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

REMOTE CART

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CART Services Provided by:
Christine Slezosky, CBC, CCP, RPR
Home Team Captions
1001 L Street NW, Suite 105
Washington, DC 20001
202-669-4214
855-669-4214 (toll-free)
info@hometeamcaptions.com



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>> Bill Benson: Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson, host of the museum's public program *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today. In March we began our 16th year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Mrs. Susan Taube.

This season is made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

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 of our *First Person* guests serve as volunteers 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. Anyone interested in keeping touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in your program or speak with a museum representative at the end of the program at the back of the theater. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Susan Taube's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave here today.

Susan will share with us her *First Person* account of her experience during the Holocaust for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for you to ask a few questions of Susan at the end of our program.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Susan Taube 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. Susan grew up in a small town of Vacha in Germany where her family lived for more than 400 years. On this map of Europe 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, together in a field near their home in Vacha.

In November, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of Pogroms throughout Germany known as Kristallnacht or the Night of Broken Glass. This shows Germans passing the broken window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht. In Vacha local party members damaged the family's 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 Kaiswerwald concentration camp, which the first arrow in blue points to, to do forced labor. In the fall of 1944 as the Soviet Army approached, Susan and her family were deported to the Stutthof concentration camp which the second arrow points to.

Here we see a photograph of the Stutthof concentration camp.

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

Susan lives in the Washington, D.C. area. Just over a year ago Susan lost her

beloved husband Herman who passed away March 25, 2014. Herman, whom we all miss deeply, was also a Holocaust survivor and had been a *First Person* guest. Susan and Herman ran their own small business, a store in Baltimore, from many years before moving to Washington, D.C. 40 years ago. She co-authored several books with Herman who was a noted author and poet. Susan and Herman have four children, eight grandchildren, and eight great grandchildren, five of whom live in Israel. The oldest of her great grandchildren is on the way to college and the youngest is 16 months old.

And today Susan is joined by her daughter Judy and her son in the front row. Maybe wave a little bit there so everybody knows you're down there. Thank you.

Susan is active with the Holocaust Survivors Association and volunteers weekly here at this museum. You will find her here on Tuesdays when she helps staff at the Membership and Donor Desk. 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 including synagogues and schools. For example, two weeks ago she spoke at a Catholic school in Elkridge, Maryland.

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

[Applause]

Susan, welcome.

>> Susan Taube: Need sunglasses.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you so much for being willing to be our *First Person*. I think we're going to have to avoid looking at the heavens for a little bit here.

>> Susan Taube: Good morning.

>> Bill Benson: Last year you were unable to join us because your time to be with us was right after the death of Herman. We're so glad to have you here this year. Thank you for doing this. You have so much to tell us. We're going to start right away.

You were just 7, living in your hometown of Vacha in Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933. After that, of course, your life and your family's life changed. Start by telling us a little bit about your family's life in the years that led up to Kristallnacht in November 1938, those years before that. By the time Kristallnacht happened in 1938 you were already 12 years old.

>> Susan Taube: I was 12 years old. Well, I was born in a small town, 5,000 people. We had a general store where you could buy everything to sewing machine, baby carriage, whatever was necessary. Because the surrounding area was mostly agricultural. This was the business end of the little town.

Things were normal. We had a normal life with our neighbors. As children, we were invited for Christmas, birthday parties, whatever was celebrated. We were always invited. And the same happened the other way. For our holidays we invited our neighbors. Everything was just fine until 1933 when Hitler came to power.

Things just changed rapidly. He had speeches against the Jewish people, Jews are our downfall. Everything was blamed on the Jews what went wrong in Germany. After all, it was after World War I. The economy wasn't a very good one. People didn't have work. It was a tough life at that time. But Hitler blamed everything on the Jews. So naturally people started to believe it. Started to be discriminated against and boycotted. The store was boycotted. They put people in uniform. As soon as he was elected, people in uniform stayed in front of the stores with a big sign "Don't buy from Jews," "Jews are our downfall." That's how it went

on and on and on forever.

>> Bill Benson: When I first met you, almost 16 years ago, you told me about the Schoen family and they had gone to vote. Would you tell me about that?

>> Susan Taube: There were elections. When Hitler came to power, he was elected legally. But when he went to the places afterwards, you received a little pin. You voted yes or no.

>> Bill Benson: For Hitler.

>> Susan Taube: For Hitler or against Hitler. Yes or no. So everybody voted yes because -- even the Jewish people because we didn't know what was in store for us, the future.

So life went on for a while. It wasn't too much change but soon enough people in the brown shirts and their uniforms stayed in front of the stores with big signs to boycott the store. And people weren't allowed to come into the store. So to make a living my father -- at one time he had a car. He had to give it up. He went on a bicycle in the neighborhood, religious, the symbols of merchandise, tried to do business this way, took orders. And then he delivered. It was a very tough life at that time. Not a very happy life, really.

>> Bill Benson: At some point you and your sister were sent to go to school in another town.

>> Susan Taube: I went to school in that town for four years, what was elementary school. After four years I graduated from there and went to what was a gymnasium. The educational system in Germany is different than here. It was like a middle school. We learned languages. It was a nice education but I was completely ignored, completely separated from all the other students. I wasn't allowed to participate in any activities whatsoever. I was in that school for about two years. I don't know if my parents, if my mental situation or whatever; told I had to leave the school.

Anyhow, I was sent away from my hometown to Frankfurt am Maim, to a Jewish day school. I lived there with strangers. My parents had to pay. It was a private school. They had to pay for my food and lodging and for the school.

I lived with these people. Actually it was nice until 1938 when the Kristallnacht came. It was organized by the government. The reason for it was -- about a few months before, we had the Jewish citizens who were not German citizens yet but lived in Germany for quite a long time already. Their children were born in Germany but they came and just picked them up, deported them to the border of Poland and just left them there. And among these people, a couple whose son was studying in Paris. When he found out what happened to his parents, I guess he wanted to bring the attention of the world to what's happening. Foolishly he went to the German Embassy in Paris with a gun, tried to kill the German Ambassador or threatened him or whatever. But they wouldn't let him in. So the secretary was in front of his office and he took out a gun and shot that man. He lingered on for about three days before he died.

During that date they organized which was later called Kristallnacht. I was in Frankfurt, lived with a family in an apartment. November 9, 10, hordes of people in civilian clothes came to the apartment just knocking down the door, not ringing the bell or anything. Coming in with sledgehammers, sticks and whatever. They demolished the whole apartment.

After they left, we didn't have a cup to drink coffee from, a plate to eat from, nothing. Nothing. It was wintertime already. We had featherbeds that were sliced open, thrown out of windows. Plants were thrown out of windows. The whole apartment was damaged. And they went from one apartment to the other. There were quite a few Jewish families living in the building.

And then they left. We were just stunned, couldn't believe what happened here. It

was cleaned up. We cleaned it up. And we went out to find new dishes, I guess. That's how it was.

In the evening the Gestapo came and arrested all male people, male persons from the age of 15 to 65. They were all deported to concentration camps in Germany. At that time we had three camps, Stutthof, Buchenwald, and Riga. You were deported to these concentration camps.

The schools were closed. The school was also demolished. The schools were closed because the male teachers were arrested. The female teachers, I guess they didn't feel like teaching either. It was just an upheaval. You couldn't concentrate on anything.

So I went back to my hometown which was Vacha. I came home. My father was gone. What happened there? The police came to my house and my mother answered the door. The police said, "I have to bring in a body. If your husband doesn't give himself up, I have to take you in. I have to bring in a body." So my father gave himself up. He was escorted by himself with the policeman to the Buchenwald concentration camp. He was there for four weeks. He was let go because he was a World War I veteran, fighting in the German Army in World War I. They let him go after four weeks. My mother had to send money for plane fare and he came home.

He came home; he was a broken man. He just said, "We have to get out of here." It's unbelievable what people can do to people. We cannot -- we hoped to go to America. That's another story. And we cannot wait for America to send us the papers. We have to get out of here.

Well, that wasn't that easy. As I said, we tried to emigrate from the time of 1936 but we didn't have any close family in America. You had to have somebody in America to vouch for you. You couldn't fall on the government. People had to have money in the bank to make sure that they can support you.

So family -- finally we found a relative of a relative. He said he would vouch for my father, let him come first; once he's established and finds a job, a facility to live, we will help you, will find help for the family to come over.

Well, that was in 1936. So when the papers came, he called the embassy in Berlin, the American Embassy and asked how long it could take for him. Because they received a number. Once the papers came to the Office of the embassy, you received a number. So he called up and found out how long it would take. They said it can take two to three years. Why two to three years? You have to wait and do the best you can.

Well, in the meantime, came to Stutthof --

>> Bill Benson: You told us your father, of course, had given himself up and then came out of the concentration camp. He would make his way to Belgium.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. He had to leave Germany. He couldn't stay in Germany. That was one of the conditions that he was dismissed also. So he -- he had to pay somebody to take him over the border. He wound up in Belgium. A lot of people had the same problem. The Jewish community in Belgium helped the people. They couldn't work but would give them food, lodging, etc.

He was in Belgium for about six months when the notice came from Berlin, from the embassy in Berlin, that he should come and get his papers so he could emigrate to America. Well, since he was in Belgium, he couldn't come back to Germany. So the papers went over to Belgium and that prolonged the whole process for almost a whole year. During the year then the war broke out but he made it out from Belgium before Germany invaded the lowlands in

1940, in the spring of 1940. He left in February of 1940 for America.

As soon as he came to America, he prepared the papers for us. And again the same process. Back to the embassy in Berlin. The number again. And waiting again. And in the meantime the war broke out. Well, the war was there. America was not in the war yet.

So we moved -- in the meantime, we were the last Jewish family to live in the little town. They made life very miserable for my mother. I was in Frankfurt in the school with my sister at that time. They made life very miserable. She had to sell the house.

Also, after Kristallnacht, everything was confiscated from the Jewish people. All of our bankbooks, everything that we had, what we owned, was confiscated. We received only enough money to live on, actually. She sold the house and never received the money because the money went in the same bank. We moved to Berlin. Hoping, hoping to emigrate to America. To the embassy in Berlin to move to America.

Well, Berlin -- again, a lot of the small towns the Jewish people just couldn't live anymore. They were discriminated against. They weren't safe with their lives anymore. A lot of people moved to bigger cities and my mother decided Berlin.

So we came to Berlin. We received a Jewish apartment which belonged to a gentleman. His job was correspondent for a German newspaper. But he lost his job in 1935 when all other Jewish people lost their jobs who worked for the government or had any positions of importance like musicians, teachers, in regular schools. They all lost their jobs at that time.

So he had an apartment. And in this apartment he lived he had one room. Another lady lived there. They had a room. We were four people. We had one bedroom, a communal living room, bathroom, and kitchen. That's where we lived.

School at that time, I really don't remember if I went back. If I went back to school, by that time I was 14, I can't really remember. If I went back, it was a very short time.

By the way, I'm 14 years old. I had to go to work. What was the work? We had to work in an old age home, myself, with elder people. They had no more families or whatever. We had to take care of the old people because the younger people, the regular people who worked there, who were supposed to work there, they had to work in the factory for the war effort.

My girlfriend was with me at the time. We worked with old people. We took care of them. We cooked. We cleaned. We washed. Whatever we had to do. Once these people got sick and were taken out from the home, they never came back. We never saw them again.

So eventually that home was closed. My next job was in a daycare center where, again, the parents of children had to go work in the factories for the war effort. The children were dropped off 6:00 in the morning. We had to be there 6:00 in the morning until 8:00 at night and the last child was picked up. So we took care of the children. It was sad, very sad actually. But it was seven days a week we had to work.

All right. So that was our job. For a while. And then by the time I was close to 15, 15 1/2, I was pulled out from there also and I had to go to work for the war effort also. I was placed with my mother. I had to work in a factory where they made parts for U-Boats. We were in assembly lines. The Jewish people were separate from the German people. The German people received their lunches there, food, and everything. The Jewish people received nothing.

>> Bill Benson: And I want the audience to understand that you were not at all paid for any of that. This is all forced labor.

>> Susan Taube: That was forced labor. But they paid -- they had to pay the government. The government took the money away.

Also, when the war started, everything became rationed for everybody. But Jewish people received special cards with a J on it, every coupon had a J on it. This reduced calories. And we could only do our shopping between 4:00 and 6:00 in the afternoon. We were not allowed in any store other than those two hours.

Not all German people were, how should I say, following the rules exactly. We had, thank God, a nice grocery across the street from us. He knew of what was going on. And since we had to work, he always kept something in reserve for my mother when we came home from work.

So we worked in the factory, took public transportation. By that time we had already our Jewish star on our clothes. It wasn't a pleasant way to go to work in the morning, to be branded with the Jewish star. You don't know who you're sitting next to or standing next to. You never know what a person can do to you.

>> Bill Benson: After spending time in Berlin, before long, though, you would be deported to Riga. Tell us what happened in the process of deporting you.

>> Susan Taube: Deportation started. I think it was September, October of 1941. The man we lived with had a daughter who had just gotten married. Not a young woman anymore but she got married. They moved to about a half an hour transportation away. He tried to call her one day and there was no answer. Called, called, called, called, no answer. After a few days he received a card from Poland, "Dear Father, due to circumstances we had no control over, we were resettled to this place here. Don't worry. We are fine. You will hear from us again." That was the only card he received. He never heard from them again.

The next came my girlfriend who had a beautiful apartment not far from us either. They received an official postcard, dear so-and-so, due to our difficult situations right now, we have to bring our German citizens from the east into the -- you will be settled. You can take with you whatever you can carry. If you have any bigger items you would like to take, you have to drop them off at a certain place and it will be shipped to your new destination. You have to report at this and this time to this and this place. This is it. So she left.

I went to say goodbye to her. I gave her a note, I said, wherever you come, put it in the first mailbox you see. Maybe when our time comes we can see each other again. So they left and I never heard from her.

Our time came in January, beginning of January. It was the same message. You can take what you want, what you can carry, etc., etc. And you be ready January 25. You will assemble at this and this place. You will be resettled.

Ok. The time came. My mother packed -- she liked to sew, so she had a nice sewing machine. She figured if I get to a new place, maybe I can do something with it, take the sewing machine, pots and pans, blankets, pillows, pots and pans, and we shlepped it over in the wagon to the place which was designated to drop it off which was a Jewish day school at one time. In the courtyard of that school we dropped everything off. Just put your name on it. We deliver it.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, am I correct in my memory that when you left the apartment, your mother had to sign an invoice for all of the things you owned?

>> Susan Taube: That came Friday night. The Gestapo, two Gestapo people, came to the apartment for the settlement. You know: It costs money. We need your bankbooks and whatever you have show it to us. They took everything away. She had to sign papers that on

her own free will she's giving it for the cost to the resettlement to wherever we were supposed to go. But that time we didn't know where we were going. So she signed the papers. They took all the bankbooks, wedding rings, watches; whatever we still had they took away. That's it. All for the cost of the resettlement.

So we went to the place. We took public transportation. It stood between two houses that couldn't be burned down when most of the synagogues were burnt down. Because it was between two houses, it was demolished inside but there were benches there. So we went in there.

Slowly, slowly, the place filled up. A lot of people came in. Saturday morning there was the Gestapo again. There were big tables. They called bench by bench, called down and give our name. Do you have any ID cards? Do you have any money left? Do you have anything left? You have to leave it here. So by that time we relinquished our only -- what we still had that's who we are.

After Kristallnacht, everybody had to give up their passports. We couldn't keep any passports. If you were lucky to emigrate, you had to pay 10,000 marks just to get out of the country, to get your passport back.

So they took the last ID away from us. Then we found out that we would be resettled to Riga, Latvia. At least we knew where we were going.

So came Sunday morning, very, very early. We all had to assemble on the street. There were trucks for people who couldn't walk. We had to walk to the railroad station which was the suburb of Berlin. And we arrived there. We looked for the train to take us. What we saw was the cattle cars. Like you see in the Museum here. They opened the doors. Inside the cattle cars were benches made out of straw. On the floor was straw. On each side of the walls were a bucket for your physical needs. No water, no food, nothing.

When the wagons were filled, about 1,000 people, off we went. 1942 was a very, very cold winter. There was no heat in this wagon, nothing. So we sat close together, actually. So many people in there. Anyhow, we arrived in Riga after about three days. The doors were opened. "Out, out, out. Out, everybody out." There were trucks, military with guns and dogs. "Out, Everybody out." Everybody assembled. "If you can walk, you have to walk about five kilometers to your new destination. If you cannot walk, you can use the" transportation – "the trucks here and we take you there." Well, the elderly people who got out, mothers with children, they used the facility of the trucks. We never saw them again.

We walked. My grandmother, mother, my sister and myself, we walked. There was ice. Everything was ice, very, very difficult to walk, holding on to each other not to fall.

Finally we arrived in the place, houses surrounded by chicken wire, double fences of chicken wires, military guns every few steps. We came into the gate and showed us where to go. Into this house they pushed quite a few people. By that time it was already dark. We couldn't see very much. We just sat there. No heat again, no water, nothing.

>> Bill Benson: I want to come back to you mentioned the ice. When you went into the little place they put you, even there everything was coated in ice.

>> Susan Taube: Everything.

>> Bill Benson: The tables, everything was coated in ice.

>> Susan Taube: Everything. Everything.

>> Bill Benson: A solid wall of ice.

>> Susan Taube: Everything was ice. We had no water, nothing, no toilets, nothing.

So anyhow, we waited until light. We woke up. We went outside to look around a

little bit. We see clothes all over the place, frozen food on the tables, frozen everything was frozen. We didn't know what was happening.

So anyhow, this was the Riga ghetto. Into this ghetto went the population from Riga, the Jewish population of Riga. They were concentrated there. After Germany invaded Russia, they invaded Latvia, too. The Jews were right away also taken to this place, leaving their apartments and concentrate in the that place. There were two big -- what was left of all of these people was 400 men and 100 women. That's all.

We came in this place and my feet were frozen. I couldn't even walk. I couldn't stand up. It was terrible. But eventually a man was in charge of the building and he came to our apartment, up to our room, and told us you have to go to work. If you don't go to work, you don't get anything to eat. You have to get a piece of bread, you have to work.

So I put on my shoes that I could hardly get into because my feet were really bad. We came out of the house. We had to assemble in a certain place. From there we received a slice of bread. And we were picked up by soldiers and taken to the city of Riga where we had to clean up the sidewalk from ice and snow so the population could walk on the sidewalks. We were not allowed to do that.

>> Bill Benson: Your job was literally to chip the ice off the sidewalks.

>> Susan Taube: And clear them.

>> Bill Benson: You were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks.

>> Susan Taube: No. We had to walk in the streets.

So they took us back to the ghetto but there was hardly anything -- I don't even remember how we lived, how we survived the few weeks. I cannot remember it. But this went on for quite a while until it got warmer.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, I know we won't have time today for you to tell us a lot about your time in the Riga ghetto but you were there for almost 20 months.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: I think from February 1942 to August or September of 1943. And during that time you were made to do a lot of very difficult jobs. Before you tell us about leaving the ghetto, tell us about a couple of the other jobs besides picking the ice that you were made to do. One of them I remember is you had to go dig peat out.

>> Susan Taube: Peat moss. It was the summer of 1943. I had a job actually at that time at the German Air Force which was not too bad, I have to say so. Because I had some food there. So the rations my mother could use from the ghetto and I ate there.

There came a time when they took young people to dig peat moss in Latvia. Peat moss was used for burning. It was material they burned in the ovens, used for cooking, etc., etc. The job was to dig it out. There was a whole machinery there that it went through the machine, the conveyor belts. The stuff was put on planks, then on the belt. From the belt we had to carry it into the meadows and turn it over from time to time so it dries off so it could be burned.

This was a job where we were outside the ghetto. We were young people. We had an area where we could go swimming. We didn't have a bathing suit but we weren't ashamed to go swimming anyway. That lasted for about six, seven weeks. And we went back to the ghetto.

At that time in 1943, there was the uprising in the ghetto, uprising already. I guess the Germans were afraid it could happen also in other places, which actually at one time there was a resistance in our ghetto but they were caught. They killed them all.

>> Bill Benson: You were forced to watch people be hanged.

>> Susan Taube: Oh, yeah. If you were lucky, you worked outside the ghetto. There were compassionate people sometimes that gave you something to eat. But it was very dangerous to bring it back into ghetto because you were searched lots of times. They took you off on the street, stopped you and searched you. Before you entered the ghetto you were searched. And if they found anything on you that you weren't supposed to have, they took you right to the cemetery and you were shot. So that happened quite often.

At one time there was working in the harbor unloading boats, food for the military, which was stationed there. And there were some young men. There one time came lemons. They figured, oh, that's a good thing to sell in the ghetto for bread, change for bread or whatever. Put them in their pockets. They were caught. And six of the guys, they hung them. We all had to march by there to teach us a lesson not to bring home anything to the ghetto.

>> Bill Benson: I think in late summer 1943 you were brought back into the ghetto. You told me that you sort of knew -- I think your words were "I sort of knew what the ball game was by that time" and from there you were sent then to a concentration camp.

>> Susan Taube: The ghetto was slowly, slowly liquidated. There was always aktion going on. We had two hospitals. People got sick. If -- there was some medication available but still the doctors, we had doctors, they did the best they could.

From the hospitals, if you were there more than a few days and you couldn't go back to work, you just were eliminated. That was it. They were always going on -- what's that thing March -- March 14 I think. They came -- we had a lot of older people still in the ghetto. They came to their apartments where the elderly people were. They said, you know, we found a new place for you where you can be working in good conditions and you will be fed there; why don't you register to go there. So people were happy to leave the ghetto. They said: What can be worse than that? When they left, we never saw them again. It was just the camouflage.

>> Bill Benson: And from there you would end up being sent to Kaiswerwald and end up, I think, at a subcamp. Tell us about going there.

>> Susan Taube: The ghetto was liquidated. We all were sent, the people still able to work, were sent to Kaiswerwald. It was already a concentration camp. They were barracks, three high, three people to each plank, very little food. Concentration camp life. Up in the morning, 5:00, to be counted, to be counted, and stay out there in the rain, sunshine, whatever it was.

And some people were lucky they still could go to work. Some people could not. I have to say I was lucky. I was picked out to go to a place called Meteor where -- we had housing there. After work we did not go back to Kaiswerwald. We had a place to sleep there. They arranged -- we were 100 women. And our job was in that place -- it was a factory where they used to produce tires, rubber boots, etc. The facility was outside Riga. One of the warehouses was made into living quarters for the hundred women. We had bunk beds there. Actually everybody had their own bunk bed, which was very nice.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother and sister?

>> Susan Taube: No. My mother and sister went to different places and I never saw them again. I knew where they were but I never saw them again.

Our job was to repair platoon boats where they cross rivers, the military. And when they were shot up, they came to this place. We fixed them up. The job was a dirty job because inside there were snakes and whatever went inside the boats from the rivers.

>> Bill Benson: And you were dealing with very toxic glues. It was a horrible job.

>> Susan Taube: The glue was very toxic. I don't know what it was. So they gave us milk to

stop the coughing, nauseated and all of that; so they provided a little milk.

The place was not too bad. We were not so much under the gun there because it was under civilian control. Actually military also but the overseer was a military man from Germany. Food, we had food enough to live, let's put it this way. Not too much. No delicacies, nothing. Soup, soup, soup, potato soup, potato, that's it. And bread.

In this place we were for quite a while. Then -- what was good in this place -- I was lucky, actually. From fixing these boats they had to be painted. So three girls were chosen to paint these boats. That was in a big room, with big windows. So we had fresh air. We could open the windows. We painted the boats.

The other thing was, there was the office of -- who was it? Who responsible for this place. There was a radio. There was newspapers. And for some reason they left the radio on all the time and we heard news that things aren't going so good for the German Army. The Army was always on a successful retreat. That was music to our ears. The successful retreat didn't come fast enough. It came June -- June?

>> Bill Benson: Summer 1944 you were evacuated.

>> Susan Taube: The SS came from concentration Kaiswerwald, picked us up. In the meantime, also, we received our striped clothing. They prepared us for evacuation, I guess, for going back to Kaiswerwald. Until then we had our own clothes, actually.

They came and picked us up, back to Kaiswerwald. Back to Kaiswerwald. From Kaiswerwald about two weeks, we were transported to the harbor in Riga, put on the boat and shipped off to concentration --

>> Bill Benson: You were jammed, you told me, like sardines into the barges.

>> Susan Taube: Like sardines. At that time not only the concentration camp but all the work camps were located around the place came to this boat. They were all evacuated at the same time on one boat. We were just like sardines on that boat. We couldn't sit down. Just standing up. No toilet facilities, nothing. I just can't picture anymore how we survived really.

This journey, the boat left. I don't know because we didn't know if it was day or night, whatever it was. We arrived in a place. They unloaded us. There was a big meadow. They said, "Get out, out, out, out." So we got out from the boat and we were sitting there on a meadow. Nothing around us. Absolutely nothing but a little hill going through.

So eventually when there appeared -- what do you call these things? Where you transport coal in, barges, barges. Into the barges they pushed us. They couldn't stand up. We had to crouch because there was no standing room. And when we get out, we came to Stutthof. We looked at each other, we were all black. Because in these barges they transported coal and other things, too. We couldn't even recognize each other anymore.

From there they marched us to the concentration camp, extermination camp called Stutthof. Big sign, live flowers, beautiful landscaping. Well, you walked in for about 100, 200 yards, you saw barracks, fence, stones, nothing. People walking around, walking, huddling. A terrible sight. And, again we were pushed in the barrack. The barracks had three layers, up, just planks. We lived on these planks.

In the morning was out -- out from the barracks. There was a trumpet to wake us up. If we were sleeping. We had to get up. We assembled outside of the barracks. We were five in a row deep, five deep, long rows. We were counted. Counted and counted and counted for about two hours because at that time there was the SS and there were SS ladies there. They were worse than the men. Very inhuman beings, horrible. We stayed there until they dismissed us. We received a slice of bread and some black coffee if you had a container

to put it in. If you didn't, you were out of luck.

We just went on. I was there for two weeks. I must say I was lucky to get out of there. One day they counted out 500 women and walked us out of the camp and to a train, a regular train actually, and transported us by train to a place what we later found out the name. So we arrived there. We got out of the train and they marched us to a camp. The camp was again surrounded by chicken wire, little huts made out of plywood. Into these huts 15 people had to go. We each received two little blankets. That was it for the first day I remember.

So we were five girls. We kind of kept together all the time. In the morning we had to go to work. The work was -- first we received a piece of bread before we went to work. The work was they took down the trees. It was a rural section of the country. They took down the trees. Our job was to dig out the root from the trees, put them -- push them to a certain place. I don't know how that worked anymore exactly. And emptied them out. Then they were pushed back up the hill again and filled up again. That was our job.

>> Bill Benson: Digging out the roots of the trees.

>> Susan Taube: Yes. In the meantime, we were full of lice. We had no facilities to wash ourselves. We had no showers, nothing anymore. Wherever we went, there was just lice.

One thing what happened there, there was supposed to be training ground for the German Army, what they were building there. Had to build boats and houses. I became a brick layer after a while. They needed people for this job. So the younger people they took for brick laying and older people out to the woods. That lasted for quite a while until it got cold and we couldn't dig anymore, couldn't do anything anymore. We had no heat in this little hut.

>> Bill Benson: As you said, these were plywood huts, no heating.

>> Susan Taube: No heating. No water either.

>> Bill Benson: And this was in the winter of 1944 and 1945 which was a particularly brutal winter.

>> Susan Taube: Before nightfall, yeah. Eastern Germany it was cold. No heat, no water. There was only one water, a big pump where we could get water. Again, if you had a container, you had water. If not, you had no water. Toothbrush, we had a little -- somehow we saved a little piece of soap. We brushed our teeth with soap. No toothbrush, nothing.

Anyhow, the wintertime we couldn't do anything, couldn't work anymore. They didn't know what to do with us. We stayed there. They took us then to one of the unfinished houses and put us in the basement. There was no heat either but it was warmer than the huts. One day they came to us and said: Well, we cannot stay here, the Russian Army is coming closer. We have to go back to Stutthof.

So they assembled us and told us if you can walk, it's about 120 kilometers from here, you can walk. If you cannot walk, you stay here and somebody will take care of you. Well, the ones who stayed behind, we never saw again. We walked.

Every day we walked so many kilometers. At night they pushed us in a barn. If we found some food along the way, we were lucky. Sometimes people provided potatoes or something for us while we walked. Water, we had snow along the way. Eat the snow for water. And if you fell behind, you were shot. You couldn't fall behind.

And that march lasted about 10 days. We came to a place, Buchenwald, the camp with barracks. Before we came, there were English POWs housed there. I don't know where they took them. This was our point of rest for a while. So we stayed there for about two, three weeks. Very little food. If they found a dead horse, they cooked it. Very, very little food. A piece of bread and that was all.

Came March 9. We heard big, big booms. Gunfire. We have to leave; we cannot stay here. Let's go. They didn't even ask us if we wanted to go or not just let's go. It was a rainy night. We marched all night. We marched. And in the morning we came to a place -- later on we found out. We came to a barn full of people, dead people, sick people, horses, chickens. They pushed us in there and they closed the door. And that was it.

Came mid-morning we heard big, big booms. We thought they were shooting into the barn and eventually they would kill us. But it wasn't to be. It was mid-morning. The doors were opened. Russian soldiers were facing us. So that was --

>> Bill Benson: March 1945.

>> Susan Taube: March 10, 1945.

>> Bill Benson: Now you're liberated by the Russians. What did that mean?

>> Susan Taube: Well, liberated by the Russians. What do you do? First you look for food. There was a village where the German people were ready -- running away from the Russians. So we went and looked for food. It was such an upheaval. The first food I found was sauerkraut. That was very good. If I didn't die then and there, I don't know. I still like it.

>> [Laughter]

>> Susan Taube: Sauerkraut. But eventually the Russians took us out from there. They took us to a farm, a German farm where the owners -- I don't know if they killed them or whatever, I don't know. They cleaned us up. Gave us fresh clothes, new clothing. We had to work in the fields to clean the fields from debris and planted potatoes, etc., what has to be planted in the spring.

That lasted about four weeks. After the four weeks -- the war was still going on. We couldn't go anywhere else, really. They took us to a place, a larger city in Germany. Again, most of the population had left. Wanted to get an apartment there. Most of the population left. We had to clean out the houses, what was on the walls we had to clean out. That was all taken to a big warehouse and shipped off to Russia.

>> Bill Benson: So the Russians were taking everything.

>> Susan Taube: Everything out. Yes. Don't forget; when Germany invaded Russia, they took everything the Russians had also.

That lasted for a while. We didn't cook for ourselves. We had like a communal kitchen. What would you call it? Anyhow, people -- stray dogs like us came in to eat. There was a Jewish man who was in charge, a Jewish soldier from Romania who was in charge of it. At that time we were six or eight survivors. We lived in two different apartments. We ate there. We got our food there.

One day a young doctor came in, a medic from the Russian Army came in into this place. He said that we are survivors and would like to meet us. We said, sure, why not. And one of our girlfriends was really sick, actually. We were happy to have a medic with some medication to look at them. So we met. That was my future husband.

>> Bill Benson: And Herman's story, of course, of what he had done was an extraordinary story. But he finds you. But to get you out of there, if I remember right --

>> Susan Taube: The Russians -- every night while we were under the Russians we had to go for political --

>> Bill Benson: Indoctrination.

>> Susan Taube: It was in Russian. We couldn't understand a word they were saying. But we had to show our faith. We had to be there. Yeah.

So we went there. And then eventually they wanted us go to Russia. Well, what do

you have to lose? You don't have any more families, nothing. What do you go back to Germany for? Go to Russia. You'll have a good life there. Right.

So my husband -- he wasn't my husband at the time. He organized the hospital about 40 kilometers from this place. He came where there was a big warehouse of medications and he came to get medications for his hospital there. He was still in the military. So we got to know each other a little more. One day he said, "Would you like to come with me?" I said, "Sure. Why not? What do I have to lose?"

It wasn't that easy to get out of there. You had to bribe some people to get out of there. One day he came. He brought a lot of vodka.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: And kielbasa if I remember right.

>> Susan Taube: And gave it to some of the Russian soldiers there. He covered me up.

>> Bill Benson: Like a stretcher or something?

>> Susan Taube: A stretcher, covered me up. He told them that I'm very sick and he has to take me to the hospital.

>> [Laughter]

>> Susan Taube: He took me away to the hospital. 40 kilometers away.

So from there he was still in the Army but eventually the Russian Army evacuated from there. The place was given to Poland, that part of Germany was given to Poland. We evacuated to Berlin.

In Berlin he was dismissed from the Army from Berlin. We went to West Germany to a DP camp in Berlin. At that time a lot of survivors came to Berlin at that time. There was the airlift going on. We couldn't stay in Berlin. So the American Army took us out from there to a place Sugenheim in West Germany. This place was a DP camp. It was barracks. Lived like the concentration camp but at least we were free and we were clean.

Since I was a German Jewish citizen going back 400 years with my ancestors I received an apartment not far from where my father was born. And this was a house that used to belong at one time to Jewish people also who were lucky enough to emigrate to America. A woman was living there. A woman with a young man who also from Czechoslovakia. She had to relinquish two rooms, give us kitchen privilege and a bathroom. That's where we lived.

>> Bill Benson: In just the few moments that we have left, your father, of course, had left much earlier to the United States. Tell us how you connected with your father and came to the United States.

>> Susan Taube: With my father -- until America got into the war, we were in touch with my father. I knew where he was living. I kept his address in my head all the time. We had nothing -- a few times along the way there were always -- take everything away from us. We couldn't even have a piece of paper left with us. But I kept his address in my head.

After liberation I prepared a letter that I'm here that I'm alive. I don't know what happened to my mother at the time. I didn't know yet. I figured when I have an opportunity, I'll mail it to my father. We were going back and forth. It was difficult but eventually I found an American soldier on the station one time. I gave him this letter to mail to America.

The letter came -- what I found out later it came to America to the address but in the meantime my father left that place. He wasn't there anymore. For some reason they didn't forward it or what happened I don't know.

So once we settled, after I met my husband and we got married and settled in a place in Poland, I sent another letter. By that time I guess the people knew what was

happening in Europe and they found my father and forwarded the letter to him. That's how I found my father.

>> Bill Benson: And as a result of that, you were eventually able to come to the United States.

Susan, one last question before we end today's program. When did you learn what happened to your mother and your sister?

>> Susan Taube: What happened, like I said, in Riga we were separated. I was sent to one place. My sister and mother were sent to another place. They were evacuated. The whole -- they also were working for the war effort. The whole factory was evacuated with the Jewish people. But, again, the Russians came closer there. They were going back to Stutthof. I understand my mother and my sister passed away there.

How I found out, because going back to Berlin there was a Jewish hospital that was still actually working for some reason. When the people came back to Berlin, they went to this place and registered there. Well, it was a year later that I came back to Berlin. I didn't find their names. So later I received a letter from a woman who was at the same place with my mother. She told me that my mother passed actually of natural causes. She's buried. Yeah. But my sister, she went back to Stutthof. She said if you went back to Stutthof, there was very bad Typhus and nobody survived there really. Nobody from that place survived there.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, thank you so much for spending this time with us.

I'm going to turn back to Susan to close the program in a few minutes. I want to thank all of you for being with us. We do *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August. I hope you can come back to one of our programs.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* gets the last word. So I'm going to turn back to Susan to close the program. But before I do, a couple of notes. We didn't have time for questions today, as you can see. We could have kept you all afternoon and just touched the surface of what Susan could tell us. But Susan, you'll stay behind if people want to talk to you? So if you don't mind, Susan, when the program is over, just stay there. If you want to come up and ask Susan a question or just say hi to her, feel free to come up on the stage at the end of the program and do that, absolutely.

As soon as Susan has said her closing comment, our photographer Joel is going to come up on the stage. We'd like you to rise at that point. Joel will take a photograph of Susan with you as the backdrop. It's just really a nice, nice thing to have.

On that note, I'm going to turn to Susan to close today's program.

>> Susan Taube: I want you all to smile.

>> [Laughter]

>> Susan Taube: I want to thank you for coming. You heard my story. It was a terrible time during this time in history. I hope it will never be repeated but sadly, sadly it is repeated in different places. Keep your eyes open. We live in America in a free country. Thank God we can open our mouth and tell people, no, you don't do the right thing. So just be aware. It can happen. It can happen. Germany also was a good country to live in until somebody came and changed our minds.

Thank you for coming.

[Applause]

[The presentation ended 12:02 p.m.]