UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON RACHEL GOLDFARB
Wednesday, August 5, 2015
11:00 a.m. – 12:02 p.m.

Remote CART Captioning

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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. Rae Goldfarb, 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 Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation and the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their first person accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our program will continue twice-weekly until August 13th. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests. It will provide information about our program when it resumes in March 2016.

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

Rae will share with us her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows we will have an opportunity for you to ask Rae a few questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Rae is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

I need to get the slides to come up. There we go.

Rachel Mutterperl was born to Beryl and Dina Mutterperl on December 2, 1930, in Dokszyce, Poland, which is now in Belarus. This photo is of Rachel, who is on the left, her mother, Dina, in the middle, and her brother, Shlomo, on the right.

On this map of Poland, the arrow indicates the location of Dokszyce. As part of an agreement with Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union occupied Dokszyce in September 1939. Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. When German SS and police began mass killings of the Jews in Dokszyce in 1942, Rachel and her family went into hiding. A short time later, Rachel's brother was discovered by the Germans and killed. Rachel and her mother sought shelter in the ghetto in Glebokie, a town north of Dokszyce. The second arrow points to Glebokie.

Here we see a synagogue in the Glebokie ghetto. Rachel's mother joined a group of partisans in the forest outside of Glebokie and became their cook with Rachel as her assistant. In the late summer of 1944, Dina and Rachel marched with partisans to the Soviet lines where they were liberated.

After liberation, Rachel and Dina left Poland for Italy where they stayed in the Santa Cesarea displaced persons camp. The arrow points to the Santa Cesarea displaced persons camp in southern Italy.

Here we see Rachel and her mother at the Santa Cesarea displaced persons camp.

In 1947, Rachel and her mother emigrated to the United States with sponsorship and support from an aunt who had settled there previously. These pictures show Rachel's official Red Cross documents.

After arriving in the U.S. in November 1947, Rae and her mother came to Washington, DC, but later moved to Brooklyn where Rae finished high school. Rae went to work for the Washington, DC court system after graduating from high school and attended George Washington University and Baltimore Hebrew College at night.

Rae married Harvey Goldfarb, a Holocaust survivor and a U.S. Army veteran of the Korean War, right after he left the Army. They have been married 63 years. She went back to the court after her daughter Lynn was born. When her son Barry was born, Rae became a stay-at-home Mom. She then went to work in the Hebrew afternoon school system.

Rae started a career in real estate in 1978 and retired 33 years later in 2011. Rae and Harvey's two children, Lynn and Barry, are both architects and live in the Washington, DC area. Rae and Harvey have two grandchildren, twins who will be 13 in this month and will be having their bar mitzvah.

Both Rae and Harvey have led active lives. Rae continues to play tennis weekly. Harvey, who is 90, ran six miles daily until he was 80. Rae says she is now "fully engaged with the Museum." You will find Rae here on Wednesdays volunteering with Visitor Services. She took a break from a portion of those responsibilities today in order to be with us for *First Person*. Rae recently spoke to cadets at the U.S. Naval Academy. Among the audience was a young woman cadet who is a relative of Rae's. She has also spoken at such places as retirement homes and local schools.

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

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Rae, thank you for joining us today and for your willingness to be our *First Person*. Thank you very much. We have so much for you to share with us and just one short hour so we will jump right in.

Before you tell us about what happened in your family during the war during the Holocaust, let's start with you telling us a little bit about your family and your community in the years before the war began.

>> Rae Goldfarb: My family was quite well-to-do. Both my parents were in business. My mother had a yard good store. Clothing was made by every family. There was no department stores, no ready-made wear. So business was pretty brisk.

My father had a dual business. We lived so close to the border. We were four kilometers from the Russian-Polish border and there was a military garrison, barracks, nearby. And my father supplied them with meat. And he also supplied them with some other products. He also exported some of the products through Germany, of all places.

Both my parents were well traveled. They traveled on business. My mother to Vilna, to Warsaw, to Lodz; my father to the German-Polish border. They had a very close relationship with a lot of the villagers around the area because of their business. They knew a lot of the people there.

My father died before the Germans came in. He came back from a trip to deliver goods to the German border in late 1937. He came back with some sort of an infection that the doctors could not identify. They did not have the modern medicine nor the modern antibiotics and he passed away. He didn't go through the horrors of the Holocaust.

My mother continued with her business and my father's business locally. The Russians occupied Poland in 1939. She had to close her business. She distributed a lot of the fabrics to families in the area, to villagers in the area, because she didn't want the communists to take it away.
>> Bill Benson: Before you continue with telling us about what it was like under the Communist occupation, just a couple of other questions. How large was your extended family?
>> Rae Goldfarb: My mother was one of eight. Her sisters and brothers all had families. I don't even know the number. I'm lucky to remember her brothers and sisters' names. I don't remember my cousins' names. Too long ago. I should have written them down. But, you know, hindsight is better than foresight.
>> Bill Benson: In your family, education was started. You started your education at a very young age.
>> Rae Goldfarb: My father was instrumental in starting a private school, a Hebrew school, basically, to teach the modern Hebrew language. They needed a number of students. I was enrolled at the age of 3. I had a governess before that so I was familiar with the alphabet and could keep up with the classes. School was not -- children were not exposed to school in Poland until the age of 7. So I was way ahead of the game.
>> Bill Benson: You were way ahead.

Did you in your small town, did you have interactions with the Christian population?
>> Rae Goldfarb: My family had a lot of interactions. I don't know about other families. I even remember spending Christmas Eve helping to decorate a Christmas tree in one of the families that eventually my brother was placed with. I don't remember much. I remember making ornaments out of eggs. We would blow out the egg, make a hole in one end, hole in the ear, blow to get the contents out, and then make a string and draw a face on it. I remember that.

I remember going to church with my brother and his -- the woman that took care of him. Both our parents were in business and we needed help in the house. So I knew all the intricacies of what to do in a church. That, of course, helped later on.
>> Bill Benson: Of course, Nazi Germany attacked Poland September 1, 1939, starting World War II. The Soviets attacked Poland from the east on September 17. And that's when your community came under Soviet occupation. You started to tell us what life was like under the Soviets.
>> Rae Goldfarb: Life had a big change because religion was kind of shunned. People still attended their religious-affiliated houses of worship but it was -- they had to do it more discretely. There was a lot of looting by the Russian soldiers. I remember my father had brought a modern alarm clock, a clock that was standing on a counter, and a soldier picked it up and tried to fasten it to his wrist.
>> Bill Benson: Like a watch.
>> Rae Goldfarb: Like a watch. They were looking for watches, of course. That's the small stuff that was hidden from them.

My mother always told the story about she had brought some night gowns, night wear, from probably one of the large cities. They were silk. They looked like dresses to the Russian women. They wore them in the street.
>> [Laughter]
>> Rae Goldfarb: You know, children remember funny stories.
>> Bill Benson: If I remember correctly, you said that the Russians thought of your family as bourgeois and there was some worry you had that you would actually end up in Siberia. And then later --
>> Rae Goldfarb: We wished.
>> Bill Benson: You wished you had ended up in Siberia.
>> Rae Goldfarb: The Russians, in order to confiscate everything that the wealthier people had, they came up with a program of deportation. They would tell them -- they wouldn't even tell them. They would come in and say, "Pack your suitcase and come." They would come at night. When that became known, in my house there was always a suitcase close by with some items. We knew Siberia was very cold, just from the word Siberia. So we were hoping to be -- we were hoping not to be deported. We didn't know the Germans were going to come. And since my mother was a widow at that time, we were the last on the list. Several families were deported. Some survived. Some didn't.

We were not deported. Now, of course, we wish we were maybe. Maybe some of us would have survived Siberia. Who knows?
>> Bill Benson: Were you able to continue education under the Russians?
>> Rae Goldfarb: Yes. School was open. We were allowed to go to school. My mother had a private tutor at home for our Hebrew studies. So my education continued. I was fortunate enough that I was not put in the grade by age but I was put in the grade by progress. So I actually had a little more education than somebody my age would have gotten by that age.
>> Bill Benson: Of course, things would change dramatically in June 1941 when Germany turned on the Soviets and attacked the Soviet Union. The German Army entered your town in the late summer of 1941. I believe by the end of 1941, Germans -- the Germans -- the Nazis forced you and the other Jews of your town into a ghetto. What do you recall of what happened when the Germans came in and being forced into the ghetto?
>> Rae Goldfarb: I remember the tanks coming in. I remember the German soldiers were throwing candy at the population. They came in as victors. Of course, the first impression nobody thought what followed would come.

The only reason we knew that things were going to get bad is my grandparents lived at the edge of town -- we lived in the center of town. If you know of any small towns, you know Main Street was the important place to live. And our house was on a main street, the main thoroughfare. It was a large house. The businesses were in front. The house was in the back of the businesses. It was gated off. The yard was gated off. It was a long house. I remember that. And there was a warehouse right next to it. That was the boundary, and the yard and the area with the large gate.

The Russians had put a family into our house. They evicted one of the families that were better off and took over their residence for their own use and they moved them into my family's house. The only reason we became aware of the German occupation was not going to be an easy one because my grandfather remembered the German occupation of the Second World War --
>> Bill Benson: From the First World War.
>> Rae Goldfarb: The First World War. Thank you. And they were very civilized. But he saw one of the officers, and he recognized him as somebody that was stationed in his house. He lived at the edge of town. And this particular gentleman and some other soldiers were stationed in his house. He tried to approach him. He waved him off. From what my mother told me, that kind of sunk into my memory, is that he came and warned my grandfather. He said, “This Army isn't like the old Army. If you want to speak to me, you can't do it on the street. Make a sign and I'll come and speak to you but I will not be able to converse with you on the street." And that gave us the first inclination that things weren't going to be good.

It was early in the war. The frontlines were moving at a very fast pace. The Russians were retreating. And the German Army just couldn't move fast enough. The occupation was a lot different than it was in some of the other cities in Poland. The Nazis were not quite organized in their programs. Shortly after they occupied our area and as they were moving on, they started to take control of the Jewish population. They formed a ghetto.

We can't show --
>> Bill Benson: No.
>> Rae Goldfarb: Ok. They formed a ghetto within an area. Our house happened to have fallen into the area of the ghetto. They selected an area where the synagogues were because there was an organized -- you know, the synagogues were organized around a plaza. There was a space in between. Like a park here. I don't know. You don't have any -- I guess in small towns you still don't have any churchyards that are big but there were about four, five synagogues. There were between 2,500 and 3,000 Jews in the town. It was a pretty sizeable town. There were about 6,000 inhabitants. And that is within the town proper. So they selected that area.

One of the boundaries was a river. It was called the Berezina. Most of the houses on the front had gates. So they had a natural boundary. And the back of the ghetto was fenced, barbed-wire fence.

The ghetto was not like what you think of a ghetto, being an area where a certain group or certain population lives. It was basically like a jail. They had guards. We could not go in and out at leisure. The only time people could go out -- not even go out but open the gates in the front and intermingle was on market day so that the farmers could sell their goods to anybody who had anything to barter or had any money. But the Germans took care of that, too. The ghetto was organized where they sort of said you're going to rule yourself. They appointed a commissioner. You understand. They appointed a committee.

They took a number of people out to work. They would ask the able-bodied population to come to this open area and they would select workers for their needs. Since the barracks were nearby and they needed -- transportation was mostly by horse and buggy. There were very few automated vehicles. So they needed cooks and laundresses, and people to take care of the horses and to clean the stalls and to shine their boots. So they would take a certain segment of population out to work, count them, of course, and bring them back counting them, too. At one point when it became apparent -- you know what happens when you're jailed? You try to think of which way to get out of there. So a few of the men on the way back from work took off. They didn't take off so they could see them; they would shoot them. But basically they stole a way.

When they came back and it was counted, it was found that some were missing. There were actually four that were missing. They didn't know about one so they thought there were only three because somebody when they started to count, somebody slipped in to make the count. The retribution was 10-for-1. They asked the committee to select 30 people as reprimand for the escapees. The committee offered themselves. They wouldn't take them. They asked them to actually select people of similar age to be the scapegoats, I guess you would call them. From what I learned later, they lined them up and machined them down. They killed them right in front of everybody. Of course, that intimidation made people think twice before trying to escape.

It was also apparent, at that time, it was also learned, that Russian soldiers -- basically they didn't want to fight. They laid down their arms and thought that they would become prisoners of war and they would be fed and they would somehow escape the fighting at the frontlines. However, they were very poorly treated. It became apparent to them that they would not survive. They were not fed because supplies were short. They did not transport them by any kind of means other than walking. Their shoes were torn. Their clothing was torn. They were cold. This was getting closer to winter. So they tried to escape. Those in the front, of course, managed to escape. Those in the back got shot or wounded. They left the wounded lying there. They would not remove the bodies. Guess who they put to removing the bodies. The Jewish population.

Aside from that, they also collected ransom. They would ask the committee to supply a certain amount of money, a certain amount, jewelry, gold, silver. It came down to where they were even collecting brass and iron. Everything for the war effort.

As the frontlines moved on -- should I continue?

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about -- you told me that they began what you called to diminish the ghetto.

>> Rae Goldfarb: That's what I was going to -- they started what they called a resettlement to shrink the ghetto. They said they were going to take the Jews to a larger ghetto because the frontlines were so close, supposedly for our safety. They selected a certain number of Jews. It became apparent who they selected. They started to select some young and some seniors for resettlement. And we found out later that they were taking them to a pit and basically executing them.

So the ghetto was shrunk. My mother started to worry about what would happen. In our house we had a hiding place. There was a space between the wall of the house and the warehouse. It was used in previous years, too, as a hiding place because of the wars that were going on. It was also used by my parents as sort of like a safe. We didn't have an iron safe. This was the safe, to keep some things that were of value. The only access was through the attic. You had to climb up and go in there. When it was apparent that the ghetto -- that they were trying to what they called the resettlement again, we went into hiding. We went into that wall, into the space between the walls.

There was a second sort of shrinkage of the ghetto. We came out. There was no place to go, no way to escape.
>> Bill Benson: When you would hide in there, there were several of you in this very small space.
>> Rae Goldfarb: Oh, yeah. As many as could get in.

When the ghetto was shrunk to such a point that it became so small -- we didn't have that much time already to hide. So the only people that were able to get in -- and basically, from what my mother told me, we slept close to the entry into the hiding place. We didn't sleep anymore. In the ghetto we slept across the bed because there were so many people to start with. Then when ghetto got smaller, of course, we had a little more space but we didn't sleep in our beds anymore. We slept close to the entry to this hiding place.

With the last -- when they finally -- the final -- what they called the final closing of the ghetto, we managed -- it came on very quickly. We didn't expect it. There was no warning at all. We heard the knocking on the doors. They didn't even take anybody to the plaza. The other ones they asked the people to come out to be counted. But this time there was no counting. They started to bang on the doors and asked everybody to come out. It was the middle of the night. We climbed into this hiding place.

My mother, my brother and I, my grandmother -- my grandfather was already taken. And about three other children managed to get in. Before the doors were broken down. We heard the looting. We heard the searching. My mother was very well-known. Everybody wanted to know -- the ones that came to loot -- where we were. She had jewelry, she had this, she had that. Where is it? They started to break things in the house, carry things out, arguing.

This was going on for about seven or eight days. It was get getting quiet. I guess most of the things were already taken from the house. It was cleared out. We thought we could get out and try to escape. It was nighttime. We managed to get out. We thought we were going to try to run for it but obviously somebody was still in the house. There was another hiding place nearby. My mother pushed us into the hiding place. She went in and the two children went in that were out there. My grandmother was to come after us. But the voices became very close and somebody said, "There's somebody." So she quickly covered the hiding space and she acted crazy. It must have been population that caught her because they called the Nazis and they took her away.
>> Bill Benson: Your grandmother. They took your grandmother away.
>> Rae Goldfarb: We stayed in that place throughout the day and I don't know how much longer. We had no food at that time. Sanitation was impossible. It was quiet. My mother said we've got to make a run for it. She knew what to do. Let's put it this way, she knew where to go. And we went for the river because she figured the river would be the least guarded.

We crossed the river and encountered two guards. They were local people that were given guns to guard the ghetto. My mother recognized them. They recognized her. She told them, "I have some jewelry with me and I'll be happy to give it to you. Put your rifles on your shoulders. Just let me and my children go."

She had one of those -- it was like a men's watch on a gold chain. She gave it to one. She wrapped it around his hand. She said, "Don't lose it. It's very valuable." The other one she gave some loose -- she says, "Put out your hands." They did. And as soon as she emptied her pockets, we ran. The two children that were with us ran in one direction. We ran in a different direction. She says everybody scatter but she told us where to run. And, of course, we were too young to know where so we kind of ran with her.

We went to the house -- I told you about decorating a tree. Very good friends. We would play with their children all the time. We were very friendly with them. He agreed to keep my brother. He had a little boy that was about the same age. So my mother left my brother with him for safe keeping. And she went to another house. She told him where we were going. She was hoping to place me with that family.

We were at the second house not very long when somebody came from that other household where my brother was -- I think she was a sister. I don't know whether the wife was a sister or his

sister. They beat up the fellow that was hiding my brother very badly. They found a Jew there. Needless to say it became very apparent what had happened. We found out later that his own mother-in-law had called the Nazis on him. They took my brother away. And the woman where we were gave us some bread and told us to go hide. She told us where to go hide. She said she will come when it gets dark and she will tell us what happened. We did. We ran and we hid.

I remember what it was. It was a bathhouse, a stone building. There were no showers and baths in the houses, believe it or not. The bathhouse was the place where people went, usually before the weekend. In order to go to church, they would clean up and put on some Sunday clothes. She told us go there because nobody is going to be using it for the next few days. I don't even know what day of the week it was. We stayed there. She came the next night and brought us some food and told us they took my brother away and, from what she heard, he was shot. She told us not to stay because they were looking for us. So we started to try to get away.

The woman that took care of my brother was the one that my mother thought of next because she was like a member of the family. Unfortunately maybe if we had run to her house but she was further away. It took us all night to get to her house from where we were. She told us she's afraid to hide us because now that it is known that my mother is escaping, that they would probably come to her house. But she said she would go to town and see if my brother was still alive. She would try to plead to give her the child because she's childless and she raised him from infancy.

We hid in the fields. The corn was pretty high at that point already. We hid in the fields and she went into town. She came back at night and told us that he was shot. She brought us some provisions. Again, day and night. The day we hid. At night we walked.

We got to a farm of a woman who was widowed. My father helped her keep the farm. She was French. She had no family. She married this gentleman and came to live with him on his farm. It was a rather large farm. She had two children. She had a son and a daughter. The daughter was close to my age. And the son was older. She kept us overnight but she was afraid to keep us because the farmers from adjoining farms came to help her with the chores. Her son couldn't do them. She and her son couldn't do them all by herself. The only place she could hide us was in out buildings or in her house. The farmhouses were basically one big room. The sleeping quarters were only blocked off by a curtain. So hiding us in the barn was difficult when you have people coming to do the chores.

The next day was a market day. She dressed me in her daughter's clothing. She dressed my mother in her clothing. They loaded the wagon for the market to take the produce to the market. Her son drove the wagon. She took a tremendous chance because if they would catch us, they would probably be put to death, too.

We got off in the marketplace, mingled for a while with the farmers there. It was more distant. The farmers didn't quite know my mother. She was dressed like one of the farmers. In the late afternoon when the people were coming back from work into the ghetto, we stole in with them into the ghetto.

>> Bill Benson: So you returned to another ghetto.

>> Rae Goldfarb: We went to another ghetto that was more distant with a much bigger town. There was a little bit of industry there. They took the people also to work in some of the industry.

The Germans were not used to the climate of Eastern Europe and Russia. They needed socks, wool socks, gloves, hats, scarves, sweaters. So they put the people in the ghetto to work knitting. They took people out to work. And they took people basically to the spinning mills because that's where the yarn -- the wool was being spun.

My mother knew some people in that ghetto. Even though they had already shrunk the ghetto some, they still had an industry to be able to keep them alive. We needed documents. There was no way to get documents because everybody had something to show that they were in the ghetto. It just so happened that one of the girls had been taken away and her papers were left at home. So I was made older. I was really born in 1932 but all my paperwork is 1930. Because my mother wanted to make sure that I would qualify to go to work. This was 1942. According to the paperwork I was 12 even though I was only 10.

>> Bill Benson: So at 12 you would be more likely to be allowed to work.
>> Rae Goldfarb: Oh, yeah. They took 12-year-old girls to work. 10-year-old girls they had no use for. So I had a way of going out to work which meant access to the outside. My job at the spinning mill was to tie the threads. If a thread broke, you know, from the spinning, I would have to quickly catch the two ends and tie them. My fingers became very nimble.
>> Bill Benson: Rae, I know you have so much more to tell us. In Glebokie, in the ghetto, your mother was determined to get out of there. She wanted to join the partisans in the forest. Tell us what she did from there.
>> Rae Goldfarb: All right. Mother was in touch with some of my father's friends through the marketplace. Since the Jews were allowed to buy from farmers, she was able to get in touch with one of the farmers that was a very good friend of my father's and also had a lot of fabrics hidden with him. And mother told the farmers, use what you need, sell what you need, and give me what I need. Basically a barter system.

At first she tried to organize something. She was very resourceful. She tried to organize a group to get out of the ghetto. In order to be accepted by the partisans, mother felt that if she brought along some people that were of use to them that we would be accepted, too. And there was a doctor that was willing to try to escape.

A tunnel was dug under the fence. The group that she had organized, we were going to try to get out through that tunnel and run for our lives, of course. But somebody got wind of it. A couple of guys went and used the tunnel before it was properly -- a group was properly organized and organized on the outside for somebody to receive us, some of the farmers that were friends because you couldn't run fast enough, unless you had some horses there. They went out and they were caught. The tunnel was compromised.

Mother decided no more trying to organize anything. It was just she and I. She and her daughter. She was determined she was going to save her child. She wasn't thinking about saving herself. She got this gun from my father's friend, a farmer, smuggled to her in a basket of eggs; straw on the bottom, the gun, straw on top, and eggs on top of it. The Germans were very finicky. They wouldn't do anything to dirty their hands or to mess things up. Any mess they didn't like. So eggs were a good thing to carry. You could easily break an egg and they wouldn't try to touch anything. On market day we were dressed in the farmers clothing and we ventured out and we continued on.
>> Bill Benson: With the basket with the gun in it.
>> Rae Goldfarb: With the basket, the gun there. Well, if we were caught, it was death no matter how. If we remained in the ghetto, we knew what would happen to us. If we were caught on the way, we knew what would happen to us. It was a bullet no matter which way.

So we managed to escape and to walk -- we were stopped -- there weren't too many vehicles -- by a truck with Germans. They saw two women walking. They asked us where we were going. We were going home from the market. They offered us a ride. Mother knew the villages, as she said, a close-by village. She's going from there. There are no roads. We're going to have to walk. We got in the truck. It kind of helped along we didn't have to walk as far.

We got off and we took off. We walked until mother knew more or less where the partisans were. Some of the people managed to escape and managed to get word back. Actually, a woman who was a midwife managed to escape. She became the head of the hospital. There was nobody else that knew how to stitch up wounds. We found out later. We managed to escape. We came to the edge of the forest and encountered partisans. It was a small group. It was actually a reconnaissance group. They agreed -- mother said she's a very brave woman and she has a gun.
>> [Laughter]
>> Rae Goldfarb: They took us in. Mother became the cook. I became the helper. I know how to peel potatoes, I'll tell you that.
>> [Laughter]
>> Rae Goldfarb: And fast. Really fast.

>> Bill Benson: So, Rae, it's almost so difficult to imagine. Here you are a little girl with your mom now hiding with partisans in the forest. What was that life like during the time you were with them?
>> Rae Goldfarb: What was life like? Well, a lot of it was work. A lot of it was work. Some of it -- there were other kids. They were under the protection of the partisans because the Germans were confiscating cattle, horses especially and cattle. They needed to feed their Army. They couldn't possibly provide as fast as they were moving.

If any of you have studied history, you know that the German Army was so successful they couldn't move fast enough into Russia.

So they confiscated a lot of things from the farmers. So the farmers were happy the partisans were there because that was some protection. They grow their cattle further into the forest, into clearing areas where the cattle could grays. And they could come and milk the cows. They could take care of their daily needs. And the partisans kept the Germans away because they didn't want to engage into anything. They were interested in occupying Russia; then they'll take care of the back side of it.

However, the Russian fronts kind of stopped. It was wintertime. The Germans were not prepared to go into the winter. They were extremely cold. The winters were very cold. We had winter from about October until Easter. That would give you an idea of how cold it was, a lot of snow. Vehicles couldn't move. There were no roads. Forget about roads. The roads were mainly cobblestone. They were pretty much pitted from a lot of movement. So moving wasn't easy.

Also, the Russian soldiers that had managed to escape -- and more and more escaped -- organized themselves in the forest. Some of them went behind the lines. The lines weren't that distinct. Some of them went behind the lines to tell what was happening and trying to get help. The Russian military sent some officers to help to organize the partisans into a fighting group.

For a while everything went along ok. I'm going to make it shorter. I realize we're almost at the time and we have a long story.
>> Bill Benson: And you have a very pivotal part to tell us about getting captured.
>> Rae Goldfarb: So the partisans were pretty much organized. The main thing that they were trying to do -- not trying to kill Germans because they didn't want to start a fight. What they were doing was trying to sabotage the movement to the frontlines, basically the train. If you know about trains, if you loosen the ties under the rails, you know what happens to a train? It derails. And when the train derails, they would lose some of the ammunition and some of the guns. Whatever they could carry away. And, of course, the Germans tried to right the trains. It took time. That way they sabotaged the progress to the front. The frontlines started to move back. They had a front in the front and a front in the back.

The Germans basically -- they were not surrounded but they had to fight their way out.

Unfortunately for me, I got sick with Typhus. So we got disjoined from our group because I was taken -- there was a field hospital set up further into the forest. This woman -- the reason I told you about this woman that was a midwife, she was in the forest in this hospital. My mother took me in to her to help heal me. Fortunate for me she took good care of me. However, we got disjoined from our group. And as the Germans did a blockade on the partisans, we were with no one.

In order to find the partisans, they started to move the population into one of the towns so that they do searches where the partisans were and dispose of them. They had to fight two fronts. Unfortunately we were brought to our hometown. We were in a distant village. The villagers did not know my mother but in the town she was afraid to show her face. And I had to basically go scrounge for food.

My head was shaved. I was dressed like a boy. They started to separate the men from the women of the villagers. They brought me up and argued whether I'm a girl or a boy. From Yiddish I knew quite a bit of German. I'm pretty good with languages. So being afraid of being separated from my mother I said one word that got us into trouble. I'm a girl. If I know the word, then I must be Jewish and my mother was hiding a Jewish child.

My mother, of course, ran out. She started to argue with them. No, I'm her child and I'm not Jewish. She's not Jewish. And my mother spoke mostly Polish amongst the population because they either spoke Russian or Belarus and very few of them knew of cultured Polish. So they called us the bourgeois, higher class. And even though she said she'd much rather be hate as a bourgeois than as a Jew.

So she came out and she told the soldiers that I'm her daughter. She started to argue with them. She said they put us under hanging tree. It was a bar with nooses. I'll never forget that. If she's your child – "if you agree that she is Jewish, I'll just hang her; however, you're going to be left alive." She says, "This is my child. I'd sooner you hang me first. I will not see my child die."

They decided that my mother was telling the truth and they let us go. However it became very unsafe of where we were. So as some of the villagers were let go, we ventured with them. Again, mother chose distant villages. However, in that village she was trying to find where the partisans were so that we could rejoin a group and be safe.

Eventually she managed -- I'm not going to go through how and what. We managed to join a partisan group and we were liberated in the summer of 1944.

>> Bill Benson: I think, Rae, it's obvious to everybody in this room that your mother was this remarkable, courageous, resourceful, smart lady.

>> Rae Goldfarb: Unbelievably, unbelievably resourceful. She had a very focused -- she was very focused on what she wanted to do.

>> Bill Benson: In the little time we have left, tell us about your liberation and what, again, your mother did immediately in the aftermath of it.

>> Rae Goldfarb: After liberation we went back to Glebokie, the larger town, to be, you know, safer. There was a group of Jews that survived, gathered there. We all lived in one house. However, she had some valuables hidden in our house. She actually had our house torched. When the partisans went out in their skirmishes -- since this was a garrison town, there were military stationed, she asked them to torch the house. She didn't want anybody to live in the house.

However, she knew where she had hidden some stuff. And we had to survive. We had to have something tangible to survive on. She knew where it was. She went to the town, first of all to see if anybody else survived. Because where do people go when they look for other families? They go to the place where they came from. However, there was nobody there. She dug up the few things that she knew where they were hidden.

One of the neighbors, who was a very friendly neighbor us, came out and said -- she started to ask her if anybody came back, if she knew of anybody, who survived. She said nobody came back. But the picture you saw of me, my mother, and my brother this woman gave to my mother. She said she picked it up from the trash. I still have it encased in plastic because it's so fragile. But I made copies of it. She gave it to my mother. She said, "I loved you. I wish I could do something but I can't do anything for you. You're welcome to stay the night but I don't guarantee you are going to survive because there's a lot of belligerence still going on." She gave my mother bread and my mother went on her way.

She came back to where we were in Glebokie and said we've got to get out. Since she was a partisan, she was accepted as a volunteer worker on a train. Basically she enlisted with the Russians. The train was going to different railroad stations to fix the water towers. The trains were running on steam. We were living on the train. Basically we had a corner with a bed, a palate. She took enough supplies with her. We had plenty of potatoes. We got as far with the train to Prussia. Conditions in Prussia were horrible. The Prussians mined everything. They mined even themselves. The military mined themselves so when the Russian soldiers came to remove the bodies, they would blow up. If you went one step off the path, you blew up.

Mother peeled potatoes. She was going to throw out the peels. We had plenty of potatoes at that time. There was a military, a Russian military, hospital train on the next track. The doctor came out and says, "Don't throw that away. I'll make soup for my people. We have nothing to eat." Mother gave him, of course, the peels. She gave him some potatoes. He says, "Look, it's very dangerous."

Mother wanted to get across, out of Russia, out of the Russian occupation area. She thought by going west eventually we'll get there. He said, "Look, there is a big gathering of Jews." We didn't know at the time he happened to have been Jewish. "I would suggest you get yourself attached to a train going south and get out of here because it's very dangerous." Trying to move the wounded as quick as possible out. He knew some of the people there. He attached -- got our car attached to a train that was heading there and we ended up where there was a gathering of Jews.

>> Bill Benson: Rae, we're going to close the program now. As I think it's probable evident, there's -- not only has Rae had to skip over an awful lot of what she went through, there is a great more to be told about what happened in the immediate aftermath of the war, their attempts to get to Israel, ending up in a displaced persons camp in southern Italy, and eventually making it to the United States and beginning a new life.

I'm going to turn the program back over to Rae --

>> Rae Goldfarb: Can I say something?

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely.

>> Rae Goldfarb: I was going to say if you want to hear the rest of the story, you know -- I left you in the middle -- go to ushmm.org. Look up Rachel Goldfarb and you'll hear the whole story. You can skip the first part and go to the last part.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: There's a lot in the first part also worth looking at that you did not hear today.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person gets the last word. So I'm going to turn to ray to close the program. A couple of things, first. One, when Rae is finished, our photographer, Joel, will come up on stage and take a photograph of Rae with you as the backdrop. We're going to ask you at that point to stand so that we can get this photo with you in the background. Because we didn't have an opportunity for questions and answers with Rae, Rae will remain behind for a little while. Ray, afterwards?

>> Rae Goldfarb: Yes. I'll be at the Information Desk, too.

>> Bill Benson: But before she does that, she'll stay right here.

>> Rae Goldfarb: I can stay right here. I can stay right here.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: We're going to tell you that if you want, please come up on stage and say hi to Rae, get your photograph taken with her, ask her the question you would have asked otherwise.

Thanks for being here. We have three more programs this year. We'll resume again in March 2016.

On that note, Rae?

>> Rae Goldfarb: I just want to tell you, I'm doing this. It's not easy; however, I feel that I need to honor my family that has perished and the whole town that has perished and a lot of other people that have perished. Unless we tell the story, there is no way we can prevent anything like this from happening again.

It is very difficult to understand what really we went through, especially here in the United States. I'm a citizen now. I know. We're exposed to a lot of wonderful things here. Value your freedom. Don't be intimidated by anybody. Don't succumb to any pressures from anybody, especially you children. Don't allow to be bullied into anything that you don't think is right to do. And you adults, teach your children to be tolerant. That's the most important thing.

This museum exists in order to prevent any such things from happening again and it can happen anyplace. It's happening in a lot of places right now. People that don't suspect of what they are going to face. A lot of refugees trying to escape. I know how it felt to be a refugee with no home, no family, no help.

Thank you for coming.

[Applause]