

And he made the son promise he's going to give me some kind of a job. And the old man comes back. He says, come back tomorrow. And I come back tomorrow. Because I says, I'll be the first one. And first comes, first gets it. So I saw the cleaning crew was going in. I almost asked them, do you have a job for me? But I was so scrawny that I couldn't deal with these big machines. And they wouldn't take me, I don't think so.

And I'm waiting near the door. Finally, the door opened. I go into the office. And they look at me. I look the same. So no-- well, it's not laughing. It was very painful for me. And they had their own-- rich people were coming in there to make fur coats, to fit them. I didn't even think who's rich and who's not rich. She was a designer. And designer comes and takes a look at me. She says, no good.

So I couldn't work in the-- because I had to look good. So she takes me. She says, we're going to go shopping. I said, I don't have no money. She says, don't worry, don't worry. She took me shopping in a store there. And she brings me gorgeous clothes. I say to her, listen, I don't have any money. Can you find something cheaper? She says, don't worry about it. Just try it on.

Well, she bought me about a half a dozen dresses. And she bought me a little pump with a little heel. And she says, try on these dresses. He says, we'll take them all. And she made me put on the pumps. And stockings, she bought me. I never wore-- and underwear she bought me. So then I wanted to take it off and put on my-- he says, don't, don't.

What she wanted it-- the man that told me that he doesn't have a job to see me now. She ran and called him. His name was Morris. She called him. And he took a look. And he left. Then he comes back because he didn't recognize me. I looked like a different person. She put my hair in a ponytail. And she put on a little lipstick on me. And I had this gorgeous dress on and I had the pumps. I'll tell you, clothes really helps. He comes back. So what are we going to do with her now? At least I can be in the showroom.

Right.

I couldn't look like a-- so I'm in the showroom. So then they had a stockroom where they have skins. They cut the skins and make-- it was a huge place. So she says, OK, you're going to be in the stockroom. And if a lady comes and wants-- looking at the packages, you can tell them, this looks better and that looks better. You could learn that quickly. And I did. If I tell them, this is better because it's shinier or something, that's where I was. I was there for a little while too.

My luck, the models didn't come in. They had enough money. They didn't worry over their jobs. What do you do? They have buyers from all over the country, no models. So that lady, she says, well, let's call Helen in. They called me in. And she was giving me a few lessons. She says, you're going to model these coats. Oh, I says, I know how to do that. So she told me, just lift your head up, walk through it straight, and walk. They had a walk. And I walked. And I said-- I was so afraid that I'm going to lose the job that I sort of smiled. I didn't have an angry face. And I would walk as many time as they told me to.

And you became a fur model there for a while? Yep.

Accidentally.

Accidentally.

And we sold so many coats that day. And they says, I'm going to-- we're going to send you to a modeling school. So they sent me to a modeling school. But you know what they do? They put a bottle on your head. And you're supposed to walk. And the bottle shouldn't fall. It's not a big deal. So after a while, I told them, listen, I'm going to go. They let me out an hour early to go there. It's OK. I'll go if you want to. But I don't think I need to do this. So then I stopped. And I really modeled.

Helen, we're-- we've got to close up in just a couple of moments. I want to ask you one more thing before we close the program. And I'll turn back to Helen also to actually close our program. There's so much more that I know the audience

would love to ask you, and I wish that I could too. Helen, can you stay behind for a few minutes, if anybody would like to come and ask you a question when you step off the stage and talk to you?

Yeah. I'm an open book.

And you are, Helen. You're an open book. And yet, everybody here feels how hard, and difficult, and painful this is for you. How long was it before you began to tell what happened to you talk about, including to your own family?

Well, I have my daughter here. And when I was having my kids, I was so afraid that I'm going to raise monsters. She had no idea. So I was talking to my husband. And he says, the only way you can do that if you're not going to talk about it. So I had to take my past, and put it in an iron box, and not open it. But it was so hard for me. I used to cry so much.

I think you told me that you would-- your kids heard you crying when they were young. And you would just say, oh, I was just having--

I got a headache.

I got a headache, right.

Because I couldn't tell them my past.

And now, you speak publicly about it. You're doing what you're doing today. That's--

That's what I do.

--remarkable. And my daughter is here to say that I didn't talk to you when you were little. Am I right? And she turned out an angel.

It's an amazing experience for me because she was frightened all through the years I was growing up to let anybody know. And it's only now that I know, much later, that she had post-traumatic stress and so forth because the nightmares and gruesome memories went on for decades. But she only began to be willing to talk about it-- I would say it was probably-- maybe 20-- 15 years ago, maybe.

No, no, longer.

Longer, maybe 20-- but fearful most of her adult life.

I think, when you kids grew up, and they were reading a book-- and a professor from an Ivy League college wrote a book that that couldn't have happened. And I says, my god, I'm still alive. I have to talk. So I started.

Started talking then. I want to-- I'm going to turn back to Helen in just a moment. I want to thank all of you for joining us today for First Person. We'll have a First Person program each Wednesday till the end of August. Then we'll pick up our program again in March 2012. Please, go to the website and check the website out. You can hear podcasts of Helen and other survivors from the First Person program. So please, do that and join us next year in person if you can do that.

We will have a new program next week, on August 17, when our first person is Mr. Haim Solomon, who is from Romania. And he ended up surviving the war in Bucharest and then was going to Palestine after the war, only to be arrested by the British and interned in Cyprus. And so you can hear a podcast of Haim or come back, if you can do that. It's our tradition at First Person that our first person has the last word. And so with that, I'd like to turn back to Helen to close our program today.

What I have to say?

Whatever you want to say.

Well, we weren't gangsters. We weren't robbers. We weren't killers. Hate did it. And I would beg you, please, don't hate. We are all God's children. And I think hate brings this on. And that's what hate did. Especially the kids, please, please, please, don't hate. Be kind to each other.

Thanks, Helen.

I don't know what else.

We all thank you, Helen.

[APPLAUSE]