

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 10th year of the First Person program. Our First Person today is Mr. Herman Taube, whom you shall meet shortly. This 2009 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Doris Smith Foundation to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring First Person.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their first hand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each First Person guest serves as a volunteer here with the museum. With few exceptions, we will have a First Person program every Wednesday until August 26. We now have First Person programs on Tuesdays, beginning today and lasting through 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 year we are offering a new feature associated with First Person. Excerpts from our conversations with survivors will be available as podcasts on the museum's website. Several are already posted on the website. And Herman's will be available within the next several weeks. The First Person podcast joined two other museum podcast series, Voices on Antisemitism and Voices on Genocide Prevention. The podcasts are also available through iTunes.

Herman Taube will share his first person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 40 minutes. We will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask a few questions of Herman. Before you are introduced to him, I have several announcements and requests of you.

First, we ask that if it is all possible, please stay seated with us throughout our one-hour program. That way, we minimize any disruptions for Herman as he speaks. Second, if we do have time for a question and answer period and you have a question, we ask that you keep your question as brief as you can. I will repeat the question so everyone in the room can hear it, including Herman, and then he'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 so now. For those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition today, please know they are good for the entire afternoon. So you can stay with us until 2:00 and then go to the permanent exhibition.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. 6 million were murdered. Roma and Sinti, or Gypsies, people with mental and physical disabilities, 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.

More than 60 years after the Holocaust, hatred, antisemitism, and genocide still threaten our world. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades and remind us of the constant need to be vigilant citizens and to stop injustice, prejudice, and hatred wherever and whenever they occur.

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 Herman's introduction. And we begin with this portrait of Herman Taube.

The arrow on this map of Europe points to Poland. And on this map of Poland, the arrow points to the city of Lodz, where Herman was raised by his grandparents. As a young man, Herman worked in a hospital in Lodz 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 his homework.

When Herman's interest in the medical field became more serious, he was advised to volunteer with the Polish army, which might lead to the opportunity to attend medical school. On August 4, 1939, he was accepted into the army. A few weeks later on September 1, German and Soviet troops invaded Poland. Herman's division was captured by the Soviets, and he was sent to Siberia. In this photo, we see refugees boarding 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 shows the approximate location of Uzbekistan. Later, Herman received his papers to rejoin the Polish army. And he fought in the front lines until the war ended.

In 1947, Herman emigrated to the United States. Here, we see Herman with his wife Susan and two of their four children in their store in Baltimore, Maryland. And we close our slideshow with this photograph of Herman taken in Pomerania after the war in 1945.

Since his arrival in the United States in 1947, Herman has established himself as an accomplished and respected poet, author, and newspaperman. Until two years ago, he wrote regularly for the Jewish newspaper, The Jewish Forward, where he worked and wrote for 60 years, and he still contributes to the newspaper.

Herman's poems are still published in The Jewish Forward and other places. He has published 8 novels, 13 volumes of poetry, and 2 works of non-fiction, including his most recent book published in 2007, *Surviving Despair*, a story about perseverance. It is, in total, his 23rd book.

I must mention that our First Person program plays a role in *Surviving Despair*. Herman will be available after today's program to sign copies of *Surviving Despair* as well as a book of his poems. And both are available for purchase not only after the program today, but also in the museum's bookstore. I'd like to mention that *Surviving Despair* has also been published in Japan under a different title.

Herman and his wife, Susan, lived for many years in Baltimore before moving to Washington, DC, about 37 years ago. They have four children, eight grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren, two of whom were born this past year. Herman continues to volunteer here at the museum for the archives, where he translates documents from several languages, including Polish, German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. And for good measure, he occasionally translates documents written in Russian. He is translating Memorial books presently 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]

OK. Sit down.

Herman, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our First Person today. Let's get started. We have so much to cover. Before the German invasion of Poland, you were a young man supporting both yourself as well as your community, as well as your grandparents, by working in a hospital in your city of Lodz, where you were born. Why don't we start today Herman with you telling us about your early years, what life was like for you and your family and your community in those years before the war?

Good afternoon. Thank you for coming to listen to an old man telling his life story. I was born and raised-- I was born in the city of Lodz. My parents died-- my father died at a very young age. And my mother followed him five years later. So my grandparents raised me, sent me to school.

And since they were very religious, they sent me to an Orthodox Jewish school that I attended till the age of 12, 12 and a half. And then I felt that the situation, the financial situation, in my grandparents' home, it was difficult to make a living. So I decided to do something else.

So I went to the Katzenelson Gymnasium. And they helped me find a job in a hospital, in the Poznanski Hospital in Lodz, a Jewish hospital. But the chief manager of the hospital was an Orthodox Jew. So he didn't like that I work on the Shabbat, on Saturdays. He said, it was against the-- he couldn't swallow it. So he kept nagging me I should find something better.

You know, the nurses in the hospitals in Poland were mostly nuns. And there was a priest, Father Jagla of blessed memory, who liked me and always was interested in my future. And he knew I am orphan. So he found me a job in a hospital, 10-- 8 kilometers outside of Lodz in Alexandrov in a military hospital to do the same thing, just cook the instrument, prepare instruments, and carry sheets from floor to the other, and help out.

And this was going on for a number of years. I went to school and also worked in that hospital. But he always asked me, what do you want to be when you grow-- this is not a future for you. So I told him, I would like to go in the medical field. He said, don't fool yourself. You come from a poor home. Medical school is a very expensive thing. We have a numerus clausus-- this means a quota in Poland for so many minorities can go to medical school.

So the only way, if you want to go in this field, join the-- volunteer to the Polish army. So I sent him-- he recommended me and signed papers. And on August 3, 1939, I received papers to report, a slip to report, the Fort Polk of the Polish army and stationed in Lodz. Nobody knew that 30 days later, September 1, 1939, Germany will attack Poland.

Herman, before we turn to the war beginning, let me just ask you a couple more questions. While you were young, you actually, quite young, began to write poetry. Tell us about how you got started and how you managed to be able to write poetry.

When my mother died, I was nine years old. I was very lonely. My other grandmother lived in another town. And relatives, each one struggled to make a living. So I used to write letters to my mother. I said, why did you leave me? This type of poetry.

Didn't have any paper. So I used to write on the wall in my room and then erase it. So one day, my grandmother discovered it and brought me a copybook, that I should write it in that. And so I started writing notes. Actually, it wasn't poetry. I took notes to my mother, always asking, me why did you leave me so alone? And how dare you leaving me. So this was my beginning.

Then at the school, gymnasium later, I started to write poetry for our newsletter. It was a school newspaper. In the beginning, we didn't even print it. We had it on the wall hanging there every week another. So I always contributed poetry to that. And this was the beginning.

And at the age of 15, for my birthday, they surprised me with a small booklet with 48 of my poems, 48-page booklet. They surprised me as a gift for me for my birthday. And at that time, I met the editor of the Jewish, or the Yiddish, newspaper in Lodz, Mr. Broderzon, a poet who lived on the same street that my grandfather. And he took a liking to me. He used to invite me to his home.

And I had a crush on his only daughter, Hanka. She's still alive in Florida. She's married. [LAUGHTER] Yeah. And he took some of those poems and published them in the weekly edition, we call it, to the newspaper. And this way I started with poetry.

Herman, you were starting to tell us a few minutes ago that in August of 1939 you joined the Polish army.

That's right.

And little did you know that just a few weeks later, Germany would attack Poland. You quickly found yourself under Russian control.

Let's not jump to that because not I found myself. My unit crossed the Bug River. So we stationed our field hospital in a church. And so one day, on September 17-- only 17 days after the war started-- the Soviets came in. And they claimed, [RUSSIAN]. "We liberated you," quote unquote.

And actually, they right away arrested the leaders of the community. They took all Polish officers from all the units there stationed on this side-- this is half of Poland-- and arrested them and sent them to Katyn and to Minsk and to Minsk Mazowiecki. And those of you who read history, they claimed later-- they killed all those, the cream of the Polish

officers, 15,000 of them. Can you imagine? And killed them all? They blamed it on the Germans. Later, years later, they found out that the Soviet, the communists did it.

So the officers, they sent the Katyn. But us, the small fry, they told us to give help to the wounded. And as soon as we did, they took them off to lazarets, or hospitals. So they took us and sent us to Siberia, not direct to Siberia. First to some retraining camps to get out the capitalistic mentality, or religious mentality for some of them, of us. And they send us first to Kuibyshev-- it's called now Samara-- and from there to Siberia and to the gulags.

Herman, if you don't mind, tell us a little bit about your journey to Siberia.

I usually, in my writings, in all my books, in all 23 books, I never write about myself. We have no right to write about myself. We write about those who give their lives that I can be here and the people who survive can be here.

But it was no pleasure. The trains-- you can find in my new book what I have here, I write about other people. So the miserable conditions of those trains. We got water only when the train stopped to let another train go by.

The food, they gave us bread talon, cards for food. But when they stopped on a station-- usually the train stopped for 2 or 3 kilometers away from the regular station. So they said the train will stay for 30 minutes or an hour to take on coal or water. And only the real young ones and the strong ones could run and try to find something with the talents.

But when we got to the station was no food whatsoever. Everything was sometimes closed. If it was open, it was only for their officers, not for war prisoners. And we always with a guard. And it was a miserable, miserable experience.

Finally, when we arrived there, and the trucks were waiting and took the people to the forest. There was no barracks. They had to build their own barracks. And this is a chapter with no comparison. You know a lot what happened in Europe, in European countries during the German occupation. But people don't realize that a million and a half people died in the gulags by the communists. And millions of people died from the hand-- Ukrainians especially, when they came and wanted to create collective farms, kolkhozes they called it.

So the farmers didn't want to go up. They had one cow or one or a few goats. So they were arrested. And most of them sent to Siberia. And a lot of them killed right there. So if you want one of those things, this is-- for this alone, we would have to have a long program.

So, Herman, tell us-- obviously, there's not enough time to talk about all of those chapters. But tell us a little bit about what life was like for you in Siberia and what you were made to do.

I worked in ambulatorium, first aid station, like a Red Cross station we had. So compared to what the people suffered, people died from frost, 30 below zero, and another windchill, another 15. So thousands of people died in the forest. But I had it good in comparison. I worked under a roof. I've worked under a roof. You know what it means in 25 or 30 below zero.

And first aid, they used to bring the people to us to give him first aid. Most of them had frozen arms, frozen legs, and coughing. And we were not allowed to give them-- some of them begged, give me 24 hours of rest. Only the chief doctor could do it. We just were allowed to give the first aid.

And many a times-- and this I saw with my own eyes-- a man ask he was a former polkovnik. Polkovnik means a colonel in the Polish army. He asked for permission to relieve himself, a man about 38, 40. By the time he went and we came-- the men who were in charge of it said, come on, what it takes him so long? And when went over, touch his shoulder, come back, he was frozen to death. He died standing with his pants down. It's not comfortable to speak in the presence of children about this.

Those were the scenes on a daily basis. Thousands of people died in the gulags, thousands. When the procurator of the Soviet Union, Vyshinsky, he made a deal with the Polish government, with the Sikorski government in London, to let Polish prisoners out from Siberia. So only he could find from 145,000, he claimed that only 25,000 survived. So those

25,000 who were after they become Allies with America, after the Germans attacked-- the Germans attacked the Soviet Union in '41 and they become Allies. And so Vyshinsky allowed those people to leave the camps.

So the Russians wanted to take those people to the Russian army. And we said, no. And then General Anders organized a new Polish army to fight the Germans in the Soviet Union, but not on the side of the Soviets. They left the Soviet Union and went to Persia, to Iran, and from there, to Palestine, and from Palestine to Europe. And they were fighting in the war there on the side of the Allies. Any other questions?

Herman, at that point, when you were released from Siberia with those Poles that were left alive, you would make your way to Uzbekistan. Tell us, why Uzbekistan? And what you did when you got there?

When I was given my documents that I'm free, I'm no more a war prisoner, so I heard from the Soviet propaganda on the radio-- the only thing. We had no newspaper. We had a radio that we heard that in Germany they killed Jews. This Jewish community was-- everybody was killed or taken out to camps. We didn't believe it. We thought it Soviet propaganda.

But then I received from some other soldiers that they also-- they received actually letters from relatives who escaped from Poland to Lwow, Lwow, Lemberg, Lviv. So that really the killing is going on. They established ghettos and even labor camps, not concentration camps. We didn't know about concentration. Labor camps and people are taken, and they disappear. First, the children disappear. Then the people over 40 and 50 disappear.

So I knew that I don't have anybody more in Lodz. So they asked me where I want to go. So before the war I read a book, Tashkent, The City of Bread. Maybe some of you read it. So I said, I go to Tashkent, a warm climate. It's not a Siberian climate. And so I go to Uzbekistan.

I registered, and when I arrived in Uzbekistan, in Tashkent, they didn't let us off the train. They had enough refugees, they said, their own. They don't need any Polish refugees here.

So they sent me to Andijan, to a city further up. When I got to Andijan, they said we can only stay here a short while. You're not allowed to settle here. You have to go to some camp.

Finally, a woman came over to me. She saw my the Red Cross on my arm. This my savior. One thing the Soviet did, they respected doctors, vraches, they call vrach, or medics. So they asked me, what are you going around here? I say, I'm looking for something to eat. I cannot buy nothing with so talent.

She asked me, what are you doing? I said, I'm a medic. She said, if you want to, at the border of Uzbekistan-- this across Afghanistan-- she said, we are building a malaria station. And we need people. If you want to go there, you will have a job. We will give you a roof over your head. And you will be secured with food and so on.

I said, I'll take everything. I'm hungry. So a day later-- she gave me a place where to stay overnight. A day later, they picked me up in a arban, in a two-wheeled wagon. And they took me. This was 22 kilometer away from a railroad. No, no railroad. 22-- and on Sunday road, I arrived in Kyzyl Kishlak. Kishlak means a village.

And I arrived there. And they took me to the doctor, Khaidarov, a Muslim, very fine man. God bless his soul. If it wouldn't be for him, I wouldn't be alive today. Not only me, several hundred people who were dropped in that village, their own refugees from Lithuania, from Bessarabia, from Romania, from Poland. So they throw them up there. Also, some people who were parents, the children were fighting on the front, and they were evacuated, so they came to the village.

So he gave me a job. And they gave me a kibitka. This means a one-room house built, excuse me, from dung, a real small one because it was close to the malaria station. And iron beds, who remembered the First Revolution, probably from the tsarist times. And a box, I sat there. It was my table, some medical box. No chairs, nothing. And I started working in that malaria station.

It wouldn't be long, though, before you would find yourself getting into trouble with the Russians.

I was in charge of the room where they delivered the-- it's called snabzhenie-- the food. And every time they delivered something, the cabbage was rotten. The rice had little worms in it. Everything they sent was-- first, it was always late. The Russians believe, kto nie rabotaet, nie kushaet. The one who don't work, don't eat. So the first one was they served their militia, the police and the KGB agent and the people who worked for them.

But the hospital, they delivered bread, 12 o'clock in the afternoon. And by the time they got there and they started cutting it up, nothing was left. So when we run out-- medications we run out right in the beginning. They said, it's a fatherland-ish war, Otechestvennaya, he said. And everything goes to the front. Don't expect any medications.

But food, I said, those mothers who are laying the hospital with malaria and those women or their men, they have children fighting on the front for this country. So why don't you give them food? So when one transport came in with rotten cabbage, I went and complained. So Dr. Khaidarov said to me, go to the city hall.

I went to city hall. The secretary said, listen, I'm a Uzbek, I'm a Muslim. You think that I'm the head here of the village. But actually, the Communist Party, the one who sent from Moscow here, he is the boss. What he said goes. I said, can I go and see him? He said, go ahead.

So I went to see him. I said, listen, three days ago, I received from Andijan that they send out a transport of cabbage. But it came to us is probably two or three weeks old. It's rotten. And people are starving. People are dying from hunger.

By the way, we had at that time an epidemic of typhus. And after typhus, people are hungry and would like to eat. And there was nothing. The 400-gram breads, by the time it got to them, it was 200. They cut it so that a lot of them fall off. And they had it, the ones who divided it.

So I said to him, somebody is stealing our cabbage, our foods. So he said, what? You accusing me, a representative of the great Stalin, the father of the Soviet Union? I'm the representative and you a Polish Jew-- no, he didn't say a Polish Jew. You are Pole, a former prisoner of war, accusing me of stealing?

And he called in a militiaman. He said, arrest that man. So they arrested me and put me in a room there. It wasn't exactly a jail. It was a hall. And I was reading poetry to myself, saying prayers. I never prayed so hard. Whatever I remember from prayers, I used that night.

And then the next morning, so when my doctor found out, Khaidarov, and a woman doctor who was there, they find out they arrested me, they came running and let me out. But he let me out on one condition-- that I immediately leave that village. He didn't want any enemies of the people here, that I should be sent to up at Tashkent to the coal mines. And I said, OK.

So when I got back to my malaria station, to the small hospital we had, Dr. Khaidarov called me in. He said, listen, for three months I'm keeping some papers for you from [NON-ENGLISH], from the second Polish army. They want you. But I didn't want to give you that letter because I needed you here. We don't have no personnel. So please, you don't go to the mines.

Here, he gave me back as much money, he said, you need. For all those months, I didn't get paid. I just got food. He said, here is your money and here are some papers and a letter of recommendation. He gave me back some of my papers. And I took a train. And from there, I traveled for 3 and 1/2 days to Saratov, to the headquarters of the new Polish army.

And after a while, after I had to have other training, other methods, I was assigned to an ambulance. And on this ambulance, I went from the full Kursk offensive. After Stalingrad, the Kursk offensive was the most important action of the Soviet army, with the Lithuanian division, with the Polish division, with the Czech division. And then we liberated Poland.

And I went as far as-- almost to Brest-Litovsk. And on June 12-- I'll never forget it in my life-- 1944, my ambulance, there came an order that we should clear the main roads. The main roads were for the big trucks with the reflectors who will shoot down planes and also tanks, that we should take with the ambulances side roads close to the main road. So we went to a side road. And my ambulance stepped on a mine.

I was thrown out from the ambulance. And the driver was killed. No, the doctor was killed. The driver was terribly wounded. All I remembered-- and I was wounded. I was laying there. And he kept screaming, Jesus, Maria, help me, help me, help me. Holy Mary, Mother of God, please help me.

I tried calling at him. And I passed out. And I woke up, I don't know, two days later or three days later in a hospital, in a lazarett. And my legs were numb. They put me a pipe here and a pipe in my ear. So I was a mess too. I don't want to talk about myself.

Interesting, one thing, they kept saying to me, this is not the Polonia Hilton. This is a hospital. We have people laying on the floors. You better move your legs. If not, we will amputate and get you out of here.

So and they cuss-- Russians, God bless them, the way they are, you know, they cuss, you can write it down. It is something. You cannot-- it's some vocabulary. I hardly could hear, but it was--

So the same woman, she was also a colonel. She was in charge of the hospital. She was a women in the 40s, also a high officer, with a lot of medals. I saw only the medals on special occasions. Always in the white uniform.

So the nurse noticed that I moved my legs. So she kept running and tell her that. So she came in and said, Gospodi pomilui. God Almighty, he moved his leg. He saved.

And I want you to you know, for saying Gospodi pomilui, in Russia at that time, you could get 10 years Siberia. They were atheist. They didn't believe in God. And especially for an officer to say that, it was-- but she said it.

Later, when I left that hospital-- I'll make it short-- when I left that hospital, I went up some-- I left the hospital a couple of days after Christmas. It was very cold. This was my second-- plus, I want you to know that I already worked-- as soon as I could go around on crutches, and later with canes, I already worked in that hospital, helping other people, doing minor-- cleaning up after them, and covering them up during the night if they kicked off the covers, or cover them when they said it's cold, and help them, feed them.

So when I said goodbye and they sent me back to the Polish headquarters in Lublin, I went up to say goodbye to her. And I walked up a slate of iron steps. And she started cussing me, why did you come? You could have got killed. I went with the cane. So I said, no, I wanted to thank you for saving my life.

And when I said it to her, she wished me well. She said, may God be with you. She looked on both sides and said it to me.

Herman, I know that you don't want to talk about yourself too much--

Then you ask me.

And I ask you. And we don't have time to talk about that period that he just kind of glossed over of being in the Kursk offensive. But I have to admit that I knew very little about the Kursk offensive. We know about the Battle of the Bulge.

Look it up. It's worth looking up.

Look it up. The Soviets lost a major nuclear sub a few years ago called the Kursk, named after this offensive. And after Herman told me about it in great detail and I read about it, the extraordinary loss of life and how that influenced the direction of much of the war. It's something we should know more about. And what Herman doesn't talk about as his role as a medic on the frontlines of unbelievable fighting for a long time.

After you recovered from your injuries-- and you didn't fully recover. You would be haunted by them for a good long time--

I was bleeding until I got to Baltimore and to Johns Hopkins. And Dr. Joseph Kemler, head brain specialist operated on me and stopped the wounds, and took out the tonsils and stopped the wounds and the stopped bleeding. I was bleeding until I arrived in Baltimore.

After you were out of the hospital, you would return to Poland. And you would learn about a place called Majdanek. Would you say a little bit about that?

The headquarters-- I was sent to Lublin, Majdanek, from the hospital. I didn't know that Majdanek was a concentration camp, where 800,000 Jews died-- 800,000 Jews, women, men and women and children died there. But I didn't know that the Polish army, the second Polish army, took some of the barracks as the headquarters for the army.

So when I got there, I saw a line of people staying-- Americans, English officers, other officers-- staying in line. I said, what are they doing here? They joined the Polish army. I didn't know that because Majdanek was liberated in August when I was in the hospital. So I stayed. I was there. I read about it in some of my books.

And I saw the gas chambers, the so-called [NON-ENGLISH], where they killed the people with the zyklon gas. And from there, I was asked if I want my papers. I was an invalid. I said, no use.

By the way, Father Jagla survived, also Siberia. And he came to visit me. And he saw what I'm doing. So he told me, no use for you. On January 19, 1945, the war was still going on. Lodz was liberated, the city of Lodz, my hometown.

He said, no use for you going back home because none of your family survived. All the 230,000 Jews of Lodz perished. Only 800 people survived because the Gauleiter of Lodz, Hans Biebow, kept the 800 Jews to clean up the ghetto and the camps. So what did they do when they saw the Russians and the Polish army comes close? They were hiding on a Christian-- on a Polish cemetery. And they survived, but only young people.

So I knew none of my relatives are there. So the doctor asked me, what do you want to do? I say, I want to go-- there's still war, I want to go and fight. Say, what can I-- gave me my papers and I was assigned to a unit to Pomerania. They sent me to Greiffenberg in Pomerania to the headquarters of the frontier there of the Polish army.

When I got there, the doctor took one look at me-- no, I mean, the officer, Major Martynov, take one look at me and say, he said, so and so-- I don't want to repeat the words here because there are children. Say, I need doctors, and they send me invalids? I don't need any patients here. Because I was bleeding, my wounds opened up.

So I said, what can you do? I said, I cannot send you to the front. I said, you know what? Send me to the small towns we passed. We saw a lot of dead people laying there, Poles and Russians and Germans, and women and children laying dead. And I said, I will help cleaning this up. I have the experience.

So he sent me to a town called Ploty-- now in Polish, it's called Ploty-- in Pomerania. So I took-- first of all, I took three rooms, three empty houses and made the first aid clinic. This is the only experience I have is with clinics. We have very little. We tried to get together from the empty houses some medications. And this was our first aid, first help. Also, the Soviets gave us some and the Polish army gave us some medications.

Then, on the railroad, if you go today to visit Poland in Pomerania, on the railroad station, we dig up a mass grave and buried all those dead people, the Germans and Poles and other nationalities who were there, Lithuanians, in a mass grave. And put a sign up, "For you and our liberty." And people told me years later who visited, it's still there. They didn't remove it.

And after that, I worked in that hospital until May. May 8, the war ended in 1945. And then a mass of people from all sides, Polish people and Lithuanian people and other ones who were liberated by the Russians started wandering back



home from where they came from.

So they came to the town. And I organized for them a PUR, Polski Urząd Repatriacyjny, repatriation station. Gave him some food. We had plenty of clothes and gave-- a lot of them, forgive me, had lice. So we made a shower from two barrels with holes and a piece of pipe. We washed them up, gave them some clothes. Let them stay overnight and send them further.

And this was going on. But the end of May, one month after the war, I run out of medications. What use is having a clinic that didn't even have a [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] is like an aspirin. So they told me that there is a German warehouse in Koeslin, in Koszalin it's called now, that from the Ciba. Ciba is like Bayers.

Yeah, Ciba Pharmaceuticals, isn't it?

Yeah, Ciba Pharmacy. So that I can go there. So I ask my commandant of the city, Mayor Martynov, that he take me there if we went there on a Saturday afternoon. When I got there-- so first of all, my commander went off drinking a little bit of vodka with the commandant, with the mayor or the commandant of Koszalin. And I went to find a place to stay overnight because it's Saturday night.

So when I got there-- so the man in charge-- there is a picture you saw here with the first group-- told me that there is some survivors of the Holocaust from Vilna, Vilnius, if I want to meet them. I said, OK.

So he took me there to the street. And I started talking to those people. And a young woman pat me on the shoulder. She saw my uniform with the Red Cross. She said, are you a doctor? I need some help. We live here we are survivors of the Holocaust. And the Russians keep us here to work for them. And one of the girls has high temperature.

I said, don't you have a Russian doctor or a feldsher or a medic? She said, yes, she is out drinking. It's Saturday night. Because nobody dared to talk to. And she is burning up

So I apologize to the group. And I went with her to the fifth floor in our house. I came in. Six girls sitting on the bed of that sick girl. She's burning up, spots all over her face. It's scarlet fever. And first, I chased them out. I said, bring me in a towel and let's sponge her down.

I said, I have no medications with me. Now, if one of you will volunteer and come with me to the warehouse, the guard will let me in. And I give you some medications.

So the girl said, I go. So we went to the warehouse. I took some medication. And then I realized, I cannot let that young girl-- I don't know how old she was, 19, 20-- go Saturday night with drunken soldiers all over the roads. It was dangerous because a lot of bad things happened to young women of all nationalities. They didn't care if it's Russian or Polish or German. Rape was going on day and night.

So I said, you know what? I go back with you. I went back with her. On the way, she told me that she herself is from Germany, that she was in a concentration camp. Her mother was killed. Her sister was killed. Her grandmother was killed in front of her.

And after they liberated her on March 10, the Russians kept saying, we liberated you. You worked for the Germans. Now, you better work for us.

They took them to a farm. And they worked on a farm. And later, they transferred them to Koeslin, to Koszalin, to work there in a work camp. It wasn't as bad as a concentration camp. It still was the guard.

She said, but I want to get back to my hometown. Because the Russians saying, we lost 20 million people in the war, and we need you to help us rebuild our country, and we want to send you to Russia. She said, I don't want to go to Russia. I have a father. My father escaped, and he is in America. And I want maybe able to find him and go there. She said, can you help me get out of here?

So anyhow, I was sitting there two days, not only that I got medications, also translated from Latin to Cyrillic-- the Russian write with Cyrillic alphabet-- because they didn't know what the medications are. So I helped him. And I said, well I want, there is a girl there that I need in my hospital as a nurse. He said, OK, come back next week. I have to ask the authorities.

I got back next week. And he said to me that-- no, he wasn't there. He was out drinking. But he left a note that I should translate a little more and that she will be free the next day. And this was going on till the 17th, about 4, 5 weeks.

Then came an order that the Russians must leave Pomerania and give it to the Poles, to give it to Poland, in exchange because they took away-- the Soviets took away half of Poland and gave it to the Ukrainians up to Lvov. So then the commandant of the city, Mayor Martynov came to me, please, accompany my unit to Halle-Merseburg-- this is in East Germany, Halle-Merseburg-- and then you can be free to do whatever you want. You can go if you can go back to that hospital of yours.

So when I saw it so bad, I was afraid they will take all those women and the boy and the men, send them to Russia, so I hired a Jeep-- bottle vodka and some kielbasa.

You hired.

Yeah. Oh, yes, the chief of the unit, let me know-- and I went to Koeslin. The girl was sitting and eating rice and milk for breakfast. So I grabbed her hands. I said, ready to go? Now's the time.

I had a folding bed. And I was in doctor's uniform. So the guard kept screaming, [RUSSIAN], permit. Come on. I said, get away here. There's a typhus case.

And we grabbed the girl and took her with me. And the same-- about several hours later, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, we went to Halle-Merseburg. But on the way, we had to stop in Potsdam. But they didn't let us in because, President Truman, Stalin, and Attlee were there. So we had to sleep in a cemetery. So we slept at night in a cemetery.

The next day, we went to Halle-Merseburg. I gave them the truck full of medications and instruments. And I got my papers. And I told the girl, now you in Germany, you can go. She said, I heard that the Russians occupied my town. And I'm afraid of them. Can I go with you to the hospital back? And we went back to Poland. I married her.

So this is another story. I married her. And we lived in Poland till June-- July 4, 1946. Was a pogrom in the city of Kielce in Poland. We were the only Jewish family in that town-- in that hospital. And from there, we went to Germany, to Berlin, and then to the home town where she came from. And from there, in '47, in April 18-- two days from now-- 1947 we came to the United States.

And thank God we have a nice family. We have children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. And all with love, we have a granddaughter who is now in medical school in North Carolina. Another one is a teacher. And the third one is in the University of Maryland. And all the other children, thank God and thank to America, they have love. And if I have another minute--

Before we get to that, Herman, let me do a couple of things. One, Herman's wife, Susan, will be a first person guest later this year. So--

You can see outside. She's sitting at the membership desk. And she works here every Tuesday religiously. For years, she didn't want to speak. Now, she speaks. Today, she will speak to a school at 3 o'clock. She will speak here to a French school, 3 o'clock about her experience.

Herman, we have time for just one or two questions from the audience of you before we close the program. So why don't we entertain a couple of questions. And if you have a question, ask it, make it brief. I'll repeat it so Herman and everybody hears it. Any questions anybody want to ask of Herman? We've got gentlemen right here in the front.

I guess the fortitude that people must have to be able to endure these types of situations, do you think because that you were helping others that assisted you throughout this ordeal?

The question is that in light of--

I heard it.

But the folks in the back of the room may not have heard it.

Go ahead. Say it loud.

--if you don't mind. Wonder if the fortitude that you showed to help you survive was helped or came about because of the fact that you were helping so many others?

Beautiful question. If there is any reason that-- I cannot speak about other people-- that I survived, I had a calling to help people. I knew the word, mam, mamma mia, mama musha, mother, in 10, 12 languages. If the wounded were Germans or they were Poles or they were Austrian or they were Hungarians or they were Russians or Lithuanians or Jewish, so it disappears when you wear the Red Cross. You get colorblind. Size of noses don't mean anymore, and color of eyes don't mean anymore. It's human beings.

And this kept me going. Every time I could help somebody get out of bed or sit up or even talk to me or pray with me-- I was once arrested for a Polish man, so my Red Cross and started to say his prayers. And they said, oh, you're spreading religion. So they let me out, the officer realized it. So this made me going.

After I retired from teaching-- I was teaching for a number of years at American U here and Maryland and College of Jewish Studies. And I worked for the community for 20 years, and charitable-- taking care of widows and children. So after I retired, you lost the interest, why did you go on living? But for 19 years, I was supposed to help out for one month in chaplaincy, to hospice, to go and visit terminally ill people of all faiths.

So it turned out from one month, from 19 years till this spring when my doctor didn't allow me anymore to drive. And I had some trouble with my eyesight so until now-- this kept me alive. And I know of many people that-- my own wife had trachoma operation just two weeks ago. So I told her, a day after, one day after, she spoke here at a Hebrew academy. I said, why do you do that? She said there must be a reason the good Lord let me here that I survive. I have an opportunity to share, an opportunity to keep the memory of those who died alive. In this way, this keeps us going.

You know Passover we had that a few days ago. And we dedicated-- we had 25 people, not only relatives, some children from University of Maryland who are not able to go home for the holidays, so we always have them. All those years, we have guests. It's a tradition. So we dedicated half of that Seder to tell the story about the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto in April 1943.

And they ask questions like you just did. And we talked to them. And so after that, my wife was tired. She said, it was so good. We brought back the memory of our people. They were here with us. Anything else?

Do we have a question here?

Oh, yes, by all means.

Ask your question.

The question was, did he ever feel he was spared in order to heal other people?

OK. OK. Your question would have been was did Herman feel he was spared to help other people, and a wonderful answer. I think we are out of time. So I'd like to, before I turn back to Herman to close our program, first thank all of

you for being here with us today. Thank Herman, of course, for being our First Person.

[APPLAUSE]

We will have a First Person program each Tuesday through July and a First Person program on Wednesdays through August 26.

So our next First Person program is tomorrow, April 15, when our first person will be Mr. Marcel Drimer, who is also from Poland. After Germany attacked the Russian held portion of Poland in 1941, Marcel and his family would be forced into a ghetto, where they were able to escape deportations by hiding in secret bunkers. In 1943, by bribing a guard, Marcel's father was able to get his family out of the ghetto and into hiding. For a year, they lived in a hole under a floor of a Ukrainian family until they were liberated by the Russians in August of 1945.

So we hope that you will come back to another First Person program again tomorrow or later this year or again for your plans to come to Washington next year. I'd like to remind you that you can also access excerpts from our First Person programs as a podcast either on the museum's website or on iTunes.

It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. So just before I turn back to Herman with his closing thoughts, I wanted to remind you that, as we mentioned earlier, Herman will be signing copies of his books after this session. And so I have a request of you. As soon as Herman is finished, if you wouldn't mind staying seated so Herman can make his way to the back of the room and go out to where the table is set up, we'd appreciate that. And so on that note, let me turn back to Herman Taube to close up this week's First Person program.

I planned to read you a poem. But I rather say something about the books outside. My 23rd book there, *Surviving Despair*, deals with a couple of survivors, who both of them were volunteers here. And one of them was interviewed here on this stage. When she was interviewed, this gentleman here asked her, you were 18, 19 years old, did you have a boyfriend? And she said, yes. Unfortunately, the Russians arrested him and sent him to Siberia, and I never heard of him anymore.

In the back, here was sitting a man who worked on the fifth floor as a translator right here in the archives. And when he heard, little by little, when she spoke, now she turns blonde. But she was a dark haired girl. And so little by little, he came down, and they recognized each other. After 54 years, they recognized each other. My book deals with their lives, their towns, their communities, their families, how they survived, and how they lived to come to America, and what are they doing now. This is the story of the book I have here.

I really want to thank you all for coming. And thank you for the questions. It was a pleasure seeing you. It's not a pleasure talking about those things. But like I said before, we have an obligation to keep memory alive that this, no Holocaust should not happen again Thank you so much.

[APPLAUSE]