UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON SYLVIA ROZINES
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>> Bill Benson: Good morning 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 today. We are in our 16th year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Sylvia Rozines, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2015 season of *First Person* is made possible by 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 serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in their program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater. In doing so, you will also receive an electronic copy of Sylvia Rozines' biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave here today.

Sylvia will share her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, there will be an opportunity for you to ask Sylvia some questions. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Sylvia is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

Sylvia Rozines was born Cywia Perelmuter to Jewish parents Icek and Chaja on January 20, 1935 in Lodz, Poland. Her father worked in a wholesale flour and sugar cooperative and her mother cared for Sylvia and her older sister Dwora, who was seven years older. This photograph of Sylvia was taken around 1938.

On this map of Poland the arrow points to Lodz.

Here we see Sylvia on the left, her father in the middle, and her older sister, Dwora, on the right. Sylvia was about 3 years old when this photo was taken.

In September 1939, when Sylvia was 4 years old, Germany invaded Poland officially beginning World War II. Within seven days German troops entered and occupied the city of Lodz. This historic photograph shows German troops entering Lodz.

In February 1940, German authorities established a ghetto in Lodz. Jews lived isolated from the rest of the city in an area enclosed by barbed-wire fencing. The sign in this German postcard of

Lodz reads, "Jewish residential area -- entry forbidden." German authorities began deportations in 1942 from the ghetto to the Chelmno killing center. The deportations targeted children but Sylvia's father managed to find different hiding places for her. Then in 1944 most of the remaining Jews in Lodz were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Sylvia's parents and sister avoided deportation because they were chosen to clean the ghetto. They hid Sylvia in a cellar along with 11 other Jewish children whose parents remained working in Lodz. In January of 1945, the Soviet Army liberated the 800 remaining Jews from the Lodz ghetto.

Sylvia's family relocated to a displaced persons camp in Germany. In this photograph we see Sylvia at the displaced persons camps in 1947. Sylvia eventually lived in Paris until immigrating to the United States in 1957.

After living 10 years in France, Sylvia and her father immigrated to the United States in 1957 joining Dwora and her husband Jack who had moved earlier to Albany, New York. Sylvia got a job in a dress shop. She married David Rozines, who was also a Holocaust survivor, in 1959. David worked in sales. They had a son Greg, who graduated with a degree in engineering from the State University of New York at Binghamton. Sylvia went to night school and then went to work for the New York Public Schools, where she worked for 24 years.

Sylvia's husband David passed away in 1999 at age 69. Sylvia moved to the Washington, DC, area to be close to her son. Sylvia has two grandchildren, Jeffery and Alyssa.

Sylvia began volunteering with this Museum's Visitor Services in 2014. You will find her at the Information Desk on Mondays. Sylvia only recently began speaking about what she went through in the Lodz ghetto and is now speaking in local schools. In collaboration with her niece, Jennifer Roy, Sylvia's story was published with the title "Yellow Star." Her book, which has now sold 150,000 copies, is used widely in schools and has been published in a number of countries including Brazil, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Spain. Following today's program, Sylvia will be available to sign copies of "Yellow Star."

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Sylvia Rozines.

Sylvia, please join us.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, thank you so much for joining us, for your willingness to be our *First Person*. This is your first time with us. So this is very exciting for all of us to have you here. You have just so much to tell us in a short time; so we'll start.

You were not yet 5 when Germany invaded Poland September 1, 1939, starting World War II. Before we turn to the war and the Holocaust and what happened to your family, tell us what you can a little bit about your family and community in the years before the war began.

>> Sylvia Rozines: I could say we had a very nice life. Family was very close. We celebrated holidays together. Always in our house because my mom was the best cook. My father had two brothers. We all got together. I can see my parents loved to get dressed up. I had beautiful clothes. I had my doll and a carriage. We lived a normal life. Never expecting this is going to happen.

My mother loved to go to the movies, American movies, because they were still not talking. She used to go off and see them.

>> Bill Benson: She liked the silent films?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Silent movies, yes. They loved to go dancing. We had a pretty good life until the German occupied.

>> Bill Benson: Your father worked in the flour business. Sales, is that what he did?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. The flour but also there were fruit, coming from different countries. Every week he brought two bananas and two oranges. This was a luxury at that time for my sister and me.

>> Bill Benson: And you remember that as a little girl?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Oh, yes.

>> Bill Benson: How large was your extended family?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Quite large. My mother's side, my grandma had seven or eight children. My father had only -- there were two brothers and two sisters.

>> Bill Benson: So it sounds like a lot of cousins.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Within seven days of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland, within seven days they occupied your city of Lodz, unleashing the wars of the Holocaust for your family and the nearly almost a quarter million Jews who lived in Lodz. Tell us what you can about what happened to you and your family once the Germans were in Lodz but in that time before you were forced into the ghetto, in the original part of their occupation, when they first came in.
>> Sylvia Rozines: I remember very little from that time. I know we lived in one large room and a kitchenette. Later on there were so many people we had to take in another family with one child, which divided the room with curtains and they lived on the other side. And that little girl became my best friend.

In the beginning we were getting rations, a little bit more food to eat. But food was the main thing, how to create recipes to make whatever they gave us. We had to wait in line. Sometimes you waited and it was gone. So that was the main thing, how to get food. When you're hungry, it's terrible.
>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, before you went into the ghetto, if I understand correctly, the family went to Warsaw.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about that.
>> Sylvia Rozines: When the German invaded, they decided Lodz is going to become Germany. Lodz had factories and wasn't bombed. Warsaw was destroyed. And they said when the Jewish people cannot stay there and we had to leave for Warsaw in a horse and buggy, at night. And it was winter. It was so cold. We arrived in Warsaw. There was no houses.
>> Bill Benson: Because everything had been bombed?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Bombed. The whole streets bombed. So my father decided to go back. And that was a good decision what he did. He made many good decisions during the war.
>> Bill Benson: He sure did.
>> Sylvia Rozines: And we went back to the apartment.
>> Bill Benson: You told me that he had -- besides making good decisions, he had several premonitions.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: And this was one of his premonitions?
>> Sylvia Rozines: He only tells us about the one when he and his brother decided to leave Poland before the Germans arrived to find a place in Russia and just them come back and get the wives and children. At the last minute my father decided, like a premonition, he didn't want to go. His brother decided to go. And during this he lost a wife and one child. Because the first thing the Germans took, the women who didn't have husbands.
>> Bill Benson: So his brother by going --
>> Sylvia Rozines: He survived but the wife and child didn't survive.
>> Bill Benson: If I understand, also, soon after the occupation as the Nazis began making more restrictions, one of the first things you had to do was wear the yellow star.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. We had to wear it on the front and in the back.
>> Bill Benson: On the front of your clothes?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Front and back. And the same on the back. We only had so many stars. So when you changed clothes, you had to change the star. Sometimes we were wearing it with pins and sometimes sewn up. But even after the war when we took off the star, the clothes were old. You could still see the shadow of the star. And I wouldn't wear the jewelry, the yellow star, because of this. I would wear any other but not the star.
>> Bill Benson: Within a few months after the occupation in early 1940, soon after you turned 5, you and your family were among the 160,000 Jews that were forced out of your homes into the Lodz ghetto. Tell us about the ghetto and what the conditions were like there in the ghetto for you as you started to describe you were forced into a very tiny space.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. It was very crowded. One little boy asked me one time what was the colors of your ghetto. It was gray and black. Because we didn't even see dirt. There was no food for them to find. No animals. It was no schools. So I couldn't go to school.

My parents went to work and the other parents on the same floors, there were two families. In order to have company instead to stay by myself in the house, the first year my sister stayed with me. Then she had to go to work. So she was safe. She was productive. She went with my mother to a factory that were making women undergarments. I was left alone. I always went to this other little girl who had a little brother in the crib who wasn't well. We stayed together so not to be by ourselves. Two of the parents came home and made some food to eat.

>> Bill Benson: When you say they went to work, that was, of course, that was forced labor.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Of course.

>> Bill Benson: They were made to do that.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Nobody was getting paid what we did. It was forced labor. They ask each person what was his profession before the war. So if he was a tailor, he went to a factory making uniforms for the German and suits. And my father, it was lucky that he was in the food business; so he would bring flour to the bakeries. They were baking black, round bread for us. You received that bread. I don't remember how long it had to last you.

So my father sometimes could get a little flour. The bags were made out of cloth. So sometimes you could make a little hole and get a little flour. And then they divided with the group. They worked by group. If one person couldn't take the flour -- they had large packets, and the flour was going behind the packets. And then they went to one house, scale, weigh it, and every man had to go home with a little bit for the family. I thought that was wonderful what they did. One time one person could take it and the other couldn't.

>> Bill Benson: And when they would take a little bit of extra flour, that was a great risk to them. Wasn't it?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Of course. Of course. Because the baker weighed this after. So all they could take was like a handful from each. The bag had 100 kilos.

>> Bill Benson: So just let a little bit out.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Like a handful, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Enough of them were able to get a handful each; there might be a little bit.

>> Sylvia Rozines: So my mother could make some noodles out of it, with water, of course.

>> Bill Benson: And as you said, trying to come up with recipes to make that little bit of flour into something different was a huge challenge.

>> Sylvia Rozines: And to find food. But in the summer it was a little bit easier. In the courtyard was cement. The men digged out the cement and everybody received a piece of land to plant potatoes. I only remember beets and potatoes.

>> Bill Benson: So you had a little bit --

>> Sylvia Rozines: In the summer, yeah. So we had a little bit of vegetables.

>> Bill Benson: So a little vegetables, flour and bread was basically what you had to eat.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: What you were there during that time -- you made friends with a couple of little girls, if I remember.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about them.

>> Sylvia Rozines: One little girl lived right across -- it was an apartment house. She had a little brother. He was always sick. I realize now that he passed away before the ghetto was liquidated. I just imagined he had leukemia, like. Because he passed away.

We were very close. Even my parents and her parents. When there was the liberation, they got sick, the mother and the daughter. And my father helped them to go to the train. He came home. He was so upset. He said, "I don't think they're going to make it." And the father never came back.

>> Bill Benson: These two friends, Hava --

>> Sylvia Rozines: Hava, I know her second name, Kaufman. Itka I don't remember. Itka lived with us. And the three of us tried to find some toys. One day, must have been a neighbor, we had sheets -- the German didn't take away our clothes and sheets. So she held up sheets and made little dolls, stuffed it; with a pencil she made the eyes, and clothes. So we played with those. We dressed them. We undressed them. We had something to play.
>> Bill Benson: At one point you described in your book when you found your doll had disappeared. Your doll had disappeared.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. With the carriage.
>> Bill Benson: With the carriage. What do you think happened to it?
>> Sylvia Rozines: I think that my father used to trade everything for food under the barbed-wire. Polish people lived there. They didn't have much. We had lots of clothes. So he gave some clothes and they gave us some food. In the beginning, the German didn't stay and guard the fence. But later on we couldn't because there was a German standing and he could see. And once you do this, they would shoot you.
>> Bill Benson: So your ability to try to get food and trading was gone.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Food was becoming the most important thing. How to survive. When you went to war, in the factories they gave you some soup. There was a kitchen. I remember everybody put the spoon to see how many pieces of potato. If you had three pieces, you were lucky. It was mostly water.
>> Bill Benson: As terrible as the conditions were in the ghetto, as you've described, there became far worse when the Nazis began deporting Jews from the ghetto to the Chelmno killing center in January of 1942, as you were turning 7. In 1943 -- the deportations began in 1942. In 1943 they became very intent on taking all the children. Once deportations began, what was your life like after that? What did you are your parents -- did your parents do to protect you? As you described to us, Dwora and your parents, they had jobs so they were safe for the moment.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Exactly.
>> Bill Benson: But you were very vulnerable.
>> Sylvia Rozines: At that time I really lived in fear. From 1943 to 1945 I lived in fear they are going to take me away. In the beginning, they used to come during the day with papers. They knew this family had so many children. The first time they came -- you hear noise in the street. People start screaming. So he grabbed me and we hid in a place. And the second time we hid in the same place. But then the German found out where the parents were hiding the children.

My worst nightmare is when my father -- there was a cemetery across our courtyard. There was a brick wall. I don't know how he climbed -- my father was very strong. He climbed the brick wall. I remember he grabbed me and pushed me over and he digged a hole and he buried me there and put the grass and the straw. The good thing was he didn't leave me there. I saw other children being left alone just sitting between stones but he made believe he's cleaning, like a cleaning person. The ground. And we stayed 48 hours until my sister came. She was a teenager. She says, "I don't know how I climbed that wall," but she did to tell us we could go home.
>> Bill Benson: For 48 hours you were hidden in the cemetery.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. This kind of left me very bad memories because after the war I had -- for 10 years I had that dream. It was coming like maybe once a month or maybe twice a month. But the same dream. I'm buried and the German is upstairs with a gun and my father stays next to him. And I say, "He's going to kill me" and I wake up in the same dream. I came to America, the dream stopped. I never had it. I started to talk to children and I was afraid this was going to come back but it never did. So that's why I was able to do it.

But I was a very vengeful lady, even in my 50s. I lived in Rochester, New York. I was asked to speak to schools. I did it one time. I had a friend who did it every day. I just couldn't do it. I just didn't -- I was upset. So I stopped.

When I moved to Maryland, my niece started to talk about the book, everything started coming back and I'm able now. I have no dreams, nothing. And I'm glad I can do it now.
>> Bill Benson: We are, too, Sylvia.

As you described, you hid a number of times in the cemetery.
>> Sylvia Rozines: The cemetery was the one time.
>> Bill Benson: And then the Germans realized that people were hiding in the cemetery.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: So what did you do then?
>> Bill Benson: Then the German noticed they're not going to win. More than half of the children out. So they decided that one family can keep one child. So I was the child. I received a paper. And every time the German came and we had to go out in the courtyard, we showed them the paper. I was safe. But many people had two children and they had to make decisions. It was horrible.
>> Bill Benson: That happened to I think one of your own relatives. Didn't it?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes, to a friend.
>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, you described in your book the times when you were alone at home, in the apartment, and you had nothing to play with, your dolls were gone; you made up games. Can you tell us about that?
>> Sylvia Rozines: About the games -- I cannot, to tell you the truth, we were so young. We didn't have any schooling. We didn't even start kindergarten. So what we did, we stayed together. I don't know if we talked what we talked. For some reason this part I don't remember well. But I do remember it was so cold in the winter. My father took some furniture to make a fire in the oven so we can be warm. But after a while there was very few furniture, like a table and chair, a bed he left. We had night tables and a nice little lamp. So when I was cold, and by myself, I used to put a lamp and a cloth, and imagine the sun is shining. That's what I remember.
>> Bill Benson: One of the things you wrote about in the book was looking at things from different angles just to keep yourself occupied, like laying on the floor and looking up. The description of that is so powerful in your book of passing the time.
>> Sylvia Rozines: The time. When we were buy ourselves. I was so happy when my parents came home. Then my mother started to make some dinner. I had someone to talk. But having the two little friends, we were always the three together.
>> Bill Benson: And then you lost one of the friends. Right?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Both of them. They didn't come back.
>> Bill Benson: Although your parents were able to keep you hidden, for the family to remain together under these conditions that became even more improbable in the summer of 1944 when the Nazis decided it was time they were going to liquidate the ghetto. There were 75,000 Jews still in the ghetto and they were going to send them all to Auschwitz-Birkenau. How was it that your family -- describe to us what happened that made it possible for you all to not be sent on the trains to Auschwitz.
>> Sylvia Rozines: They needed some people to clean up the belongings. Everybody left their belongings, furniture, beautiful things from before the war. They needed strong people to be able to go from house-to-house because the ghetto became a ghost town. So they decided to leave 800 people.

We were going through a selection. If you were young, you went left. That means to Germany. When our family stood before the German who made the decision, the leader from the ghetto, he said to my father, you strong, my mother is good, my sister but because of me we have to go left. We were going to go. We had one box packed and a bottle of water. And this is the second time my father had the premonition. He says, "I'm not going." And everybody looked at him. And he's crazy. They said, "You're going to die here." He says -- I went -- they put us in two big factories.
>> Bill Benson: Just explain a bit more. So you did not know, of course, where the trains were going to take you. So that's when people thought your father was crazy to say I'm not going on that train.
>> Sylvia Rozines: We didn't know what was happening. We didn't have any radios. We didn't know what was happening. But for some reason many people thought once you leave this, then you're going to die. You used to say, oh -- I used to hear people -- people tried to occupy their time. They used to say: Let's live a little because later we're going to fry. I am translating it. So we had something like they thought it's worse. And some people thought, oh, we go there. The German used to tell us the propaganda on the loud speakers: Give your children away. They're going to have food. They're going

to have milk. I didn't remember what milk tasted and what was an egg. So some parents decided to give away their children and some people wanted to go.

So it was the 800 people when they left to clean up. My father saw the factories had a basement. He decided -- he said to his friends, "I'm going to put my little girl in the basement. My name is on the list. And I'm going to stay."

Some of his friends and one brother listened to him. Some people were afraid to listen to him. He says, "I made the decision for me. Now you have to make your own decision because I don't know what's going to happen." And some did. And that's why it was children, those 12 children in the book, survived.

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us more about what happened when your parents and Dwora were part of the cleanup, 800 people during cleanup, because your father was so decisive, tell us about what he did about your cousin Nina, I believe. Can you tell us that?

>> Sylvia Rozines: My cousin Nina is alive. She lives in New York. We're the same age. One time her mother -- they were taking the children. We never knew which streets they were going to barricade. So it happens they barricade her street. And they took by force my cousin. And the mother came to our house screaming: They took Nina. Please help me, help me.

So my father and her father and somebody else, they used to put you in the hospital and in the hospital trucks came and took you away to Germany. They got out. They made believe they were chimney sweepers. She was very -- I was a tall girl for my age. She was tiny. And they got her out to the chimney. They brought her back.

>> Bill Benson: They took a wheel barrel in, covered with bags.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Like they're cleaning.

>> Bill Benson: They hid her in the wheel barrel and then pulled her out.

>> Sylvia Rozines: But in `44, her parents, they had enough. They thought it was better. They left in `44. The reason she survived -- she was lucky. She never went to Auschwitz. They put her with gypsies. And gypsies were allowed to keep one child. So her mother could take her. And the father went someplace else. And after the war, the father came, the first one back, and stayed with us. We were in the city, at that time had a large apartment. And then he heard the wife is alive. So they got reunited.

>> Bill Benson: So when you were going to be sent on the trains to Auschwitz not knowing where you were going, your father made that decision I'm not going and in the chaos he sort of slipped you all in to be part of the cleanup crew. And then you went to the --

>> Sylvia Rozines: The Germans, we had a Jewish leader. They told us, you go to this factory. I don't know how he hid me and we got into the basement and the other children. Must be at -- at night and took those children. And the next morning they went to work with horse and buggies. And there was an electric car. They loaded up their belongings and went to the train station and everything went to Germany.

But sometimes in the houses they found some food. It was summer time, I remember. Because the windows were open. And when you walked through the street, you could see papers flying, like a ghost town. They were going house-to-house and cleaning up. And sometimes we found the yards with still the vegetables. So the last year we were not as hungry because we were 800 people. And everything was left over, the flour. So we could bring it to the camp. There was a camp. There was a kitchen. The women cooked. So that was not as bad with the hunger but we were still afraid what the German are going to do with us.

>> Bill Benson: As you say, a ghost town. This is a place where at first 160,000 people were there and now there's 800 adults and 11, 12 children hidden in the basement of the one of the buildings where those 800 people were. What can you tell us about what it was like for you for months to be down in the basement of this building with 11 other children?

>> Sylvia Rozines: I don't remember how long I was there but it wasn't a long time. The German came and found us. They went down and took all the children. We marched to the house with the Germans

where the Germans stayed in a special house. It was called the red house. The parents were devastated. What are they going to do with those 12 children?

I couldn't understand German at that time. I heard them talking and talking. I had my little cousin Isaac who lives now in Canada and his mom said he should listen to me. He was really a good boy and stayed. He would hold my hand. And finally they allow us to go back.

My father knew the city so well. So he used to go through the backyards because it was winter and lots of snow, go through the backyard to see what the Germans are going do with us. When he saw us coming out from that house, he knew we are coming back to the camp.

The reason we found out why the German did this, there were not too many German in that house. But many people ask me: Why didn't you go? Young men, kill those German? They had a telephone. And every day they were getting -- or maybe twice a day -- calls from Germany if everything is ok. If we would kill them, hundreds and hundreds of German would arrive killing us.

But that's what they had the same plan. They made the men dig three large holes in the cemetery. The men came home. They knew it was for us. You could hear already bombs falling far away. I could see little tiny planes. They were very high. They knew the war was almost over. So they decided to kill everybody. That's why they didn't kill the 12 children. They knew in a few months they were going to kill everyone.

>> Bill Benson: I want to take you back just a little bit. When the Germans found you in the cellar after you had been hiding there, that must have been terrifying for you.

>> Sylvia Rozines: It was.

>> Bill Benson: They pulled you -- you wrote about they pulled you by your hair and pulled you up. If I remember right, the 800 adults stepped up and surrounded these few Germans. You described that in your book. They made it clear that they could not take the kids. And because there were so few German soldiers, they left at that point.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. There was very few soldiers there. They had guns, of course. When they decided to kill the 800 people, many, many German arrived, hundreds. Because it was the house and the house had -- all of those cars arrived. We knew to kill 800 people, you needed many soldiers.

I'm continuing.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Sylvia Rozines: The leader who was Jewish from our camp, he opened the door. He says, "Tomorrow we're all going to get killed." Just go wherever you wanted to hide yourself. It was January, very cold. Groups formed. Some persons in a big basement in this building. Some groups formed on the left. My father for some reason was the last one to leave. He couldn't believe this is going to happen. He made this man who worked the trolley go to the place where the German is to make believe he's trying out, something mechanical if they ask him. They didn't ask him. But he saw all the Germans in the cars. That's the time he decided to go.

So all those people -- he was like a leader. They said whatever you do, because they had their children, they follow. And he decided to go to the house across where the Germans were staying. He figured by the time they go house-to-house, this is the last house they will look. And he could see what was happening in that courtyard where the Germans are. We had the shade. He made a little hole and he watched. We stayed there maybe three nights. We only had bread. We couldn't make a fire because they would see the smoke. But the bombs were falling now very close. We were not afraid of the bombs. We wanted it to because with knew then we would get liberated.

So the next day was quiet. No bombs. We see this lady walking on the street. Most of the people now in the apartment said let's go out, we were liberated. My father was still scared. He said maybe they put it as a decoy. Then we saw other people coming. the Polish people were brought to the wires. They could cut them. The German were gone. They wanted the furniture and the clothes. We didn't have time to clean up all of that.

>> Bill Benson: So the Polish citizens, they were coming to get what was left in the ghetto now that the Germans were gone.

>> Sylvia Rozines: And we came up from the two camp buildings and just stood on the street to be happy that we are free. We saw the Polish people carrying everything. It never occurred to us to go back and get some. I don't know, some maybe young men went to the factories and brought out coats because my mother wind up with a coat to be warm. And the rest, we were like in shock. But many of the Russia -- they were colonels and captains, came and told us that we are the first Jewish people being liberated. So everyone started to cry. We thought we were the only ones. We didn't know other camps in Germany. They gave us chocolate, whatever they had for the children. He says -- they were really, really nice us. They said you can go and do whatever you want, on the other side. But we were still scared.

Should I said -- at that time I only spoke Polish. I became 10 years old the day after the liberation. And when I was standing there, I heard a voice, a lady's voice, saying aloud, "Look how many are still left over." And that was a shock to me. I thought they would be nice. Yeah.
I never forget because I can still say it in Polish.
>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, as you told us, you went back -- when you did go back to your apartment, you found that everything was gone.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Gone.
>> Bill Benson: What was left?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Pictures.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about the pictures.
>> Sylvia Rozines: The pictures were laying on the floor. We had large pictures with frames but they took -- because of the frames, they took the frame. There was nothing left in that apartment. But we did find the pictures.
>> Bill Benson: Some of them had footprints on them?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: And those include the photographs we saw. Right?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. The ones when I'm young.
>> Bill Benson: That was from then.
>> Sylvia Rozines: I gave all my -- Holocaust museum would only accept original. So I have a son who is very angry at me. But I gave away the original. They made me beautiful copies.

Because later on I was thinking for the future. My grandchildren won't know some of the pictures, the people. They only would recognize maybe my parents. They have nice copies. So I figured I wanted to do this.
>> Bill Benson: Your parents made the decision to not stay in Poland very long after the war. Tell us how they got out of Poland.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Then we got out of the camp and we looked for an apartment. First we went to an apartment in the ghetto. And then the Polish people started to set fire. When I say the Polish people, that doesn't mean all the Polish people. There was a clan who formed and they did it. So we decided to move out to the other side of town. We found a nice apartment where German used to live that was empty. You didn't need -- they just told us -- you know, there was no law at that time made. If you find an empty apartment, you have the right to go in. We were there. My father started again his business. And one Polish man who he did business before the war lent him some money to start. And he did very well. We had a really nice life, beautiful apartment, furniture, food.

In the beginning, the money, there was no money. So we exchanged -- we went to the open market. We gave some clothes and the Polish people gave us food. So food we had. But it happened -- I had a big problem. I couldn't eat that food. I wasn't used to it. So my mother did everything -- whatever I liked she fixed for me but I couldn't eat. It took up many years. Even in France. I just couldn't eat certain foods. It just didn't appeal to me.

Then we were doing well and it started. This clan went at night to the people and started to take a little of their money, beat them up. Our neighbor did it. Then there was a very famous city. They went and killed all the survivors who lived there. So my father decided it's time for us to leave. We survived the war and now we get killed after the war?

So we left at night. We left all of our belongings which the German didn't take away. There was a beautiful table cloth someone did by hand. I begged my mother. I will hide it under my coat. We had to leave like going for a walk. Of course no television. So in the evening the people used to take walks. It was normal. My mother put like two blouses. Nobody could see. We all went for a walk. And when it got dark, we went to the train station and left to near the border of Germany.

And then I don't know how my father found someone. He was transporting gasoline. He hid us behind the gasoline. We went to Germany, to Berlin. That was the first displaced camp. They gave us the shots not to get sick. That was American side. The best camps were on the American side. They were very nice. So we were assigned a camp and we stayed there. And food was not a problem. There was a kitchen. Women were cooking. We had an electric little oven you could do in your room. We waited. Which countries would allow us to come?

>> Bill Benson: Your father wanted to go to Palestine. Right?

>> Sylvia Rozines: In the beginning, no country allow us yet.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Sylvia Rozines: So `46, it was Palestine. We couldn't go there. My father got tired of waiting. We found out my mother had a brother who lived there many years before the war in Paris, France. We received a letter for him to come. Then we went also through the border. Not legally. There was no passport at that time. We arrived in Paris, France. I finally was able to go to a regular school, at 12 years old, and start schooling. And my mother language is really French. But Polish, I kind of wanted to forget it, which I'm sorry now because I get people and I can only understand --

>> Bill Benson: Was that a hard time?

>> Sylvia Rozines: The kids were so good. I was the only child in that whole school who was not French. They helped me. The teachers helped me. It was wonderful. That time we were starting to live a normal life until 1951. My mother at 45 got cancer. I lost her. I was 16.

So my sister, who was already married. She was in America. She loved this country. She came to take care of me. She took me: Come to America; it's so much nicer. My father decided we should be together. Then in 1957, I emigrate to America.

>> Bill Benson: With your father.

>> Sylvia Rozines: With my father.

>> Bill Benson: You came together.

>> Sylvia Rozines: We're very close. My father became my mother and father. So we did a lot in France. He loved to go to operas. He did it in Poland, too. So the two of us used to go often.

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, before we turn to our audience and ask them if they have some questions of you, your niece, Jennifer Roy, working with you, wrote your story about your years during the Lodz ghetto, during the Holocaust. Tell us what writing that book has meant for you.

>> Sylvia Rozines: It just brought back memories what I never thought to talk about. She brought up all the memories asking me questions. Later I decided I wanted to do this book for my grandchildren. I wouldn't be here but for my great grandchildren so they have the story.

I have a granddaughter. She didn't like me to talk about it. And she couldn't read the book. She was reading it, she was 16. I'm after her now to read it again. She's now grown up in college.

This book started the whole thing why I started to speak to children. I thought I had nothing to say because some of my friends had horrible stories. They were in concentration camps. When they told me my stories -- I had American friends, couples, and Holocaust survivors and two of them told me they were in concentration camps. I didn't talk about me because what they went through, compared, I had my parents to take care of me. That's why I was able to survive. Wouldn't be my father, of course I wouldn't be here. They never separated the mother from the child. You go right or left. So my sister maybe. But she was young. But this is our destiny, I guess. It happened, a miracle, he decided to put those children in the basement.

>> Bill Benson: Should we turn to our audience and see if they have a few questions for you? We'll do that a little bit later.

We have microphones on both sides of the aisle. We ask that if you have a question, wait until you get the mic. Try to make your question as brief as you can. I'll repeat it so everybody in the room hears it, including Sylvia. And then she'll respond to your question.

Who has a question they would like to ask Sylvia? Do we have any brave souls to start us off here?

A hand up back there, I believe. I think the mic is coming your way.

>> Yes. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us today. I have a question about just after Lodz was liberated in 1945, and also in Germany at the displaced persons camps, what was it like meeting more children, some of whom had different kinds of experiences, speaking Russian, Polish, Yiddish? How did you interact with these other children and tell the stories? What was that like?

>> Bill Benson: After the liberation.

>> Sylvia Rozines: In DP camp. After DP camp, some children came from Russia. The parents were sent there. They also spoke Russian. But mostly I tried to have -- talk to the ones who spoke Polish. And like Hungarian, we couldn't communicate. So groups formed, you know, who could speak the same language.

In DP camp, we were not afraid at all. We felt free. We were not afraid the German are going to come and hurt us. No.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Sylvia. Thanks for the question. I think there's another hand back there and one over here, too.

>> I just wanted to ask you your most fearful moment during your childhood.

>> Bill Benson: What was your most beautiful moment --

>> Sylvia Rozines: No, fearful.

>> Bill Benson: Fearful. I'm sorry.

>> Sylvia Rozines: The fearful moment was being buried in the cemetery. And since then, after the cemetery, I was always a scared child. I was scared even when I was growing up, you know, like being by myself in the house. When I lost my husband, I didn't realize that I was still this scared little girl. I had to have a night light. I lived in a house and I was not comfortable. And I said: What can happen? The Germans are not here.

But after the war, when we lived in an apartment, I was always scared at night they are going to come. There was no German there. But at night there were shadows from the street lights, went through the curtain. I imagined a German is standing. I had a tough time with this. I was very bashful. I couldn't talk to strangers. Now I'm just the opposite.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: We really know it was a big step for you to join us today.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: We're very, very happy you did. I think we have a question right down here. Wait until we get you the mic.

>> When you were liberated and you were in these camps, when you heard about Auschwitz for the first time and the concentration camps -- you had no idea.

>> Sylvia Rozines: No.

>> How did react?

>> Sylvia Rozines: That was horrible. My uncle came -- one of the uncles, we were in the same city. There was an office what you put your name, I'm alive; I live on this street. So one -- I remember it was a Sunday. He arrived. He still wore the striped suit. And another, and they started to tell us the story. So our story, we didn't say anything compared how they suffered. It was terrible. It was in shock, we were.

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, you told us that your cousin Nina survived.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Did any other family members survive?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. I had some cousins also who survived. Not the parents. They were like my sister's age. And I have in New York still a few but mostly they're passing out now. I am one of

the -- there are some younger ones than I. But if someone is younger than I, they don't remember. If they are 2 years old, I hear people speaking but they speak their family story what they heard.
>> Bill Benson: I'm going to -- unless there's another question -- oh, we have one here. Time for one more -- one or two more questions, then we'll close. We have a hand down here. I think one -- we'll go back here and then come down front.
>> How was it when you went to Berlin? How did the Germans treat you?
>> Bill Benson: When you went to Berlin, what was it like? How did the Germans treat you in Berlin?
>> Sylvia Rozines: When we went to Berlin, right away we went to the camp which was American. Oh, the German were afraid. They were afraid to do anything. They didn't have the food. So the German had nothing to do with us. There was American soldiers. If anything happened, there were MP around. No, they were too afraid. Plus they were mostly women and children. Their soldiers got killed, too. They were afraid. Because they knew what was happening. Because some of the concentration camps were very near. They just ignored it. So they knew they were guilty.
>> Bill Benson: And a question --
>> Sylvia Rozines: They wanted just if they could get some food. There was a dress maker. My mother and I needed clothes. So we went to the German and we gave food. Instead -- no money. And we bought the material and she made dresses. No, we were not afraid they will hurt us. American soldiers were all around. I never heard anyone being hurt, you know.
>> Bill Benson: Ok. One last question right here in the front.
>> What happened to your father? Did you stay with him once you came to the United States? Did stay close to your father?
>> Bill Benson: What happened to your father?
>> What happened to him in the United States?
>> Sylvia Rozines: I lived with my father until I got married in Albany, New York. And then he lived by himself. And my sister was there. We were visiting very often. He passed away at 77. It's too bad he was not alive when the book came out. Because after doing the book, everybody said, “Your father, he is the hero in that book.”
>> Bill Benson: If you get a chance to read the book, Sylvia's father, just a remarkable human being.
>> Sylvia Rozines: He was a terrific person to help. He had lots of courage. He was very strong. He was lifting up. That's why he was chosen to do this job, 100 kilos of flour on his shoulder. That's why he delivered. It was horse and carriage. He went from the bakery to the bakery. But having this job helped us not to be as hungry as the other people.
>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Sylvia to close our program in just a moment. I want to thank all of you for being here. I remind that you we'll have *First Person* programs Wednesdays and Thursdays each week until the middle of August. So I hope you can come back and join us.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. But before Sylvia has the last word, I'm going to ask -- when she's done, I'm going to ask two things. I'm going to ask you all to rise because our photographer, Joel, is going to come on stage and take a photo of Sylvia with you as the backdrop. So we'll ask you to do that. And then because Sylvia is going to be available to sign copies of "Yellow Star," we're going to want to get Sylvia up the aisle as quickly as we can. So let Sylvia get up there and then we'll have you folks leave.

I don't know if this is -- I'll do this anyways. You have a young guest here.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: She's read your book 22 times.
>> Sylvia Rozines: 22 times. Vivian.
>> Bill Benson: Vivian, 11 years old. Right there. That's wonderful.

[Applause]
>> Sylvia Rozines: I never expected my book to be so well-known. The book is used all over the United States to teach students about the Holocaust. They are teaching 12 years and up, and older. I am receiving letters from all of those children, from all over America, thanking me, read the story. All the 12 years old impressed that I had the courage. I was walking, picking pears, that was a good job.

And then I stole a pear for my sister. So everybody -- I even have pictures they draw and they send me. And some of the students come to the Holocaust museum with the book. I sign the book. We take pictures. Together if they want the picture together.

I want to thank you for coming and listening to my story. I thank Bill Benson so much for helping me to give this presentation. I have the Museum to allow me to be a volunteer and to explain. Mostly I like to speak to students but I have people from all over the world. I stay at the Information Desk. And because I speak French, I have many people, French, and I have another language, Yiddish, what I speak. So I can speak -- explain to them what to do in the museum. And we have people from all over the world are coming here. I'm so happy that you could come and hear my story.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]