--were alive or not. What was the other question?

And of course, you had brought your friend with you.

Oh, yeah. I brought my friend. But as I mentioned before, she was so weak. So I took her in the corner of the car. And with my hands, I was holding on to the railing and with my back, pushing away the crowd so she wouldn't be squashed. As a matter of fact, when we landed, my hands were all swollen. It was in the winter time, holding on to the metal rails.

And metal rail in not only a freezing January, but one of the worst winters in Europe's history at that time. So you end up at Ravensbrück.

Ravensbrück was like hell. That was a camp built for one fifth of the prisoners they had. So you can imagine the sanitary conditions there. We were sleeping like four people on one of those cots-- heads to toes, you know. Some people were sleeping on the floor.

And when you woke up in the morning to be counted, like everywhere, we would run to the latrines. And the center 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 to your face to wake up. And in the meantime, you were stepping on corpses, people who expired during the night.

And the sanitary conditions were just-- but one thing I can tell you about Ravensbrück, there was often times, although we were young and we wanted to survive, but we were so dehumanized that sometimes we just wanted it to end. We didn't care how.

But I remember one incident in Ravensbrück as I was standing in line. Ravensbrück had a crematorium. And they were wheeling by carts with corpses, naked corpses. Only the skin was holding the bones together. And once in a while, one of those corpses would fall off and another one would fall off. And they just picked it up like a piece of wood and put it on top.

And I remember at that time standing in that line and saying to myself, no, I'm not going to wind up like this. I must hold on. I must survive. That's the thing I remember from Ravensbrück.

When we stayed for a while in Ravensbrück, then they sent us to a smaller camp, which was also a part of Ravensbrück, Rechlin. And as I mentioned before, that was a small camp. But the sanitary conditions, again, as I mentioned before. We spent most of our free time trying to eradicate the lice, picking off each other, which we were unsuccessful. And that was a very small camp.

And in the morning one day as we were standing in line to be counted, one of the military and one of the kapo, a woman, came over and pointed their finger to about a dozen girls to step forward.

Manya, I'm going to-- if you don't mind, we're going to come back to that. Tell us-- when you went to Rechlin, tell us about the labor that you were forced to do at Rechlin. You were always continuing to have to do work no matter where you went.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Yes.

Well, it has a little airport station, you know. And it was often bombed. We had to clean up. The houses were bombed. We had select the bricks, which are better, so according to whatever was left.

You had to repair the runways.

The runway for the-- those-- little camps were-- the little planes usually landed there. And the other thing you told me, you said that our satisfaction was to watch-- "our only satisfaction was to watch the Germans

hide when planes."

That was ready towards the end of the war. And constantly there were planes flying overhead. We would sit-- lay down with our heads up, watching, hoping that they do something. We were so disappointed each time a plane flew by and didn't do anything. And the Germans that were supervising us, they would lay down, hide their heads under their helmet, you know. And we wanted something to happen, an end.

But it took a long time till, eventually, I guess, the Allies had different plans. That's why they questioned after the war-- was the question, why didn't they bomb Auschwitz. But they wanted to-- well, it's a long story. I'm not going into politics about Churchill and all of this.

[LAUGHTER]

So now you were telling us that you were then taken by one of the Gestapo and a kapo. And there were some other young women there. Tell us what happened then. This was at Rechlin before you were liberated.

Yeah.

I think this is-- you were about to tell us about the Swedish Red Cross, I think.

Oh, yes. When we were standing in line to be counted at this time, and I was among those dozen girls that were selected to step forward. And of course, a selection in camp never meant a better lot. And then they marched us to the gate. Outside was standing a white truck, a covered truck. And there were kapos, you know.

They motioned to us to climb up on the truck. Although the tailgate was down, but we were so weak we could not manage. And all of a sudden, a crate appeared for us to step on that crate to get into that truck. We thought we're hallucinating. We never saw such a gesture from the Germans. But later we found out why.

We got on the truck. Each one of us was giving a care package. I think those were donated by the Red Cross and Canada. We tore it open. We didn't even know what it. It was food. We ate it all.

There was powdered milk, and cocoa, and sardines, and crackers. And we ate it all at once. We didn't even care if that is our last meal. It was food. Of course, a lot 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 because we thought, what will the future be? Will there be a future?

And we landed in Copenhagen. You see, that white truck had markings on the side from the Red Cross, and on the top. But we were not aware of it. And the reason the kapos were so nice to us, they wanted to show the personnel from the Red Cross how well they treated us.

Well, we landed in Copenhagen. Denmark was still under occupation, but the Danish people were very nice to us. They provided food and a place to rest. And then from Copenhagen, we went to Malmo, to Sweden.

And there's this long story, how that rescue came about too.

Tell us a little bit about that. It was-- how did that come about.

Well, at that time, the chairman of the Swedish Red Cross, Folke Bernadotte, was in Germany negotiating with Himmler, who was the head of the Gestapo, either the exchange or the release of Norwegian and Danish POWs because both Norway and Denmark were under German occupation. And since it was already the end of the war-- it was the end of April 1945-- Bernadotte insisted that the prisoners from-- some prisoners from Ravensbrück should be released. Actually, that transport is called the "White Buses" because from Ravensbrück, there was a big transport. It was a very large camp. For us was just that one truck.

So that, if you want to read up, if you're interested, maybe some of you are Swedish. So because I spoke

the other day to a Swedish lady. She was very proud of it, you know. She knew the whole story. Because otherwise, very few people I spoke to knew about it.

And then we were-- yes, as I mentioned, we worked in a factory that produced soot. So as it turned out, it was our lungs that were infected. So they converted a school to a temporary hospital or sanatorium, whichever you call it. And I was there four months, until I cleared my lungs.

And this was while you were in Sweden, while you were in Sweden. You told me that, while you were there, one of your biggest thrills was to be able to send packages yourself. Will you say a little bit about that?

Yes. The person that you saw at the beginning, on the picture, that survived, that was my mother's oldest sister. And I found out after the war, because they were-- people ask, how did you find each other. There were constantly lists from the Red Cross, Jewish organizations. We constantly were looking for somebody that survived or somebody looking for somebody.

So I found out that this aunt was alive. But she was in a displaced persons camp in Germany. And I made-- and I was-- at that time, I was already working. I was making uniforms for the Germans. So I was a professional seamstress, you know. So I got a job.

I got a job after they released me. I got a job as a seamstress. And I was making good money because the Germans were very delicate. The stitches-- how many stitches to a centimeter was counted. So you can imagine.

So I was a good seamstress. I made good money. And I made a promise. I sent this aunt in Germany, every month, a package.

And of course, you've told us about your friend that you helped save and--

Yeah. Everybody asks me if she survived because she was sick. She did survive. As a matter of fact, she is in-- she lives in Israel. I visit her six times. She was here once. And we're still best friends.

Actually, how we became friends was we were climbing up onto a bunk bed, I from one side and she from the other side. And she said, I'm Lola. And I said, I'm Manya. And that's-- and it was very important in camp to have somebody. Because whenever you were so low and you wanted to give up, your friend would hold you up and say, we have to survive.

Will you tell us when you were parted in the camps from Lola, about your pajama top.

Oh, this I don't even remember. I don't even remember that part. Well, Lola got sick again in Rechlin. And when they selected me, I didn't want her to know. I didn't know what to do. I thought to myself, I'd rather she thinks of me that I left her than to think that they took me away to be killed. You understand?

So I remember, I had, I think, a part of a pajama. I don't know how I got it. I left it for her, you know.

Manya, it would be four and a half years before you were able to get your visa and come to the United States.

Five.

Five years. Tell us how you were able to get your visa and make it--

Well, being a Polish citizen at that time was a big demand. And the United States has a quota, how many people can come in. So it took me five and a half years to wait in Sweden to come to the United States. Yeah.

And what prompted you to come to the United States?

Oh, that's another story. My father's oldest sister was in the United States. She left at the turn of the century, as a matter of fact. My grandmother was so upset because in those times, especially a Jewish person that left in America, they probably didn't observe kashrut or so. You know, it was a big-- big tragedy. As a matter of fact, I think she was mourning even.

But that sister, she was the oldest, and my father was the youngest. And there were probably many children. And in those days, one child took care of the other. And so she was very close with my father. And she often wrote that she wanted us to come to the United States.

But on the other hand, my mother didn't want to leave her family. Because in those days, it's not like now. You jump on a plane, you're there in a few hours. If you left home, you never saw your family again. So my mother didn't want to leave. You know?

But my father and that sister were very close. She used to write such lovely letters, and father would read them to us. So when the war ended and I didn't know what to do, I didn't know where to go, so I wrote to one of those newspapers and so on.

And through somebody else-- actually, she was looking for another relative, and she saw my name. And that's how I got in touch with-- but unfortunately, by the time I came, she had passed away. But she had six children, you know.

To tell you the truth, in the beginning, we had a hard time, we survivors. Maybe people meant well, but nobody wanted to hear about the Holocaust. Forget what happened over there. You're now in this golden country. Start your life anew.

I'm here and this country, it will be 60 years. And I still can't forget what was over there. As I say, people meant well. But nobody wanted to listen.

Manya, you got married on my very first birthday, June 17, 1951.

[LAUGHTER]

I couldn't resist.

Yes, I was an old maid already.

Tell us a little bit about--

Because in Sweden-- you saw my picture. I wasn't too bad looking.

[LAUGHTER]

I had many boyfriends. But I didn't want to get involved. I wanted to come to that United States, to that aunt that was so nice. But the person I married, actually, was also-- his mother knew my mother, you know. And that's how we got introduced.

I was once at a meeting from that little hometown. I was visiting my cousin in New York. By the way, actually at that time, when I came, I don't know if any of you know where Secaucus, New Jersey is. I lived in-- that's where my cousin lived, so I lived there. Anyway, I used to come to another cousin, also survivor, to the meetings.

And when I was dancing with my cousin, my husband's aunt asked my cousin's mother-in-law, who is that pretty girl that's dancing with Arthur. Oh, I have a-- I have a nephew here. Well, our people-- I mean, they knew each other. It wasn't a complete stranger. But we didn't know each other.

And he had-- I think, if I remember right, he had served in the Polish army in exile in Russia.

In Russia. He came over. Sometimes I bring the picture, a chest full with medals. But he was in Russia, in the Polish Army.

Manya, we have time to turn to our audience to ask you some questions. Is that OK? OK I'm going to-- if you have a question, and we hope that some of you will, please make it as brief as you can. I will repeat the question so everybody, including Manya, hears it before Manya answers it. So let's see who's got a question here. Because if not, I have dozens more.

Yes, sir?

Hitler became chancellor in 1933, and he died in 1945. Was there some kind of a jealousy that Jewish were doing very well in Germany, that [INAUDIBLE] people? Why Hitler hated the Jewish people? Was there jealousy, professional jealousy?

I think that is such a complex question that probably-- we're here to really hear Manya's story today. But what I'd like to do is maybe have you chat with somebody in the museum afterwards, like Warren right here on the right side.

I'll answer this gentleman's question. Hitler's aim, actually was to exterminate the Jews. But don't forget that he murdered 5 million others, the Poles, the Gypsy, Jehovah's Witnesses, the homosexual, the sick, anyone that didn't fit in in the superior race.

Thank you, Manya. Thank you. OK, do we have another question? Yes, sir.

My question for Manya is how you felt as a young person [INAUDIBLE]

The question is, really what you felt and were feeling, being such a young person. Because for everybody else in this room, can't imagine the terror. Is that a fair way of putting it?

Yeah. I don't know. Like youngsters usually ask me how I survived. I'm sorry, I can't. I can't tell you. I was not a hero. It was just meant. I don't know.

One of the things, Manya, when I-- the very first time I met you, you told me something that I thought was so powerful and poignant. You said that just-- and I'm paraphrasing-- but just out of the blue, things will just evoke feelings for you. And one of them was a gust of cold wind.

I don't know if you remember telling me this. But just things evoke memories and feelings. Is that something you could say something about?

I don't remember. I've told you so many stories.

[LAUGHTER]

And I remember one that you told me was just things that bring back the fierce cold that you went through. There's so much frozen times. Anyways, Manya was talking about just the evoking of feelings and memories that just kind of come out of the blue, even today. And this was 2000, but I'm sure to this day--

It's very hard. I can't expect you to comprehend. It's very hard to comprehend how we really survived because I don't know. I can't explain it. It's unbelievable because I can't explain to you how dehumanized we were. We were not like human beings.

We couldn't even look a German into the eyes. We had to look down. If he walked down on the sidewalk, you had to walk on the street.

One of the things you told me, Manya, is that, as you told us earlier, when you were literally stripped naked, but what you were really stripped of, you said, was our entire dignity.

Don't forget. It's not like now, young girls wearing bikinis. Keep in mind how many years ago that was-- about 70 years ago. I didn't even get undressed in front of my own mother to take a bath. That's how bashful I was.

Yes ma'am.

Yes. Did you ever find out what became of your family, of your mother and your brothers. Did you know if they ended up in another concentration camp?

No. They end out in Auschwitz.

The question is what--

I'm sorry. This lady sits so close.

What did you learn about what happened to your family? Say a little bit more about when you finally learned for certain and about the rest of your extended family. What do you know?

There is a search going on. The Germans kept meticulous records. But until a few years ago, they were not available because there's several countries that were in charge of those records, and they wouldn't let it go. And in the meantime, people were dying, unable to find out about their families.

The reason what I found out, people that went directly to the gas chambers there's no record.

Yes, sir.

Yes, It's kind of interesting when she was mentioning the planes flying overhead, how the German soldiers would get down and cover their heads. I guess you probably-- [? I heard that ?] you meant that what cowards they probably were, all the big strong soldier covering his head when a plane would fly over, how he was scared that [? you guys were ?].

The comment is about when Manya mentioned being on the airfield and the Allied planes would come over, and the Germans are down there under their helmets while you're just lying there.

No protection.

Absolutely.

That was already towards the end of the war. And by that time, the soldiers that were watching us were really either invalids or elderly soldiers.

Most of the others had all gone already.

Exactly. OK.

Yes, ma'am.

During your time in the camps, was there any memory or specific person or hope that gave you the will to survive? Or was it just, I'm here. I might as live?

The question is, while you were in the camps, was there any person or circumstance that kind of gave you a sense of the will to live? You did share with us your experience at Ravensbrück, when you said, I'm not going to end up like that. But was there any--

No. But as I mentioned, it was my friend. Because every time I gave up, she was kind of like hold your arm. Manya, we must survive. You know? So that's-- and I guess it was the same way the opposite.

And as you told us, Lola is still alive.

She's still alive. As a matter of fact, after the war she went to France to meet the doctor that saved her. And he just couldn't believe that she had survived.

I think--

Miracles happened. Yes, sir. There's somebody there.

Yes, sir. Thank you.

Just on the back of that question, was religion in those days a big part of what gave you that will to draw further [INAUDIBLE]

The question is, did your religion play a role in giving you the strength and the will to survive?

I don't think so because I remember, as a little girl-- I consider myself 13 years old a little girl in those times. When I saw how a baby was torn from my cousin's arms, and she didn't want to give it to the Gestapo. So he pushed her with the baby to that group. And then my aunt, the baby's grandmother, stepped forward. She wanted to help. So she too was pushed to that group.

That was destined. We knew already by that time where it was destined. So I used to have discussions with God. Of course, I never got an answer. But why? Why? It's not that I lost faith in God. But you just wonder why things like this happened.

To tell you the truth, if I still believe in God? Yes.

Thank you, Manya. We're at the end of our program. I'm going to turn back to Manya in just a moment to close our program. But first I want to thank all of you for being here with us. We'll have our last "First Person" program next Wednesday, the 15th of August. Then we'll resume again in March of 2013. So if you go to the museum's website, you can get information about next year's program.

It's our tradition at "First Person" that our First Person has the last word. So I'm going to close. I'm going to turn back to Manya to close the program. As soon as she finishes, Manya is going to step off the stage over to the right. She's going to-- let her get up-- if you don't mind, let her go up the side there because she has to go sign books. And so she'll be signing copies of Echoes of Memory. So if you have a chance, please stop by and say hi, and maybe take a look at her book.

I might excuse myself because--

Because of your hand.

Yeah.

An x will suffice, as we described. Manya?

Oh, what can I say? As you came in, I don't know if you saw the permanent exhibit or not, you notice that this museum is unlike any other museum. Most of the museums are trying to portray peoples accomplishments in the arts and sciences. This museum is trying to teach you what hate, discrimination, prejudice, disregard for human life can do.