

Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's program First Person. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 13th year of the First Person program.

Our First Person today is Mrs. Manya Friedman, whom we shall meet shortly. This 2012 season of first person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring First Person. And I'm pleased to let you know that Mr. Louis Smith is here with us today.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you, Louis. 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 with this museum. Our final program for this year will be next Wednesday, August 15. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about next season's First Person program.

Manya Friedman will share with us her first person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 40 minutes. If we have time toward the end of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask her a few questions. 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 their 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, taken before the war. Manya had two younger brothers, David and Mordechai, and was surrounded by many close relatives.

This is a portrait of Manya, her cousins, and her aunt, who is pictured in the middle, circled. And in this photo, Manya is approximately four years old, and she's circled on the lower left. Manya's aunt is the only person in this photo who survived the Holocaust, other than Manya.

In 1938, Manya's family moved to Sosnowiec, which is indicated by the red arrow, a larger city located near the German border. When German troops invaded Poland in 1939, Sosnowiec was occupied. Under German occupation, Manya's parents experienced persecution, and 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, which is indicated with the Red arrow. Manya's family was deported to Auschwitz, which is indicated with a green arrow.

In January 1945, as the Soviet army approached, Manya and other prisoners were evacuated on a death march. They were transported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, and the arrows show the route they took. In April 1945, Manya was liberated from the Retzow camp by the Swedish Red Cross.

Manya lives in the Washington, DC area. She has two children, a son and a daughter, and a 24-year-old grandson, Joey, who, having graduated from college in California, is pursuing his dream of playing professional baseball.

Manya's volunteer work with the museum has been with visitor services, as well as a translator. Manya was one of our two pilot First Person guests in 2000. At the time, it was her first time speaking publicly about her Holocaust experience. Since then, Manya has spoken frequently on behalf of the museum, both here in the museum, and in many settings across the country, such as military installations, universities, and colleges, as well as at local schools.

She spoke at an event in Washington, DC about genocide, held at the Newseum and sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Manya has now spoken in at least 27 states and Puerto Rico. She is especially proud that she was honored by Rotary International with their highest award.

Manya is also a contributor to the museum's publication, *Echoes of Memory*, which features writings by survivors who participate in the museum's writing class for survivors. 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]

Manya, thank you for joining us and for being willing to be our First Person. We're so glad to have you here today with us. And I just have to note, as I said in my introduction, that she was our very first pilot when we first tested the idea of this program, now in our 13th year. So thank you so much for every time you've been with us.

Thank you.

You have so much to tell us. We have a very short time, so we'll start.

OK.

Let me just start off by saying, you spent most of your early years in Chmielnik, where you were born, then moved to Sosnowiec in 1938, the year before Germany's invasion. To start first, by telling us about your family, your life, your community before the war began, and then continue from there.

Well, I was-- it was mentioned-- anyway, you already have everything in here. You probably don't even need to listen to me. I was born in the central Poland in a very small town. I lived there with my parents, two younger brothers. And in a small town, even we were not related to people, everybody knows everybody's business, you know. So everybody felt like a relative, you know.

But one year before the start-- before the war started, for some reason, my parents decided to move to a larger city. I really don't know was it for reasons for education or was it for business. Anyway, we moved to a larger city. And that was in '38, one year before the war started.

And, as you know, September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. By the way, that city happened to be not far from the German border. So on the 1st of September, Germany invaded Poland. And it happened to be on a Friday. By Monday, Germany already invaded our city.

At first, some shots were fired from some buildings. The Germans took everybody out from that building, and everybody was shot, even people that were hiding in bunkers. And in the afternoon, they ordered that all men should step out from their building. They selected the Jewish men, marched them to an airless, windowless basement, and they demanded that the rabbi should step forward. I assume you know what a rabbi is.

It's so happened the rabbi was not among them. But in order-- because they say the rabbi should step forward or 10 Jews would be killed-- the rabbi was not among them, but in order to save 10 Jews, an elderly Jew stepped forward, and he said that he was the rabbi.

They took him out, beat him up, pulled out half of his beard, and then throw him back to the rest of the men, and told them 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 having a good time.

They kept them in that basement overnight, without food or water. In the morning, they marched them to one of the factories in the city. We brought food, but there was a tall wall around that building. All we could do is just throw it over the wall. And selection started.

Some people were sent away. Some people were detained to do work in place. And we were standing at that gate and waiting for our dear ones to come out. But it was getting late already, and we had to leave. And I still vividly remember to this day how we walked home from that building without father. We walked behind mother. It was almost like

walking at a funeral. Because we had no idea if we will ever see father again.

He did-- I also remember, when we got home, above my parents bed hung two portraits of them. I remember standing in front of father's portrait and like saying goodbye because we had no idea if we'll see him. He did come home later. It-- it seems they detained some people to build latrines.

I omitted one thing. When the war started, the old people from our hometown, from that little town got together, my parents' friends, and everybody thought that Hitler certainly would be stopped, that the big powers, like England, France, Russia, will intervene. And people had no concept what war was going to be.

They thought even if there is war, only the men would be involved, that the women and children would be left alone. So they decided, the men, to send the wives and the children back to that little home town in Central Poland, convinced that Hitler wouldn't reach us there. And the men had to stay back, because if you had a business or a shop, you just couldn't walk away.

As it turned out, we got up the next day, dressed in our best clothing-- to tell you the truth, we children were quite excited that we're going back to our hometown to see our friends again. We traveled about five kilometers-- five miles-- nine kilometers. And the truck were bombed. So, of course, it was a big commotion. Being afraid that the train would be bombed, we got off. And since it was only five miles from home, mother decided we should get back home.

But we had our packages. I remember she knocked at somebody's door and begged them to take this from us so we could walk home. Of course, by the time we got home, our feet were blistered, and we were tired, but we were happy to be back home with father and in our own bed.

And at that time we thought that's the worst thing that could happen to us. Little did we know what laid ahead. And continue what I-- sometimes I get emotional. Sorry, I run from one thing to the other.

And our city was composed about 130,000 inhabitants. Among them were 28,000 Jews. But they also brought in the Jews from the neighboring town because it was easier to control them. And all along, deportations were going on. 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 in place.

They suggested that we open shops. At first, the Germans rejected that. They didn't want to hear about it. But then they realized, if they be busy here, they be needed here, they won't be sent to the front, and, of course, they would get big bribes for people to get employment.

So in 1941, the first shop opened. I happened to get employment in that shop. To tell you the truth, I wasn't much of a seamstress, but I was lucky. I was sitting between two ladies that were professional seamstresses. And we had a quota to make. Everything with the Germans was a quota. Of course, for those two professional seamstresses, it was not a big deal to make the quota. And I assume they probably felt sorry for me sitting next to them so they helped me out.

I hate to admit that I became proficient enough that I could make the quota myself. We were making military uniforms, the mustard-colored shirts for the Hitler Youth. And also, later in '41, when Russia invaded-- when Germany invaded Russia, we were making white camouflage, because when they had to fight during snowstorms or so.

The thing in that shop, the thing was the pay was minimal. You could not survive on it. As a matter of fact, girls were fainting at work from lack of nourishment. The only thing was that card. You called it an employment card. The Germans called it a sonderkart. We called it a way to life.

Because in the beginning, when the Germans caught you on the street, and you could provide that card, that you're employed, they would let you go. But that was just temporary. Because in March 1943, as our shift was about to leave and the other shift was waiting in the yard to take over, the Gestapo surrounded the building, and we were all taken for deportation.

At that time, my parents and my two brothers were still at home. They came to the place where they kept us. They brought me my suitcase with my belongings, but we could not communicate. It was such a commotion. We were on the second floor. But I vividly remember my parents standing there in front of the building.

My two brothers tried to climb up the wall to show me that I have something sewn in my garments. And I remember watching my parents. And I assume we had the same thought-- will we ever see each other again? And as it turned out, 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 at first to a camp which was actually owned by private Germans. We were on a loan from the Gestapo. It was a brand new camp. That camp was producing carbon-- soot.

And the Germans were in desperate need of that product. Because from that they were making the rubber, synthetic rubber, from which the tires that were making for the military to run. It was also used for other purposes too. But you can imagine how we were-- working in a shop like this, how we looked. After the war, we found out it wasn't just our outer appearance, how that's affected our lungs.

And in camp, you didn't have to make any decisions. But you still had to decide when you got that piece of bread in the morning, should I eat it now or maybe save it for later? And the same thing goes in the evening, when you got 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? Well, often your luck ran out.

And in the beginning, I mentioned that was a private camp, but soon the SS took it over, and we became part of the-- the other prisoners of war. I mentioned I had my-- my personal belongings that my mother brought to the things. We once came home-- came home-- came back. All those things were gone. We were given striped dresses, one pair of underwear, a pair of wooden shoes.

And we had to go through showers. Our heads were shaved. We went through inspection, if we were hiding anything. And naked, we had to walk in front of a bunch of Gestapo to have our arms tattooed. And you have it in here-- my number was 79357. And, of course, from that day on, we were not called by our names, but by our number. And we worked like this till January 1945.

Manya, I don't want to interrupt your chain of thought here, but before we move to that point, you mentioned that you were making soot. Tell us more about that work. You've told me a great deal about that, how arduous it was. But I also want you to talk about how-- and you were a very shy person-- how you were selected to be a leader.

In charge.

In charge.

I don't know.

Tell us about that.

I don't know. When the war started, I was 13 years old, and very shy, a young girl. And for some-- when there was a line, I usually was hiding behind a taller person in front of me. Maybe because I was so shy, maybe that's why they picked me. I was selected to be in charge of several girls.

The first-- that-- oh, boy-- do you have any engineers here? I can't explain to you the whole procedure.

Because you know everything about it.

I know everything about. But I was working in the first section. We had to keep records-- how much material-- oil-- we used, and how much waste it was. And we also had to watch that the others weren't weak-- for dampers, whatever they

call it.

If the temperature-- we had to watch the temperature. If the temperature was too high, that oil burned, and it settled like a solid thing. And that didn't produce the fumes that settled on the machines to produce the soot. And if the temperature was too low, that oil just went through. We're just producing that fume. I hope I explained myself.

You did. You did.

Not being an engineer, but I knew the whole procedure. Of course, that was the machines that were producing. There were like turbines turning. And there were knives that scraped off that soot. And that went down into bags that went-- pipes that went to the pack station. That was the worst-- worst work, was in that pack station.

You can't imagine, from a big pipe, the soot coming down in paper bags-- big paper bags. So those girls could never get their eyes or face pores cleaned because that soot went in this. And that was our job.

Tell us your work schedule. Because I was astounded when you said that you worked, I believe--

Three weeks.

Three weeks with one-- the third Sunday off.

Yeah, but we had to work a double shift to get that third Sunday.

To get the third Sunday off.

Yeah.

And how did you spend that time that you were off every third Sunday?

Often-- in the later camp-- the first camp wasn't so bad-- but either washing your uniforms. The later camps were terrible, like Ravensbrück and so on, where we spent every free moment picking the lice from each other, which we couldn't eradicate.

And Manya, you told us a moment ago, that you were, for whatever reason, at 13, picked to be in charge. You had to actually explain things to visiting--

That's another-- yes. Well, there's so many incidents.

Of course.

I could sit all day here. I had to collect the reports. As I was explaining before-- how much oil was used, how much was discharged, and so. And at the end of the shift, I had to collect this and take it into the boss, to the office. And once, I was in the office, and I was bending over to explain to the German boss what the procedures.

And the German overseer, the German kapo-- that's a German woman overseer-- went by-- the door was-- of course, the door to the office was open whenever one of us went in. And she saw I was bending over. Then when I got back to camp, I was reprimanded that I have to stay on *achtung* when I speak to a German. So things like this, I mean it was every day something. I could go on and on with that.

So earlier, you started to tell us that you continued there until early 1945 as the Russians got closer. What happened.

Yes, when the Russians were coming closer, the Germans decided to evacuate us. At that time, I was working on the night shift. We came back to camp in the morning. There was a big commotion. Everybody was talking we're going to be evacuated. We didn't know where to or what.

And we were each given a blanket and some bread. But I had to make a very serious decision. My best friend was there, in the infirmary. And I had to decide what to do. Should I leave her there? I couldn't take her. She was very weak. And at first, I thought I'll leave her, and she will be liberated by the Russians. 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 girl-- as a matter of fact, she lives in New York. And between the two of us, we took her out from the infirmary. I have to explain something about the infirmary.

In camp, you were not-- you did not complain that you were sick. Because if you were sick, and you couldn't work, they didn't need you. That-- it was a Jewish Frenchman, the doctor. He took a big risk for keeping my friend in the infirmary. You see, the excuse was that we were working with that soot, and every time we got a scratch or cut, we got an infection. So that was the excuse, and that's why my friend was in the infirmary.

As I mentioned, we took her out from the infirmary, between the two of us. We had to give up some of our bread because we had to hold on. We went to the railroad station. And there were no cars. I don't know if you were up already to exhibit and so the railroad track upstairs. Well, we were not put in a car like this.

We were put in open cars, the type that you transfer coal. And that was in January. And believe me, the winter in Europe can get very severe. And all we had was a blanket.

And after the war, I found out that our destination was near Berlin. But for some reason, we wound up in Czechoslovakia. And if you know geography, Czechoslovakia is to the south. Wherever we went, the railroad tracks were bombed. I assume they used the better tracks to transport the military.

The Czech people were very nice. They came to the station where we stopped. They brought some bread and water. But the military would not let them give it to us. They'd even shoot-- were shooting at them. And sometimes, the Czech people went where there was an overpass, and the train went underneath, and they would throw down some food to us.

And we're traveling like this, back and forth, and back and forth. The snow that fell on our blanket served to quench our thirst. And we traveled like this maybe 10 days. In the middle of the night, we wound up which turned out to be Ravensbrück.

Manya, I'm going to ask you to tell a couple of things. We're in good shape, time wise. You described to me while, I think, you were on the trains, an incident with one of the Jewish nurses that was with you.

Oh, yeah.

And then I want you to also tell us about how you protected your friend.

Well, thank you for reminding me. As I say, I get off track. Right next car-- in the next car to us, in the railroad car, happened to be the nurse from our camp. At one of the stations, she climbed up on the railing with a tin cup and begged the military guy there for some water because one of the girls fainted.

And instead, he pulled out his gun and shot her. And she fell down between the cars. And the cars were going back and forth. We saw her laying there, not knowing if she was--