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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
***FIRST PERSON* SERIES**
SUSAN TAUBE

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 the museum's public program *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. This is our 14th year of *First Person*. Our *First Person* today is Mrs. Susan Taube, 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 first-hand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each guest serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Susan Taube will share with us her *First Person* account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have time toward the end of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask a few questions of Susan. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Susan is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction. We begin with this portrait of Susan Taube, born Susan Strauss, in 1926. Susan grew up in the small town of Vacha in Germany where her family lived for more than 400 years. On this map, the arrow points to Germany. This picture shows Susan's home and

her family's business in Vacha. The Strauss home is on the right-hand side with the storefront.

Here we see Susan and her mother, Bertha Strauss.

In November, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of Pogroms throughout Germany known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass. This photograph shows Germans passing the broken window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht. In Vacha, local party members damaged the family store and imprisoned Susan's father in the Buchenwald concentration camp. In 1939, Susan, her sister, mother, and grandmother moved to Berlin.

Susan and her family were deported to the Riga ghetto in January 1942. The arrow on this map points to Riga.

Eventually, Susan and her mother were sent to the Kaiserwald concentration camp, which the green arrow points to, to do forced labor. In the fall of 1944 as a Soviet Army approached, Susan and her family were deported to the Stutthof concentration camp which the red arrow points to. This is a photo of the Stutthof concentration camp.

After the war Susan married and immigrated with her husband, Herman Taube, and their family to the United States in this photograph, Susan, Herman and their children pose in their family store.

Today Susan lives in the Washington, D.C., area with her husband, Herman, who is also a survivor and has been a *First Person* guest as well. Susan and Herman ran their own small business, a store in Baltimore, for many years before moving to Washington 40 years ago. She has co-authored several books with Herman, who is a noted

author and poet. Susan and Herman have four children, eight grandchildren, six great grandchildren, and a seventh who is on the way. A number of grandchildren and their spouses are graduating from various academic programs this spring, including one granddaughter who with her husband are both graduating from medical school at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. At the same time, the husband of another granddaughter is graduating from medical school in Virginia. And there are several other grandchildren graduating from college this month.

Susan is joined today by her daughter, Judy, and several friends. Judy's son, Ben, and his wife Bonnie both graduated from the University of Maryland and are both teaching in Montgomery County.

Susan is active with the Holocaust survivor association and volunteers here weekly at this museum. You'll find her here on Tuesdays when she steps the staff, membership and donor desk. Please visit if you happen to be here on a Tuesday. Susan also speaks frequently at the museum. As an example, she spoke to a German group that promotes reconciliation. She also speaks in other settings locally, including recently at two synagogues.

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

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Thank you so much for joining us and your willingness to be our *First Person* today. I know you have so much to share with us. [Inaudible] after that, your life and that of

your family's changed. Tell us about that time before the war and before Kristallnacht, about your family.

>> Susan Taube: Well, it was a little town, about 5,000 people. And among them, there were about 20, 25 Jewish families. Four children school-aged, school-aged children.

Life was normal. My parents had a store that sold baby carrots, sewing machine, whatever you needed to buy. The surrounding area was mostly agriculture. Not much else going on there. So this was the point to come and purchase what you needed for your house, for your clothing, for whatever you needed.

Life was normal, very normal. We had children. We had neighbors. We were invited for Christmas. Then came Passover. They came to our house. They wanted matzo, whatever specialties we had on Passover. It was very nice, very nice neighbors, everything.

But things changed very rapidly in 1933, when Hitler came to power. Everybody had to go and vote. After you voted, you received the little pin. You voted yes or you voted no. But around the places where you voted, they watched very closely what you were voting for. So everybody was voting yes for Hitler.

>> Bill Benson: In fact, Susan, I think you said the pin said "I voted for Hitler" or "I didn't vote for Hitler."

>> Susan Taube: The Jewish people. We didn't know what was in store for us.

>> Bill Benson: You told me about a neighbor, the Schoen family. Tell us about them.

>> Susan Taube: They were two houses away from us. They were very religious people. We

shared a lot of things together. In Germany, at that time it was a frugal time. It was after World War I, and people, really, materialistic -- they were very poor, really. So we shared a lot of things together like newspaper and whatever. They had chickens. They give us eggs. It was a nice, neighborly situation, helping each other.

Things changed rapidly in 1933. I went to school. It was my second grade then. In the beginning it wasn't too bad. The children, we still played together. But a few months later I was separated, ignored. Just ignored. That's all. Nobody fought for me to participate in anything. The teachers put me separately on a bench in the classroom. Just ignoring.

This was the school I attended for four years. I must have been a pretty good student, because one day I graduated into a middle school. The educational system is different in Germany than in here. In middle school we learned languages. I leathered French. The same situation there. In fact, it was much worse there. By the end of the day there was a bench. I was sitting on the bench, just by myself, the whole row of benches. When came recess, I had to be first one to leave and the last one to come in. I sat by myself. Nobody paid attention to me.

I was in that school for about two years. I don't know what my situation was. Anyhow, my parents decided, or were informed, to take me out of that school. I was enrolled in a school in Frankfurt am Maim, in a Jewish day school. I lived with complete strangers there. But this wasn't too bad because at least I was among my own people. I had playmates. A normal life, like a child should have.

But things weren't normal even there because people started to emigrate. People worried about jobs. A lot of people lost their jobs in 1935. And the Nuremberg Laws came into effect, that the Jewish people couldn't participate in anything from the government, entertainment, or whatever. Everybody lost their jobs. People had to emigrate, which wasn't very easy because not many countries -- it was after World War I.

Everybody was still struggling, I guess, or whatever. I was a child. I wouldn't know the circumstances there. But I know my parents tried to immigrate to America, but we had no close relatives. My mother was a only child. My father was an only child so no close relatives.

Finally, finally, somebody came and vouched for my father. At that time you needed to immigrate to America, you had somebody vouch for you in America that you don't fall under the government. So that person vouched for my father. Say you come first. You find a job. Get yourself settled. And then we will help you to bring the family over.

So my father got the affidavit that came to the consulate in Berlin. And when he called up how long it would take -- he received a number. And he called up to find out how long it would take for the number to come up. They told him it can take up to three to four years. Ok. What can you do? You have to wait and see.

In the meantime came Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht, was -- like you saw in the picture here. The reason given for this was in 1938, I think it was the beginning of 1938, the Gestapo came to the houses of Jewish people who were not German citizens,

who came from Poland and Russia or from the east, but lived for many, many years already in Germany. Children were born in Germany. But even if you are born in Germany, your citizenship goes where your father is coming from. So even if they come from Poland, the children, they're Polish citizens.

So they came at night and deported these people, took them to the train station and deported them to the border of Poland. Among them were the parents of a young man who was studying in Paris. When he found out what happened to his parents, he got very angry. I guess he wanted to pay attention of what is happening there. Foolishly he went to the German embassy with a gun and killed the secretary there. Well, he didn't kill him. He injured him for three days. Three days, Germany organized what is called Kristallnacht. I was in Frankfurt at that time.

I lived with a family by the name of Bumburger. There were about three, four Jewish families. The rest were Christian families. Around 10:00 in the morning, people came to the door, didn't ring the bell or anything like that. Just knocking on the door, came in. Was nice. I don't remember really. Demolished the whole apartment. We didn't have a plate to eat from. Pillows were torn open. Plants were thrown out of windows. The whole apartment was a mess. And they went from each apartment to the next one. And that happened to all Jewish properties. The businesses were also destroyed. When you walked along the streets in some sections where people still had a business at that time, their windows were smashed in. Everything was inside the store, too.

In the evening came a report. The police came again to the

apartments and arrested all male persons over the age of 16, between 16 and 65, and took them to concentration camps. At that time it was Buchenwald, Dachau, and Sachsenhausen. Well, after this, the schools were closed. The teachers were arrested. So I went home to my hometown. The same happened there, too. My father tried to hide, but the police came and said, look, it's a small town. Everybody knew each other. They told my mother if you don't -- if he doesn't give himself up, we have to take you in. We have to bring somebody to the station. So my father gave himself up. He was taken by himself with one policeman to Buchenwald concentration camp, which was about 60-kilometers from our hometown.

After, I stayed at home for a while. Then the schools opened up again in Frankfurt. And I went back to Frankfurt am Maim. My father got out of the concentration camp after four weeks. My mother had sent money for a train ticket so he could come back.

When he came back, he remarked that the situation, what happens there, is just unbearable. You cannot believe what people can do to other people; we have to get out of here. No matter where we are going, don't wait for America, just let's get out of here.

Well, when he came home, he couldn't stay home because we had to leave the country.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, that was one of the conditions for letting him out.

>> Susan Taube: Also, he was a World War I veteran, from World War I, fighting for the German Army.

>> Bill Benson: Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, was November 9 -- 10, 1938. So we're now probably in late 1938, December.

>> Susan Taube: He left. Yeah. So he went over to the border to Belgium with nothing on him. They had to pay somebody to take him over there. After a while we found out that he's safe, but he had no money or anything. But the Jewish community took care of the refugees. He wasn't the only one who had to leave.

After he was gone for about two, three months, we got information from Berlin that he should come to Berlin for a physical and be ready to get his papers to immigrate to America. Well, since he couldn't come back, the papers were sent to Belgium. That prolonged the whole process a lot of time, six, eight months or even more. I don't know. I don't remember exactly.

Anyhow, he got out just -- well, in the meantime, the war started. The war started. Things changed again. A lot of things changed again.

>> Bill Benson: Before we go on from there, the war began with Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. When your father was in Belgium, you told me that you would try to send him things because he had no money over there. Tell us about sending him a shoe.

>> Susan Taube: First of all we bought postal stamps from the post office that he could cash in for money in Belgium.

>> Bill Benson: And you couldn't send him any money. That was illegal. So you sent him stamps.

>> Susan Taube: Money was confiscated right after Kristallnacht.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Susan Taube: We had no more control over our assets. Everything was confiscated. We sent one shoe at a time so he could have a pair of shoes. If you sent a shirt, you had to take off the buttons or something to send the shirt so it was damaged goods and not new. It was very tough.

>> Bill Benson: I think you said sometimes you'd even put in one sock. Stuff would get stolen and confiscated. So no one would want one shoe.

>> Susan Taube: One shoe. Anyhow, he got out. His papers came to Belgium. And he got out just before Germany invaded the lowlands. He got out in February of 1940. In May Germany invaded --

>> Bill Benson: In May 1940.

>> Susan Taube: 1940. Germany invaded Belgium and France.

>> Bill Benson: He made it out to the United States.

>> Susan Taube: He made it out to America. Yeah. Yeah. We were in touch with him until America went into the war. We knew where he was. He found work. He got papers for us. But then, again, America went into the war. Everything was shut out.

>> Bill Benson: I think before America went to war your mother moved you and your sister to Berlin to be close to the U.S. consulate so that if you were able to get the papers, you could go join your father.

>> Susan Taube: That wasn't the only reason we moved. We were the last Jewish family in that little town. They made it very, very difficult for my mother to stay there, very difficult. Very

difficult.

>> Bill Benson: So then now your mother is with just her two daughters living in Berlin.

>> Susan Taube: My mother sold her house. She didn't get any money for the house. The money was also put on these accounts where you had no control over. We received only enough to pay our rents, food, and a little bit like pocket money. That's all. That was government controlled. Everything was government controlled. We had to give up jewelry. Everything I had to give up. Even fur coats. When the war started, fur coats had to be delivered.

When we moved to Berlin, we came to Berlin in 1939. At that time already all small towns, some Jewish population left these towns and moved to bigger cities. You just couldn't stay in the small towns anymore. So we came to Berlin. Berlin, the Jewish community again took care of the people who came in from these little towns, provided living quarters, etc., for these people.

Our new facility was in a house that belonged -- the apartment belonged to a gentleman by the name of Frederick who was a correspondent to a German newspaper at one time but also lost his job in 1935. It was a nice apartment. He had one room. We had a room privately. And that was it. We were four people. My grandmother, my mother, my sister, myself.

In Berlin, I think I went to school for a little while but not for very long. By that time I was 14 years old. And by 14 years you had to go to work. It wasn't really work. The war was on.

Let's go back. My first job when I came back to Berlin was an all-day -- not only me. I had friends there. We had to take care of the elderly people because the nurses and caretakers who used to take care of them had to work for the war, the factories. And we as teenagers had to do their jobs. So we did it. The older people. If they got sick or something happened to them, you know, they disappeared. They were taken out saying to hospitals, but we never saw them again.

So eventually this home closed up. My next job was in a daycare center where, again, the parents had to work. They had to go to work in the mornings. We had to be there 6:00 in the morning to accept the children, receive the children. We stayed until the last child was taken home at 8:00 in the evening. We went by public transportation there. And we took care of the children. That was my job for quite a while.

>> Bill Benson: And during that time, of course, the deportations of Jews began.

>> Susan Taube: Coming to that. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Susan Taube: Deportation started. One of my friends who worked with me in the children's -- in the daycare center, her parents lived not far from us. Very nice people. They were originally from Romania, but they lived there for a long time. One day they came to the house and just took them away. That's it. They were gone.

The next came to the next person. Due to circumstances we have to bring our citizens from the east into the right. And you will be resettled to the east. Be ready on this and this time. You can take with you whatever you can carry. If you take any

bigger items, you bring it to a certain place, and it will be shipped to your new destination. That was the message on the post.

When she left, I said goodbye to her. I gave her a self-addressed stamped envelope and said put it in the mailbox, when you see one. When my time comes, our time comes, maybe we can find each other again. Well, they left. I never heard from her.

Our time came in January. We received the same information. Be ready at this and this time. It was the end of January 25th of January, to be ready. It was the same information. And that's it.

In the meantime, also from the children's home, where my age wasn't 15, they took me out from that home and I had to work in the factory where they made -- receiving equipments for submarines. Again, there we had to be there early in the morning, 6:00, and worked until about 7:00, 8:00 in the evening. The Jewish people were sitting separate from the other people. The German people received lunches there, food. And we had to bring our own food.

Food for Jewish people at that time was rationed. Everything was rationed, actually, at that time for everybody. Jewish people had the coupons with the stamp on it. You could only go to the store and buy food between 4:00 and 6:00 in the afternoon. Not any other time.

>> Bill Benson: I think you told me that when you were making the submarine receivers, the radios, that you were told if you made a mistake, it would be treated as an act of sabotage.

>> Susan Taube: Right. Yeah. There was always somebody going back and forth watching what we are doing.

>> Bill Benson: So the pressure must have been intense.

>> Susan Taube: Well. You do your job. That's it. I don't think anybody was thinking about sabotaging.

>> Bill Benson: So January 1942 is when you --

>> Susan Taube: January 1942 we received our notification. And on the 25th of January, it was Friday evening. They came, two Gestapo people. They asked if we still -- they wanted to see our papers, if we still have jewelry, watches, or whatever we have to leave it there because this will be paying for our resettlement fee. They gave us a receipt for it, a piece of paper. They marked everything down. They gave us the receipt. They left us enough money --

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind me interrupting for a second. I think you told me when your mother had to sign the receipt it said, I am willfully -- it's my own choice to give you all my jewelry and money to pay for my resettlement.

>> Susan Taube: And you had to sign your name, Sarah Strauss. We also were honored with a second name. For women it was Sarah, and for men it was Israel. So every document that had to be signed had to be signed this way. It wasn't our chosen name. Anyhow, that was one of the laws.

The Gestapo came to our place. Well, my mother, she used to sew a little bit. So we took the sewing machine, whatever you need, pillows, blankets, pots

and pans, and put it on the wagon. We carried -- whatever the thing it was, to the destination where it was supposed to go. This was originally a Jewish school which had a little, you know, what do you call it? Like a -- everything was left there. Just put your name on it.

>> Bill Benson: Like the sewing machine and all of that?

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. Just put your name on it. It will be delivered to your new destination. Never knowing where to. So we left everything there. And in the evening they came. The Gestapo came. Again, leave what you still have. Gave the receipt. And then left us enough money to take public transportation to the place of concentration, which was a synagogue that wasn't run down during Kristallnacht because it was between two houses but it was demolished on the inside.

Eventually in this place came about 1,000 people. It was very hot. We had the knapsack, little suitcases. We had put a lot of clothes on ourself. But we came to this place. It became so hot that we had to strip ourselves. So whatever.

Saturday morning we were called by the Gestapo. There were big tables there. They called bench by bench, people were called down. They told us, well, you have your ID, your kennkarte. All passports were confiscated in 1938. All passports were confiscated. We got a new ID which was called a kennkarte. There was a J on it. And this kennkarte was taken away from us at that time. We were told we are getting a new ID, and our new place where we will be. And at that time we found out that our new -- our destination will be Riga, Latvia. Ok. So Riga, Latvia.

In that synagogue, we stayed until Sunday morning. Early

Sunday morning, they marched us -- there were trucks there. Very early in the morning. So the public shouldn't see it. They took the elderly people and who couldn't walk or whatever to the train station. We walked. It was about five kilometers maybe. We walked.

We came to the train station in the suburb of Berlin and we looked for a train. There was no train. But the cars like you saw in the museum. And through the cattle cars, they opened the doors when everybody was there, about 80, 90 people. On the sides were benches made out of straw. And on the floor was straw. And on each side of the end of the wagon was a bucket for your physical needs. And that was it. And once everybody was in these trains, they were closed from the outside and off we went.

1942 was a very, very extremely cold winter. There was no heat in there. We had no water. Only that little bit of food we still had from home. And that was it. The journey took about I think three day and three nights. I don't know exactly. But we came to Riga. It was the end of January. Probably 1929, 1930, something like that. We arrived in Riga. The doors were opened. And, “Out! Out! Out!” “Out! Out! Out!” The SS was there. Sticks, guns, whatever. Dogs. A lot of dogs were there. "Out! Out! Out!" People were just frozen stiff. They couldn't move. It was terrible. They were hitting on the people.

And the trucks. They said, you have to walk about five, six kilometers to your new destination. If you can walk, you're welcome to. If not, you can go in the trucks and we take you to your new destination. Well, the people who went on the trucks, mostly elderly people, or women with children, we never saw them again.

We marched, my whole family marched. We came to the

ghetto. We came to the place. We saw, you know, a neighborhood surrounded by chicken wire, double fence of chicken wires. There was a big gate. Soldiers standing there with guns. They told us to march in there. They showed us where to go, to a house. And into this house -- I don't know how many people they pushed. It was dark at that time, so we didn't see much anymore.

So we sat down in the house. Waited for daylight to come. Daylight came. We looked around. And we saw food on the place, clothes laying around, stuff there. We couldn't figure out what happened there. Then we went out and we saw clothes outside, black spots in the snow, snow and ice. Everything was ice. Everything was frozen there. Couldn't figure out what happened.

Again, we stayed there for a day -- until February 4 we stayed in that house. February 4, everybody -- in the meantime came transfers from all over Germany, from all the big cities in Germany, from Czechoslovakia and from Austria.

>> Bill Benson: Am I correct, that house you were in, there was no heat, no water? Everything inside was covered with ice?

>> Susan Taube: Nothing. Ice.

>> Bill Benson: You described it to me once as almost a surreal scene of everything coated in ice in the house.

>> Susan Taube: Everything. Everything ice.

>> Bill Benson: You just waited there.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. If we went out, we -- that's it. So came February 4 we were told to

get out. They were assembling in a certain place. There were trucks staying there. The SS was there. The dogs were there. They soldiered us out. Old people, children, mothers with children. Mostly old people put on the trucks. Among them, my grandmother. Never to be seen again.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, mindful that you still have a lot more to tell us, tell us about your time in Riga, what you were forced to do, and then where you were sent from there.

>> Susan Taube: Well, first of all, my feet were frozen. I couldn't even walk. They got better after a few days. Then there was a man in charge of the whole building. There were a lot of people in that one house. He came to each door and said, look, you have to go to work. If you wanted to eat, a piece of bread, you have to go to work.

So my first job was to shovel snow, remove the ice from the sidewalks in the city of Riga. We marched out of the ghetto. We always walked, walked, walked. While we were there, we got ice picks, shovels. We moved the ice so the people of the city could walk safely.

>> Bill Benson: But you were not allowed --

>> Susan Taube: No. We were not allowed to walk on that. We had to walk in the street. From Germany, we also had already the Jewish star. We had it sewn on our clothes.

So this lasted until it got warmer. Then I got a job with the German Air Force, the headquarters of the German Air Force for the Russian Front was in Riga. And my job was there to clean the house, wash laundry, help in the kitchen. They had these big ovens there that would heat a whole apartment. We had to clean out the ovens and

fill them up again with wood and whatever.

This was actually a good job because I worked among the military, and I had to clean. All I had from the ghetto, we had bed bugs and lice. We didn't have any bathrooms to take showers or whatever. So at that job when I came in in the morning, they gave me maid's clothes. I had to take off my old ones, take a bath, and go to work. In the evening, I reverse. So actually this was a good job comparing to other things, what other people did.

Food, I had a little food there. So that was helpful to my mother. The rations they were giving in the ghetto was hardly anything. If you were lucky, we got a piece of horse meat, bread. Sometimes bread. Sometimes rotten potatoes or rotten vegetables because at that time everything was frozen.

So anyhow, if they bring food in from the workplace to the ghetto, it was very dangerous because on the way you could be searched. If they found anything on you, they could take you right to the cemetery and that's it. That was the end of you.

That happened to me once. Thank God they didn't catch me. But I had a big piece of meat on me. And I tried to hide it. I got through. Thank God, I got through. Yeah. It happened that people got shot, hang.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, eventually you would be taken someplace else to dig peat. Tell us about that.

>> Susan Taube: In the summer of 1943 they took young people to dig peat moss, about

40-kilometers outside the Riga ghetto. Peat moss was used for burning, heating, burning, whatever they used it for. There were men. They had to dig the peat moss out from the ground. There was a whole machinery going on there. It was then put on planks. The planks were put on the conveyer belt. From the conveyer belt we had to carry the planks to a bit of metal so they could dry up and turn them around now and then. That was our job for white a while.

When this was over, I went back to the ghetto. And my new job was again working military. The German soldiers going to and from the front in Russia at their R&R. So before they went home, they were deloused because they all had lice. And going there, it was their last stop of entertainment, I guess.

So this was, again, cleaning, helping the soldiers, washing their laundry. Keep the place clean. Which wasn't, again, not too bad because soldiers wasn't like the SS. The SS a little bit different people.

Well, then came 1943, the end of 1943. There were selections all the time, actually. From time to time they felt like killing Jews. So they get together quite a few people. Always select, soldier them out and took them away.

We had two hospitals, also. The people, if they stayed more than a few days and didn't get better, they just took them away and that was it.

We went -- they started the liquidation of the ghetto. Came Kaiserwald. The ghetto was liquidated. Slowly, slowly, the young people, working people, were sent to Kaiserwald. Kaiserwald was already like a real concentration camp. Bars, slight

clothing, and work. We had work. We did have to work all the time. There was no way to stay back home to stay back in the ghetto. If you didn't have a job and you were found home for no reason whatsoever, they could take you away and that was it. You always had to get out of that ghetto.

We did have a few children still in the ghetto. Some people were lucky to save their children. We had a school for a little while. I mean, not a school. Just like -- be careful for the children. All were taken away eventually. They were taken away.

>> Bill Benson: I don't want to slow you up because of the time, but you told me that while in the Riga ghetto, the Jewish community did its best to try to have some sense of normalcy, to have a place of trying to educate the kids to the extent you could. So you tried to hang on to some sense of normalcy.

>> Susan Taube: Keep them occupied. The children were hungry when we came home from work, and they were along the fence begging.

>> Bill Benson: So then you go to Kaiserwald and to a place called Meteor. And you told me that the labor at Meteor was horrible.

>> Susan Taube: Well, I should say I was lucky. I was in Kaiserwald only two weeks. At that time I was separated from my mother. My mother was sent to one place with my sister, and I was sent to another place. We had no control over our lives whatsoever.

So I was sent to Meteor. Meteor used to be a Jewish factory that would produce the tires for cars, rubber boots, shoes, whatever. The Germans took that over. They converted it into a repair shop for platoon boats.

>> Bill Benson: Pontoon boats.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. When they were shot up, they came to this place to be repaired. It was the dirty work the men did. We had a few men there. They cleaned them out from snakes, turtles, whatever was in these boats, collected in the river. And then they came to the factory. They had long tables there. They were put on these tables. We had to glue them together again.

The glue was very dangerous. It was a synthetic glue. I don't know what it was made of, but people began coughing. So because it was an important job to do, took a long time to teach these people, they supplied some milk for the people who did this job.

I, myself, again have to consider myself lucky. I and two other girls, these boats had to be painted before they went back into action. So they came to a big room, very airy room with windows and everything. And there the boats were painted.

The other advantage we had there, it was the office of the caretaker of this place, and the engineer. For some reason they left the radio on. We saw the newspapers. And we had an idea what's going on around in the world. So from there we found out that Stalingrad was lost. The Germans are on a successful retreat. That was music to our ears. But the retreat didn't come quick enough. It took until 1944, August 1944.

They came to us, the SS came. Without any warning, you have to go back to Kaiserwald. Back to Kaiserwald. We were in Kaiserwald for about a week. And the whole camp, what was still living there, was still alive there after sorting out the old ones,

old people and people who could not work anymore. Put on a boat in the harbor of Riga and shipped to concentration camps in Germany.

On this boat, at that time, came also people from all of these little work camps around Riga. They used the slave labor in different capacities. People were living on these workplaces. But at that time they all came to this boat.

>> Bill Benson: So the Russians are dancing, taking -- forcing all of the Jews out of the camps.

>> Susan Taube: Taking the evidence what they did there.

My best girlfriend who I knew from Berlin, her parents were also in a different work camp than she was. She was with me. They were in a work camp. When these people came in, she looked for her parents. She found out that everybody over 30 would not be allowed to come to the boat. She never saw them again. She got very depressed, actually.

So the journey on that boat. There were about 5,000, 6,000 people on that boat, standing up the whole time. No toilet. Nothing. You couldn't go out in the air, nothing. No water. No food. I think it took two or three -- I don't know how long it took. I don't remember. We arrived. We disembarked. They put us on the metal. And we didn't know where we are going. We didn't know anything was going to happen to us. And eventually they came. They came -- coal and other things in. We were pushed. We couldn't stand up. We could only sit down or crouch down. We got out. We couldn't even recognize each other. Everybody was black.

Anyhow, we came to Stutthoff. Beautiful flowers, beautiful lawn. A hundred yards in you saw the barracks, you saw the gravel. You didn't see anything but this. We were pushed in barracks, four up length to sleep on, like sardines. That was it.

In the mornings, about 4:00, 5:00, the alarm sounded. "Out! Out! Out!" "Out from the barracks!" Stay on appell. You were counted and counted and counted. Looked over. Counted again. One SS girl came. She didn't find the right number. In the meantime, they took the directory from the barracks. People died overnight. We stood there for hours sometimes just to be counted. Rain or shine. It was still August. It was very hot, actually. And then they dismissed us. They gave us a piece of bread. Something like coffee. And that was our food for the day until nighttime. We received a bowl of food. If you had a bowl. If you didn't have a bowl, you were out of luck.

And then in the evening again appell. The same thing all over again. For hours you stood. That's it. And then we went into the barracks and tried to sleep. But who could sleep? Nobody could sleep. We were four girls at that time. I remember, we sneaked out of the barracks and laid in front of something there. One of the girls, she smelled bread. She said, you know, I smell bread. I don't know what's here. Let's look. So the window was open. It was the supply room for bread. She went in. She stole a loaf of bread. Good thing she wasn't caught. So we had a piece of bread, an extra piece of bread, to eat that day.

And this went on. We were there for about two weeks. Luckily, luckily for two weeks. In the meantime, we saw every day selections, people going by to the

crematory.

In two weeks, we stood on appell. They counted out 500 women. We were among them. They were not telling us anything, just counted 500 women. Marched us out of the camp to the railroad station. Real railroad cars this time. Put us on the railroad car. Hours later we came to a place called Sophienwalde, which was supposed to be -- we were supposed to build a training camp for the military there. They took down the trees. We had to take out the woods from the trees. So they could pave the roads for the heavy equipment or whatever they used there. And that was our job.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, one quick question for you. I believe it was at Meteor, but you became very close to a small group of women. I think you called them lagaswizer. They were with you at this point. You stayed close together.

>> Susan Taube: Stayed close together. Only one is still alive. So we were there in Sophienwalde. That's what our job was to take out the roots. I don't know what it was we had to push. They were on tracks. To a certain place we had to push them, unload them.

>> Bill Benson: The logs.

>> Susan Taube: The logs, yeah. Pushed them back. Filled them up again. And that was our job. Food was, again, only a piece of bread in the morning. Just bread. Nothing else. We had a water pump there. The camp was made of little huts from plywood. And in each hut were 15 women. And on the floor was just straw. Nothing else, just straw. And we each received two small, little blankets.

So we were the four girls, four girls, kind of together. So one

would put the blanket on the straw. One we used for pillow. And the two we used to cover us up.

>> Bill Benson: That winter of 1944 to 1945 was an extremely brutal winter.

>> Susan Taube: It was brutal.

>> Bill Benson: You would stay in those circumstances --

>> Susan Taube: No. We didn't stay in these little huts. After we finished for the woods, we had to build the houses, the housing. I became a brick layer. But then it got cold and we couldn't do either one anymore so we were laying around. But it got so cold eventually they took the whole camp and put them in one of these unfinished houses, in the basement. Again, there was no floor or anything, just sand. But it was warmer than the huts.

In this camp we had a commandant who was in charge of the camp. He was one of five brothers. Four of them lost already their lives during the war. So I guess he got that job as a compensation. I wouldn't say -- he was human. A human person, as human as he was allowed to be. He tried to -- not to help us but to comfort us a bit. So when it got very cold -- we had no clothes, our striped clothes, nothing else, no clothes whatsoever. He managed to get us sweaters from the people who were killed. So each of the sweaters had a big red mark on it so we would be recognized God forbid when you run away. So that sweater when it got very cold, I wore one on the top and one on the bottom to keep warm.

But anyhow --

>> Bill Benson: You stayed there until March 1945. You were forced on a Death March.

>> Susan Taube: We left that camp. We had to leave that camp. We went on the Death March first for 10 days.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that.

>> Susan Taube: February. February we were assembled. And the commandant told us, look, the Russian Army is coming closer; I have to take you back to Stutthoff. I have orders to take you back to Stutthoff. If you can walk, you're welcome to walk. If you cannot walk, stay here. Somebody will take care of you. Well, we walked. Somebody to take care of, we never saw them again.

So we walked for 10 days. Slow, rain, it was February, nasty, nasty weather. At night, he found the bon fires where we could stay overnight. If he found something for us to eat, we were lucky. If not, we had nothing to eat. So we pulled grass, whatever we could find we eat.

We came to a place called Lauenberg. There was a camp -- there used to be a British POW's, but they were also evacuated already. I don't know where they took them. We stayed there for about two weeks.

Then came March 9. We heard shooting very close by. Again they came for us. You cannot stay here. You cannot stay here. The Russians are on our heels. We have to leave.

So we marched all night, all night we marched. It was a rainy night. A lot of people died along the way. In the morning, they pushed us into a barn, a place called Chinov, full of people already, dead, alive, animals, whatever. They just pushed us in

there, and that's it. Left us there. We thought that's the end of us, really. We just sat down and we waited.

So around 10:00 in the morning we heard big, big, big booms. They said, what's happening? I said, they're shooting at us. But the doors opened, and the Russian Army was there. So that was our point of liberation. So the Russian Army came. We went out of the barn looking around. There were the German population ready to leave the place to go west because they were running away from the Russians. They go west. They had their wagons loaded. So we went on the wagons looking for food. Food was available. What I found first was sauerkraut. It was delicious. That I didn't die right there and then, I don't know. But I was alive. And I still like sauerkraut. Yeah.

We stayed around the whole day. We didn't know what to do. We couldn't do anything. So at night, some people, some of the girls went into the German houses. But that wasn't a good idea. The soldiers, if you were Jewish, not Jewish, they had their fun. We stayed in the night in the barn. Next day came a Russian officer. Told us, you cannot stay here. The war is still around here. You cannot go west. You have to go east. So he gave us a wagon, a horse, a Jewish man who could handle the horse. We all went on the wagon.

They took us to a farm, a German farm. We had to clear the fields. That was for the Russians now. We had to clear the fields from the debris and planted potatoes and whatever has to be done in the spring to make it filled, whatever. That was our job for about four weeks. But we were not under the gun. They cleaned us up. They were

feeding us. When this job was finished, we were taken by the Russians to a place called Koszalin. War was still going on. The war didn't end until May. To a place called Koszalin. They gave us an apartment there.

Our job was -- the German population had left from there. They went west. Clean out the houses where nobody was living anymore. What wasn't nailed on the wall or whatever has to be taken out and put in a warehouse. This was shipped to Russia.

From this place we got our first wardrobe, actually, because we could find some clothes that fit us, eventually. And we started to look a little bit more human again. The hair started growing. Our hair was shaved off before we went to Stutthoff. We were completely bald. But our hair started to grow back. We started to look human a little bit.

In Koszalin, like I said, we cleaned out the houses. But we didn't cook for ourselves. There was a kitchen. In Russia, they say -- a kitchen for people, for the military who came in to eat. They wanted to eat. And we were assigned to the kitchen to eat there, too.

>> Bill Benson: Like a mess hall almost.

>> Susan Taube: Something. But not that big. Not that big. Yeah. That's where I met my husband. My husband was a soldier in the Polish division of the Russian Army. He was a medic. He came to Koszalin because there was a big warehouse of medication that the Germans had there. He was taking care of a hospital not far from there. He came for medication for the hospital. He came to the kitchen, right across the kitchen there. He came to the kitchen. So the soldier who took care -- he was from Romania, a Jewish soldier from

Romania, told them that there are survivors here and if he would like to meet them. So he said, sure, why not? One of our girls was very sick, actually. So we took him there right away. He put her in quarantine because she had a terrible rash. We didn't know what it is. But she survived. She's still living. But she has Alzheimer's.

So that's how we met. One thing leads to another.

>> Bill Benson: I'll interrupt for just a second. If we had more time, you would actually hear the rest of her story about meeting Herman and how eventually in order to protect them from the Russian soldiers, quarantined all of them and then through bribing with vodka and kielbasa was able to take Susan and get them out of there. They worked together in the hospital. The rest is history, as you say.

Susan, two last things before we close the program. Tell us I think a remarkable story of how you located your father. And then when did you learn about what happened to your sister and your mother?

>> Susan Taube: Oh. What happened to my sister and my mother? After the war, we found out what happened. I kind of figured -- I came back to Berlin. And Berlin there was a Jewish hospital. It was still active, actually. And when the people came back, they registered there. I couldn't find their name anyplace. That was already almost a year later. So I kind of figured out.

My father, I found -- well, after the war, with my husband already, we were traveling back and forth back and forth. I had a letter prepared. I felt if I had an opportunity, I will mail that letter to my father whose address I kept in my head the whole

time. And that letter was mailed to America. But he never received it. Eventually, eventually we settled in Poland. Again, I wrote a letter to him, to the same address. By that time the people, I guess, knew what was happening. They found my father in the meantime. They forwarded the letter to him. That's how I got attached with my father.

After the war, when my husband was dismissed from the military, we went back to Poland. He wanted to go back to the place where he took care of the hospital and figured we would, you know -- the Polish people suffered also. We weren't the only ones who suffered a lot.

We lived there for about a year. It was really nice. But then came 1946, the survivors who came back to a city called Kielce, in the same house about 40 people. One day the Pols came. We don't know who did it. Killed all of them. So if this could happen after what happened, we figured there's no future for us in Poland.

There were organizations already now. Jewish organizations were able to take people out from there. We went from there back to Stettin. It was a border between east and west. And from Stettin we were picked up from military and taken to Berlin to a DP camp in Berlin.

But in Berlin we couldn't stay -- couldn't stay either. So we went from Berlin to a DP camp in Zilsheim – Zeigenheim, that was close where my father was born, actually where my father came from. And while there, things were falling already a little bit in place. And since I was a German Jewish citizen, born in Germany, Jewish parents born in Germany, they went back, 400 years back, I received a small apartment in a place, in a Jewish

house that used to be a Jewish house but belonged now to a German woman. She had to relinquish the two rooms from that house. We were living there. Since I got in touch with my father, he sent the papers. And from there we went to America.

>> Bill Benson: And started a remarkable life after that.

>> Susan Taube: In 1947 in April we came to America. And here we are.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Susan in just a moment to close our program. As you can see, we could have spent the rest of the afternoon with you, and I wish we could have done that. I want to thank you all for being here. I remind you that we will have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. I invite you to come back again if you could or next year when we resume.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. So I'd like to turn back to Susan to close the program. When she's done, she'll step off the stage over here. We didn't have an opportunity for question and answers, but, please, absolutely feel free to go chat with her, meet her. Ask Susan questions at that point if you want.

Susan?

>> Susan Taube: Well, I got a little prepared statement. Well, the last word. First of all, thank you all for coming. Sharing my life story with you this afternoon was not my desire to share my anger or anguish of my lost family.

Ok. The remnants of my people, among them have children, I share with you my life story for one reason only, to share with you one of the darkest chapters

in man's history. I started with the killing of six million Jews and end with the killing and maiming of more than 50 million people, men, women, and children. Humanity has deserted us. But we never lost faith in a better world to come.

Spreading hate against the free world, against our country and freedom-loving people even penetrated the rest of the world. We see daily explosions of terror against peaceful, innocent people. The museum and these survivors are dedicated not only to keep the memory live but serve as a warning to all who enter the sanctuary of memory. Speak up. Do not allow the forces of hate to spread through the country. While leadership failed us during the dark period of the Holocaust, we say this, never again. We appeal to this museum. Give your children sense of joy and the sense to be and have respect for the American veterans who are fighting for our freedom wherever they are.

[Applause]

Thank you.

[The presentation ended 2:08 p.m.]