

Good afternoon, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson, and I am the host of the museum's public program First Person. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 11th year of the First Person program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Helen Goldkind, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2010 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Doris Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for, again, sponsoring First Person.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each guest serves as a volunteer here at this museum. We will have a First Person program each Wednesday through August 25. We will also have First Person programs on Tuesdays in June and July.

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

Helen's podcast from 2009 is presently available on the website, and will be updated with today's program in the very near future.

Helen Goldkind 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 have an opportunity for you to ask a few questions of Helen. We ask that you stay in your seats throughout our one-hour program, that way we minimize any disruptions for Helen as she speaks.

I'd like to let those of you who may have passes to the permanent exhibition today know that they are good for the time printed on your ticket, and 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 Germany.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Helen is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Helen's introduction, and we begin with this portrait of Helen Lebowitz Goldkind.

Helen was born in 1928 in Volosianka, Czechoslovakia. Helen was one of seven children born to a close-knit Jewish family. On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Czechoslovakia. Helen's father owned a shoe store in their home town of Volosianka. When Hungarians closed her family's synagogue, her grandfather, fearing for the safety of the synagogue's Torah scroll, secretly brought it home.

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

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

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

Helen was liberated from Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1945. Here we see a photo of liberated survivors. Helen emigrated to the United States in 1946. We close our slide presentation with this photo of Helen at her wedding to Abe Goldkind in 1947.

Helen came to the United States in 1946, as I mentioned, married Abe in 1947. They would move from Richmond, Virginia to Baltimore soon after their marriage. Helen and Abe have three children, had three children. One daughter is a microbiologist with the United States Navy. Their other daughter is a psychologist. And their son is a gastroenterologist, and he is also with the United States Navy.

Helen and Abe would eventually move to Florida, but Helen moved back to the Washington DC area in 2000 after Abe passed away, so that she could be close to her children and grandchildren.

Helen has eight grandchildren, ranging in ages from 15 to 33, and she has eight great-grandchildren with her newest granddaughter being born just two weeks ago. Helen volunteers at the membership and donor desk where you will find her on Thursdays. She also speaks frequently to groups here at the museum, as well as other settings.

And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Helen Goldkind.

[APPLAUSE]

Right there. Perfect. Is that OK?

Yeah, that'll [INAUDIBLE].

Helen, welcome and thank you so much for being with us, and for your willingness to be our First Person today. We have so much to talk about, so we should begin. When Czechoslovakia was partitioned and then occupied by Hungary, you were living in the town of Volosianka. Your family had lived there for several generations.

Before we begin talking about what happened once the Hungarians came, tell us about your early life, your family, your community, what it was like before the Hungarians and then the Germans after that came.

You don't want me to talk about the Czechs?

You can talk about the Czechs. Yes, just tell us about that early life.

Yeah, well I was born in Czechoslovakia. And my life was really terrific because my mother had six brothers and one sister, and they were all married and had children. And life was very good. My father made a good living. We had a Bata store, a shoe store. And I felt no antisemitism. I was as good as anybody else.

Most of my friends, actually, were non-Jews. And just to say that my life was very good at the Czechs. The Czechs tried to be a democracy. Until the Hungarians came in, that's when things started going bad.

When I say, bad, they took away the store from my father because it was a franchise. So you no longer can own a franchise. And then, food was rationed. There was a lot of things that the Jews didn't get any-- they couldn't buy it.

And then, when they did, they had to come like after 5 o'clock. And many times, when they went to the stores, they were out of that food.

Before we continue on, about once the Hungarians came, let me ask you just a little bit more about those early years. You had, you mentioned to me, one time that you had just a beautiful synagogue in your community. Tell us a little bit about that.

Well, when the Hungarians came in, they closed the synagogues. Why? Because the Jews couldn't get together. And so I had-- my grandfather was 86 years old, and he was very religious. And being that he couldn't go to the synagogue, he managed-- I mean, the children managed to get the Torah scroll-- Torah scroll is the Ten Commandments are there.

So the older people used to go to my grandfather and worship there. But what happened, I was going to the same school,

but I no longer could sit where I wanted to. I had to sit in the back. And I felt like my friends pulled away.

And I just-- being that I was so young, I wondered why. Because I didn't change.

So it was the same school, it was the same friends?

And the same teacher.

The same teachers.

They pulled away. Evidently, they must have been told by their families that you're not supposed to socialize with the Jews. And life was difficult, of course. But still, we were together.

The only thing-- I had two brothers, and they were soldiers. But then, they took away their-- they gave them shovels, instead of-- they had guns.

They had been soldiers in the Czech army, right?

Yes, but even the beginning, in the Hungarian army, they were still soldiers. But after a while, they gave them shovels because they weren't trusted anymore as soldiers.

Didn't you have an uncle who was a very senior officer in the Czech army?

Czechoslovakia, I have the picture of him. So if anybody wants to see it, I can show it to them.

Anyway, my mother worried because we no longer were getting any mail from them. So that was hard.

From your brothers?

Yeah, that was her worried. After a while, after a while, even life was difficult, but we were going to school, we had to sit in the back, they never called on us. So we would come home and we would say, we just going there being humiliated and they never call on us.

So my father believed in education. So he hired a teacher that was fired because he was a Jew. And that teacher was teaching us. After a while, our house became a school, sort of a school--

As other kids came in?

Other kids, the Jewish kids came. And my grandfather's house became a house of worship. But you know, it wasn't bad, because we were still together with the family.

Helen, during that time, as you explained, your father had his business taken away from him. And how did the family then make ends meet? How were you able to eat and things like that, once your father lost his business?

Well, our house was surrounded with a little bit of lawn. So we used to plant potatoes or carrots. I remember, a little girl, I went into that place and pulled out a carrot. And I went and washed it, and it tasted delicious. It was so sweet.

But I can't, even today, I can taste-- I don't think the carrots of today are that sweet.

[LAUGHTER]

Somehow, we managed. My grandfather and grandmother lived not far from us. So we had enough milk, we had enough potatoes, and you survive. You don't eat meat, or you don't eat fancy stuff, but you survive.

But so somehow, the family managed under these very difficult circumstances. And that went on for several years until 1944, when the Germans then occupied Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Yes.

And then, life, of course, changed dramatically.

Completely.

Tell us what happened when they first came.

Well, when the Germans came in, we had to wear a Star of David on our hands. And also, the houses had to have a Star of David.

It was painted on the house?

On the house. So maybe two weeks later, they said, the Jews should go to the square, take one-- excuse me-- take one suitcase. And they're going to be taking to Germany. At that time, Germany, they occupied most of Europe. And they need people to work on a farm.

So we really weren't frightened. We figured we'll go and work and we'll come back. But as they lied to the world, they lied to the Jews. And they took us to Uzhhorod, and they kept us in Uzhhorod-- it was a ghetto. And they kept us in Uzhhorod.

And one day-- wait, I'm not going to be good at this-- one day, my grandfather had a long beard, and they said, all the old men should come to the square. And they went and cut their beards, and they beat them up.

My mother was there with him, but there was nothing she could do, because she was afraid they're going to beat him up even more. So she waited until they were finished with him. And they-- and she brought him home. And we were all sitting on the floor. And she-- and he was just like in a shock.

And we were all crying because he was black and blue, and we thought that he is in terrible pain. So my mother, a couple of days later, she went and took a scarf and covered his face. And after a while, he said, you know, I know you're all worried because I'm in pain. But the humiliation, that's what really hurt me most.

More than the physical pain.

More than the physical pain-- he looked black and blue, an old man. And I really never saw my father cry. And at that time, I remember how he cried looking at him.

After-- I told you, I'm not good at it.

No, Helen, take your time. There's water there.

Yeah, I'll have a little water.

OK.

Helen, even before that terrible thing happened to your grandfather, share with us an incident that you told me about where you went to a little shop, had gone to this little shop for ice cream. And will you tell us this?

Yeah, I felt that was a minor thing.

It wasn't minor to you at the time.

At that time, because I was so little and I didn't understand.

Right.

As I told you, my uncles were living not far from us. And I must have done something, and one of my uncles gave me a quarter. And I ran to the store. The man that owned the store knew me, because I used to play with his children.

And I come, I have the quarter, and he wouldn't give me any ice cream because I was Jewish. And I just couldn't understand it. I just didn't understand it.

So I came home crying. I didn't get any ice cream.

Do you remember, in any way, how your parents tried to explain that to you? If they tried to offer you some explanation for that so you could understand?

Well, they felt the war will be over one day and things will go back to normal. That's the only thing that they were hoping for.

Did your family-- did your parents, to your knowledge, have any awareness of what was happening to Jews elsewhere in Europe at that time, by 1944?

Yes, we knew that they were killing 100 Jews there, 100 Jews there. And but we didn't know that the mass murder was going on the way it was, really. When we left home, we didn't think we were going to go to Auschwitz. We thought that we were going on a farm.

So anyway, we left the ghetto in cattle cars.

Tell us-- before you tell us that, Helen, tell us about the ghetto, itself. What do you remember about that? You were an early teenager by this time.

Yes.

What was life like in the ghetto?

Well, first of all, you didn't get any information at all. I mean, but you did get some food in the ghetto. We were just waiting that we'll be ready to go to this farm, and we'll work there.

And was your whole family together in the ghetto?

At that time, except my brothers.

They were still in the brigade.

Yes. So we were sort of happy together. But one day, when they had already enough Jews to put them in a cattle car, in the cattle cars, they took us to the station, and loaded us into these cattle cars. And there were so many people in this cattle car that it was hardly any place to sit down.

It was like standing room only, if I remember well. So the older people-- the older people couldn't stand. So it was terrible.

And then, they gave us a bucket for all these people in the cattle cars. And you know, it got full right away. And the cattle car got messed up. And it was really chaotic.

We were already looking how to get out of this cattle car. So finally, we got to Auschwitz. Yes?

We saw, through these little windows, it says the arbeit macht das leben frei. That means work makes a person free. So we figured we're on that farm. But the problem was there was a smell, like they were burning flesh. We didn't know it at that time, but now we found out.

By the time we came to Auschwitz, they were capable of gassing 10,000 people a day. And they couldn't get rid of them, they couldn't burn them. So they had a big pit, and they were just burning-- it was an outside pit.

So we knew we were not on a farm. But we were somewhere in a strange land that we have never been to.

They didn't open up our cattle car until late, it was already dark. And we got in-- it was still daylight. And finally, it got dark, and they put on the flashlights, I mean--

The floodlights?

Yes, and the Germans, if you forgive me, I'm going to call them the monsters, whoever worked in Auschwitz. I feel they were monsters.

Finally, they opened up these doors, and they said, heraus, heraus, go out, go out. In the meantime, we took these little suitcases and we threw it in this-- in the pit, or whatever you call it. So my grandfather, he had his Torah scroll, and he refused throwing it down because it's a sin.

And my mother, you know, they started beating him up. And my mother ran to him and she says, please, throw it down, throw it down. So he says, they don't understand that it's a sin. So they were beating him up.

And he fell on the ground with the Torah scroll. And for us, you know, my mother, my sister, and she was-- I had a six-year-old brother that came with us, and she held on to him. But he also had a book with him, because in Europe, there weren't too many toys. If you ever got a present, that would be a book.

And so he loved that book and he held that book. And my mother asked him to throw it down, and he didn't. He didn't understand why he has to throw it down. My mother packed a book for him, but he already saw that she had to throw away that suitcase, and he didn't want to give it up.

And finally, my mother made a deal with him, sort of, and he gave the book to my mother. And then, he watched my mother throwing it in the gutter. And he cried terribly because he thought that my mother will be able to save that book.

And then, as we were running to the right, a monster came over. And he pulled him-- oh, not doing too good.

Just take your time, Helen.

A monster came over, and he pulled my little brother away. And of course, he cried, and my mother cried. And she was running after him. And then, they beat her up. And I remember her being on the floor, they were kicking her around with these big boots, and she was bleeding. And she went to the left with my little brother.

I don't know, maybe if she wouldn't have ran to my brother-- I don't think she would have survived. Like this, at least, I knew that my brother didn't go crying to his death. That she comforted him.

And your sister was with you?

My sister was with me.

Where was your father?

My father went with the men. They separated them.

At the ghetto, they separated him out?

Yes.

So he had gone at a different time?

Well, the men were separate, and the women were separate--

Oh, at Auschwitz, they separated him. OK.

So actually, I don't know what happened to my father. But he never came back. So I imagine what--

So there, it was and your sister. What happened to you next?

Finally, when they were already finished sort of, they separated the old ones, the young ones. They took us-- they took us to get a shower. But you know, it was so-- the road to the shower, you had flowerbeds on the side, and in the back, you heard a-- excuse me-- in the back, you heard a music playing.

I didn't see-- I didn't see the musicians, but I heard it. And at the time, when we were passing to go to the showers, I didn't know that the back of these flowers they have these gas chambers that they were gassing my family and my people.

And they took us into these showers, and they cut our hair, and we had to give up our clothes. And I got a striped dress and wooden clogs. And a bowl-- it was like a dark red bowl. And a spoon. So we had to wait until they cut all these girls' hair.

So we were like naked. And I remember these monsters walking back and forth. And they had like a good time. They were laughing.

We were already glad when it was over, that we did get showers. But we were already glad when we got this dress, so we could put it on us.

After we were finished in that shower room, it was already dark. So they took us back into a barrack. When we got to this barrack, I was on the top floor, and there was a little crack, or whatever. And my sister was there with me, and four other girls.

And I looked through that crack and I saw people hanging out on the fence. I didn't know at that time that it was an electric fence, and I said, Sylvia, look, look. This is not a farm-- people are hanging from the fences.

Well, and she said, OK, probably tomorrow we'll find out what's happening here. So what happened was when they took us out to zählappell in the morning to count us, because we no longer had names--

That was to have you line up and count you in the morning.

Yes, and they were still there. But later on, there was a brigade that came with pitchforks to take these people off. It was Jews that were trying to escape. But there was no way.

And we've been in Auschwitz for some times, but they, in the morning, we got some coffee. I don't know if it was coffee, whatever it was, it looked like coffee. And a slice of bread. And at night, we got some soup.

And they took us once a day to the bathroom and to wash. So you know, I was sort of normal, yet, and I waited for my next. And by the time-- by the time my next came, it was-- they didn't tell us how much time they gave us, they just let

us in. They didn't talk to us. So I waited for my next, and by the time my next came, it was already-- they were, the girls had to leave, and I was still there.

And a kapo came and started hitting on me. And I cried. I didn't know why I got beaten up. So my sister heard my cries, so she came in and she pulled me out.

And by that time, I was already bleeding because these rubber hoses, once you got it, they tore your skin. And she wiped me around with her dress, and we went back to the barracks. But the next time, I already knew that we don't have enough time.

So I tried very hard to get in line to be the next. That went on, I don't know exactly how many weeks. I just don't recollect it. And while we were going on zahlappell, you know--

The daily lineup.

Yeah, lining up, they came to see who was-- whether Mengele made a mistake, Mengele was the one-- can I go to that? Mengele was a doctor in Auschwitz. And he had two jobs. He played God, and he also did research on twins, and on Gypsies. He wanted to make a master-- they wanted to make a mater race, people with blue eyes and blond hair.

And now, when I think, Germany had the best universities, I mean they were really progressive people, that they couldn't figure out that, I think, we have about 3/4 of people that are not blond. You only find them in Scandinavia. We were seven kids, I was the only redhead. The rest of them were all dark.

Anyway--

You and Sylvia would, after some weeks, after some period of time, you were then selected for slave labor.

Right.

And sent away. Tell us what that meant to be selected for slave labor, and what happened to you from there?

OK, from Auschwitz-- in Auschwitz, they took us to the railroad station. And they put us into, again, cattle cars. And we're sitting there. And all of a sudden, we hear, boom, like the bombing, boom. And we were so happy because I still had some family home in the ghetto. And we were hoping they going to bomb the tracks, or they could have bombed-- they could have bombed, you know, Auschwitz.

But after a while, it got quiet. And the train went off.

These were Allied planes bombing?

Yes, but we could hear them in the trains. They were so close.

Anyway, we got already to Germany. And first, they took us to the factory. And they all assigned us to different jobs. I don't know why, but they gave me a very difficult job.

What I had to do is take the empty shells-- they were big-- and I had to put them under the machine and fill them. And then, when they were full, I had to-- I had to pick them up with my whole body and put it in that wagon again. And I got burnt. And it was a very, very difficult job.

You were handling these explosives, to fill it, right?

Yeah.

Very toxic.

They called it spring stuff.

Spring stuff.

Isn't that gunpowder? It was very hot and yellow. You know, I remember.

So after a while, I'm talking about after a while, I just felt I can't do it because I was hungry, and I was cold, and I was overworked. So I figured out whoever didn't go out to Zahlappell, and they stayed in the barrack, that they somehow got rid of them. I didn't know how to kill myself. I just didn't know-- maybe I wasn't even strong enough to kill myself.

So I stayed in the barrack. And my sister noticed that I wasn't there, so she ran into the barrack. And she found me there. And she-- I'm sorry.

Your sister came back to get you out of there.

Get me out.

She wasn't going to let you do that.

No. She lifted me up and shaken me. And I thought, she got off her mind. And I want to die and that was finished.

Because the people-- I think what kept her going is the people that went to the gas chamber, they didn't know the world knows, otherwise they would stop it. So if somebody is going to survive, tell the world. So she wanted to do that.

And then, we both cried. And she was pulling me out, and she was trying to bribe me. She says, I'm going to give you a piece of my bread, but you got to hold on to your life. I don't want to be left alone.

And we promised that if we survive, we'll have to tell the world what happened. So that's what kept her going. But I couldn't do it anymore.

So at the beginning, I would take a piece of bread from her. But then, I was afraid she'll die and I'll be alone. And I didn't want to be alone. So I stopped taking the bread.

And but if we got a potato in our soup, we would share it.

Did Sylvia do the same kind of labor that you did?

Well, she had a different job than I had.

In the same factory, of course.

In the same factory.

You had mentioned to me that it was better to be on the day shift than the night shift. Why was that?

Well, because at night, the doors were closed, the windows were closed, so we had no circulation at all.

With these toxic--

With this toxic air. So the girls used to faint away. A little bit of hair we had was like dark orangey. And our eyes got yellow, our bodies-- we really didn't look normal, like people-- we looked like outer space, or someplace.

Helen, if you don't mind, you had shared with me, while you were there in that camp, the labor was so extraordinarily

difficult, but you have several very powerful vivid memories of several things. And one of them involved two sisters, as I recall.

One sister, I only had one sister.

No, no--

Oh, two sisters. Yes, that goes back when we were in the train, my mother said we should take care of each other. And I had my grandma there. And my older sister had to take care of my grandma. So she held on to her.

So she just went to the left, because my grandma was old.

I was thinking more, there was-- you told me about another incident where there were two other sisters in the camp with you. But we'll pass over that and come to another one. You also shared with me the fact that the SS that were the guards, led this normal family life right there in the camp. Will you say something about that?

Well, what their job was, like some people are teachers or whatever, their job was to take kids to the gas chamber, and old ones. And matter of fact, I have a picture of one. And then, they went home and played with their own children. That's why I don't think that they were really human-- a human being can't do that, when they know that every day they have to go and take people to the gas chamber, and then go home and live a normal life.

That's what I meant by it.

Helen, as the Allies began getting closer, you would be taken from that camp and forced to go to Bergen-Belsen.

Yes. Now, one day-- one day, nobody came to open up the door from that barrack. And we were always closed in from the outside. And it's already daylight. Nobody came.

And all of a sudden, we never knew what time it is because we had no watches. All of a sudden, we see civilians coming to open the door, and they said we no longer are being there. They didn't need us, sort of they were explaining. And they're taking us to another camp, to Bergen-Belsen.

But Bergen-Belsen didn't register to me because I didn't really know what Bergen-Belsen is. So they came with a pickup truck-- from about 2,000 girls, we were left maybe 400 or 500, if that much. They were dying out from the bad-- you know, from--

From the ammunition that you were working with?

Yes, and then we were hungry, and--

Diseases.

Diseases. So anyway, they took us with a pickup truck to Bergen-Belsen. All of a sudden, I see camps at Bergen-Belsen. And they took us in, and they opened up a barrack.

Me and my sister walked in, they were already people-- it was already in the end, close to the end-- there were people, dead people, dying people, delirious people. And the barrack smelled terribly.

It's just, if somebody imagines hell, I think that barrack was worse than hell. So we had no place to sit down, me and my sister. So we saw a few bodies near the wall, so we took them and we moved them over a little bit. And then, we just sat there. We were waiting for our death. We didn't think we were going to survive.

As we were waiting there, we saw the lice going, eating the dead ones. And then they came in and they were eating us. At one time, we took off our clothes, because our clothes was so full of lice. And it was even worse, because they had us

there, you know.

So we put our dresses on back. And--

Helen, it was while you were at Bergen-Belsen that you would end up being liberated.

Yes, but let me tell you about the time we were liberated. I was already like a skeleton with a heartbeat. And when the soldiers, the English opened up the door, they didn't know what to make out of us. So I remember, they called on Eisenhower to see what this is. They couldn't-- they didn't know what it was.

So whenever Eisenhower goes, the photographers go, and the newsmen go. And evidently, these pictures that you all saw upstairs is because Eisenhower came and they took pictures.

There's a quote on the back side of the museum that is a quote from Eisenhower when he was at Bergen-Belsen. Were you still with your sister at the time you were liberated?

Yes, but my sister got sick first, would you believe that? So she got sick first. And the English were trying to pick up the people that were still alive, that were still breathing. So they picked her up first. And I thought she'll come back tomorrow, but tomorrow didn't come.

She didn't come. So I evidently was already sick, too. And I was going to look for her. So I was going and going. And I saw like a little mountain was moving. And I knew yet that mountains don't move.

But as you were getting closer, so many lice and insects were running around over these bodies, it was like--

A mound of bodies?

Yes. And I remember that. And I says, my God, the mountains don't move. And then, I got closer, and I saw it was lice and insects that-- I thought the mountain was moving.

In the meantime, I have to tell you that--

This is Freddy?

Yes, shall I take time to do that?

Please, please.

After the war, there were a few of these SSES that I call monsters, they were pulling on a body. They tied his ankles. And I took a look down, and I screamed, Freddy, Freddy! And he opened his eyes.

He was being pulled because they thought he was dead?

Yeah.

And you looked down, and he opened his eyes.

Yeah. And I screamed, I said, it's my cousin. He opened his eyes, and that monster got scared. And he took off the rope from his ankles and left him there.

But in the meantime, I, myself, fell.

You passed out.

I passed out. And the English came, and evidently, they picked me up, because that I don't remember. They picked me up and put me in a makeshift hospital. And I was in that makeshift hospital for a while. And I was strong enough to lift my head up by my elbows, you know. So I looked around. Of course, I looked for my sister, and I didn't see her.

And I started crying. And the nurse came over, and she says, why are you crying? You're feeling better. And I said to the nurse, listen, please let me die. My life is not worth fighting for anymore. I had a sister and she died here.

She says, how do you know she died? I says, you know, I looked around, and she's not around. So she says, what was her name? I tell her.

I didn't know that there are more makeshift hospitals. I didn't know. Then, after two days, she comes over to me and she says, you know, your sister is alive. But she's very, very sick.

And I looked at that lady and I remember, I says, if she lies to me, it wouldn't be right. So I sort of believed her-- I wanted to believe her. And she did tell me the truth.

And maybe a week or so, they put us together. They brought her to my hospital-- to my makeshift hospital. And there we are. And I tell her, you know, I saw Freddy. She says, oh, you had-- your fever must have been so--

She thought you were hallucinating.

Yes, she didn't want to believe me. After a while, I, myself, thought that's what happened. But that Freddy survived. Otherwise, he would have been on that mountain, if that monster would have taken him there.

Right, would have taken him away. And you-- and then, Freddy would join up with you and your sister, stick with you, right?

It was a problem, because we were afraid they're going to separate us again. So he took up our name, Lebowitz-- his name was Milbauer. And that's how we were.

Because he was going to hang on to you no matter what.

Right. Right. And then, they-- shall I? Do we have more time?

We do. We do, we have a little more time.

Well, the Swedish Red Cross took out 600 people from the hospitals. They took them to Sweden. And my sister-- he was with us, too. Because--

Everywhere you went, Freddy went after that, yes. Yes.

In Sweden, they asked us if we have family somewhere else, not in Europe. Because Europe was emptied out from Jews. So I remember, we had a sister in America. She came out in '38. And but I didn't know-- I didn't know where she lived. So I told them her name, Frances, at that time was Lebowitz. And they put our names in the papers.

And she saw these names. But she couldn't figure out that that's us, because what were we doing in Sweden? She didn't think. And she called the Red Cross in Sweden, and they told her that there are two kids, and they're very sick, and that's why they're in Sweden. And then, I was two months in a sanitarium.

And they made me feel better. And then, they send me to school, and my sister went to work. But they treated her like a human being.

You told me, it was somewhat a funny story, in that when you were trying to find your sister, you were saying "Brookleen."

"Brookleen."

And they were having a very difficult time trying to figure out where your sister might be-- Brookline? And they asked that, and then finally they figured out and ran an ad in the paper in Brooklyn, didn't they.

Brooklyn, yeah.

And you found her. And did Freddy come with you when you came to United States?

No, that's what the problem was. He had an uncle and his name was Milbauer.

But now he had your name.

Now he has our name. So he couldn't come out. We came out before him, until the whole thing got straightened out. That he became Milbauer-- he really became Milbauer. And then, his uncle sent him papers, and he also came out. It was a mess.

Helen, you've talked to me in the past about your treatment in Sweden, and I think you've suggested that had you not had a relative here, you might have stayed in Sweden.

Yes. I'd like to say something-- I know I talked a lot about monsters. But the Swedish people were-- if not for Sweden, I would lose-- I would think everybody are monsters. But the Swedish, if you would have seen me, I was eaten up from lice and from that spring stuff, and I looked like a skeleton. And they took care of me. They fed me. They bathed me.

And they brought me back to life. So I feel if I wouldn't have had a sister in Brooklyn-- "Brookleen"-- I would have stayed in Sweden. Because that life appealed to me. These people appealed to me.

Now we have a few minutes to turn to our audience, if you would like, and ask them if they would like to ask you a couple of questions. Should we do that? We have a little bit of time for a couple of questions.

If you have a question, please make it as brief as you can. I will repeat the question so everybody in the room can hear it, including Helen. And then, she'll answer it. So do we have anybody would like to ask Helen a question?

We have a brave person back here in purple, I think. Yes?

Whatever happened to your sister, Sylvia? Did she stay in Sweden, or did she [INAUDIBLE]?

The question is, what happened to Sylvia? Did she come with you to the United States? What happened to Sylvia?

Yes, as a matter of fact, she survived. And she died two years ago. So now, I'm by myself. I mean, I have a family, my own children. But I no longer have any sisters or brothers.

OK, with a pink hat, and then the young lady behind you after that. OK?

What about your brothers?

Question is, about your brother.

They never came home. I don't know where they died. I don't know.

OK, and the young lady right there.

Oh, my little brother, are you talking about?

I was asking about your two older--

Your two older brothers-- they never came back? And you never learned what happened to your two brothers? No, no. Young?

How did you meet your husband?

Oh, so that's actually a question I would like to have asked myself, if we had enough time. How did you meet your husband?

It's a great story.

[LAUGHTER]

And you should tell it.

OK, away from this tragedy. When we came back, we were very depressed and we kept on crying. Because if I saw a kid, I would say, this is not a Jewish kid. Or if I saw an old man, is he Jewish?

And my sister, she wasn't rich, but she managed to send me for help. But you know what, there is no help when you lose your whole family. There is no help. Nobody can tell you, feel better.

So we were depressed. And my sister said, why don't you go to New York? We were in the house and crying. Finally, one Saturday, we decided we'll go and see New York. We were-- I didn't have any friends but my sister had friends, and we were five of us.

So we went to New York. And all of a sudden, we see music, we hear music. So we just looked in there, and the kids were having a good time. And I'm standing there, and there were two kids-- they had Hungarian parents. And the Hungarians teach their children how to say a word or two. And they were laughing.

And I was so angry at them. I said, what are they laughing about? There's nothing to laugh about. I gave them dirty looks, and they laughed me.

[LAUGHTER]

I mean, they were normal. I was the un-normal one. And I'm standing there waiting for my sister and her friends, and then, all of a sudden my husband comes, asking me to dance. I says, I don't dance.

[LAUGHTER]

And he wondered, why am I there? He says, come on, I'll buy you a drink. I said, I don't drink. In the meantime, he recognized that I have this accent. So he saw-- he right away saw that I'm a strange bird there. And you know.

But he wanted to know, he wanted to know. And he started questioning me. And I didn't want to talk, because I didn't want to cry.

So finally, my sister and her friends came and we were going home. And he had a new car, believe it or not. So he says, I'm taking you all home. And the other girl said, OK.

I look at my sister-- and my sister told me, my other sister, Frances-- she told us not to go in no car. And we have to be home at a certain time. What to do? So--

[LAUGHTER]

So we decided we'll go in the car. That was number one, we shouldn't have done. And then, we came a little bit late, and my sister was waiting near the door. And she really-- says, how come you're late? And didn't I tell you to come back?

And so, me and my sister decided we have to tell her the truth. So we told her the truth, there was a man that took us all home. And here we are. So that man, he came back next day.

[LAUGHTER]

I was washing the floors, because my sister lived in a one-bedroom apartment with two children. She was poor. And on the third floor. And then, she didn't have a telephone.

So the bell rings. And I'm running down the steps. She thought, it's the telephone. I'm running down the steps, and all of a sudden, I see a man there. But I'm passing him. He says to me, where are you running? I said, I'm going to get the telephone.

He says, wasn't the telephone. It was me ringing. So he says, he wants to come upstairs. I said, you can't come upstairs, because I'm washing the floor. There is no place.

He says, he's going to wait in the hallway. I come back, my sister said, who was it on the telephone? I says, it wasn't the telephone, was him.

[LAUGHTER]

So finally, I finished washing the kitchen, and we let him in. He waited for me in the living room. And that's how I met.

The rest is history, as they say, right? Helen, I think that's probably all the time we have for questions. We're going to close the program. In just a couple of moments, I'll turn back to Helen.

I'd like to thank all of you for being with us today. I'll remind you that we'll do a First Person program each Wednesday until the 25th of August, as well as Tuesdays through the end of July. So hope you can come back another time this year. Or if not, perhaps you can join us next year.

Our next program is tomorrow, June 23rd, when our First Person will be Mr. Julius Menn, who is from Poland. His family fled the Nazis and made it to Palestine in 1940.

I'd like to remind you also that our First Person programs have podcasts that are available on the museum's website, as well as through iTunes. So it's a way for you to hear some of our First Person programs.

It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. And so with that, I'd like to turn it back to Helen to offer us her closing thoughts for all of us. Oh, and one more thing, Helen, can you stay behind for just a couple of minutes if anybody would like to come and chat with you?

Sure.

So if after the program ends, if you want to come and meet Helen, or say anything to her, or ask her another question, please know you can do that.

Well, you know, I tell everybody not to be prejudiced, and please, please not to hate, because hate is cancer. They'll hate me today, but they'll hate you tomorrow. So when you hear hate or prejudice, please, please speak up. And that was a big problem in Europe. People didn't speak up-- they were taking their neighbors, they never asked where are they, or what's going on?

And sometimes, the Germans said, well, we didn't know, we didn't know. They were passing laws-- when we know that a law was passed, we usually speak up against it. But nobody spoke up against the laws against the Jews. And that was the biggest problem.

If you go in here, they have an exhibit, and that's a good example why you should speak up when you hear propaganda, hate, and lies. And don't buy it. Just please don't buy it.

You know, there is a-- it's actually on the wall as you come in from the back. You want to read this to them?

Do you want to read it?

Yeah, well, you can read it. I need the glasses.

OK, might be able to use mine.

Oh, OK. This is the Pastor Niemoller's--

You maybe have--

--statement, if you've not heard it. "First, they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews. I did not speak out, because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me."

Yeah. This is on the wall here. I don't know if you saw it. But the reason why I thought it was-- I bought it for a dollar in the store.

[LAUGHTER]

Because he was with Hitler in the beginning.

He was.

And so he's warning the people of this world to speak up against hate and prejudice and all those things. And because people were buying in to their hate.

Thank you, Helen, very much.

You're very welcome. Thanks for coming. Thanks for coming.

[APPLAUSE]