

Good afternoon. We have a full house today. So I think we actually have a couple of empty seats down here if anyone who's standing in the back wanted to come and sit down. I see one, two, three seats. Don't be shy.

Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Edna Friedberg. And I'm a historian here at the museum.

I'd like to thank you for joining us for our First Person program. Today, our guest is Mrs. Manya Friedman. And we'll be meeting her here shortly. And I'd also like to acknowledge that her son is here. He just walked in.

And my grandson.

And her grandson just walked in and surprised her. So that's really nice. Welcome.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand experiences during the war. Each First Person serves as a volunteer here at the museum. So we know them well. Sometimes you might see them upstairs in the museum, usually wearing a burgundy blazer, helping to make your visit here run more smoothly. But today, Manya and others who are our guest talk about their experience during the Holocaust.

With a few exceptions, we'll have a First Person guest each Wednesday through August 26. And actually, through the end of July, we will also be running this program every Tuesday, because as you see, it's quite crowded. So if you have any friends or family who are visiting the museum this summer, please encourage them if they can to come on a Tuesday or Wednesday at 1:00 to hear the First Person program.

The 2009 series of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Doris Smith Foundation. And we are grateful to them for sponsoring First Person, which they have done before. This year, we are offering a new feature associated with this program. Excerpts from our conversations with survivors will be available as podcasts on the museum's website and also on iTunes. So if this is something you'd like to maybe share with your class at home or a neighbor or just be able to play it again. It will be available.

Mrs. Friedman's podcast will be available in a few weeks. But I actually just checked now. And if you search under her name on our website, we actually have an excerpt from an interview that she gave in 2005 here at the museum as well. And you can hear from other survivors.

The First Person podcast joined two other podcast series that the museum does. One is called Voices on Antisemitism, which features a range of guests reflecting on hatred of Jews and other hatreds and genocide in the world today, and Voices on Genocide Prevention, in which you can learn more about Darfur, the ongoing genocide in Darfur, about Rwanda, Bosnia, and other more contemporary events.

Today's program, Manya will share her first person account of her experience during the Holocaust for about 35 or 40 minutes, after which, we'll have a chance for you to ask questions of her. So please do keep in mind questions. Save them for the end.

I have a couple of housekeeping announcements, though, before we meet her. First of all, I ask that if possible, please stay in your seat for the duration of the program out of respect for Manya and to avoid disrupting the program. Also, please take a look at your cell phones and turn off ringers, pagers, things like that now while you think of it just to keep things running smoothly.

I also wanted to let those of if you have passes for the permanent exhibition with times of 1:30 or 1:45 or 2:00, they are good for the balance of the day. You don't need to rush out of here to get there at that time. You'll be let in any time after your entry time.

In a moment, we'll watch a brief slide presentation to help introduce Manya to you. I just want to say that what you're

about to hear from Manya Friedman is one individual's account of the Holocaust. Obviously, millions and millions of people were caught up in this history. And history is made up of the experience of real people. Each person's experience is different.

More than 60 years after the Holocaust, hatred, antisemitism, and genocide, unfortunately, still threaten our world. And the life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades and remind us of the constant need to be vigilant citizens of our democracy and to stop injustice, prejudice, and hatred wherever and whenever they occur. So let's watch this brief slideshow. And then I will invite Manya Friedman to join me on stage.

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, also known as 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 Germany.

Manya Moszkowicz was born in Chmielnik, Poland, in 1925. This map, an arrow will show you Poland. Chmielnik is located in Central Poland.

This is a photo of Manya's parents. Her father owned a furniture shop before the war. And her mother took care of the home.

Manya had two younger brothers, David and Mordechai, and was surrounded by many close relatives. This is a portrait of members of Manya's family. You see here she's circled there, about four years old in this picture. This is also a picture of her cousins, and her aunt is pictured in the middle.

In 1938, Manya's family moved to Sosnowiec, a larger city located near the German border. If we we can get an arrow, that'll show us. Yep. Sosnowiec. There, she had her first experience with antisemitism. Signs were posted urging Polish citizens to boycott Jewish businesses.

When German troops invaded Poland in September 1939, Sosnowiec was occupied. Under German occupation, Manya's parents experienced persecution, forced labor, and were arrested, which we'll hear more about in just a moment.

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. Gleiwitz is marked there. Manya's family, the rest of Manya's family was deported to the Auschwitz killing center, and she never saw them again.

In January 1945, as the Soviet army approached, Manya and other prisoners were evacuated on what is known as a death march. They were transported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. So this arrow shows the route that they took. And later, Manya was taken to the Rechlin camp, where she was liberated by the Swedish Red Cross in April 1945. In 1950, Manya emigrated from Sweden to the United States. Please join me in welcoming Mrs. Manya Friedman, our First Person guest.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

Hi.

Hello. And--

First of all, I just want to open just by thanking you for being our guest today. I know it's not easy for you to talk about this history. And we're grateful for your willingness to share your experiences.

I think it's our obligation to do it. And welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. When you walked

in, you probably noticed that this museum is unlike any other museum. Most of the museums portray what people accomplished in science and art. This museum tries to convey to you what hate and discrimination and prejudice can do.

If you wonder why you should learn about the Holocaust, the Holocaust is a cautionary warning to all humanity what can happen when prejudice and injustice can lead to. The Holocaust didn't happen in the Dark Ages committed by uncivilized people. It took place in the 20th century committed by the most cultural nation in Europe. And it didn't just happen. It was very systematically executed.

It started out with digging ditches. The Germans would line up the people along the ditch. The people had to dig the ditches. They lined. They shot them. The people fell in the ditch. And the local people were made to cover them up with the dirt.

Manya, I'm going to interrupt you a minute. And we had agreed that it's OK if I interrupt her so I'm not being disrespectful here. But I want to back up a little bit just to help people to understand about your background a little and what your family life was like before. Is that all right?

Well, I can do it after? Can I?

OK, finish your piece then and tell me when you're ready.

OK.

That's fine.

I'm sorry.

No, I'm sorry.

That happens when you get interrupted. No matter how many times we talk about it, we still get very emotional. So they started digging ditches. And the local people had to cover them up with dirt. Sometimes the dirt was still moving.

Later, they used covered tracks and put people in and used carbon monoxide to kill them. But that too was not fast enough. So they invented Zyklon B. That's what they used in the gas chambers.

And it's true, the Nazis and their collaborators, their aim was to exterminate all European Jews. But as you read, they killed, murdered millions of others. And among them, more than a million and a half children. They didn't die because of what they have done, but because of who they were.

And when you think of millions, you see a number with a lot of zeros. But please keep in mind that all of those numbers represented somebody's dear one, a father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife. Well, as I said, I'm not an educator. I'm not a scholar. I won't teach you about the Holocaust. With your permission, I can only share my own experience with you during that time.

As it was mentioned, I was born in Central Poland in a small town. I lived there with my parents and two younger brothers. And for some reason, I attended in the morning-- I lived a normal life. In the morning, I attended public school, in the afternoon Hebrew school.

And for some reason one year before the war started in 1938, my parents decided to move to the big city. I don't know if it was for business reasons or cultural reasons. Anyway, that city was located not far from the German border.

Manya, I want to ask you, what kind of school did you attend? A religious school? A government run school?

In the morning, it was I guess like a public school, the same as it here, public school.

So you were educated in Polish?

In Polish. And in the afternoon, I had to go to Hebrew school. Sometimes I would argue with my parents when my friends were outside playing why I have to go to Hebrew school. My excuse was I wasn't going to marry a rabbi anyway. But-- [LAUGHTER] but my father insisted. You see, in those days, you had to know Hebrew because the books were not translated like they here translated in English that you can pray, you know.

Anyway, as I mentioned, one year before the war we moved to the big city. And as we know, September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. That evening, my parents and their friends got together to decide what to do. They were convinced that Hitler would be stopped before reaching Central Poland.

And anyway, the concept was that if there would be a war, only men will be affected. That their wives, the women and children will be left alone. So when they got together, they decided to send the wives and their children back to that small town in Central Poland. And of course, the men had to stay back because if you had a business or a shop, you just couldn't walk away and leave it.

So the next-- to tell you the truth, we children were quite excited about going back to that town because we left our friends behind there. We didn't realize really what war is all about. So the next 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. But somehow, father managed to put us on a train, and we traveled to the next town, which was 5 miles away, 8 kilometers. And the railroad tracks in front of us were bombed.

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

Manya, how old were you at this point? And how old were you--

When the war started, I was 13 years old.

And your brothers?

Each one was two years younger. So one was 11, and one was 9.

OK.

And we decided to go back home. But in the meantime, we had our packages. So mother was worried 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 by the time we got home-- I assumed we wore our new shoes-- our feet were blistered. But we were happy to be back home together with Father and in our own beds. And at the time, we thought that's the worst thing that could ever happen to us. Of course, little did we realize what laid ahead.

And since I mentioned, our city was not far from the German border. The war started on a Friday. And Monday, Germany already invaded our city.

At first, some shots were fired. I assume some people fired in defense. Everybody was taken out from that building. And people that were hiding in there-- something wrong?

Well, I'm just trying to make a little--

Quick, quick sound adjustment.

Oh. Thank you.

Thank you.

So-- well, nobody complained, so I didn't know. [LAUGHTER] So--

You're saying people are being taken out of a building.

Yeah.

The Germans had just come into Sosnowiec. Did you see soldiers?

People were taken out from that building. And everybody was shot, even people that were hiding in the bunkers. Same thing was repeated on the neighboring street.

And in the afternoon, the Germans ordered that everybody should step out from their houses. They selected the Jewish men, marched them to the city hall, put them in a windowless, airless basement without food or water. And they ordered that the rabbi should step forward or 10 Jews would be shot.

It so happened the rabbi was not among them. But in order to save 10 Jews, an Orthodox Jew stepped forward. He said that he was the rabbi. They took him out, beat him up, pulled out half of his beard, and threw him back in, and ordered the rest of the men to say the mourner's prayer because they were all going to die.

So you can imagine the expression on their faces. And in the meantime, the German soldiers were taking pictures of them, filming them, and having a good time. Well, they were kept overnight. In the morning they were marched to a nearby factory. And again, they were not given any food or water.

And, Manya, your father was among them?

That's the reason I knew that story because my father happened to be among them. They were kept without food. We brought food. But there was a tall wall around that building. So we could just throw the things over the wall.

And they started-- the Germans started selections. Some people they selected for work. The businessmen were put in jail. Some of them managed later to get out for big bribes. The rest were executed. Some were let go.

Anyway, we were standing and waiting. And by the end, there were a few of us waiting at the gate for our dear ones. Still, we didn't know what happened to them. But we had to leave because it was getting dark. And I remember so vividly walking home behind my mother. It was almost like walking at a funeral because we had no idea if we'll ever see Father again.

I also recall when we came home, above my parents' bed hung two large portraits of them. And I remember standing in front of Father's portrait, like saying goodbye because I had no idea if I'll ever see him.

He did come back later. It seems that they detained some people to build latrines. But from that day on, there was no peaceful moment. Any little thing was a matter of life and death.

How long was it till your father came back? Do you remember, more or less?

The same evening, but late at night.

I see.

Yeah.

OK.

Then, curfew was imposed. My mother and a friend, a neighbor, were standing in front of the house. Two soldiers went by. And they arrested them.

And it was the same thing. We spent the night not knowing what happened to them, if we will ever see them again. That's what I mean by saying that there was never a peaceful moment. Because if you got up in the morning in your own bed, it was almost like a miracle. You went out and you found out that your neighbors were taken during the night.

Well, right away, curfew was imposed, as I said. And also, since our city was not far from the German border, that area was right away annexed to Germany. We became part of Germany. We need a special passports and special permissions to get around.

Soon, the synagogue was burned down. At first, we thought it was just a single incident. But nothing with the Germans was just a single incident because later we found out that the synagogues in the neighboring cities were also burned down.

Jews had to move out from the main streets and could only take with them whatever they could carry. The Germans came in, took inventory. And if somebody was lucky enough to have a baby carriage or a cart, otherwise you just had to walk away with whatever you carry.

Later, orders went 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 city and the old city. And in order to get from one part to the other was quite a chore.

And orders went out that Jewish children no longer can attend school. Sometimes when I speak here to youngsters and I remind them when there's a snow day or teachers conference, they are probably happy that there is no school. But believe me, it's different when you are told that you're not allowed to go to school. You couldn't even be tutored by some people because you were not supposed to gather in one place.

And all kinds of restrictions went out. Ration cards were given out. There were only a few stores that provided the things.

Food rations?

Food rations. And Jews were not allowed to have anything else in their house but what it was on those ration cards. There was no milk or butter or meat or eggs. Sometimes ladies would be stopped in the street and their handbag inspected. And just for having a few eggs, you could be shot on the spot.

And of course, the deportation kept going on all the time. Our city was composed of 130,000 inhabitants. Among them were 28,000 Jews. But they also brought in the Jews from the neighboring towns because it was easier this way to control them.

So by the end of 1940, about half of the Jewish population was already deported. And Jews started thinking of ways that they could be useful to the Germans, like make uniforms for the military, boots and still remain in place. At first--

Manya, sorry, I need to interrupt you for a second, just in case there are people in the audience maybe who don't know what deportations were. If you could explain what you mean by being useful and where Jews were being taken. What did you know that point?

Well, at that point, there were constantly deportations. People were either caught on the street or taken out from the houses and sent to Germany, either to concentration camps or to the gas chambers. As a matter of fact--

But people disappeared is what you're saying. People were there and taken?

Often, they told us that just a resettlement. They even told-- the Germans told that you can bring your cart and your blankets and how much luggage you can bring. But the train left, and all those things were left behind. And when the people that work on the railroad came back, they told us that the transport didn't go like to Theresienstadt, which was a model camp, but went to Auschwitz.

So there was the constant threat of just being picked up and disappearing?

That's-- so as I mentioned-- I'm sorry to be interrupted-- and I'm sorry I'm having a hard time.

That's how we have to do it. I know I'm sorry it's hard for you. So just to make sure people understand.

So as I said, at first, the Germans rejected it. They didn't want to hear when people suggested that we open shops to be useful for the Germans. But later, they realized that they probably could get big bribes. Or if they will be needed in place, they won't be sent away.

So the first shop was opened in March 1941. I happened to get employment in that shop. But my parents had to provide 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 Germans, a certain quota had to be made. Like there had to be a quota how many people to send away. And if they didn't have enough, they make up the numbers by taking people from the hospital or the children from the orphanage to make up the quota.

Well, in the factory was the same thing. We had to make a certain number. And I assume for those two ladies that were professional seamstresses, for them to make the quota was not a big deal. And I also assume that they felt sorry for me sitting between them. And they helped me out to make the quota. I hate to admit I became proficient enough later that I could make it myself. And we worked in that shop.

The supervisor of that shop was an elderly gentleman. He constantly was telling us how lucky that we work in that shop, that we won't be deported. Because in the shop, we got a card. You call it employment card. The Germans called it a Sonderkarte. We called it a way to life because in the beginning when they caught you on the street for deportation and you could provide that card, they would let you go.

The payment in our shops were minimal. You could not survive on it. Often girls were fainting at work from lack of nourishment. But we were also counting on that card.

And in the meantime, a ghetto was formed. You could not leave the ghetto or enter the ghetto without the militia supervising. Usually, it was to go to work or return from work.

As long as we were outside the ghetto, often at great risk, we would exchange some personal things with non-Jews for some food. But once we were in the ghetto, I cannot describe the hunger. It's absolutely undescrivable. But we were still counting on that card, until one day as our shift was about to leave and the next shift was waiting to take over, the SS surrounded the building. And we were all taken for deportation.

When was that?

That was in 1943, in March 1943. When my parents were still at home, at that time, when my two brothers, they came to the place where they kept us. Ironically, that happened to be a brand new Jewish high school that was just built, a place for young people to get their education and a better future. In the meantime, that was holding people that were meant to be sent either to the concentration camps or to the gas chambers.

As I mentioned, my parents found out that we were detained. And they came to the place where they were holding us. They brought me a suitcase with my personal belongings. But we could not communicate. There were so many people. And we were on the second store.

But I so vividly remember them standing there right in front of me. The thing-- I think I mentioned I was 13. And I was the oldest. So you can imagine, my parents were very young. And especially in those days, you married young.

I just remember watching my parents, I think right in front of my eyes they aged maybe 20 years. And I assume each one of us had the same thought. Will we ever see each other again? As it turned out, that was the last time I saw my parents and my two brothers.

I also didn't mention that in the meantime, we had to wear a white arm-- in the beginning, we had to wear a white armband, all the Jews, embroidered with the blue Star of David. And there was a streetcar especially for Jews that was running on limited time.

It so happened my father got a job in the other end of the city. And often, he missed-- he was detained at work and missed the streetcar that was especially for Jews. So you can imagine, at great risk, he would remove the white armband and in get on the streetcar that was for the rest of the population. And I can simply not describe to you the anxiety every evening sitting at home and waiting until everybody was safe at home.

Later, we had to wear the yellow Star of David. Those had to be permanently sewn onto the garments. And--

The armbands slid on and off is what you're saying?

Yeah, the armband, you could remove. But the yellow star-- also, every Jew got an additional name, Israel, every woman Sarah. And our passports were stamped with the letter J.

It also happened when the war started, a lot of the young men-- as I mentioned, nobody expected that the war will involve everybody. We just thought that the men will be involved in the war. So a lot of young men ran East, either to get away from the Nazis or to get through to Russia. But some of them, either they couldn't get through or they realized that they left families behind and wanted to come back.

And since I mentioned, we needed special passports, well, one day, two Jews were hanged in the center of the town accused of making false passport. Everybody that was on the street had to stop to watch. A few days later, four Jewish men were hanged, also accused of the same thing. I think that the evening in many Jewish homes somebody lit a candle in their memory.

And, well, I kind of keep going back and forth. After they arrested-- they took us for--

For deportation.

For deportation. We wound up in a camp, which was a temporary camp, where the buyers came to pick us out. We were assigned to actually a camp that was a brand new camp. And it was owned by a private German.

Manya, can you explain what you mean by buyers because I think people who are not familiar with forced labor--

The buyers, like you come here to buy to buy ships or cows or whatever, you know.

They were looking for slave labor basically.

For slave-- well, we were all slave laborers. So--

They came to pick you out. To see who--

Yeah, they selected us. And we were taken to a camp. It was a brand new camp. And we still had the things from home. And as I said, it was owned by a private Germans. We were on a lease from the Gestapo.



And we thought that since everything was nice and clean and so there'd be a chance to survive. That camp, that factory was producing soot, carbon. You see, the Germans were in desperately need of that product because from that they were making the synthetic rubber. And from the rubber, the tires on which the military or the Wehrmacht was running. So we thought, we are useful. They'll need it.

Well, soon after the SS took us over. We became a subcamp of Auschwitz. Barbed wire was installed around the camp. We had to go through showers. Our heads were shaved. We had to go through inspection if we were hiding anything. 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. Don't forget that it is not like it now, young teenage girls wearing bikinis. In those days, I don't think that I even got undressed in front of my own mother to take a bath.

My number was 79357. And from that day on, we were not called by our names, but by our numbers. But believe me, they took away much more than our names.

And life went on. Of course, in camp were awakened every day at dawn to be counted. For some reason, they could never get the numbers right. We used to stay sometimes for hours to be counted and counted. Some people fainted. They had to be supported.

And then we had to go-- you see, in camp, you didn't have to make a decision. Decisions were made for you. Still, when you got that piece of bread in the morning, you had to decide, should I eat it now or maybe leave some for later? And the same thing was in the evening to 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 potato? But sometimes you ran out of luck.

Well, live in that camp went on till January 1945. That was the time when the Soviet army was coming closer. And they decided-- the Germans decided-- to evacuate us.

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

And they think we didn't know what we were going to do, what will happen. I had to make at that time a very serious decision. My best friend was on the infirmary. And I had to decide what to do.

She was not really capable of taking care of herself. So I thought maybe I should leave her, and she would be liberated by the Russians. But there was also a rumor on camp that they were going to burn down the camp, not to leave any trace.

So I convinced another friend-- as a matter of fact, she lives in New York now-- and between the two of us, we took our friend out from the infirmary. And we went to the railroad station. Each one of us got a blanket and some provisions. And we went to the railroad station.

Well, there was no car. So they put us up for the night in a barn. In the morning, we went again to the railroad station. I don't know--

And this was January, right? Freezing cold winter--

It was middle in the middle of January. I don't know if any of you already went through the permanent exhibit and you saw the car that they transported people. Well, they didn't put us in a car like this. They put us in open cars, the type that you transport coal. And that, as Ms. Feinberg mentioned, that was in the middle of January. And believe me, the winter in Europe can get very severe, and all we had was a blanket.

I had to take my friend in the corner of the car, with my hands I was holding onto the railing and with my back pushing back the crowd so she wouldn't be squashed. And we kept going like this back and forth. Wherever we went, the

railroad tracks were bombed. I assumed they used probably a better track to transport the military.

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

The Czech people were very nice. They came to the station where we were stopped with bread and water. But the guards would not let them give it to us. As a matter of fact, they were even shooting at them sometimes.

Sometimes, the people, the Czech people, went where there was an overpass and would throw down some bread to us as the train was going by. And we kept going like this back and forth, back and forth. The snow that fell on our blankets served to quench our thirst.

And one of the stations-- in the next car happened to be the nurse from our camp-- at one of the stations-- I was giving it-- at one of the stations, she begged the guard for some water because one of the girls fainted. And instead, he pulled out a gun and shot her. And she fell down between the cars. We could see where the cars going back and forth she was laying there, not knowing if she was still alive or dead.

We went like this maybe for 10 days. We wound it up in Ravensbrück. We came to Ravensbrück in the middle of the night.

Ravensbrück is a concentration camp in Germany.

And they only could put some of us in the barracks. So the rest of us, they put in the showers. And knowing what showers meant, you can imagine-- to this day, I reminisce with my friend how we sat and hold on to each other and saying goodbye because we thought that's it. Luckily, we sat through the night and we saw at dawn, the shades, the cracks in the shades, that the light came through and we survived.

But Ravensbrück was like hell. That was a camp that was meant for one quarter of the prisoners that they held. So you can imagine the sanitary conditions in those camps.

I remember getting up in the morning, run to the latrine. In the meantime, you hold on to your hand, there was like a fountain to catch a few drops of water to apply to your face, to wake up. And then again, standing in line to be counted. And in the meantime, you were stepping on corpses, people that expired during the night.

Luckily, I wasn't long in Ravensbrück. From Ravensbrück, I was taken to a smaller camp, a subcamp of Ravensbrück, which-- over there again, the sanitary conditions were undescrivable, indescribable. We spent every free moment trying to eradicate the lice, which we were unsuccessful.

And one day in the morning standing to be counted, some of the kapos, which were German overseers, and some of the military walked up and pointed a finger to about a dozen or so of girls to step forward. I happened to be among them. I took a quick glance around me. Why me? How do I differ from the others? You see, in camp a selection never meant a better lot.

Then they marched us to the gate. Outside was standing a covered by truck. They motioned us, the kapos, to step onto the truck. Although the tailgate was down, but we had a hard time. We could just not manage. We were so weak.

All of a sudden a crate appeared for us to step. We thought we were hallucinating. We never saw such a gesture from the German kapos. Later, we found out why.

When we got on the truck, each one of us was giving a care package. Those were I think donated by the Canadian government. We tore it open. It was food. We didn't even know what it was. There was powdered milk and cocoa and sardines. We ate it all at once. We didn't even care if that was our last meal.

And we kept going in that truck resigned. We didn't know where to, what to. I think we didn't even talk to each other.

Each one was preoccupied with a thought, what will the future be? Will there be a future? And we landed in Copenhagen. You see that white truck--

Manya, I have to interrupt you a second. Did you have any sense that you were free? That you were liberated?

No. No. No.

Nothing.

I have to hurry. I was given a sign how many minutes I have.

You have enough time. You have enough. Don't worry. Don't worry.

So you can see I have to talk fast.

I just want to make sure that they can follow exactly the sequence.

We had no-- as I said, we didn't know. As I mentioned, a selection in camp never meant a better lot. When they sent you away-- and here we were in the truck not knowing-- we didn't realize the truck had markings on the outside from the Red Cross. But we were not aware of it. So we landed in Copenhagen.

Copenhagen, Denmark was still under occupation. But the Danish people were very nice. They gave us food and a place to rest. And from Copenhagen, we went to Malmo, to Sweden.

Over there, there was a big reception. There were clergymen and dignitaries and the general public. Everybody greeting us and this. We just could not comprehend that we really out of camp.

You see, the reason the kapos were so nice to provide a crate for us because they wanted to show the service people from the Red Cross that they treated us humanely. Well, I sometimes say that when I was in Sweden, in Malmo, I felt like I was standing a side and observing all this. We just could not comprehend that we really free.

And then, of course, they took the sick ones right away to the hospital. The rest of us they put-- after going through showers and disinfecting and delousing and giving clean clothes that the people donated, they put us up in a school.

We were very hesitant. We did not trust everybody. We wouldn't even go into the shower until one of the service people opened the faucet to show that water comes out. We were so suspicious of everybody and everything. And at night, if you woke up, there was always somebody at the window looking out to make sure that we're not in camp any longer.

Well, a few days later, they actually-- that took place the end of April, April 28, 1945. So a few days later, the students in the middle of the night came running up the stairs, yelling the war's over, the war's over. We woke up. We didn't have any pajamas or nightgowns. We were in our underwear. But who cared? We ran out and were hugging and kissing. The war's over and so on.

And of course, each one of us that survived hoped that somebody from the family survived too. Well, you already know that unfortunately nobody from my family survived. And you may wonder why we talk about this because every time we go through this, it's like reliving the horrors of the past.

But we're the only ones that can bear witness, no matter how painful it is. And unfortunately, our number is diminishing. And we have an obligation to the millions that were murdered to talk about them so their death was not in vain.

We have an obligation to tell you about the prevention of crimes against humanity and genocide. The Nazis had their collaborators. But there were also the bystanders. And there is a quote that evil prevails when good people do nothing. But on the other hand, if you go up to the permanent exhibit, you see that we have a wall with names of people that risk not only their own lives, but the lives of their families in order to save others. We call them the Righteous Gentiles.

And there are so many atrocities going on right now. Not long ago, there was Rwanda and Bosnia. Now there's Darfur and the Congo. We hope that once you learn about the Holocaust, you make some commitment to help to prevent such atrocities to happen again. Do speak up when you see injustice done because nobody is now immune to it. It can happen anyway. And fortunately, we live in a country where we do have a voice. It's the best country in the world, even with all its shortcomings. So as I mentioned, speak up. And use the lesson from the past and try to prevent such atrocities against humanity and genocide.

Often-- well, I don't know, there not too many young people in the audience. But a few young people that are here, I want to speak especially to you because our hope is especially in because you are the future of this country. And as I mentioned, it's the best country in the world. So don't take things for granted. Use your potential to make this country and the world a better place.

Do not judge people by the color of their skin, their ethnic background, or their religious belief. Be tolerant. And speak up when you see injustice done. That slogan, never again, no longer belongs just to the Jewish people. We all have to say, never again. Thank you very much for listening.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you, Manya. Also, I want to apologize that I interrupted you. I know it makes it harder. But sometimes just to help people who maybe have not been to the exhibit yet, we made our deal.

I have a couple of questions for you. And then I'm going to open it up. I'm sure the audience does. I want to know-- I'm sure people in the audience are curious if you ever returned to Poland and how you found out about your parents and your brother or any members of your family.

Well, how I found out, after the war, right away there were all kinds of lists provided by Jewish organizations, by the Red Cross. And I also wrote to the places where I lived to the police. And that's how I found-- as a matter of fact, when you saw the picture of several ladies there, in the center was my aunt. She's the only-- from my extended family-- that was just that aunt and four cousins that survived. And that's how I found them is through the police in one of the towns where I used to live.

Many Holocaust survivors don't even have any photographs of their family. How do you have that picture of your parents?

Well, those pictures were given to me when I came to this country. When I came, after the war, I didn't have anything.

So they were sent to relatives in the US before the war?

Apparently.

OK. And when did you come to the United States?

I came in 1950. I had to wait for about 5 and 1/2 years in Sweden because being in Sweden, I was considered a Polish citizen. And at that time after the war, there was a big demand by Polish people to come to the United States. And United States also has a quota, how many people you let in. So it took me 5 and 1/2 years to come here.

So something to keep in mind when you're following debates on immigration policy today. It's not new to our era. And they have big impacts going back. But anyway, I'd like people to raise their hands if they have questions. Because the program is being recorded, I'll need to repeat the question even if you think everyone heard you. So don't be shy.

May I say something?

Of course. It's your day.

Yeah. Because I'm usually asked if my friend survived. She did survive. She lives in Israel. I visited her about six times already. She was here once. So--

[APPLAUSE]

Do you know why you were selected by the Red Cross?

No.

The question-- sorry, I just have to repeat, just for the recording.

Good. Good.

--is whether Manya knows why she was selected by the Swedish Red Cross at liberation time.

It was just some of those overseers came over and just pointed the finger at a few for no reason at all. As a matter of fact, when I was selected, I wasn't very happy about it because I didn't know what the future was going to be. As I mentioned, again and again, a selection in camp never met a better lot.

Yes, ma'am. Either of you. There's one behind and one in front. You can sort it out.

Did you know what happened who were not selected by the Red Cross.

The question is whether she knows what happened to the people who were not selected at the end of the war from your camp.

That camp was later liberated by the Russians.

Yes.

Who took care of you in Sweden?

Who took care of you in Sweden?

For four months, I was like in a sanatorium, a school, you know, converted like to a hospital. Because after working in a shop that produced soot, you can imagine it wasn't just my outer appearance. But apparently, it affected my lungs. So I was four months.

And after that, I had to get a job and support myself. As a matter of fact, every single month, I used to send-- the aunt that survived, she was in a displaced people's camp in Germany. I used to send her every single month a package. And since I learned how to make the uniforms for the Germans, I got a job as a seamstress.

Manya mentioned displaced persons camps. Tens of thousands of survivors of the Holocaust who were liberated from concentration camps really just had nowhere to go after liberation. Some of them went home to look for relatives. But many of them were afraid or had no home to go to. So many of them continued to live in camps, known as DP camps. In this case, they were administered by the Allies, by Americans, British, in occupied zones of Germany. And many people stayed in these camps for years, years, waiting for visas to be able to leave Europe. Yes, ma'am.

I know that many survivors had to go through a long period of silence before they were able to speak. And some have never been able to speak. How were you able to do that? And did it take a long time before you could speak.

I didn't start speaking until I joined the museum about 10 years ago or so. It's not that I couldn't speak about atrocities what happened in camp. But when it came to speak about my parents, even to this day, it's hard.

As a matter of fact, I mentioned about I had a tattoo. In 1970, my husband was transferred on a job to a Southern state. And he knew how I felt that will people will ask me about the number. And in those years, people were not aware about the Holocaust as now because now it's taught in all the schools and everything. And he insisted-- he knew how I felt about having to explain it-- he insisted that I remove my tattoo, you know. So that's why I carry with me my Swedish passport. The kids usually want to see my tattoo. So in the Swedish passport, it says that on my left arm I had a tattoo and the numbers.

Manya, was your husband American or European?

No, also from Europe.

And where did you meet and when?

Well, actually our families knew each other from before. I met him in New York. But during the war, he was in Russia. He was in the Polish army in Russia.

I will say in relation to your question about silence that I've known Manya-- I've had the good fortune to know Manya for a number of years and including when she first started to volunteer here. And you were so shy and nervous about talking then, I would never have had to interrupt you the way I did now. And I think it's really-- I'm really so impressed and proud of you that you do this.

Thank you.

--even though it's not easy. I've seen just a big change. And I know it is painful every time. So if you'd seen her five years ago, it would not have been the same speaker.

Thank you.

So there was a gentleman back there. Yes, sir. OK. All right. Then you. Yes, ma'am.

Can you still believe in a supreme being?

The question is whether she still believes in a supreme being? Do you believe in God?

Of course, I believe in God. Although when this happened, when I saw the baby torn from my cousin's arms and thrown on a hip, I was questioning God. Why? I had discussions with God. Of course, he never answered me, you know. But I do believe in God.

Yes, sir.

Mrs. Friedman, it's a privilege to hear you here. Talking a lot about the future, brought students from the United Kingdom here. What are your thoughts about John Demjanjuk's trial? Will that achieve anything.

What?

The question is-- there's a group of students here from the United Kingdom. And he's wondering what you think about John Demjanjuk, about the Nazi guard who was just-- or accused Nazi guard who was just deported to Germany from the United States. Had been living in Ohio for many years as an auto worker?

It's just too bad that he was allowed to stay in the United States so long because now he's an old man, you know. Yeah, we have many like this that they deny that they did anything. And so--

I think--

I don't know. It's unbelievable how people can be so sadistic because our entire being in camps depended on the sadistic attitude of the Germans, German soldiers, and the degree of their drunkenness sometimes. As I said, for a few eggs in your handbag, you could be shot on the spot. It's very hard to describe this.

Yes, sir.

I'm sorry. I hope I answered your question.

[INAUDIBLE]

In the blue shirt, yes.

On the 29th of April, 1945, I walked into Dachau as an American soldier. I located it. And I-- and that's the day that I became an atheist because I could not believe that a supreme being could possibly have allowed this to occur. And I give you credit.

Thank you, sir.

[APPLAUSE]

I know it's awkward for me to repeat everything but otherwise someone who's listening to this later won't know that we have a liberator in the audience who said that on the 29th of April 1945, he walked into Dachau, and that he was unable to believe in God after that experience, unable to believe that God would let that happen.

Well--

Thank you for sharing.

--it's people that did it, not God. And Dachau was the first camp actually built by the Germans, which was at the beginning not for-- it was like for communists or socialists or so.

Sir, we're very honored to have you here today. Thank you--

Thank you, sir.

--for your service. Yes, ma'am.

Going back to the beginning when the Germans came to your town, how did they identify people as Jewish?

Well, in Poland, on everybody's birth certificate was what religion you are. And, yeah, you see, I didn't mention-- there's a lot of things I didn't mention. A Jewish committee was formed. But the Jewish committee wasn't there to help the Jews.

The Jewish committee was there to do the dirty work for the Germans. The Germans gave out the order. And the Jewish committee had to execute them. And of course, the Jewish committee had a registry of all the Jews. And as I said, in Poland, on our birth certificates, the religion was what religion you were.

And it was different throughout different parts of occupied Europe. But usually, it was neighbors who would identify who was Jewish. Sometimes there were official registry. Sometimes it was just people looking to curry favor or gain protection for their families.

I think we have time for one more question. OK, we'll do two just because I feel bad to turn people down. First you, ma'am, and then in the back there's a young man.

Manya, I think you're remarkable for your strength and sharing your story with everyone. And I will pray for you. I wanted to ask if your sense was that the evil from the Nazis crept in suddenly and quietly or did it hit like a ton of bricks?

The question is whether the evil from the Nazis crept in quietly or hit suddenly? In your opinion. That's all you can give.

It was unbelievable. So it must have hit us suddenly because we just could not believe that something like this can happen. And another thing is we also believed that the mighty powers, like England and France and Russia and the United States, will intervene. That's another thing that a lot of us-- I left out-- that's another things, we felt like nobody cared about us. That's how we felt being in camp, not only what we went through from the Germans, but everybody had forgotten us.

Although England and France declared war on the Germans because they had a pact with Poland to defend Poland, but they were incapable of doing much. Russia, as we know, made a pact with Germany to divide Poland among themselves. And at that time, in the beginning, the United States was just not inclined to fight somebody else's war across the ocean.

So we felt not just oppressed by the Germans, but completely forgotten by the entire world. I cannot describe how we were just not like human beings. That's how we were treated.

Forgotten people.

The young man in back for the last question please.

What was your feeling about the Nuremberg trials?

He's asking what your feeling was about the Nuremberg trial. That's a great question.

Well, it's a great question. I'm not a politician. A lot of them got away, a lot of them. To tell you the truth, even the United States invited some of the Germans, you know. And that's politics. I don't want to get involved in it. Because I could have-- if we speak on a person to person basis. I don't want to make a statement.

It's a diplomatic answer. I will encourage you, if you time to go up to the second floor of the museum in the Wexner Center there, we have a special display, an interactive display, about the Nuremberg trial and other post-war trials about what does justice mean? Really good to take your students if you have a few minutes.

So unfortunately, we are out of time. It is our tradition at First Person to let the First Person have the last word. So I don't know if there's anything else you want to say or--

Well, all I can say is be aware and think what happened during the Holocaust. And it can happen again. So do your best and try to prevent it from happening again.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]