

Good afternoon. And welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program First Person. Thank you for joining us today.

We are in our 11th year of the First Person program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Manya Friedman, whom we shall meet shortly. This 2010 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Dora Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring First Person.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each guest serves as a volunteer here at this museum. With few exceptions, we will have a new First Person program each Wednesday until August 25. We will also have First Person programs on Tuesdays April through July of this year.

The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides a list of upcoming First Person guests and information about each of them. Excerpts from First Person programs are available as podcasts on the museum's website. They are also available through iTunes.

Manya's podcast from 2009 is presently on the museum's website and will be updated shortly with today's program. Manya Friedman will share with us her first person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask Manya a few questions.

We ask that you stay in your seats throughout our one hour program. That way we minimize any disruptions for Manya as she speaks. For those of you who have passes to the permanent exhibition today, please know that they are good for the time on your ticket, but they're also good for any time after that.

The Holocaust was a 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.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Manya is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction. And we begin with this photo of Manya Moszkowicz, who was born in Chmielnik, Poland in 1925. The arrow on this map of Europe points to Poland.

Her father owned a furniture shop and her mother took care of the home. This is a photograph of Manya's parents that was taken before the war. Manya had two younger brothers, David and Mordechai, and was surrounded by many close relatives.

In this portrait of Manya, her cousins, and her aunt, and her aunt is circled in the middle, and Manya circled on the lower left here, in this photo, Manya is approximately four years old. Of all of Manya's cousins pictured here, none survived. The only survivors in this photo are Manya and her aunt who is circled in the middle, as you can see.

In 1938, Manya's family moved to Sosnowiec, a larger city located near the German border. There she had her first experience with anti-Semitism. Signs were posted urging Polish citizens to boycott Jewish businesses. And our arrow points to the location of Sosnowiec.

When German troops invaded Poland in 1939, Sosnowiec was occupied. Under German occupation, Manya's parents experienced persecution, forced labor, and were arrested for curfew violation. In 1941, Manya was forced to work for a German company that produced military uniforms. In March 1943, she was taken to the Gogolin transit camp. And from there to the Gleiwitz forced labor camp. And the arrow points to the location of Gleiwitz.

Manya's family was deported to Auschwitz. She never saw them again. And the green arrow points to the location of

Auschwitz.

In January 1945, as the Soviet army approached, Manya and other prisoners were evacuated on a death march. They were transported to the Ravensbruck concentration camp. And the arrows on this map show the route that they were forced to march.

Later, Manya was taken to the Rechlin camp, where she was rescued by the Swedish Red Cross in April of 1945. In 1950, she emigrated from Sweden to the United States. And we close with this contemporary photo of Manya. Today, Manya resides in the Washington, DC area. She has two children, a son and a daughter, and a 22-year-old grandson Joey, who is a college student in California and also plays baseball at that college.

Manya volunteers here at the museum with visitor services, as well as serves as a translator for the museum. Manya was one of our first two pilot First Person guests in 2000. At the time, it was her first time ever speaking publicly about her experience during the Holocaust.

Since then, Manya has become an accomplished speaker and speaks frequently on behalf of the museum, both here in the museum and in many other locations in the Washington, DC area and elsewhere across the country. Just yesterday she spoke to a group representing all the military branches here in Washington, DC. She recently spoke at a college in Wyoming. A while back, she spoke at an event at the Newseum about genocide that was sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars that aired on the television station C-Span. Manya has now spoken in 27 states and Puerto Rico.

She is also a contributor to the museum's publication, Echoes of Memory, which features writings by survivors who participate in the survivor's writing class. After today's program, Manya will be available to sign copies of Echoes of Memory, which is also available in the museum's bookstore. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Manya Friedman.

[APPLAUSE]

OK. Well, can you hear me?

Yes.

Yes.

OK.

All right. Manya, thank you so much for being here, for being willing to be our First Person today. And in our short period, you have so much to tell us. So we'll get started.

You spent most of your early years in Chmielnik where you were born, then moved to Sosnowiec in 1938, the year before the German invasion. Let's begin today with you telling us a little bit about your family, your community, and yourself before the war began. And then take it from there.

Yeah. If you don't mind, can I start a little earlier than that?

As early as you wish.

First of all, I'd like to welcome you to the United States Holocaust Museum and thank you for wanting to learn about the Holocaust. As you entered, you probably noticed that this museum is unlike any other museum. Most of the museums are trying to portray people's accomplishments and arts or sciences. This museum is trying to teach you what hate, discrimination, prejudice, racism can do.

Some young people wonder. They are skeptical. Why should we learn about the Holocaust? To you, it happened a long

time ago.

But the Holocaust is a cautionary warning to all humanity what can happen when hate and prejudice prevails. And it can happen anywhere and anytime. As Mr. Benson already pointed out, Hitler's and the Nazi party's aim was to exterminate all European Jews, which they managed to murder 6 million. But they also murdered millions of others, the Poles, the Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, the homosexuals, and among them about a million and a half children.

They were not murdered because of what they have done, but because of who they were. And when we think of millions, we see a number with many zeros. But keep in mind that each of those numbers represented somebody's dear one, a father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife.

While I'm not an educator, I'm not a scholar, I can only share with you my own experience during that time. And like Mr. Benson wanted me to start, where I was born. I was born in Central Poland in a small town.

I lived there with my parents, two younger brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, host of relatives. And since it was a small town, even people I was not related to were like relatives. Because everybody knew everybody's life in a small town.

And I think I led a normal life. I attended in the morning public school, in the afternoon Hebrew school. Even if I sometimes argued with my father why I have to go to Hebrew school since my friends were outside playing, but I guess he prevailed. In those days, the books were not translated. You had to know Hebrew in order to pray, you know.

And for some reason, one year before the war started in 1938, my parents decided to move to a larger city. I don't know it was for business reasons or cultural reasons. That city happened to be not far from the German border.

And as you know, on Friday, 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 this small town in Central Poland. The concept was that even if there is a war, that women and children won't be affected.

So they decided to send their wives and their children back to that small town in Central Poland. They were also convinced that the mighty powers, like England and France and Russia and the United States will intervene and stop Hitler. Well, as it turned out, although England and France declared war on Germany, but they were not capable to do much. And Russia, you probably know, had made a pact with Germany to divide Poland among themselves.

But anyway, they decided to send the wives and the children back to that small town. To tell you the truth, we children had no concept what war is all about. We were even glad that we are going back to the small town to meet our friends again.

So in the morning, we got up. We all dressed in our best clothing and headed for the railroad station. The place was mobbed. Everybody wanted to get out. And we were afraid that we will be separated from Mother.

But somehow Father managed to put us on the train. And we traveled to the next town, which was five miles away, eight kilometers. And the railroad tracks in front of us were bombed.

So you can imagine the commotion. Everybody being afraid that they'll bomb the train. We all got off the train.

And since it was only five miles from home, Mother decided we should walk back home. And in the meantime, of course, we had our packages. I remember Mother knocked at somebody's house and begged them to take those things for us. And we started way back, to go back home.

I mentioned that we wore our best clothing. Apparently we wore our new shoes. By the time we got home, our feet were blistered. But we were happy to be home together with Father and in our own beds. And at the time, we thought that that's probably the worst thing that could happen to us. Of course little did we realize what laid ahead.

Well, as I mentioned, Germany invaded Poland on a Friday. On Monday, they already invaded our city. Some shots were fired, probably some people in the fence.

Everybody was taken out from their building, even people that were hiding in the bunker. And everybody was killed, was shot. The same thing was repeated in a neighboring street.

And in the afternoon, the Germans ordered everybody to step out from their houses. They selected the Jewish men, marched them to the city hall, put them in an airless, windowless basement. And they ordered 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 elderly 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 to the rest of the men and told them all to say the mourner's prayer because they were all going to die. So you can imagine the expression on their faces when they heard this. And in the meantime, the German soldiers were taking pictures and filming them and having a good time.

You see the reason I know all this is because my father happened to be among them. They kept him overnight there, without food or water. In the morning, they marched him to one of the factories in the neighborhood. And then a selection started.

Again, they were not giving any food or water. We brought food, but the factory had a tall wall around. And all we could do is just throw the food over that wall.

Then they started selections, people they selected to work. Business people were sent to jail. Some of them later managed to get out after big bribes. Others were executed. Some they let go.

We were standing at the gate, some of us were still standing at the gate and waiting for our dear ones to come out. We had no idea what happened to Father. But it was getting dark and we had to leave.

And I so vividly remember walking home after Mother. It was almost like walking at a funeral. Because we had no idea if we will ever see Father again. I also remember when I came home-- excuse me, jeepers. Can I reach this? Sorry. I think I talk too much.

[LAUGHTER]

When we got home, I also remember above the bed of my parents hung two big portraits of them. And I remember standing in front of my father's portrait, like saying goodbye. Because I had no idea if we'll see him again.

He did come home later. It seems that they detained some people to build latrines. But from that day on, there was no peaceful moment. If you got up in the morning in your own bed was like a miracle. Because when you went out, you found out that your neighbors were taken to be deported.

And right away, all kinds of orders went out, all kinds of restrictions. Jews had to turn in all their valuables, even radios and bicycles. Later when the Germans invaded Russian, the Jews also had to trade in furs and ski boots.

Then orders went out. 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 the Jews had to leave. If somebody had a cart or a baby carriage, otherwise you had to walk away with only whatever you could carry.

Later orders went out that Jews were not even allowed to walk on those main streets. And it so happened our city was composed of two parts, it was the city and the old city. So in order to get from one part to the other was quite a chore.

Orders went out that Jewish children no longer can attend school. Sometimes I speak to youngsters like you. And I remind you when there's a snow day or a teachers conference, you're probably glad that there's no school. But believe me, it's different when you are told that you are not allowed to go to school.

Then orders went out. We were given ration cards. On those ration cards, there was no butter, no milk, no meat, no eggs. And Jews were not allowed to have in their house anything that was not on those ration cards.

Often ladies would be stopped on the street and their handbag inspected. And if they had a few eggs or some butter, you could be shot on the spot. You see, our entire life depended on the sadistic attitude of the German soldiers or the degree of their drunkenness.

Right away, the synagogue was burned down. And the neighbors were not allowed to go out and extinguish the fire. At first we thought it was just a coincidence. But nothing with the Germans was just a coincidence everything was very well-thought out and executed. Because later, we found out that the synagogues in the neighboring town were also burned down.

And there was a streetcar that was running especially for Jews on limited time. Also, by that time, Jewish people had to wear a white armband embroidered with the Star of David. It so happened my father got a job at the other end of town and often was detained at work and missed that streetcar that was for the Jewish population.

So at great risk, you can imagine, he would remove his armband and get on the streetcar that was for the rest of the population. You can imagine how he was worried that somebody might recognize him. And I simply cannot describe to you the anxiety, sitting at home every evening, and waiting until everybody was safe at home.

There's also, since I mentioned our city was not far from the German border, we right away were annexed to Germany. We became part of Germany. So we need a special passport, special papers.

It so happened when the war started, many of the young men run East, either to get away from the Nazis or to get through to Russia, hoping to save themselves. But some of them couldn't get through. Some of them realized that they had left families behind and they wanted to come back. But they needed those special passports.

So one day, two Jews were hung in the center of the city. And whoever was around had to stop to watch them. They were accused of making false passports. A few days later, four Jews were hung, also accused of the same thing. Among them was a father and a son. I think that evening in many Jewish homes somebody lit a candle in their memory.

And later, instead of the white armbands, the Jews had to wear the yellow Star of David. Those permanently had to be sewn on to the garments. Also, again, a ghetto was formed.

As long as we were outside the ghetto, at great risk we would exchange some personal things with non-Jewish people for some food. But once you were in the ghetto, you could not leave the ghetto or enter the ghetto without supervision. You could only go to work.

So that hunger in the ghetto is indescribable. Sometimes I go home with my friends from work from here. And I say, gee, I'm so starved. I can't wait to go home. You cannot describe what being starved and hungry means.

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 to control them.

Thank you very much for sitting and listening to me. Because I made a pact with him not to interrupt me. I get too emotional.

OK. So as I mentioned, they also brought in Jews from the neighboring towns because it was easier to control them. There was formed a Jewish committee. But the Jewish committee was there not to help the Jews. The Jewish committee was there to do the dirty work for the Germans. The Germans gave out the orders, and the Jewish committee had to execute them.

So by the end of 1940, about half of the Jewish population was already deported. And Jews started thinking of ways,

how they could be useful to the Germans and still remain at home. They suggest that we open shops to make uniforms and boots for the military.

At first, they rejected it. But later when they realized that they could get big bribes or maybe if they'll be needed here, they won't be sent to the front, the first shop 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 because I was sitting between two ladies that were professional seamstresses. And like everything else with the Germans, a quota had to be made. They had a quota how many people to send away. If they didn't have the number, they would take the people from the hospital or the children from the orphanage to make up that number.

Well, the same thing was so many numbers we had to produce. I assumed those two ladies sitting beside me probably felt sorry for me. So for them to make that number, that quota, since they were professional seamstresses was not a big deal. They helped me out. And I made that quota.

I hate to admit, I became proficient enough later I could make that quota myself. And we worked in that factory. Yes, we had a German, an elderly German. He constantly reminded us how lucky we are to work in that factory. The payment in that shop was minimal. You could not survive. Girls were fainting at work from lack of nourishment.

The only thing was we had that card. You call it employment card. The German call this the Sonderkarte. We called it a way to life. Because in the beginning when they caught us on the street for deportation and we could provide that card, they would let us go. That's why that elderly German constantly reminded us how lucky we are.

Well, one day as our shift was about to leave and the other shift was waiting to take over, the SS surrounded the building. And we were all taken for deportation.

At that time, my parents with my two brothers were still at home. They came to the place where they kept us. They brought me a suitcase with my personal belongings.

But we could not communicate. There was such a commotion. We were on the second floor.

But I so vividly remember my parents standing there in front. I think right in front of my eyes they aged, maybe, 20 years. I forgot to mention that I was 13 when the war started. And I was the oldest. So you can imagine my parents were still very young.

And I assume that each one of us had the same thought, will we ever see each other again. And as you probably heard already, that was the last time I saw my parents and my two brothers.

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

That shop was producing soot, carbon. You see, the Germans were in desperately need of that product. Because from that, they were making synthetic rubber and from rubber, the tires on which the Wehrmacht, or the military, was running.

But you can imagine us working in a shop that produced soot. It wasn't just later. I found out after the war it was not just our outer appearance. It was how it affected our lungs, too.

And like in every other camp, you were awakened at dawn to stay in line to be counted. For some reason, they could never get the numbers right. We would stay for hours to be counted and recounted.

And in the meantime, girls were fainting. They had to be supported. And then we went to work.

Most of the time in camp, you didn't have to make a decision. But you still had to decide when you got a piece of bread in the morning, should I eat it now or maybe save it for later. And the same thing was in the evening when you were getting that bowl of watery soup. Should I try to get ahead in line to make sure 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 run out of luck.

Well, as I mentioned in the beginning, that shop was owned by private Germans. Soon the SS took us over. We became a subcamp of Auschwitz. Barbed wire was installed. Our personal things were taken away.

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 Gestapos to have our arms tattooed.

To this day, I cannot forget that embarrassment. Keep in mind that it isn't like now with young ladies wearing bikinis. In those days, I don't think I even got undressed in front of my own mother to take a bath. That's how bashful I was. That's why I say that to this day, I cannot forget that embarrassment.

And of course, from that day on, we were not called by our names, but by our numbers. And believe me, they took away much more than our names. And we were going every day to work, and so on.

That lasted till January 1945. That's where the Russian army was coming close and the Germans decided to evacuate us.

Do you want to interrupt me? No?

[LAUGHS]

No. Keep going. I'm going to come back.

The Germans decided-- I was working that night on a night shift. We came back to the camp in the morning. There was a big commotion. We are being evacuated nobody knew where to or what.

We were given each a blanket and some bread and to get ready. Yeah, by when the SS took us over, we were also given the striped dresses, one pair of underwear, and one pair wooden shoes. And that's all we had. We were given blanket, some bread, and to get ready for the evacuation.

But at that time, I had to make a very important decision. Because my best friend was in the infirmary. And I had to decide what to do. She was very weak.

At first I thought maybe I should leave her and she would be rescued by the Soviet Army. But there was a rumor in 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. And between the two of us, we took out our friend from the infirmary.

And we went to the railroad station. There was no train. So we spent the night in a barn. I don't know if you have already seen the exhibit or you're going to see. If you are going to see the exhibit here, you'll see a railroad car they transport people to the concentration camps or to the exterminator camps.

But we were not put on a closed car like this. We were put in open cars, the type that you transport coal. And that was in the middle of January. And believe me, the winters can get very severe in Europe and all we had was the blanket.

I had to take my friend in the corner of the car. And with my hand, I was holding onto the railing. And with my back, pushing away the crowd so she wouldn't be squashed.

And we traveled back and forth. Wherever we went, the railroad tracks were bombed. I assume they used a better track, probably, for the military.

And later I found out our destination was Northwest near Berlin. But we wound up in Czechoslovakia. And if you know

geography, Czechoslovakia to the South.

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

And we were traveling like this, back and forth, for about 10 days. The snow that fell on our blanket served to quench our thirst. And at one of the stations, it so happened the next car was the nurse from our camp. At one of the stations, she climbed up on the railing with a tin cup and begged the guard for some water because one of the girls fainted.

And instead, he pulled out his gun and he shot her. And she fell down between the cars. And as I said, the cars kept going back and forth. We could see her lay there not knowing if she was still alive or dead.

And we traveled like this for maybe 10 days. And we wound up in Ravensbruck. To tell you the truth, the last leg of that journey I don't even remember well. I only remember we came to Ravensbruck in the middle of the night.

So they could put only some of us in the barracks because they would have to put on the lights. The rest of us they put in the showers. By that time, we already knew what the showers meant. I don't know if you young people know, because one young lady asked me the other day why we were afraid of the showers.

Because in the extermination camps, when the transport came, they were told to get undressed and go into showers. But instead of water, the Zyklon B, the gas came out from the faucets. And we already knew that.

So that's why I keep telling that my friend and I kept sitting, sat there holding on to each other, like saying goodbye. That that's it. But somehow, we managed to sit through the night. At dawn, we saw through the cracks in the shades that we survived the night. In the morning, they put us in the barracks.

But Ravensbruck was like hell. That was a camp that was supposed to hold one quarter of the prisoners they had. So you can imagine the sanitary conditions there.

I remember getting up in the morning and running to the latrine. On the way was, like, a fountain with dripping water. All you could do is hold out your hand to catch a few drops of water to apply your face to wake up. But in the meantime, we were stepping on corpses, people that expired during the night. And like in every other camps, every morning we were awakened. We had to stay in line.

But one thing I remember about Ravensbruck, you see, it was very important to have a good friend in camp. Because we were young. We wanted to survive. But the conditions, I mean, we were so dehumanized.

There were sometimes we just wanted it to end. We didn't care how. But when you had a friend, whenever you got so low, she would hold you up. And she'd say we must survive.

And one thing I remember about Ravensbruck, you see Ravensbruck had a crematorium. While we're standing in line, they would wheel by corpses, carts with naked corpses, only the skin was holding the bones together. And once in a while one of those corpses would fall off. Another one would fall off. They just picked it up like a piece of wood and threw it back on that pile.

And I remember standing in line and saying to myself, no, I'm not going to wind up like this. So that's the only time I remember. When I got so I decided to fight, not that I could do anything about it.

Well, we didn't stay too long in Ravensbruck. And they sent us to a smaller camp, which was a subcamp of Ravensbruck. And then over there, again, the sanitary conditions were indescribable. I think we spent every free moment trying to eradicate the lice, which we were unsuccessful.

And one day as we were standing in line to be counted, one of the kapos, which is the German overseer, and one of the

military men walked over to our group and pointed the finger to about a dozen girls to step forward. It so happened I happened to be among them. I took a quick glance around me. Why me? How do I differ from the others?

You see, a selection in camp never meant a better lot. If they selected you and sent you away, that was it. Well, they marched us to the gate. Outside was standing a white, covered truck.

And there were some kapos and military and motioned to us to climb up into the truck. Although the tailgate was down, we still couldn't manage to. We were so weak, we couldn't climb up.

And all of a sudden, a crate appeared for us to step on that crate to get into the truck. We thought we were hallucinating because we never saw such a gesture from the German kapos. Later we found out why.

Then we got on the truck. Each of us was given a care package. I think those were donated by the Canadian government and by the Red Cross. We didn't even know what it was. It was food. We tore it open.

There was powdered milk and cocoa and sardines and crackers. And we ate it all at once. We didn't even care if that was our last meal.

But some of the girls got sick, not being used to such food. And we kept going in the truck, resigned. We didn't even talk to each other. I assume we were thinking what will the future be, will there be a future.

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

But we were not aware of it. The reason was-- very few people know about it. I speak to so many audiences. Nobody knows about it.

At that time, the chairman from the Swedish Red Cross was in Germany, negotiating with Himmler, who was the head of the Gestapo, the release of the Norwegian and Danish POWs, or the exchange. Because both Denmark and Norway were under occupation. And since it was the end of April, the war was almost over. And Himmler realized that Germany had lost the war. Bernadotte insisted that he should release some prisoners from Ravensbruck. And that's how we got to be on this transport.

You want to ask me something? Or should I go on?

Keep going. And I think if we have time, I'll turn to the audience for a few questions. And I may have some for you.

OK. We came to Sweden. And of course, we couldn't believe that we-- the Danish people were nice. They were giving us a place to rest and food. But we couldn't stay, because as I mentioned, Denmark was still under German occupation.

We went from Denmark to Malmo, to Sweden. Over there, there was a big reception, dignitaries, clergymen, the general public. But we just could not comprehend that we are really free.

We could not. I can't describe it. Sometimes I describe, like, I was standing aside and watching this, like I was not involved. Because we just couldn't believe that we're really out of camp.

Of course, right away they took the sick to the hospital. We went through delousing and disinfecting and showers. And, again, we didn't trust anybody. We wouldn't go into the showers until one personnel from the Red Cross opened the faucet to show us that water is coming out.

Then they put us up in a school. Each one of us got a mattress. But when you woke up at night, there was always somebody at the window looking out to make sure that we're not in camp any longer.

And a few days later, the students came running up the stairs in the middle of the night yelling the war is over. The war is over. We came out. We didn't have any-- we didn't sleep in any pajamas or nightgowns. We slept in our underwear. But who cared? We ran out. We were hugging and kissing jumping. Because, after all, the war was over. And since we survived, we hoped that somebody from the family survived, too.

Well, you already know about my family. As a matter of fact, from my extended family, which used to be a very large family in those days, I remember whenever there was a Jewish holiday, my grandparents had to remove the furniture to accommodate everybody for the holidays. And for my extended family, only one aunt and four cousins survived.

Well, I just want to tell you it's not easy for us to speak about this. Because every time we speak about it, 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 that's why we are doing it in the memory of the millions that were murdered so that their death was not in vain. We think we have an obligation to them to tell you what hate and discrimination can lead to.

And with all the atrocities going on right now, you young people don't probably remember Bosnia and Rwanda, now we have Darfur in the Congo. we really have to speak up and do something. Because you see, the Germans, the Nazis had collaborators. But there were also bystanders, people that did nothing.

There is a saying that evil prevails when good people do nothing. And there's also a poem by another German pastor when he says, when they came for the communists, he didn't speak up. When they came for the Jews, he didn't speak up. Then when they came from him, there was nobody left to speak up.

That's what I mean. That people do have a choice to be good or evil. When you go up to the museum, you'll see a wall with names of people who not only risked their own lives, but the lives of their families to save others. We call them the Righteous Gentiles.

So I'm trying to do-- when you learn about the Holocaust, to make some personal commitment and to try to prevent atrocities like this to happen again. And especially I like to speak to young people. Because you are the future of this country. You might not realize it. Some of you might even become president.

So please speak up when you see injustice done. And be tolerant. Don't take things for granted. Use your potential to make this country and the world a better place.

Don't judge people by the color of their skin or their ethnic backgrounds or their religious beliefs. Be tolerant. And speak up.

Fortunately, we live in a country where we do have a voice. It's still the best country in the world, with all its shortcomings. So use your voice and speak up when you see injustice done. Well, thank you very much for listening.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you. And we're not quite done yet. So Manya, a couple of questions for you before I turn to the audience, two questions for you.

One is tell us how you came to the United States, how you found your way here. And then secondly, when you really learned what happened to your family members, when you knew for certain what happened.

First of all, I want to thank you for being so patient. I mean, you know. You can see I get so emotional when I talk. And I'm interrupted, I lose my thought.

Well, anyway, how I came to this country. My father had a sister here that came here way back at the turn of the century. She was the oldest. My father was the youngest. So in those days she was taking care of my father.

And she insisted that we should come to the United States in her letters. But of course, my mother wouldn't leave her

family behind to come. In those days, it's not like now. You jump on a plane and you're there in a few hours. When you left Europe to come to the United States, you never saw your family again, you know?

So when I realized-- and she used to write such nice letters. Father used to read her letters to us. So when the war ended-- I mentioned I was 13 when the war started. The war in Poland lasted almost six years. By the time the war ended, I was 19, which is a mature person. But after all that what I went through, I came out like a lost child in a strange country with nobody, not knowing what to do.

So I thought maybe if I come to this end, I'll find some solace. Unfortunately, I had to wait 5 and 1/2 years to get a Polish visa. The United States also has quotas, you know. And at that time, a lot of people from Poland wanted to come. So it took me 5 and 1/2 years to get a visa to come to the United States.

By the time I came, my aunt had passed away. She had six children. But to tell you the truth, we had nothing in common.

In those days, nobody wanted to hear about the Holocaust. The thing was, maybe they meant well. Everybody was saying forget what happened over there. You're now here in this golden country, start life anew. We started life anew.

I can tell you one thing. It's 65 years since the war ended. But the Holocaust, like a shadow, still follows us around. Because at every occasion, we miss our family.

Like, when we bought a house in a new development where we could accommodate grandparents to come over and stay over the weekend, everybody's grandparents who lived in the neighborhood, my three-year-old daughter asked my husband's aunt, Aunt Roma, would you please be my grandmother? Because all the other kids had grandmothers. And I can go on and on.

So that's in the beginning. Now all the schools are taught about the Holocaust. The other day we had 36 schools coming to visit that were registered schools that came to the museum to visit in one day. 30 million people have visited this museum, 30 million people.

And most of them are not Jewish. It's not a Jewish museum, this. That's what-- I'm sorry. I keep going on. I can go on for--

[LAUGHS].

Thank you, Manya. Why don't we do this? Why don't we turn to our audience and ask them if they have a question they'd like to ask you. And when you ask your question, try to make it brief.

And we've got one person, a brave soul ready to go. And I will repeat the question before Manya answers it. And I'll repeat it so that everybody in the room, including Manya, hears it. And then Manya will respond to it, so the young man in the fourth row back there.

Do you still have your tattoo?

The question for Manya is do you still have your tattoo.

I happened to hear this.

Yes, I figured you did.

Sometimes I hear.

[LAUGHS]

Well, most young people ask me. In 1970, my husband was transferred on a job to a Southern state. And at that time, people didn't know much about the Holocaust, especially in the South.

And I had a hard time speaking about the loss of my parents and so on. He was worried I'll have a hard time. So my husband insisted that I remove my number.

But I have a mark very things. And I carry with me, just for young people like you, I carry with me my Swedish passport. Because on my Swedish passport, it says that I had a tattoo and my number, 79357. That was my number.

And I'll tell you another thing. I just a few days ago came across it. I was going over my papers. And I found my citizenship papers. And would you believe it, even on my citizen papers, it says I have a tattoo on my left arm.

And Manya, as you said earlier, at one point, everything is stripped from you, including your name. And in the camps, you were known by your number.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

OK. Who else would like to ask a question? This is an opportunity, folks. OK. Yes, ma'am. Over here?

Did the second friend survive?

The question is of the friends that you were friends with in the camp, did they survive?

Thank you for asking. I usually make a point to. Because I'm always asked that question. She did survive. And actually, she went to visit the doctor. That was because he was not supposed to keep her.

You see, in camp when you were sick, you didn't say you were sick. But since I mentioned, we worked in a place where we produced soot. So every time you got a scratch or a cut, you got an infection. So he reported to the authority that she had an infection.

So after the war, she wanted to thank him for taking such a risk and keeping her. He was a Frenchman, a Jew. She went to France to thank him.

He didn't believe. He said it was a miracle that she survived. She survived. She lives in Israel. I visited her about six times. She was here once. And we still--

Is it Lola?

Lola.

Lola.

[BUMPS MICROPHONE]

Oops, I'm sorry. You see, I speak with my hands and with my mouth.

[LAUGHTER]

OK. Do we have another question, young man right here.

Was your husband in the Holocaust?

The question is was your husband in the Holocaust?

My husband was in Russia in the Polish army. Because he is from South-- from East Poland. So as I mentioned in the beginning, the concept was that men will only be involved. So he and his father ran away to Russia hoping to survive. And they left my husband's mother and his sister, which did not survive.

But my husband and his father survived in Russia. And he was in Russia in the Polish army.

And fought against the Nazis.

Yes.

Yes.

Yeah, he came back with a chestful of medals. It was a Polish unit in Russia. That's what I find.

I liked when Manya told me that they got married on my first birthday, June 17, 1951. I like that. Do we have another question? Yes, sir, right here.

Do you have any side effects from not eating when you were younger?

The question is, do you have any side effects that have lasted because of the nutrition and not eating after that time?

Well you see, when I was taken to Sweden, I was in a sanatorium for four months to clear my lungs. I mentioned I worked in a place. So in Sweden, they fed us oatmeal three times a day, I think. And as a matter of fact, the doctors even wrote in the newspaper the people should not give us any food packages. Because we have to get used to, our stomachs have to get used to.

But one thing was, like in that improvised sanatorium, each one was in a hospital, a bed, and a little table with a drawer. The nurses came. They couldn't open the drawer because it was always stuffed with bread.

We always were afraid that we won't have. So we were hoarding that. It was stale already. But it is.

I don't know if it's in your area, too. In this area, whenever they predict snow or something, people run to the grocery store to buy food and toilet paper. And the other day, we had a storm here. And my neighbor said, if I'm going to the store to get some food. And I said to her, you know, a survivor has always plenty of food in the house.

[LAUGHTER]

You know, besides the malnutrition, one of the things that Manya didn't have a chance to go into in detail is the extraordinary hard labor that she was forced to do. And she mentioned she worked in making soot. That doesn't tell you the story of how extraordinarily difficult that work was and years of exceptionally hard, hard, hard labor. Do we have another question? Yes, back there.

How long did it take you to find out what happened?

The question is how long did it take you to find out what actually happened to your family.

Well, right away all kinds of lists appeared both from Jewish organizations, the Red Cross, and people looking for people. I wrote right away, since I was from two different towns, to the police station at each town. As a matter of fact, that's how I found one cousin. Because I figured if somebody will come back, they'll go to the police station and register and find out.

So it took me-- it took a while. It took a while. But right away, all kinds of lists appeared. That's how I found-- because I wasn't together with my friend. She remained in Germany when they took me to Sweden. And that's how we found each other because people were looking for people.

When did you find out that your aunt was still alive, the one that was in our photograph?

Well, only a short time after. And as a matter of fact, she was in a displaced person camp in Germany. And I decided, I got a profession. I used to make German uniforms.

So I got a job as a seamstress after I came out from the sanatorium. And I decided to send every month a package to Germany.

And you told me that that was one of your biggest thrills at that time was to be able to send her something.

Well, that I could help. And she used to always send-- well, she remembered me as a little girl, you know. And she always used to say that actually she was the one that should help me. She forgot that I'm a grown person now, by then, instead of me helping her.

I think we have time for another question if anybody else would like one. Yes, ma'am, back there.

Are your cousins here in the United States or do you have contact with them now?

The cousins that survived, are they in the United States, or do you have contact with them?

Well, from those cousins, only one is still alive in Israel. Two were in the United States and two were in Israel. Only one is still alive.

Well, I'm going to turn back to Manya in just a moment, just to close our program. But before I do that, first I want to thank all of you for being with us and being such a wonderful audience. I want to thank Manya for being willing to take a very short period of time and try to explain a lifetime, frankly, and particularly a six-year period that is unimaginable. And thank you for doing that for us, Manya.

And thank you. I love you.

It is very mutual.

[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]

Let me remind you that we'll have a First Person program every Wednesday until August 25. We'll also have First Person programs on Tuesdays until the end of July. So our next program will be next Tuesday, June 1, when our First Person will be Mrs. Nesse Godin, who is from Poland. Mrs. Godin survived a ghetto, slave labor, several concentration camps, and a death march before she was liberated.

I'd like to remind you that the podcasts from our programs are available on the museum's website. They're also available through iTunes. And also, as I noted earlier, Manya will step down off the stage in a moment and go up out of those doors. And she will sign copies of Echoes of Memory, the museum's book of writings by Holocaust survivors, including Manya's writings.

So it is our tradition that our First Person has the last word. So Manya?

Well, what can I say? I just can repeat what I told you before. Speak up when you see injustice done and be tolerant to

others.

Thank you. Thank you, Manya.

[APPLAUSE]

OK. Thanks.

Thank you, Bill. You were so patient. Thank you.

This worked out well.

Thank you so much.

[SIDE CONVERSATIONS]

You let me go ahead but I understand when you interrupt me.

Oh, this worked out beautifully.

You understand what I mean.

Absolutely. And I still got to ask you some questions.

[LAUGHS]

You got to see folks.

OK.

[SIDE CONVERSATIONS]