

Hello, everyone. And welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Nina Ellis. And I am an oral history interviewer here at the Holocaust Museum. This is the ninth season of First Person. And today's First Person is Manya Friedman, who we're going to meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share their experiences associated with the Holocaust. Each First Person guest is also a volunteer here at the museum. There will be a First Person program every Tuesday and Wednesday for the rest of the summer here at the museum. At the museum's website, which is www.ushmm.org, you can find a preview of all the upcoming First Person programs. 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 this year's program. And I'd like to introduce to you now Mr. Louis Smith, who's here with us.

[APPLAUSE]

Today, we're going to listen to Manya Friedman for about 40 minutes as she shares her story as a Holocaust survivor. And after that, you're going to have a chance to ask her some questions. But before I introduce her, I have a few requests of you.

First, if possible, please stay in your seat for the whole program so that we can minimize any disruptions while Manya's speaking. Secondly, please fill out the form that you were given when you came in and return it to the staff when you leave in the back of the room because your feedback is very important to us. Photography is not permitted during the program. And also, please turn off your cell phones and pagers now while you have a chance.

And also, for those of you who might have passes to the permanent exhibition at 1:30 or 1:45, you should know that your passes are good all day long, so for the rest of the afternoon. So don't worry about that.

One other point of information before we move on, earlier this year the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum announced that it has begun providing information to Holocaust survivors and their families from the International Tracing Service, or ITS, Archives in Germany. This archive used to be the largest closed Holocaust archive in the world with information on approximately 17.5 million victims of the Nazis, both Jews and non-Jews. After many years of work, the contents of that huge archive have been made available to the museum.

The ITS material is being transferred to the museum in installments. The first of which arrived last August. If you want more information about the contents of the ITS Archive, go to the museum website. Or you can go to the second floor to the Benjamin and Vladka Meed Registry of Holocaust Survivors. It's in the Wexner Learning Center.

Now, our speaker today, as I mentioned, is Manya Friedman. To give you a very brief historical context for her story, we have prepared a little introduction for you.

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.

Manya Moszkowicz was born in Chmielnik in Poland in 1925. This red arrow points to Poland. Her father owned a furniture shop. And her mother took care of the family. This is a photograph of Manya's parents taken before the war.

Manya had two younger brothers, David and Mordechai, and was surrounded by many close relatives. This is a portrait of Manya, her cousins, and her aunt, who's pictured in the middle. And Manya is approximately four years old in this picture. That's her in the green circle. That's her aunt, I'm sorry.

In 1938, Manya's family moved to Sosnowiec. It was a larger city, located near the German border. There, she had her first experience with antisemitism. Signs were posted there, urging Polish citizens to boycott Jewish businesses. When

German troops invaded Poland in 1939. Sosnowiec was occupied. Under German occupation, Manya's parents experienced persecution, forced labor, and were arrested for curfew violation.

In 1941, Manya was forced to work for a German company that produced military uniforms. In March of 1943, she was taken to the Gogolin transit camp and from there to the Gleiwitz forced labor camp. Manya's family was deported to Auschwitz.

In January 1945, the Soviet army approached. Manya and other prisoners were evacuated on a death march. They were transported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. And this red arrow shows the route of that transit.

In 1950, Manya emigrated to the United States. Today, Manya Friedman lives in the Washington area. She has two children and one grandchild. She's a volunteer here at the Holocaust Museum, and she takes part in the museum's Memory Project, which is a monthly writing workshop for survivor volunteers. Some of her stories have been published online at the museum's website. They are eloquent descriptions of her life before the Holocaust, memories about her family, and the fascinating story of her eventual rescue in 1945.

And when this program is finished, she'll be signing copies of a book called Echoes, which the museum has published and which contains essays by many Holocaust survivor volunteers. So please welcome now to the stage, Manya Friedman.

[APPLAUSE]

Hello, Manya.

Hello.

Manya is going to tell us in her own words her story today and probably start out with a little introduction and telling us about her early life in Poland.

Well, first of all, I'd like to welcome you and thank you for coming to the United States Holocaust museum to learn about the Holocaust. You probably noticed, some of you, that just came in or some of you that already went through the exhibition, that this museum is different than any other museum.

Most museums try to portray the accomplishment of people in either arts or science. This museum is trying to convey to you what hate discrimination, racism, and indifference to human lives can do. And the Holocaust is a cautionary warning to all humanity. Because after all, it didn't happen in the Dark Ages committed by uncivilized people. It took place in the 20th century committed by most cultural nation in Europe.

And we talk about millions. You probably visualize a number with a lot of zeroes. But keep in mind that each of those numbers represented somebody's dear one, a father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife, and more than a million and a half children. They didn't die because of what they have done, but because of who they were.

Well, I'm not an educator or a scholar. With your permission, I can only share with you my own experience during that time. As it was mentioned, I was born in central Poland in a small town. I lived there with my parents, two younger brothers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, host of cousins.

Since it was a small town, even people I was not related to were almost like family. I remember in the morning going to school, people would stop me and ask me how I was, how my parents were. I'm just trying to relate that I had a normal life.

I attended in the morning public school and in the afternoon a Hebrew school. Sometimes I argued with my father why I have to attend Hebrew school because my other friends were outside playing. But in those days, the prayer books were not translated into English like they are here. You had to know Hebrew in order to pray.

And as it was mentioned, one year before the war started, for some reason, my parents decided to move to a large city. I don't know, was it business reasons or cultural reasons? Anyway, that city was not far from the German border.

And as we all know, on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. It happened to be on a Friday. On Monday, the Germans already invaded our town.

The first night, and when Germany first invaded Poland, we heard the news, my parents and their friends got together to decide what to do. Since we came from a small town in central Poland, everyone was convinced that Hitler would be stopped before reaching central Poland. After all, the mighty powers, like England and France and Russia and the United States, will probably intervene and stop the Nazis.

As it turned out, of course, they were wrong. Although England and France had a pact with Poland to defend Poland and England declared war on Germany, but they were not capable of doing much. And as we know, Russia made a pact with Germany to divide Poland among themselves. And at that time, the United States was not anxious to get involved in somebody else's war across the ocean.

Anyway, the men decided to stay back and send the wife and the children back to their small town. Of course, if you had a business or a shop, you just couldn't walk away and leave everything behind. So in the morning, we got up. We dressed in our best clothing and headed for the railroad station.

The place was mobbed. Everybody trying to get out. We were worried that we will be separated from Mother. But somehow, Father managed to put us on the train. And we traveled 5 miles, 8 kilometers, to the next town. And the railroad tracks in front of us were bombed.

So you can imagine the commotion. Everybody got off the train being afraid that the train would be bombed. And since it was only 5 miles from home, Mother decided that we should walk back home.

But in the meantime, we had the packages. And Mother was afraid to leave them in the street, of being suspicious. I remember she knocked at somebody's door and begged them to take those things from us. And we decided to walk home.

Well, by the time we got home-- I mentioned we wore our best clothing. Apparently, we were wearing probably our new shoes. By the time we got home, our feet were blistered. But we were happy to be back home with Father and in our own beds. And at the time, we thought that that's probably the worst thing that could happen to us. Little did we know what lay ahead.

Well, as I mentioned, on Monday, the 4th of September, the Germans already invaded our towns. At first when they came in, some shots were fired, maybe in defence. They took everybody out from that building, even people that were hiding in the bunkers. And everybody was shot. The same thing was repeated on a neighboring street.

And in the afternoon, the Germans ordered everyone to step out from their houses. They selected the Jewish men, marched them to the city hall, put them in an airless, windowless basement. And they demanded that the rabbi should step forward or 10 Jews would be killed, shot.

It so happened the rabbi was not among them. But in order to save 10 Jews, an elderly Jew stepped forward. He said that he was the rabbi. They took him outside, pulled out half of his beard, and beat him up, and threw him back into the rest of the population.

And they ordered the men to say the mourner's prayer because they were all going to die. So you can imagine the expression on their faces when they heard this. And in the meantime, the Nazi soldiers were taking pictures and filming them and having a good time.

They kept them in that place overnight without food or water. In the morning, they marched them to one of the factories in our city. On the way, they ordered the barbers to go home and get their equipment and be back within 10 minutes or

they'll be shot. Just to be killed for no reason, any insignificant thing was a matter of life and death.

Well, the they marched them to that factory again without food or water. We went there. We brought food.

But that factory had a tall wall around. All we could do is throw things over the wall. The barbers did come back, brought their equipment. They shaved everybody's head and everybody's beard. Some of you may not know, but for Orthodox Jews to have a shave was quite painful.

And then selections started. Some people they sent to work. The businessmen, they put in jail. Some of them later managed to get out for big bribes. The others were executed. Some people, they let go. And some of us were still standing at that gate, waiting for our dear ones to come out.

The reason I know all that story is because my father happened to be among them. But since it was getting late, we had to leave the place. And I so vividly remember walking home with mother. It was almost-- it felt like walking at a funeral because we had no idea if we'll ever see father again.

And I remember when we came home, there were two big portraits hanging above their bed. And I was standing in front of my father's portrait, like saying goodbye, because we didn't know what's going to happen. He did come home late at night. It seems that they detained some people to build latrines. And from that day on, there was no peaceful moment.

A few days later, they imposed curfew. Mother was standing with a neighbor in front of the house and talking. Two Nazi soldiers went by. They arrested them, and they spent the night in jail. But we at home had no idea what happened. Again, we didn't know if we will ever see her again.

You got up in the morning in your own bed it was almost like a miracle. Because when you went out, you found out that your neighbors were taken during the night and deported. And things like this right away, all kinds of orders went out. Jews had to turn in all their valuables, even radios and bicycles. Later orders were out that Jews were not even allowed to walk on those streets.

And it so happened, our city was composed of two parts. It was the old city and the city. So in order to get from one part to the other was quite a chore.

And a Jewish committee was formed. But the Jewish committee wasn't there to help the Jews. They were there to do the dirty work for the Nazis. The Nazis gave out the orders, and the Jewish committee had to execute them.

Orders went out right away. The synagogue was burned down. And they wouldn't let the neighbors go out to put out the fire.

We thought it was just a coincidence. But nothing with the Nazis was just a coincidence. Later, we found out that the synagogues in the neighboring towns were also burned down. And in one of them were about 200 people that perished.

And ration cards were given out. And those ration cards, there was no milk or butter or meat or eggs. Often ladies would be stopped on the street and their hand bag inspected because Jews were not allowed to have anything in their house that was not given on those ration cards. As long as we were outside the ghetto, at great risk we would exchange some personal things with non-Jews for some food. But then, the ghetto was formed.

And also, a streetcar that was running uncertain limited hours that was especially for Jews. My father happened to get a job in the other part of town. And sometimes he was detained at work, and he could not get on that streetcar that was especially for Jews. By that time, we were wearing already the white armbands embroidered with the Star of David.

So in order to get home, at great risk, I cannot describe it to you, at great fear that somebody might recognize him, he took off that armband and got on the streetcar that was for the rest of the population. And I simply cannot describe to you the anxiety every evening sitting at home and waiting until everybody was safe at home.

After all this went out, instead of the white armband, Jews had to wear the yellow Star of David. Those had to be permanently sewn on to their garments. And in the meantime, of course, the deportation was going on.

Our city was composed of 130,000 inhabitants. Among those were 28,000 Jews. But they also brought in the Jews from the neighboring small town because it was easier to control them. So by the end of 1940, about half of the Jewish population was already deported.

Jews started thinking of ways that they could be useful to the Nazis and still remain at home. They suggest that maybe we open shops to make uniforms for the Germans, boots for the military. At first, they rejected it. They didn't want to hear about it.

But then they realized they probably could get big bribes. And if they would be needed here, they probably wouldn't be sent to the front. So in 1941, in March 1941, the first shop was opened.

I happened to get employment in that shop. But my parents had to give a sewing machine for me to be accepted. To tell you the truth, I wasn't much of a seamstress. But I was lucky. I was sitting between two ladies that were professional seamstresses.

And like everything else with the Nazis, there had to be a quota, so many pieces, or so many people to be sent away. If they didn't have the quota, they would often take people from the hospital or the children from the orphanages to make up that quota. Well, for those two ladies to make that quota was not a big deal since they were professionals seamstresses. And I guess they felt sorry for me, so they helped me out I was making that quota.

And again, the pay in that shop was minimal. You could not survive. Girls were fainting at work from lack of nourishment. The only thing was we got that card. You call it employment card. The Germans called it a Sonderkarte. We called it a way to life because right in the beginning when you got that card and you were caught on the street for deportation, and you could show that card, they would let you go. As a matter of fact, we had an elderly gentleman that was director of that shop. He constantly reminded us how lucky that we work in that shop and we won't be deported.

Well, in the meantime, orders went out-- right in the beginning, since I mentioned our city was not far from the German border, that area was right away annexed to Germany. We became part of Germany. So in order to get around, you needed special papers, special passports.

You see, right in the beginning when the war started, a lot of young men ran East, either to get away from the Nazis or to get through to Russia and be saved. You see, the concept was that the war will concern only men, that women and children will be left alone.

But later, some of those men could not get through to Russia. And they wanted to come back. They realized they had left some of them wives and children behind. And they needed special passports. Apparently, there were some people that were making false passports because soon two Jews were hung in the center of the town. And whoever was on the street had to stop to watch. They were accused of making false passports.

Soon after, four more Jewish men were hung, also accused of making false passports. Among them was a father and a son. I think that the evening in many Jewish homes somebody lit a candle in their memories.

And in the shop, as I said, we worked. In the meantime, a ghetto, the ghetto was formed. You could only leave the ghetto or enter the ghetto with somebody, with a Jewish militiaman. Most of the time, you left the ghetto to go to work.

While we went-- I mentioned before, well as long as we were outside the ghetto, at great risk we would exchange some personal belongings with non-Jews for some food. But once we were in the ghetto, you could not do anything. And the hunger was indescribable.

And we were going every morning to work. One day, as our shift was about to leave and the other shift was waiting to take over, the SS surrounded the building. And we were all taken for deportation.

My parents and my two younger brothers were still at home. They came to the place where they kept us. They brought me a suitcase with my personal belongings. But we could not communicate much.

The thing was there were so many of us, everybody trying to talk. We were on the second floor. But I so vividly remember my parents standing there. And I think right in front of me, they aged maybe 20 years. And I didn't mention in the beginning, that when the war started I was 13. And I was the oldest. So my parents were still very young.

And they were standing there, as I said. And I assume each one of us had the same thought-- will we ever see each other again? And as it turned out, that was the last time I saw my parents and my two brothers.

From there, we were taken to a temporary camp, where the buyers came to select us. And we were taken to actually a brand new camp. It was owned by private Germans. We were on a lease from the Gestapo.

Since it was a brand new camp and we had our still personal belongings from home, we kind of thought, well, maybe there will be a chance to survive. That factory was producing soot, carbon. The Germans were desperately in need of that product because from that they were making synthetic rubber. And from rubber the tires on which the Wehrmacht or the military was running.

So we were considered as very useful. And surprisingly, there were us, maybe about 200 girls. And between us, we ran the whole factory from the beginning to the end of the production. But you can imagine how we looked working in a place like this. After the war, I found out it wasn't just our outer appearance, but it also affected our lungs.

And we were working in that factory. Beside the German overseer, there was a Jewish woman that was our overseer. And there were Jewish, which we called the supervisors, that were working us-- walking us to work and back.

But after a while, the SS took us over. And they installed barbed wires. They brought in German overseers, women. We called them kapos.

And we had to go through showers. Our hair was cut. We had to go through inspection. And naked, we had to walk in front of a bunch of Gestapo to have our arms tattooed. To this day, I cannot forget that embarrassment.

Keep in mind that was so many years ago. It's not like now. Sometimes I say to young kids, young girls, they wear bikinis or so. In those days, I don't think I even got undressed in front of my own mother to take a bath. And here, we had to walk in front of a bunch of Gestapos.

And from that day on, we were called by our numbers, but not by our names. My number was 79357. And we became a subcamp of Auschwitz.

Well, most of the time in camp, you didn't have to make any decisions. But still, when you got a piece of bread in the morning, you had to decide-- should I eat it now or maybe save it for later? And the same thing was in the evening when we got that bowl of watery soup. Should I try to get ahead in line to make sure that I get that bowl of soup? Or maybe wait for later and be lucky enough to find a piece of turnip or a piece of potato? But sometimes, you luck ran out.

And of course, I didn't mention that every morning at dawn we were awakened to stand to be counted. You call it roll call. We called it Appell. For some reason, they could never get the numbers right. They used to count us over and over. And girls were fainting and had to be supported. And then we went to work.

And we worked till January 1945. That's when the Soviet army was coming close. And they decided to evacuate us.

I was working at that time on the night shift. We came back to the camp in the morning. There was a big commotion. We are being evacuated. Nobody knew anything where to or what.

The thing was at that time I had to make a very serious decision. My best friend was on the infirmary. And I had to

decide what to do. Should I leave it there or take it with us?

She could hardly walk on her own. At first, I thought maybe I should leave her. Since the Russian army was coming, maybe she would be liberated by the Russians. But there was also a rumor in camp that they were going to burn down the camp not to leave any trace.

So I convinced another of her friends-- she lives in New York now-- and between the two of us, we took our friend out from the infirmary. Each one of us was given a blanket, some bread. And we were marched to the railroad station.

When we got to the station, there was no cars. And in the meantime, we could not return to our camp because another group from Auschwitz was already waiting at the gate to get into our camp for a rest. So we spent the night in a barn. The next morning, we walked again to the railroad station.

Some of you that went through the exhibit, you probably saw the railroad car up there. It was a cattle car. Well, we were not put in cars like this. We were put in open cars, the type that you transport coal. And that was in the middle of January. And all we had was a blanket. And believe me, the winters in Europe can get quite severe.

And we were traveling-- yes, I had to take my friend to a corner of the car. With my hands, I was holding onto the railing, with my back pushing away the crowd so she wouldn't be squashed because she could not defend herself.

And we kept going. Wherever we went, the railroad tracks were bombed. We kept going back and forth and back and forth. It seems they probably used the good tracks for the military.

Anyway, later I found out our destination was northwest, near Berlin. But we wound up in Czechoslovakia. And if you know geography, Czechoslovakia is to the south.

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

And we kept going back-- the snow that fell on our blanket served to quench our thirst. At one point-- I mentioned that the train kept going back and forth and back and forth-- at one station, it so happened a nurse from our camp was in the next car. She climbed up on the railing with a tin cup and begged the guard for some water because one of the girls fainted. And instead, he pulled out his gun and shot her. And she fell down between the cars. And as I said, the cars were going back and forth. We saw her laying there, not knowing if she was still alive or dead.

Well, we wound up-- the last leg of the trip, I don't even remember. I remember the night we walked-- we arrived in Ravensbrück. Ravensbrück-- Ravensbrück was like hell. It had four times the amount of prisoners that it was meant to accommodate. So you can imagine this situation. The sanitary situation was indescribable.

And again, we had to get up every morning. And we ran to the latrine. And the way I remember it was like a fountain. All you could do is reach out your hand to catch a few drops of water to apply to your face to wake up. And in the meantime, you were stepping on corpses, people that expired during the night.

You see, all along in the camps, although we were young and still healthy and we wanted to survive, but sometimes there were times that you just wanted it to end. You didn't care how. But when you had a good friend-- it was important to have a friend, because whenever you were down, your friend was supporting you, kind of held you up, and said, we have to survive.

And I remember one incident standing in Ravensbrück, Ravensbrück had a crematorium. They were wheeling by corpses in carts. Only the skin was holding the bones together. And once in a while, one of those corpses would fall off another one. They just picked it up and threw it on the top like a piece of wood. And I remember standing at that time and saying to myself, no, I'm not going to wind up like this.

Well, luckily, we didn't stay too long in Ravensbrück, only a few months. Then they send us to a smaller camp, which was a subcamp of Ravensbrück. Over there again, the sanitary conditions were indescribable. I think we spent every free moment trying to eradicate the lice, which we were unsuccessful.

In one morning, while standing to be counted, one of the kapos and one of the military men walked up to a line-- that was a small camp-- and pointed a finger at about a dozen or so people to step forward. I happened to be among them. I took a quick look around me. I thought, why me? How do I differ from the others? You see, a selection in camp never meant a better lot.

Then they marched us to the gate. Outside was standing a white covered truck. They motioned to us to climb up on the truck. Although the tailgate was down, but we were so weak we could not climb up. And all of a sudden a crate appeared for us to step on the crate to get up. And we thought we were hallucinating. We never saw such a gesture from the German kapos. But later we found out why.

And we got on the truck. Each one of us got a package, a care package. I think those were provided by the Canadian government. And we tore it open. It was food. We didn't care what-- we didn't know what it was. We didn't care what it

It was powdered milk, and cocoa, and sardines, and crackers. And we ate it all at once. We didn't even care if that's our last meal. It was food. And some of the girls got sick, not used to such food.

And we were going in the truck resigned. We didn't even talk to each other. I assume each one of us was thinking, what will the future be? Will there be a future?

And we landed in Copenhagen. You see, that white truck had markings on the side and on the roof. That white truck was from the Swedish Red Cross. It's a very little known fact because it took place at the end of April 1945 while Germany was still at war.

But at that time-- yes, from Copenhagen, we went then to Sweden because Denmark was still under occupation. You see, at that time, the chairman of the Swedish Red Cross, Prince Folke Bernadotte, was in Germany negotiating with Himmler, who was the head of the Gestapo, the exchange of POWs from Norway and Denmark because they, both countries, were under German occupation.

And since it was almost the end of the war, Himmler probably realized that Germany had lost the war. Bernadotte insisted that he should release some prisoners from Ravensbrück. I think, as it turned out, Bernadotte saved about 15,000 people. And among those, about 5,000 or 6,000 Jews.

Well, from Copenhagen, we went to Malmo, to Sweden. There was a big group waiting for us. There were dignitaries and clergymen and just the general public. But I always say, I felt that I wasn't there among them, like I was standing on the side and observing them. We just could not comprehend that we are no longer in camp. We couldn't.

Of course, they took the sick ones right away to the hospital. And we had to go through showers and disinfecting and delousing. And we got clean clothes.

But we didn't trust anybody. We wouldn't even go into the showers because we didn't believe it's real showers. One of the Swedish Red Cross personnel had to go in and turn on the faucet to show us that water comes out.

And then, we were put up in a school. Each one of us got a mattress. But we could not comprehend that we are free. If you woke up at night, there was always somebody at the door-- at the window looking out to make sure that we are no longer in camp.

And a few days later, in the middle of the night, the students came running up the stairs yelling, the war is over, the war is over. We didn't have any nightgowns or any pajamas. We slept in our underwear. But still, the war was over. We ran out. We hugged each other. We jumped up, and the war was over. And of course, since we survived, most of us thought, well, since we survived, probably somebody in the family survived too. And as you already know, unfortunately, I was

the only one that survived.

Well, I just want you to know it's not easy for us to talk about this because every time we talk about it, it's like reliving the atrocities of the camp. But we're the only ones that can bear witness. And unfortunately, our number is diminishing. So we have to do it regardless of how painful it is.

We are trying to convey to you what hate and discrimination can do, and racism. And the thing is, with all the atrocities going on now-- I mean not long ago was Rwanda and Bosnia. Now we have Darfur, the Congo. Nobody's really [INAUDIBLE] our aim is to convey to you, and we hope if you learn about the Holocaust, you'll make some commitment to try to prevent such atrocities to happen again.

Hitler had his collaborators. But there were also the bystanders. And don't be a bystander. Speak up.

Fortunately, we live in a country, the best country in the world, with all its shortcomings, that we do have a voice. There is a saying that evil prevails when good people do nothing. And there's also a poem etched by a German pastor, Martin Niemoeller, which I can't tell you the whole poem. But more or less, he said, when they came for the socialists, he didn't speak up because he wasn't a socialist. Or when they came for the Jews, he didn't speak up because he wasn't a Jew. Then when they came to him for him, there was nobody around to speak up.

But on the other hand, if you go up to the museum, you'll see that we have a wall with names of people that not only risk their own lives, but the lives of their families to save others. That goes to show you that people do have a choice to be good or evil.

And especially, I see so many young people among you. I just want to talk to you. Keep in mind, you might not think about it, that you are the future of this country. So take your opportunities. In this country, you have-- some of you might even be president, you know-- and try to prevent another Holocaust.

Speak up when you see injustice done. And be tolerant. Don't judge people by the color of their skin, their ethnic background, or their religious beliefs.

You know, there used to be a saying the Jews, never again. But never again does not apply any more just to Jews. I think I talked enough. Thank you very much for listening.

[APPLAUSE]

You would like to take some questions?

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you very much. Thank you. I apologize I didn't give you a chance to say anything.

That's OK. You'd like to take some questions?

Yeah, if there's any questions, please.

Yes, in the striped shirt.

Thank you very much. My question is how do you respond to people or organizations who claim the Holocaust did not happen?

I think that's the worst thing that I can ever hear. As a matter of fact, I didn't speak for a long time. Not that I couldn't speak about atrocities in camp. But I couldn't speak when it came about my family, you know.

But just this made me speak. Another thing was also I was thinking, maybe by speaking about my family, I honor their memory. But the people that deny that the Holocaust-- how can you deny it? I mean it's not just the Jews that promote it. You go up on the fourth floor, the first sign you have at that General Eisenhower, later President Eisenhower, the Americans, the soldiers, that what they saw. So how can you-- well, we have all kinds of people.

[LAUGHTER]

So-- yes, anybody else. Yes, there.

Can you talk a little bit about your immigration to the United States and how you survived? How you got started without any family?

Well, it wasn't easy. You come out without anybody. I, being in Sweden, it's almost like a lost child. You know, what do I do? Where to go?

I remembered my father had a sister in the United States. She was the oldest. He was the youngest. In those days, when there were so many kids, the oldest were taking care of the youngest. And she used to write letters to us. And Father would read those letters to us. And they were always-- Actually, she wanted us to come to the States. But my mother wouldn't leave her family behind.

Anyway, when I thought of it, I applied for a visa to the United States. Unfortunately, it took me 5 and 1/2 years to come to the United States because I had to wait for the Polish quota. The United States also has a quota. And at that time there was a big demand by the Polish people. So it took 5 and 1/2 years for me to come. In the meantime, my aunt passed away, you know.

How I got adjusted here, it wasn't easy? Maybe people meant well. But when I came here, the saying was, forget what happened over there. You are here in that golden country. Start life anew.

But believe me, it's more than 60 years since the Holocaust, and the Holocaust like a shadow still follows us around. Because at every occasion-- when my son was born, I had nobody-- even when I got married, one of my surviving cousins was at my wedding. When my son was born, I had nobody to share that happiness, or when my son got married, I mean.

That's what I mean. I'm trying to convey to you. You can't forget what happened. Maybe people meant well. But how can you forget? Did I answer your question? Sometimes I get go off when I start talking.

Would you believe it, I was a very shy person. I never spoke much. And now, if you excuse my expression, don't shut up. So-- [LAUGHTER] anybody else?

Were you ever able to go back after the war?

To--

The question was, have you ever gone back?

Yeah, well, I did go back in '89 because my daughter wanted to see where we are from and all that. I had a hard time because wherever we went, people thought that we came to claim the inheritance. I had to convince people that, no, all I want is to find out if anybody came back or something like this. Yeah.

My father was a survivor. And my aunt is a survivor. They come from a town not far from where you were brought up, a town called Kielce.

Well, Chmielnik is right about maybe 30 kilometer from Kielce.

I asked my aunt this question. And she had an interesting answer. And I'm curious where you found the strength to persevere to go on in the middle of the horror that you were living.

I don't know. I can't answer you this question. I don't know. You just go out. You can't-- you keep on going, you know. I don't know.

I'm not a hero. Like when I speak to young kids, junior high school kids, they usually write me hundreds of letters. They call me heroes, that I'm a hero. Believe me, I was not a hero in camp.

The reason I survive? It's almost like drawing a ticket on the lottery, you know. I didn't do anything heroic to survive. Yes, ma'am.

Do you feel your faith gave you any strength during your time to help you survive?

What?

The question was, did your faith give you strength to survive?

I don't know because in the beginning, I really had a lot of discussions with God. When I saw babies taken out from mother's arms and thrown on the hip, I was asking God. Of course, I never got an answer. But if you ask me if I believe in God, yes, I do.

Can I ask another question?

Yeah.

Did you feel abandoned by God? Or did you feel like God was beside you?

Well, we felt why? Why? I mean innocent-- most of those people-- all of those people, they were all innocent people. But what do we know? What do we know what God-- you know. And as a friend of mine, said Nesse, it wasn't God's doing. It was the Nazis' doing.

Another question right here.

Yeah, I wanted to know, how much of what happened to your family after you were separated from them were you able to learn-- how long they were able to live or where they were--

Well, they stayed-- they liquidated-- I was taken to camp in March '43. And they liquidated the ghetto at the end of '43. And I think my father had a good job, you know, because they kept him. And my brother was 12 years old. He already got employment there. So they stayed till the end till they liquidated the ghetto. And then they were all sent to Auschwitz.

Manya, we're just about out of time. So I want to tell people that Manya is going to stay afterwards. And she'll be out in the lobby signing copies of the book, Echoes, that I told you about. But it is our tradition here at First Person that you have the last word of the afternoon.

Well, I can just say what I already said to you. Be tolerant. And do speak up when you see injustice done. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you, everyone.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.