Thursday, March 21, 2013

1:00-2:09 p.m.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: DORA KLAYMAN

Held at:
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW
Washington, DC

(Remote CART)

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>> Bill Benson: Good afternoon, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. We just began our 14th year of *First Person* yesterday. Our *First Person* today is Mrs. Dora Klayman, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2013 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*.

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. Our program will continue until mid August. The website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Dora Klayman will share with us her *First Person* account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor, for about 40 minutes. If time allows, towards the end of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask a few questions of Dora. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Dora is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

Dora Klayman was born Theodora Basch on January 31, 1938 in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Here we see Dora sitting on a park bench with her younger brother, Zdravko. On this map of Yugoslavia in 1933, the arrow points to Zagreb. In this photo, we see Dora on an outing to the zoo with her parents, Salamon and Silva. Salamon ran a brush-making factory; Silva was a teacher.

Pictured here is her maternal grandfather, Rabbi Joseph Leopold Deutsch. In April 1941 while visiting her maternal grandparents in the small town of Ludbreg, Germany invaded Yugoslavia. Ludbreg became part of a puppet state run by the Ustasa, or Croatian fascists.

In 1941, her parents and housekeeper were arrested. From then on, they were sheltered by her mother's sister Giza and husband Ljudevit. On the left, Aunt Giza, on the right her husband Ljudevit. The photo of Ljudevit was taken many years after this one of Giza. Later in the war, Aunt Giza was denounced and sent to Auschwitz, where she perished. Dora remained in Yugoslavia until 1957, when she emigrated to the United States.

We close with this portrait of Aunt Giza, Dora and Zdravko taken to be sent to Ljudevit in the concentration camp where he had been sent. In 1957, as Dora was on her way to Switzerland, she met Daniel Klayman, who was returning to New York from a postdoctoral study as a Fulbright scholar in India. They were married in Switzerland a year later. Together they arrived in the United States in the fall of 1958. By the following year, Dan and Dora came to Washington, DC and Dan embarked on a career as a researcher in the medicinal chemistry at the Walter Reed Army Research Institute with his work culminating in his expertise in the development of medicines against malaria. Dora then taught in Montgomery County public schools, including 23 years at Bethesda Chevy Chase High School, where she headed the English as a Second Language Department.

Dan passed away in 1992. Both of their children live in the Washington area. Wanda is a deputy executive director of an international association that deals with issues of transportation. Elliott is a freelance videographer and owns a video company. He is married to Iona and has three children.

After retiring from full-time teaching in 1999, she became active as a volunteer with this museum. Her work consists primarily of translating material from the Holocaust written in Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian. The ongoing project is connected to the Jasenovac Archive.

Other recent works including a translation of a booklet that accompanied a 1942 anti-Semitic exhibit in Croatia and photographs gathered during the post-World War II trials in Yugoslavia.

Dora enjoys traveling. This past summer she attended an international child survivor conference in Cleveland. In 2011, she visited Auschwitz for the first time. In 2010, she took a trip to her former home in Croatia. In January of this year, Dora went to Cuba. To add to her language skills, Dora continues to learn Hebrew.

With that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Mrs. Dora Klayman.

[Applause]

Dora, thank you so much for being willing to be our *First Person* and help us in our first week of getting started.

>> Dora Klayman: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Good to have you. We only have an hour. We have a great deal to cover. We should get started right away. I'd like to start first, Dora, with asking you about the prewar years. War came to Europe with the invasion by Germany of Poland in September 1939. You were 3 years old when war came to Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941. Before we turn to that time, tell us about your

family, your community, what life was like in those years leading up to not just the war, but war in Yugoslavia.

>> Dora Klayman: To begin with, I was born in Zagreb, and my paternal family was in Zagreb. My maternal family was in the small town of Ludbreg, which is important, because that's where I ended up. In Zagreb my family hadn't been there very long, but it's the capital of the city, had a vibrant Jewish population, very well integrated and highly educated, and not terribly Orthodox. There was an Orthodox faction. However, my family, I would say, were what we would now call modern Orthodox.

My father, my father and his brothers, especially one brother, were very good at leading services in the synagogue, and so I think my father came as such as a cantor, maybe for high holidays to the small town of Ludbreg, and that's how he probably met my mother. Though, I'm not totally sure of that.

My maternal side of the family in Ludbreg had been there for a very long period of time. My grandfather came from what was Czechoslovakia, I think from Slovakia, actually. Because the community, a small community, wanted and needed a rabbi. By the end of his life, which was in 1942, he would have served as a rabbi of that congregation for 40 years.

He was, again, very well educated, had a doctorate, spoke many languages. What is very unusual about that community, as well as the community in Zagreb, is the sense of integration and the sense of participation in the community. I'm always struck by some of the photographs, which everybody can get to see actually online, of my mother in a tennis outfit with very many non-Jews, my grandfather sitting with other members of the faculty for the elementary school, where he was actually teaching Jewish children, along with there is a priest sitting on the other side.

>> Bill Benson: The same school together?

>> Dora Klayman: The same school, yes. The Jewish community was small. I think at the time of the beginning of the war, there about less than, or fewer than 40 families. At one time, it had been larger. What was happening in the Jewish community as they were doing well, getting educated, they would go to the capital city or they would -- many of them actually emigrated, and so that the population kind of diminished before, before the war. But it was a totally integrated community.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about your father and mother's occupations. Your father, I mentioned he had a brush business.

>> Dora Klayman: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: It was much more than that.

>> Dora Klayman: It was a small factory, which he had begun and was doing well. I think there were some 11 employees, and there was -- I sort of remember the space, but not very well. There is a photo, I think online also, of him sitting with the employees, but he himself was in the overalls and --

>> Bill Benson: Manufacturing.

>> Dora Klayman: Manufacturing it, yes. They were making all kinds of different brushes.

The other, his other brothers, one who unfortunately did not survive, was a very well-known cantor. And one who did survive, who played a large role in my life later, Joseph, worked with the Jewish Community Center, which was a fairly substantial organization and still exists in Zagreb to this day, in a much smaller form.

By the time these people were adults and working, their father had passed away. Then the mother, my grandmother, actually passed away of natural causes during the war. I think very early

during the war, and she is actually buried in Zagreb, and I can actually visit her grave. She's the only one.

>> Bill Benson: The only family member you have a grave to visit?

>> Dora Klayman: The only family member whose grave is in existence. After the war, some of the surviving members put a stone up for all the rest of the members who had perished.

Anyway, that's the father's side of the family. My mother was, in a sense, unusual for the period in that she was a very good student, and she was sent on to school and she became a teacher, and actually worked for a bit of time in a small village where there was an elementary school near Ludbreg. And as a teenager I would often run into people who would say, "Oh, I know who you are. Your mother taught me." It was sort of very nice to know that.

She was very good at languages. She went to a teachers' college in a town that was very close to the Hungarian border. It was the bilingual town. There are a lot of Hungarian spoken there. I hear she had learned very fast to speak Hungarian.

My grandfather, whom I mentioned before, who was the rabbi, was very good at languages, and he served as a court translator for Hungarian and German for many years. Maybe I have inherited that little trait.

>> Bill Benson: Five or six languages yourself.

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Your Aunt Giza and Uncle Ljudevit were essential to your survival. Tell us a little bit about them.

>> Dora Klayman: That's an unusual story in that there we were in a small town and the oldest daughter of my grandfather, my grandparents, Giza, she was 15 years older than my mother. She was actually born in Bratislava, and my mother later on in Croatia.

She too was educated to work in a bank, and there she met Ljudevit, who was 10 years older than she, and they fell madly in love, and he, as everybody else in Ludbreg besides the Jews, was Catholic.

So it was a romance that didn't seem to come to a fruition except much later. So they were in love, and from what I gather my grandfather didn't allow the marriage to happen. However, in 1940, when they already knew what was happening in the rest of Europe, my grandfather consented, and they went to Hungary and got married. Why to Hungary? Because Yugoslavia did not have the institution of a civil marriage, but Hungary did.

>> Bill Benson: Only religious marriages?

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah, only religious marriages. But Hungary had from the old Austro-Hungarian system, they did allow civil weddings, civil marriages, so they went to Hungary to get married.

So it was very late. I think their courtship was about 30 years long.

[Laughter]

But they lived in a very small town. I'm sure they saw each other a lot, but I'm not asking any questions.

[Laughter]

Interestingly enough, my uncle, I asked him many times, he never said it was my grandfather who didn't allow the marriage. I heard that from other people. He never said that.

>> Bill Benson: Never said that?

>> Dora Klayman: No. He always said, She was quite happy living with her parents, and I was quite happy living with my mother, it was fine.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Dora, when Germany launched its attack on Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, you happened to be away from your parents in Zagreb on a visit with relatives in Ludbreg. Tell us about the circumstances, to the best you can, about your being away at that time, and what happened once the Germans entered Yugoslavia.

>> Dora Klayman: Well, it was in the winter of 1941 that I was sent to visit with my grandparents and my aunts who lived in Ludbreg. I don't know to this day exactly why, except some neighbors of ours were visiting, and my mother said "Could you take her?"

So I remember the train, somehow, and I remember saying goodbye, and that was fine. But I'm not sure whether they had suspected that things would happen, or whether I was just sent on a vacation. Because, at that time my mother had a baby, and so I was 3 years old and my brother was a baby, and so maybe it was a nice time for me to go away for a while. I don't know.

Then in April, Yugoslavia was attacked, and basically fell apart within six days. Almost as soon as the Yugoslavia army fell apart, the king left for London. The army was just falling apart totally, everybody was going every which way.

At that time, the pro-Nazi right wing Ustasa came to power. The first thing they did, because they came to power with German help, the first thing they did is start the deportations.

>> Bill Benson: Right away?

>> Dora Klayman: Mm-hmm, pretty much right away. All the laws were all of a sudden being passed, and it was all of the laws that Germany had on the books, and so they just were complying with all of that.

It was basically a government that was -- people that had been in Italy fomenting and figuring out how to get in power, it was the right wing group, called Ustasa.

When they came to power, one of the things that they did was start following all of the laws, the German laws. They immediately started some deportations. At that time, the camps hadn't even been built. There were camps here, camps there, sort of short-term gatherings or killings, but not the kind of organized thing that happened very shortly after.

My parents were among the very early people who were arrested, and my mother took the baby with her, and they were in basically in a jail in Zagreb. There was the place where Jews would be gathered. And then a housekeeper of ours came to see if she could take the baby, and they allowed the baby to be given to her.

>> Bill Benson: She went to the jail to see if she could get your brother Zagreb?

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah, my brother. Then she called the relatives in Ludbreg, and --

>> Bill Benson: Which, of course, is where you are.

>> Dora Klayman: Which is where I was. Then my Uncle Ljudevit, went to get my brother and brought him back.

>> Bill Benson: Before we go on from there, the fact that your uncle could come to Zagreb and pick up your brother, was it because that he was a Catholic was the reason he could probably safely travel? Do you know?

>> Dora Klayman: Well, yes, and of course, I didn't talk much about him from before the war and about that family.

>> Bill Benson: Chance to do that, yes.

>> Dora Klayman: Let me backtrack a little bit, yeah.

So he was an incredibly well thought of, considered person in that town.

>> Bill Benson: Pillar of the community?

>> Dora Klayman: The pillar of that community. He had served as the mayor. He has a high position in the bank. His family had been there for quite a bit. His father was already a fairly well-known and respected member of the community. And his mother's family was what they call sort of a minor aristocracy. So she had actually inherited also some money. So they were well-to-do by local circumstances, and educated.

My uncle had been sent away also to school, and he had a degree in economics, a version of it, I can't really translate that so well, but basically something like that. And he was also very musical and a part of the community as a whole. He was part of everything. He started the fire department. He ran a salon for music. He played the violin and conduct an orchestra. He just was into everything.

So he also was one of the very first in Croatia to have a car.

Going back how to get to Zagreb, I don't remember whether he still had his car or not, whether he took somebody else's or somebody else went, but this is what, in a way, allowed him to -- and he was Catholic, of course, so that allowed him to travel and go there and get something.

>> Bill Benson: At that time be free of harassment?

>> Dora Klayman: At that time, yes.

>> Bill Benson: You had other relatives in Zagreb, too, at the same time. Were they all rounded up at that point?

>> Dora Klayman: Well, actually, one of my uncles -- no, they were not rounded up. And why not? Because they were, in a sense, rounded up. One on my mother's side, the only person who was there, and one of my father's side, they had been in the Yugoslav army. So they were taken as prisoners of war. So they survived as prisoners of war within Germany, actually.

My two aunts, yes, they were taken, but I'm not sure at what time. I just don't know that part.

>> Bill Benson: You had one aunt I wanted to bring up. Was it Aunt Blanca?

>> Dora Klayman: That was in Ludbreg.

>> Bill Benson: I want you to talk about her when the time comes.

>> Dora Klayman: That was my mother's sister. There was one uncle who survived because he was working for the Jewish community. The interesting thing is that the Germans, the Germans and the Ustasa all kept the Jewish community functioning. I'm talking about the office of the Jewish community, not the Jewish community, but the office of the Jewish community. They kept it functioning because it was apparently a way they could keep track of things. That's where he worked, and he worked there until 1943. That's a separate story.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Dora Klayman: I'll talk about that story.

Back to my Aunt Blanca, if you want me to. That was in Ludbreg. She was my mother's sister. She was married, and the family ran a store of textiles. They had two daughters, my cousins. The

four of them at one point left Ludbreg and could have saved themselves, as some other people did. Because many people were escaping to Dalmatia.

Dalmatia is the area, I think, the audience probably has heard. If anybody ever hears anything about Croatia, they always hear about Dubrovnik. You ask anybody in Croatia, Have you been to Dubrovnik? That part near the Adriatic Sea, that's Dalmatia. That was neither part of the so-called Independent State of Croatia, nor was it German. It was Italian. Italian in all of this parcelling of parts of the country, Italians got that part. They were in charge until Italy abdicated. It was 1943.

>> Bill Benson: Didn't you tell me that at one point --

>> Dora Klayman: They went.

>> Bill Benson: They went, and Ustasa said come back.

>> Dora Klayman: Nothing will happen.

>> Bill Benson: You'll be safe, come back.

>> Dora Klayman: And they came back. They had been so well ensconced there. They lived there all their lives. They couldn't fathom something would happen to them. Everybody was believing things. The Roma, also persecuted, they were told they were going to be given new land, and there were many Roma around there. They just all nicely went, sat there and collected. People believed them.

>> Bill Benson: Now, let's go back to you. Your brother Zdravko is brought back with your uncle, now you're in Ludbreg. What happens then?

>> Dora Klayman: We're shuffled between the grandparents, aunts, uncles and so on, until 1942. 1942 there was a big raid, and basically all of the Jews were taken away.

>> Bill Benson: In Ludbreg?

>> Dora Klayman: In Ludbreg. Except for my aunt, who was married to a man who was Catholic. She was not taken in that raid. Everybody else was. And of course, my brother and I were not. And this is always a question: Why weren't we taken away?

>> Bill Benson: Because everybody in the community knew you weren't their children.

>> Dora Klayman: Everybody in the community. Ludbreg is a very small town. It's a few thousand people. Everybody knew there was only one synagogue, one rabbi who lived there 40 years. Everybody knew who we were. Yet, I was never taken. A., it's a miracle. B., I think that maybe because it was not the local Ustasa, the local people who were doing the raids, but somebody who had come. All of a sudden it was a garrison there, and they were stationed there and in charge of the raid.

I think they went by lists. Since we were not from that town, we were not on the list. This is my assumption. Those two kids running around there, they were left behind.

I very clearly remember. That's one memory I have. This was 1942. By that time I was 5. I do remember everybody leaving and crying and hugging and saying goodbye and carrying little satchels and pillows. We were left behind.

>> Bill Benson: So for the moment, you were safe. But then also, I think in 1942, the pillar of the community, your uncle, who is taking care of you, he is arrested.

>> Dora Klayman: Right. Later on.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that.

>> Dora Klayman: He was arrested too. Well, in that town, one of the things happening in that town is that -- oh, it was happening in the country, is that the partisan movement had begun to gather people.

>> Bill Benson: The resistance?

>> Dora Klayman: Resistance movement, yes. There were so-called partisans. There were people who just did not want to see what they called the occupator succeed. There were people who were communists, who when Russia was attacked, they certainly were going to go do something about that. They were sort of not communists in the way that we thought about it after, during the cold war, but the kind that people there thought in kind of idealistic terms.

Jews, people were gathering in the mountains and trying to get whatever arms they could, and trying to fight. And Ljudevit, among other people were accused of sympathizing with the movement, which of course they did surreptitiously, at one point they decided to gather some of the pillars of community and send them to what already was now established as a big camp, which was a horrible place, Jasenovac. It was a horrible place.

Most people know Auschwitz and Machausen, but this was small in comparison to those camps. It was very large for that area, in the number of people killed there. It's not known by many people. But it was one of the most vicious administrations that ran that camp. People were being killed in every which way.

I'm told that when my grandfather came there, that they didn't even come to go through the gates. Somebody hit him on the head and killed him right there.

People talk about, you know, slashing throats and hitting people with shovels. It was just an awful camp. People were starved to death, worked very hard. My uncle ended up there. Differently from Jews who were herded in and killed, some of the Catholic Croats who went there were accused of something and told they would have such-and-such term there.

>> Bill Benson: For your uncle it's more like a prison?

>> Dora Klayman: It was a prison.

>> Bill Benson: He gets a sentence. OK.

>> Dora Klayman: So when he got there, they figured out that he was a banker, and so they put him to work in a place which actually allowed him to survive, which was some kind of an office. It was still he was hungry, but he was always very frail, and he would have never survived had he been doing what my father was doing.

>> Bill Benson: Who was also there?

>> Dora Klayman: Who was also there. My mother died very early, apparently, I think of typhus. My father survived for a very long period of time. Uncle Ljudevit who was there saw my father. When he returned, he did return, he told us that he saw my father, who was working very hard, carrying bricks and they were building things.

The prisoners had to build their own furnaces and do all kinds of other work. So I know that my father was there, and I know that my uncle was there and that he managed to survive that period of time with some people who were fairly kind to him, who ended up in prison after the war. They were re --

>> Bill Benson: War crimes trials?

>> Dora Klayman: War crimes trials, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Dora, while your uncle was at Jasenovac, what was happening with you, your brother and Aunt Giza?

>> Dora Klayman: We were trying to survive, and every once in a while there would be more raids and things, but they had already gotten rid of most of the Jews, so that was -- we would hear there would be a raid, then I would hide someplace. I remember my aunt taking us, all of a sudden taking us on a train and we were going to the next town. There were people who told us what was going on. The major thing happening is the partisans were now all in the -- Ludbreg is sort of around a river, and then to start sort of mountains, hilly, it's hilly and becomes mountains. That's where the partisans were.

There were attacks on the town of Ludbreg. There were many attacks. Often, we would have to run to the basement and hide and spend time in the basement. There was a time that we had to spend days in -- it was not a basement, American-style basement, it was a cellar. It was a wine cellar.

You had to go out of the house and open the door and go down into the cellar. The cellar had earthen floor, and shelves, shelves full of drying fruit, mounds of sand where you bury potatoes and carrots. There were big barrels, because we had a vineyard. The vineyard produced grapes at the end of the year, they would press the grapes, put the wine in these barrels. There were barrels full of wine, if there was any wine left.

There were frogs jumping everywhere. But then we put some cots down there, and some

bedding. We were living in this house that was built in 1885. It had the really thick walls. So there were thick walls, and the tiny windows were all the way high up. So you were pretty safe down there.

>> Bill Benson: From bullets flying?

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah, from bullets flying. But sometimes we didn't have the time to get into the cellar because the fighting would start in the middle of the night, and so we ended up having to stay in the house and hide the best we can.

>> Bill Benson: I want to come back to that in a minute.

>> Dora Klayman: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: At some point, your uncle gets released, he's able to come home. Also, your aunt also gets arrested.

>> Dora Klayman: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that.

>> Dora Klayman: Well, eventually, as I said, since most of the Jews were gone, they were gone, but there was somebody at one point that denounced my aunt. There is a thought that we knew who that was. Eventually later, on, my uncle tried to do something about that person, but unfortunately he was able to run to Austria after the war and saved himself. Somebody denounced her, and they came and arrested her.

>> Bill Benson: Was your uncle back yet?

>> Dora Klayman: My uncle was not back at that time. He just was coming back. When he came back and he found out what happened, he couldn't do anything. He followed her, tried to follow to where she had gone, and he followed her as far as Slovenia, but could not catch up with her,

because they had taken her to Auschwitz.

Now, for many, many years, we thought that they took her to Auschwitz, but we didn't know. But now we know, because when this last archive came to this museum --

>> Bill Benson: That's just in the last several years.

>> Dora Klayman: Right. We actually found her name. And her registration card. She died soon after, they say of sickness. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: While your uncle was trying to find her so that he could bring her back, if he could, what happened to you and your brother?

>> Dora Klayman: Well, we had, next to our old, old 1885 house, another building, which the two families, my Aunt Blanca and Aunt Giza and their husbands were building, and they had built much of it, but not completed the second floor of it. The bottom floor contained a store that belonged to my uncle. Then in the back there was an apartment.

This is a footnote I'm going to say now, because we didn't ever talk about it before. But after many, many years, I just got that back. Why? Why didn't I have it before? Because after the war, the communist government had confiscated it, and then it was confiscated for all these years, and then now the government recently, like maybe 10 years ago, after the fall of communism started to give things back to people. It got tied up in courts for a while, but somebody told me to ask for it, and so I --

>> Bill Benson: Really?

>> Dora Klayman: Now I have a store and an apartment in Ludbreg, which of course --

[Laughter]

Yeah.

[Laughter]

With the economy as it is, I wish I could sell it, but so far I haven't. It's not grand. It's very small, you know. Jokingly somebody said "Just start a Starbucks."

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Still standing?

>> Dora Klayman: Yes, still standing. Anyway, the family lived in the apartment in the back, the Runjaks. They were a Catholic family. I didn't say that the Ustasa were deporting Jews, Roma and Serb Orthodox. We had some Serb Orthodox villagers, who immediately all joined the partisans. They were sort of in that area. They also, many, many Serb Orthodox people in larger numbers than anybody else got killed. Those people who know about the last war in Yugoslavia that was always brought up. It was not the way the world --

>> Bill Benson: Going to the family Runjak.

>> Dora Klayman: Yes. They were Catholic, very devout Catholic family.

>> Bill Benson: They knew who you were?

>> Dora Klayman: Oh, yes.

>> Bill Benson: Yes, OK.

>> Dora Klayman: They knew who we were, and they knew it was pretty dangerous to have us. But because it was not allowed to give shelter to Jewish children or anybody, but they were willing to take us in. It was a couple with three children, who were much older than we. The oldest, they were teenagers, two teenagers. The oldest one was definitely a teenager, and there was a courtyard that

sort of was the back, in the back of both of those houses. At the one point, the courtyard was requisitions by Ustasa forces. There they were bivouacked in our courtyard.

>> Bill Benson: Same property?

>> Dora Klayman: Same property. We were with the Runjak family. We were told, my brother and I, to call Mrs. Runjak mom and Mr. Runjak dad. We must have -- I don't know, children seem to be understanding sometimes beyond what you would expect. We understood that it was dangerous not to do so. So I knew, I was old enough to know if anybody was there that we didn't know, I would call her mom, but if she had ever gone, I would call her Mrs. Runjak. My brother, who was much young, three years younger, he couldn't distinguish one from the other. So he always called her mom. To his dying day. We'll get to his death. Anyway, he always called her mom.

They were very kind, wonderfully kind family. Mr. Runjak was a painter, a house painter. Mrs. Runjak ran a clinic where she -- there was a huge amount of glaucoma there. She ran an eye clinic. There were farmers coming from all over the village to be treated by her.

Lots of people knew we were there. But again, nobody said anything.

>> Bill Benson: Yet, your Aunt Giza had been denounced?

>> Dora Klayman: Yes. Well, she was a Jew.

>> Bill Benson: At one point, you were baptized, right?

>> Dora Klayman: The Runjak family, because they were very close, very devout family, apparently the priest said to Mrs. Runjak, according to this oldest daughter who is still alive, or she was in 2010 when I was there, who told me that the priest had come and said to Mrs. Runjak "What are we going to do with these children? You baptize them."

>> Bill Benson: Sort of we've got a problem on our hands, here's a way to take care of it?

>> Dora Klayman: Right. Right. I don't know how exactly it went, I never questioned my uncle later on about how that all went, but I know I was baptized. So was my brother.

>> Bill Benson: Dora, you're with the Runjaks, and now your uncle, when he tries to find your Aunt Giza and he's not able to do so and save her, he comes back.

>> Dora Klayman: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: What happens then?

>> Dora Klayman: Somehow we muddled until the end of the war. Ludbreg was liberated a few times. I think there were these constant battles. Some of the battles were pretty awful, and some of them were still while my aunt was alive. That's why I remember so vividly, because our house was across the street from another house that was two stories, and there were people shooting, one group shooting from our backyard and the others shooting from that second floor, and the bullets were flying through our windows. That was the time we were not --

>> Bill Benson: In the cellar.

>> Dora Klayman: We didn't have time to go to the cellar. So there was this one night that I remember where I was crouching in a corner, sitting on a sofa in the corner, and my uncle and aunt were in the bedroom, and I was crying because of all the shooting. They came to -- my uncle came to see, to comfort me, and the bullet flew right into the window and right through his head.

>> Bill Benson: Where he had just been?

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah. In a way, that saved his life. After the war, you can take a look at our house, there were holes everywhere in the living area. We had this big European armoires and they

were pierced with bullets. If you took out a tablecloth or sheet, it was like when children take a napkin, you cut it up, that's what this looked like.

>> Bill Benson: You said to me when we first met that, for you as a child, your fear was getting shot and killed in battle, as opposed to worries about deportation, because it was so tangible and real.

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah. That was very tangible, very real. We lived with it a lot. There were really bad battles. There was one on my street. My street eventually got named after that one neighborhood that got decimated. The Ustasa and Germans had somehow surrounded a brigade of partisans within the street, and they fought and fought and fought, and at the end they ran -- the partisans ran out of munition. They took the last bombs they had, and detonated them amongst themselves, and we knew in what house. It was sort of a last house on the street. They just committed mass suicide. So that street was later on renamed the 17th brigade.

Then in the morning you would wake up, you didn't know who was in charge. You looked through the shutters to take a look, figure out who was there. I have terrible memories of horses pulling carts full of bodies just piled up, naked bodies piled up. So there were just these battles.

Even as children, that's what we played with, played battles with -- I remember playing battles with cornstalks.

>> Bill Benson: Dora, before we turn to the end of the war and talk briefly about that, then I think we'll have a chance to turn to our audience for a few questions, I think you told me that the partisans would take control of the town, they'd have it for a while. You would feel somewhat safe, you could go outside, you were free for a little bit.

>> Dora Klayman: Absolutely.

>> Bill Benson: Then the Ustasa would come back in, push them back out, and it changed hands, I think you said at least seven times during --

>> Dora Klayman: Changed in a small way. I think they were two periods of a fairly long periods, many months, that the partisans held the town. That was very nice. Toward the end there was a really -- they were really starting to figure they were losing. At one point, they invited the head to come to town, and of course, everybody was going to go and see what's happening. I remember wanting to go, and I wasn't allowed to go. In fact, I could just hear out through the window.

One of the things that was interesting about me standing out, and my brother, and how miraculous it was that no one took us ever, I mean sent us away, killed us or whatever, that both of us, you can't tell now, but I was a bright redhead. So was my brother. It's very unusual in Croatia. There are really no redheads. We really stood out.

I remember when Pavelic came, I was told not to go out anywhere without a hat on my head. It was summertime. You just had to keep out of their way. Then do everything you were supposed to do, even when there was school. I was trying to go to school at the end of the war, and I had to go to church on Sunday, I would march in and try to remember some songs or some prayers, which, of course, they taught me. So there were periods it was OK, and then periods where it was very frightening. But you kind of muddled along.

>> Bill Benson: May 1945, the war is over. It's you, your brother, your Uncle Ljudevit. What can you tell us about how he tried to rebuild a life at that point with you?

>> Dora Klayman: We just sort of -- the first thing that he wanted to do is adopt us, after we figured out no one was coming back, my parents were not coming back. Some people did come back. Two

of my uncles showed up. Fantastic that they survived. Both wanted to take my brother and me. There was one on my mother's side of the family, the only survive on my mother's side of the family. On my father's side of the family one member survived. Both of them survived as prisoners of war.

I was told, my uncle said, Well, it's up to you. Here I was 7 years old, and I said, I'm not going away. Because I didn't know who these people were. I love my uncle. He was fantastic. He was -- it was obvious he loved us very much. We were all he had left. One of the things I hadn't said before is that this wonderful family of his, his aristocratic mother, they all died young, everybody. There was a huge family, and they all died of tuberculosis or infections or something.

He was actually the only survivor in that family. So he certainly wasn't -- didn't want to give my brother and me up to anybody, and I wasn't anxious to go at all, and I said no, I'm not going. So both of my uncles left for Israel. They both remarried. Well, one remarried, his wife was killed. The other had never married before. He married, also a Yugoslav survivor.

They all left. So that was just the three of us left, and unfortunately my brother died in 1946, very suddenly, like within three days, of scarlet fever, because we had really no antibiotics and he apparently had a weak heart, and that was that.

>> Bill Benson: So it's just you and your uncle now?

>> Dora Klayman: Mm-hmm.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned to me the impact of losing your brother, what it meant to your uncle.

>> Dora Klayman: I think it's interesting, but I think it meant a lot more to him than to me at the time. Because I was a kid of 9, and I don't think I quite understood. But to him, it was a major loss and he -- I think he grieved it very much all his life. My brother was a very cute kid, and I think probably

why I didn't grieve so much, I was so jealous. He was younger, but he was very smart, very cute, and he would get up and recite poetry. I was like --

[Laughter]

It was a great loss, and it was a great loss to my uncle. On the other hand, he never remarried, and so it was we had maids, housekeepers and housekeepers and maids. Some of the housekeepers were really very interesting and educated people who, after the war, had lost a lot, lost their families. There was one in particular who was highly educated lady, who had taught me my first piano, taught me German. I was always afraid my uncle would marry one of them, but he never did. We remained friends, that particular housekeeper. Again I went to the university in Zagreb, she had already returned, because things were returned to her. I actually lived with her in her house.

>> Bill Benson: Why don't we turn to our audience, see if they have a few questions. If you have a few, we hope you do, please ask them. Then we'll do a close, few closing remarks, and Dora will close our program for us in a few minutes.

If you have a question, please make it as brief as you can. I will repeat it so everybody in the room hears it, including Dora, then she'll respond to it. So who wants to go first? Yes, sir, right here.

[Audience question]

>> Bill Benson: Who were the Serb Orthodox?

>> Dora Klayman: The Serb Orthodox communities, I don't really know how these particular villages were Serb Orthodox. They were obviously Serb people who had come, who had emigrated to that part of the world. Much of the Serb Orthodox community in Croatia did not live in that part of the

world. They lived through where, during this 1992 war, there was a lot of talk about where the majority lived, and it was mostly on the border between Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia, going much further east. But I don't know.

There were many, many Serb families that lived in what was Slavonia. If you think of Croatia, sort of like the lay of the land is sort of like a crescent, then in the crescent that's very close to Serbia, that part, where the east-northeast, that area is on the border of Serbia. There were many Serbs living there.

So in terms of the deportations, the Ustasa were deporting whole villages. If you take a look at like when there was a whole archive at the Holocaust Museum that came from the Jasenovac. That's an interesting story in itself. I was looking through that, and there are whole villages, a list after list after list of people that were deported. That's basically where they were.

>> Bill Benson: All right. Do we have another question? If you don't, I have tons. Yes, sir?

[Audience question]

>> Dora Klayman: What was the relationship between my aunt -- what was the relationship to my aunt who took me in? She was my mother's older sister. There were four children in that family. Three girls and one boy. The fellow was the one who did survive the was, but the three women were killed. The oldest one was Iza, that one. My mother was 15 years younger, and then Giza's husband, Ljudevit, with whom I lived, was 10 years older than his life. So imagine when I was growing up with him, it was really -- he was born in 1885. I was really living with somebody who was my grandfather's age. Would have been my great-grandfather's age. I shouldn't say that. He could have been my grandfather, because he was 25 years older than I. That sometimes was a difficulty as

I was growing up, because I always used to think, oh, he doesn't understand, he doesn't understand me, he's too old.

>> Bill Benson: Some things never change.

[Laughter]

>> Dora Klayman: People often ask me this question, you know, What was it like living without your parents? I would say, Well, I was living with a parent, because he did everything for me that a parent could have done. He was a fantastic person, very loving, and I never lacked for love, which probably makes me sane these days, as sane as can be, because I did not really suffer from that kind of deprivation.

On the other hand, when I was growing up, I would say, oh, well, he's too old, and if I had my parents, well, you know, it would have been this, this, and that. Of course, that's not true. I was just objecting to having to clean up my room or something.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: I think we have time for a couple more. Go ahead.

>> You kind of talked about it a little bit, living with your neighbors, how dangerous it was not to call them mom or dad. Were you 7. How much did you understand what was going on? Was that something you understood or --

>> Bill Benson: The question is because of how young you were, did you really understand all that was going on, why you had to move around, why you had to sort of keep your identity quiet? What did you actually understand, or were you shielded from it?

>> Dora Klayman: I probably didn't understand very much. It was more like almost sometimes like a game. Like, you know, OK, you have to go to the basement, or OK, get on a train, don't say this, don't say that. I didn't know what the consequences could have been, nor did I -- I certainly didn't understand the larger question of what was going on, I don't think.

>> Bill Benson: One more question, right here.

>> When you were living with the family, you were living with a Catholic family and were baptized, had to go to church. Did that affect your belief system at all, and did it make your transition when you came your uncle came home, back to your faith, difficult or different?

>> Bill Benson: No, no, it was on the mic. It's OK.

>> Dora Klayman: Well, my uncle, I sort of became, for a while, very Catholic, because my friends were very Catholic, and there were no Jewish children. So, you know, I would follow up and do everything that they did. But then, very shortly, you know, we went under a communist system. I was 7 years old. One period ended, the other one began. Not quite in the same way. Under the communist system, I fared reasonably well in terms of what happened to some other people.

Of course, under the communist system all religion was taboo, basically. So there goes my Catholic beliefs. I knew nothing about Judaism, nothing at all.

One thing we never got to, of course, because there's so much to say, is that when I was 16 and I was in high school, I had to be sent to another town to go to high school to a nearby town. I went to an academic high school, and I was boarded. Then my uncle in Switzerland, who survived, the one working for the Jewish community, he survived, he went to Bergen-Belsen, they survived, they went to Switzerland, and he established contact with me. They wrote every once in a while.

The other uncles kind of forgot about me for a while, but he wrote to me. They invited, he and his wife invited me to visit with them in Switzerland. At the age of 16, I actually went to Switzerland, which was unheard of in Yugoslavia at that time. You just did not go to a foreign country under communist system. You couldn't get visas, you couldn't do anything. I was considered what the Yugoslavians called a victim of fascism.

So I got a passport and visa, and I could take $5, and I was allowed. And I went by train. My uncle waited for me on the border, and we ended up at their house. I found myself in an Orthodox Jewish family. I'm like, what is this? You know? I knew nothing. Absolutely nothing.

There was one Jewish family that did come back to Ludbreg, but they were nonobservant. The only thing I knew is that at passover, at this time it would a year, I didn't know exactly what it was, we would gets matza to eat. That's about it. The Jewish community would send from someplace, I don't know where, probably from the States, we would get a few boxes of matza. All of a sudden, I'm in this Orthodox Jewish family, but I was like full of wanting to learn things, so -- and I liked them very much, and really we discovered we really loved each other.

I went back home, but they said, When you are at university why don't you come study here for a while. So I want to point out that in your notes over there, there is an error. It says that Lozan is a small town in Croatia. Nothing like that. It is a fairly large town in Switzerland.

[Laughter]

That's where I ended up at the university, my second year. First year I was in Zagreb, second year at University of Lozan studying French. It's between Croatia, between Yugoslavia and Switzerland. That's how I met my husband.

>> Bill Benson: I think we probably should bring it to a close because of the time. Thank you for the questions. The last question was a wonderful way to get in something we weren't going to get in, so I'm glad of that. Before I turn it back to Dora to finish up our program, I want to share one thing with you, because I want to share it with you. We don't get to hear about after what Dora just told about, she's now out of communist hands and her uncle is still there, he was not able to leave. But because Dora has this marvelous faculty with language, she is on a train and there's some American, Englishmen and others talking in English. One said "Oh, look at that beautiful redhead." And she heard and understood.

>> Dora Klayman: I had been studying English for five years. That was in high school I was studying English, but I didn't have any chance to talk to anybody. Here are these guys in the hallway, discussing. It was about Little Rock. I don't know if the young generation remembers, that was a horrible time in the United States when Governor Faubus didn't allow black children to attend public school. Everything in Europe heard, like, God, how horrible.

There was a discussion of that. My husband was explaining, all Americans are like that, and so on. Anyway, we met, and talked about various things, and sang Mozart, did not exchange that we were both Jewish. He never expected a Jew in Yugoslavia, and I never thought in those terms.

[Laughter]

Because I knew nothing. So then I went to Switzerland, he went to the States. We corresponded. And through the letters we discovered who we were and got very close through letters. I know that's hard in the days of e-mail and faxes and tweets and so on.

[Laughter]

So I have still a pile of letters, which people who are tweeting will never have.

So he came back and we were married in Switzerland in an Orthodox ceremony.

I'm back to observing being Jewish, and I belong to a synagogue, and my grandchildren were in bar mitzvah, and I'm studying Hebrew.

>> Bill Benson: I want to thank all of you. We have a *First Person* program every Wednesday and Thursday through August. Please come back. We have a tradition that our *First Person* gets the last word. On that note, I will turn it back to Dora. When she's done, she will step off the stage over here. If anybody wants to ask more questions, chat with her, just shake her hands, I'll take a photograph, if you've got a camera. Whatever you feel like you want to do. Dora?

>> Dora Klayman: It's wonderful to have you all here, and I want to say that I have really appreciated working at this museum, because I do feel that the experiences we have had need to be told and retold and that we need to keep the memory of those who lost their lives alive, we need to keep that memory alive. And we need to know what happened, so that, hopefully, it won't happen again.

Sometimes I doubt that that is possible, and other times I'm very optimistic. Most of the time I'm very optimistic. I still believe in the basic goodness of man, and I think having you all here always reinforces that optimism of mine.

On the other hand, sometimes I feel I don't really want to talk about myself, and yet when I'm here I feel it was worthwhile and I hope you feel so too. It was good talking to you. Thank you for coming.

[Applause]

[Ended at 2:09 p.m.]