to Sweden, you and your sister. And then you were able to recuperate over there.

Yes, I was two months in a sanitarium. And then they send me to a school. And my sister went to work in Gothenburg. Yeah. I'll never forget the sweets.

They took good care of you, did they?

Oh, they did. I'll tell you, the way I looked, burned up from the spring stuff, eaten up with lice. I don't know if I would take care of myself, the way I looked.

How did you-- what made you then come to the United States? How did you get to the United States?

OK, I had a sister that came out in '38. And they put our names in a paper. And--

So she was living in the United States since 1938.

'8. So they found our names. But she couldn't connect, because we were never in Sweden. So she wrote to the Red Cross in Sweden, and they says, yes, they found two girls. They come from Czechoslovakia. And their name is that. So she knew already that.

Then she sent us an affidavit. And four months later, they-- we were here. They wanted to unite us because we had nobody in Europe anymore.

Right.

So that's what happened.

I'll tell you the truth, but I bonded with these girls in school. I told my sister, you know what? I don't know, because we became, like, sisters in that school. We were 10 girls in a group there.

And so my sister says, look. From America, you can go anyplace you want to. And if you don't like it. But this is a real sister. So that's how I came to them.

You told me a cute story about your sister was in Brooklyn. But if I remember right, you were saying "Brook-leen."

Yeah.

And so the various officials were trying to figure out where you were talking about.

They had a problem, because there was no "Brookleen."

[LAUGHTER]

So they were doing "Brookline." Is that how you said? The "Brookline?"

"Brookleen." I told them she lived in "Brookleen," but I--

But in the meantime, they had difficulty because she got married. They had a--

Different name.

--name already. But they did bring us together.

Yeah. Helen, we have a few more minutes. Why don't we turn to our audience just for a few questions. And then we'll close, and Helen will have a few more remarks for us. The gentleman here in the yellow shirt. Yes, sir.

Did you have an identification tattoo?

Question is, do you have a tattoo?

When we came, the Czechoslovakian people came to Auschwitz almost like the end. And they were dire for people to work. So instead of them bothering us, tattooing us, they send us to Germany into the ammunition factory.

But there were factories near Auschwitz, and these people were tattooed. A lot of the Polish people were tattooed. They had more time with them than with the Czech people.

The roundups of the Jews in Czechoslovakia came late in the war, and so I think 1944--

All they wanted us to help them out to work.

Yeah. OK. Do we-- young man right here.

Based on your experiences on your imprisonment and your liberation, what do you think America's role in war, should it help out to liberate people?

Question is, given your experience, and then being liberated, what's your view of what America's role should be in the world with these kinds of circumstances?

You mean to say today, sweetheart?

Today. Mm-hmm.

Today? [LAUGHS] I don't know what to say, except I just want to tell you my feelings, OK. Well, I think America is the greatest country in this world. There isn't a better country. Not to say that everything is perfect, but it is the greatest place. We try to wrong the right. And we give-- and the freedom that you have is undescrivable.

So today, look what we were doing. In Afghanistan, we tried to liberate people. But maybe we're extending ourself. We can't be the police over the world.

I mean, I don't want to be political here, believe me. That's not my subject. But as far as I'm concerned, to Great America, by numbers, you're number one in my heart.

OK. We have time for one more. We'll go-- maybe two more. Ma'am.

Whatever happened to the rest of your family?

Question is, what happened to the rest of Helen's family?

They were all wiped out. Nobody came back.

They were on the train with you? Were they on the train?

Yeah. I mean, they were all gassed. Don't forget, 6 million is 6 million.

Helen, did you say that-- I think you said that almost 90 family members went to Auschwitz.

Yeah. And just me and my sister survived, because my other sister lived. She died since then. But she was here in the United States. So they all perished in the gas chambers.

And it was easy for the Germans to get rid of all these people. Matter of fact, when we came, they were capable of gassing 10,000 people a day. So they couldn't get rid of the corpses. So they had an open pit.

And that's what we smelled, even though we were in the cattle cars. That's what we couldn't make out. Because it was an open pit, and they were just throwing people in this fire on the outside.

I think we have one more question over here. Yes, ma'am.

Yeah, I wanted to know, how old were you during all this period.

Question is, how old were you during the war years, Helen?

When I got to Auschwitz, I was 13. And let me tell you something, that was my luck, because if I would be 12, I wouldn't be sitting here.

Right, right. And 14 when the war ended for you?

Yeah.

Yeah. OK. Want to thank all of you for being here today with us for First Person. And of course, very much want to thank Helen for her willingness to share with us some-- just a glimpse, just a-- that's all we could do, is just touch on her experience during the Holocaust and during World War II. And of course, we're not able to talk about her life after the

war, getting herself settled in the United States and building a new life.

We'd like to remind you that we have a First Person program every Wednesday until August 27. We're also doing them on Tuesdays in June and July. We have another First Person program tomorrow, June 18, when our first person will be Mr William Luksenburg, who's from Poland. And he will tell us about his survival from a ghetto, forced labor camps in Germany and Poland, and then being sent on a death march. So we hope that you can come back and join us for another First Person program, and if not this year, put us on your schedule for next year.

It's our tradition at First Person that our "first person" has the last word. And so with that, I'm going to turn back to Helen to close the program. And before I do, Helen will-- you'll be able to be available for a short while afterwards, Helen?

Yeah.

And so if you want to come down and talk to her, ask her another question, or just meet her, she'll be over here by the podium. So please feel free to do that. So thank you again. And Helen.

Can I talk to the young people first.

Absolutely. Any order you want.

OK. Because this young man, he had a question for me.

He asked a great question.

It is very, very hard for me to talk about what happened, even though it was so many years ago. But I'm putting my hope in you young people that you're going to make a better world for everybody. Some people would like to take this as-- was God's will. I don't want I don't want to be religious or political.

But I feel when God gave us this Earth, he also gave us a free will. And everything that we do is our decisions. We can choose evil or we can choose goodness. And I'm hoping, through this experience, being here, hearing me, that you will make wise choices and wise decisions so nobody should-- would get hurt like the generation I had to live in.

Now shall I talk-- [LAUGHS] [SIGHS] I want to thank you for coming and listening to me, because this is not an easy thing even to listen to. But I'm hoping you're learning that [SIGHS] hate, hate is cancer. Eventually it gets to everybody, and the end is death. So I hope we can learn not to hate and not to be prejudiced.

And just caring. Caring. Pick the right choices. And that's what I'm hoping, that the older generation can do to, you know, drop the hate, and you'll see we're going to have a better world-- if you have any hate in you. I'm hoping you-- no, no, you have it. I hope nobody has it. I think once they come, they look for something better, if they come here to learn.

Thank you.

And that's it. Thanks for coming.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

I'll help you down the stairs, Helen.