

USHMM First Person with Susan Taube
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>> Bill Benson: Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson, host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. We began our 17th year of the *First Person* program this past week. Our *First Person* today is Mrs. Susan Taube, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2016 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 firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our program will continue twice weekly 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 you will find in your program today or speak with a museum

representative after our program ends. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Susan Taube's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave here today.

Susan will share with us her *First Person* account of her experience during the Holocaust for about 45 minutes. If we have time toward the end of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Susan some questions. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Susan is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

We begin with this portrait of Susan Taube, born Susan Strauss. Susan grew up in a small town of Vacha in Germany, where her family lived for more than 400 years. On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Germany.

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

Here we see Susan and her mother, Bertha Strauss, together in a field near their home in Vacha.

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

In 1939, Susan, her sister, mother and grandmother moved to Berlin. Susan and her family were deported to the Riga ghetto in January 1942. The arrow on this map points to Riga.

Eventually, Susan and her mother were sent to the Kaiswerwald concentration camp, which the first arrow points to. There they were forced to do forced labor. In the fall of 1944, as the Soviet Army approached, Susan and her family were deported to the Stutthof concentration camp to which our second arrow points. This is the photo of the Stutthof concentration camp. After the war, Susan married and immigrated with her husband Herman and their family to the United States. In this photograph, we see Susan, Herman and two of their children in their family store in Baltimore.

Susan lives in the Washington, DC area. Two years ago tomorrow, Susan lost her beloved husband Herman, who passed away on March 25, 2014. Herman, whom we all miss terribly, was also a Holocaust survivor and had been a *First Person* guest. Susan and Herman ran their own small business, a store in Baltimore for many years before moving to Washington 42 years ago. She co-authored several books with Herman, who was a noted author and poet. They have four children, eight grandchildren, and nine great grandchildren, the five of whom live in Israel. The oldest is on her way to college, and the youngest is 6 weeks old, named for Herman. A 10th great grandchild is due imminently in Israel. Susan is active with the Holocaust Survivors Association and volunteers weekly here at this museum. You will find her here on Tuesdays when she helps staff at the membership and donor desk. Susan also speaks frequently at synagogues and schools. For example, speaking recently at a Catholic school in nearby Elkridge, Maryland.

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

[Applause]

I might mention that in January, Susan celebrated a milestone birthday, her 90th birthday.

[Applause]

>> Susan Taube: No, 90.

>> Bill Benson: 90.

[Laughter]

Susan, thank you for joining us, and your willingness to be our *First Person*. In our short period of time, you have so much to tell us. We'll start. You were just 7 and living in the small town of Vacha in Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933. After that, your life and that of your family changed dramatically. Let's begin first with you telling us a little about your family and what it was like in the years leading up to Kristallnacht.

>> Susan Taube: Well, I was 7 years old when Hitler came to power. I was until this time life was normal for us, very normal. We had a store. My mother. I had a sister. My mother's mother used to live with us. Life went on very normal, until Hitler came to power.

Right away, as soon as he came, there were people in uniforms, standing in front of the store, wouldn't let customers into the place to buy. Commerce completely died down in the store. So my father took to going to the neighborhood, because it was mostly farm country around the little town. He was like a peddler, selling and delivering. This went on for quite a while, until it came a time that even this wasn't possible anymore, because people didn't want to be seen, to be known that they buy from Jews anymore.

Anyhow, the business was closed. My mother, in the meantime, came Kristallnacht and my father was arrested, and he was sent to a concentration camp, Buchenwald.

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about what happened after Kristallnacht, let me ask you a couple of other questions, if I can.

>> Susan Taube: About Kristallnacht?

>> Bill Benson: About events leading up to that. When vandalism began happening to property, at first the insurance, you told me the insurance would pay for it, but after a while that stopped.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah, we had to pay our own damages. Kristallnacht happened. In 1938, suddenly people who were not German citizens, were in Germany, came from Poland, Romania, whatever, they're picked up at night and without any warning, without anything, put on trains and dumped on the border of Poland.

A young man, who was among them, he was studying in Paris. When he found out what happened to his parents, he got very upset about it, and wanted to bring the attention of what happened to the world. Foolishly, he took a gun, entered the German Embassy in Paris and shot the secretary there.

So after 24 hours, then the secretary died, and during the time the government organized Buchenwald, what was later called Kristallnacht. People at that time, I couldn't go to school in my hometown anymore. Five Jewish children, we had to leave the school system. I was with my sister, one of them at that time.

They came to the apartment without ringing the doorbell or anything, just knocked down the door, came in, and demolished the whole apartment. There wasn't a cup left, a plate left to eat or drink from, nothing. Most of the men from age 16 to 65 were taken to concentration camps. Among them was my father.

My father was let go after four weeks because he was a veteran of World War I, was fighting in the German Army, so they let him go. He had to leave the country. They told him he had to leave, cannot stay in the country. He had to leave the country. So he packed a little suitcase and he went to -- he picked up what they called, what do they call somebody to take you over the border?

>> Bill Benson: A smuggler?

>> Susan Taube: Over the border to Belgium. My mother was left in the little town Vacha. Life was miserable for her, that she thought or was forced to sell the store and the house, but never received any money for it. After Kristallnacht, all of our assets were confiscated and whatever was available, for savings or whatever, we had no control over it anymore.

We received each month a certain amount to live from and pay our bills or whatever it was, and that was it.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, while you were going through that, your father had escaped the country. Were you able, was your mother able to be in touch with him during that time?

>> Susan Taube: Yes, yes. After a while we found out that he made it safely to Belgium. He had just what he was wearing, nothing else at all. But he was there.

Going back a little bit, we did try to immigrate to America at that time. It was very difficult. You had to have somebody to sponsor you, so you wouldn't fall on the government. Even after you found somebody, and the payment came, we went to the embassy, once the papers got there, you received a number, and you had to wait for your number to come up.

We had a distant relative finally who was willing to work for my father. You come first, you establish yourself. Once you have a job or whatever, they will help you to bring the rest of the family.

Well, in the meantime was Kristallnacht. He went to Belgium. The papers, he was called to the consulate in Berlin. Because he was in Belgium, the papers had to be transferred to Belgium, and that whole process took about six months before he actually could leave Europe.

He left Europe just before the German Army went into Holland, Belgium, invaded there. So he just made it out. He made it out in February, they invaded in May, I think.

>> Bill Benson: I was struck by one of the things you shared, that when he was in Belgium, your mother would send him things because he had no money. You sent him shoes --

>> Susan Taube: One at a time. You couldn't send a pair of shoes, because they would be taken away from you. If you sent a shirt, you had to remove the sleeves. If you put the whole shirt, he wouldn't get it. A pair of pants, you had to cut off one leg. I also had to be -- that's how we lived.

The Jewish community in Belgium took care of the refugees. He was not the only one who was in this situation. There were quite a few, and the Jewish community in Belgium took really care of them.

>> Bill Benson: With your father gone, it's you, your mother, sister, other family members. Your mother moved you to Berlin.

>> Susan Taube: She was forced. We were the last Jewish family in that little town, and she was forced to sell and move. We moved to Berlin. The reason was because we thought since we wanted to immigrate to America and the section of Germany that the people who to belong to the -- had to come to the consulate in Berlin. I was kicked out of school when I was 10 years old. Yeah. My parents sent me to Frankfurt am Maim, to a Jewish school. I lived there with complete strangers. I

didn't have money for private school, food, lodging. They had to pay for that. Eventually my sister joined me there.

>> Bill Benson: What happened once you were in Berlin?

>> Susan Taube: Well, we received -- all these little towns -- we had to leave the little towns. Just couldn't stay anymore. In Berlin, whoever had an apartment, Jewish people who had a bigger apartment had to share, share their apartments with the people from other towns. And we were assigned an apartment. Owner of this apartment was a man, he was a reporter or whatever in the German newspaper, but that also stopped. All official employment, post office, banks, anything official after 1938 all Jewish people were dismissed from their jobs. All of them.

So we moved in with him. One bedroom, communal living room, bathroom, kitchen. My grandmother, who was with us, she had a cot in the bathroom where she slept. My mother, my sister, myself, we slept in one bedroom.

In Berlin, at that time I was 14 years old, I was no longer in school. All the Jewish schools were closed already. My first job was to take care of children in a children's home, like day care center, where the people, the parents dropped them off, like 6:00 in the morning, and picked them up 8:00, 9:00 in the evening. We had to be there 5:00 in the morning to accept the children, take care of the children all day long, six days a week, 6 1/2 days a week, because people had to work half-days on Sundays also. That was our job. Without pay.

>> Bill Benson: That was what I wanted to make sure you said.

>> Susan Taube: Without pay.

>> Bill Benson: Forced labor.

>> Susan Taube: Yes. The Jewish community, we had to do this.

Then came October, and very slowly -- no, it was not October. Yeah, it was October. It was they took me out from there, me and my girlfriend, we had to work in an old-age home. The old-age home was the relatives all had to work. The people were taken care of in that old-age home. That was our job there.

Slowly, slowly these people disappeared. As soon as they got sick, they were taken out and they never saw them again. I think it was worst in the old-age home than the children's home, yeah. OK. What happened next?

By the time I was 15 1/2, I was growing up enough, old enough, they put me out of this kind of job, and I had to work for the military industry. What did I do? What was my job? We were assigned to a factory where they made receivers for U boats and we stayed on the assembly line. Jewish people and German people were separated in the workplace also. We never sat together with anybody.

In the meantime, we also received the yellow star we had to wear. The German people received lunches and breakfast. We had to pay our own. Everything was rationed already, because the war was going on, so everything was rationed. Jewish people had to go to the police station to pick up their own cards, what do they call it?

>> Bill Benson: Your work cards?

>> Susan Taube: Card for food. Coupons. Coupons. When you went to the store, they knew you were a Jew, and you got only part of what regular people received. We received half of what the German population got.

The shop, we could only go between 4:00 and 6:00 in the afternoon. During this time there was hardly anything left in the stores, because people shopped all day long. Whatever was left, we had to take. You find some good people and men who owned the grocery store knew the situation what was happening, and he always kept something for my mother when she came in.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, told me when you were forced to make the submarine receivers, you were told if one didn't work that would be considered an act of sabotage.

>> Susan Taube: Yes, sabotage. And you would end up in a concentration camp. Yes. You could be seen as sabotaging it. I don't think so. I wouldn't, anyway.

>> Bill Benson: Of course, eventually, you would be with your family, you would be deported to Riga, Latvia.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. To have a job like this, I think it was in the late November. I don't remember anymore. How did we find out? The gentleman we lived with, he had a daughter who had just gotten married. Not a young woman anymore. She lived about half an hour away from him. He tried to call her, there was no answer.

He tried a few days, he couldn't think what was happening. Eventually, he received a postcard from Poland, from Lodz, Poland: Dear father, due to circumstances beyond our control, we were resettled here to this place. So the German citizens who live in Poland are being resettled to the German side. We are here, we are fine. You will hear from us again. That was the only postcard, whatever he got from her. Never heard anything again.

After this it started to get very organized. People received notices by mail. I'm just telling you about my girlfriend, my best girlfriend. We were actually like sisters. One day they received a notice,

the postcard, Mr. And Mrs., due to the same circumstances you have to be ready at this and this date. You will be resettled to the east. Whatever you want to take, you can take what you can carry. If you have bigger items to take, you drop them off at a certain place with your name on it, it will be sent to your new destination.

Well, whatever they carried they had and whatever was dropped off they never saw again.

She left. I wanted to say goodbye to her. I said, well, when our time comes, mail to me so I know where you are. I hope to see you again. And that's it. I never received a card. I never heard from her again, nothing.

Our time came in the end of December, I think it was, yeah, middle December.

>> Bill Benson: 1942, December 1941?

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. The same message, be ready at this and this time. You can take with you, etc., etc. That was Friday evening. They came, two gestapo people, and asked for our bank books, jewelry, what's still left. Also, jewelry was confiscated during Kristallnacht. We had to give everything up except our wedding rings.

If you had anything left, jewelry, whatever, bank books, cash money, you can take with you 100 marks. That's all you're allowed, because your money will be exchanged at your new destination, they told us. Everything they took away, they signed the papers that they received it, and they left. They left us enough money to take public transportation to go to the place where we assembled.

The place where we assembled was a synagogue that was not burned down during Kristallnacht because it was standing between two private houses, big houses. This was the

concentration point for all the people. Eventually, 5,000 people were in that place. That's it. We waited.

Next, we didn't know anything where we were going. Next morning, Saturday morning, there were only benches, no beds, nothing to sleep on. Only benches. Water was supplied, but no food. Nothing at all. They called us, table set up, the gestapo sitting there. They called people down and they said, well, you still have papers left? Do you have any passbooks left? At that time we didn't have passports. They were taken away. Ideally, we had the card with the J stamp on it. This we still had. You can leave it here. You get a new ID at your new destination.

What is your new destination? We found out we will be resettled to the city of Riga, Latvia. OK. Riga, Latvia. It came Sunday morning. We had to assemble in front of the synagogue. Early, early morning, before anybody woke up, there were the trucks, and they transported the people who could not walk, they were taken. We had to walk about five kilometers to the train station called Kaiswerwald, a suburb of Berlin.

We came to the station, looked for a train to take us. What we saw was the cattle cars, that you see in the museum. The cattle cars were opened up and inside were benches made out of straw. Straw on the floor. On each side of the walls was a bucket for your physical needs. A few bottles of water. That was it.

Once it was filled up, the wagons were filled up, I don't know how many people they pushed in there, we laid like sardines on the floor, no room between us, nothing. You couldn't move. Which was good, because it was very cold. There was no heat in there either.

So those doors were closed, and off we went to Riga, Latvia. Probably took three days, three nights. Very cold. Winter. It was 1942. January 1942, very cold. As I said, no heat, nothing. Anyhow, we arrived in Riga. The doors were opened. There was the SS. "Out! Out! Out!" Dogs, barking. "Out! Everybody out!"

we could hardly move, we were all so stiff from the travel. But we moved. We walked about 10 kilometers to your destination. You can go in the trucks and we take you there.

Well, the people who were in the trucks, mostly children, elderly people, we never saw them again. My mother, my sister, even my grandmother, we walked. We walked the 10 kilometers, on icy roads, slow, ice, cold, very, very cold. Holding onto each other, just not to fall. Terrible.

We come to the ghetto. Houses surrounded by wire. Double fences. Double wire fences. A big gate with sentries there on both sides with the guns. We were pushed in there, and pushed to a certain house. They pushed us to a house with no light, no heat, nothing. It was already dark by that time. We didn't even know where we are.

So in the morning we woke up, we looked around and there was clothes all over the place and food on the stove and food on the tables and clothes all thrown around, blood in the snow. We didn't know at that time what happened, but soon enough we found out that that was the population of the Jewish people of Riga, Latvia, and they were all concentrated in that place before we came, and in late December they were most of them murdered.

They kept behind 500 women and 4,000 men for labor. The rest were all eliminated. All in mass graves in Riga, Latvia. This we found out later.

Anyhow, into the house we went. Just looking around, after two days they came to us. He was assigned from the headquarters of the gestapo that they have to provide people for cleaning up the streets from snow and ice, and they should bring the people from the ghetto to do this kind of work.

So one man was in charge to organize that. He came to each apartment or room, whatever it was. In each apartment there were about 10 people. Just like sardines. They said you have to go to work. If you want to eat, you have to go to work.

We were assembled in the front of the house in the morning. We received a piece of bread, and they took us all to the gate of the ghetto and they marched us under the gun to the city of Riga, to certain places where we received shovels and ice picks and instruments to clean up the ice. That's what we did. It was a very cold winter.

>> Bill Benson: This was to clear the ice so that the Germans could walk on the sidewalks?

>> Susan Taube: Yes. The population. Not only the Germans.

>> Bill Benson: But you were not allowed to walk?

>> Susan Taube: We were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks. We had to walk on the streets.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind, when I first met you 16 years ago, you told me about this, you described that scene when you entered the ghetto. That in my mind I still can't almost imagine it, where everything was covered in ice.

>> Susan Taube: Everything.

>> Bill Benson: You were forced into the room, the tables were coated in ice. There was leftover food. There was clothing, all under sheets of ice.

>> Susan Taube: Sheets of ice, yeah. This didn't change until late March or beginning April. It was a very, very cold winter. Really cold.

>> Bill Benson: You would stay in the Riga ghetto about 20 months, and were forced to do many different kinds of things.

>> Susan Taube: Well, after this job finished, the ice was gone, the snow was gone, my next job was working for the Luftwaffe, Air Force, which wasn't so bad actually. We had to clean the offices where they're living. They confiscated the most beautiful houses in Riga. We were picked up in the morning by the soldier, always under the gun, marched to the place of work, then we had to work all day to clean the houses, do the laundry, whatever had to be done, help in the kitchen sometimes, which was good. At least we get some food there. That was good. Because the ghetto supplied very, very little food. Very little. We received some bread. We sometimes would receive a little bit of vegetables. And horse meat. Horse meat we got. But there was no place to cook it, because we had no facilities to cook anything.

One member came -- how should I say? I remember he collected little scraps of metal and made little stoves. While we were working in the street -- walking in the street, we saw a piece of wood, we picked it up and took it home to cook on this little stove.

>> Bill Benson: One of the things you shared with me, Susan, despite all that awfulness, the Jews in the ghetto tried to make life as normal as you could. You even named your streets in there.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. We organized a school. There were still children there that were saved. We organized a school. We even had councils. Yes, we had, thanks to the Latvian Jews, we had

instruments, we had concerts even. One time even the commandant of the ghetto, a high officer of the gestapo, came to listen to it.

This was also the exceptions. Exception to the rule, believe me. Even one day what happened in the ghetto, well, the Latvian Jews were mostly young people left behind. They grew up in freedom. They didn't realize what the Nazis can do. They organized a resistance in the ghetto. But it was discovered, and whoever was participating in it was killed. They called them one day, and we have an organization, we have to discuss things, the commandant from the organization called them together and then the gestapo came in, and marched them to the place and shot them all down. That was it. So that took care of the resistance.

After this the ghetto was liquidated because it can happen again and the ghetto was liquidated. Also the Russians came closer. We were selected. Selections were all the time. There were old people, sick people, we had a hospital there, but no medication. Whatever little medication was, there were very sick people, and after two days if you didn't get out of the hospital you disappeared.

>> Bill Benson: At one point you said they, to get rid of the elderly people they would say, We're going to send you to a fish factory where you can work, where you're inside, it's warmer, you will have better food.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah, that was after we were three months in the ghetto. At that time, a lot of elderly people were still there, they couldn't go to work in the city. Each house had somebody what you called the caretaker. He knew the people who lived there. The gestapo came to the caretaker, said how many people you have of a certain age? He had to tell them. One day they came, they said, listen, you're not useful here, we will send you to a fish factory where you can work in a fish factory,

you can clean the fish and can, whatever you have to do. You will be taken care of there. People were happy to go, but they never went to the fish factory. This he went to the cemetery. That's it.

>> Bill Benson: In 1943, when they liquidated the ghetto, you were sent to several concentration camps, Kaiswerwald, then to a place called Mitiom. Tell us about Mitior.

>> Susan Taube: After the Russian front came closer, the concentration camp was liquidated. I went to Kaiswerwald two weeks. I was one of the luckier ones. They came, when we stood -- every morning, you got to get up 5:00 in the morning, stand outside the barracks and be counted. Counted for 2, 3 hours sometimes. You had to stay there. Rain, sunshine, whatever it was. One day when I was among the lucky ones that came, they counted up 200 women and we were put on trucks. We didn't know where we were going. It wasn't 200. No, not that many. Maybe 100.

We were taken to a place called Mitior, which was a Jewish old factory that they used to make tires for cars, boots, everything made from rubber. That was the factory. And we were taken to that factory.

This factory, the Germans took over. They brought in --

>> Bill Benson: Pontoon boats.

>> Susan Taube: Right, to get the cars or trucks over. They were damaged, shot up, they came to the factory and we had to repair them.

They came to this factory. Inside were mostly frogs, snakes, whatever. That was the job of the few men who worked there. They had to clean it out. Then we came into the factory. We had big, big long tables, they put them on the tables, and we had to glue them together.

>> Bill Benson: It was horrible work, because you're dealing with toxic glues.

>> Susan Taube: Toxic glue. A lot of people started to cough and got sick. But we were already told to do this, and it was important work for them at this time. So they got us, they supplied us a cup of milk each day to counteract the poison in our lungs. But I was lucky again. After the boats were all fixed up, ready to be put in action, they had to be painted and water proofed again. So that was my next job. We were assigned to do that.

That was in a room, nice room, back room with windows. What's good about it was that the officer, the overseer of the operation, the office was in that place. It was closed in with glass, but the door was open. There was a radio, and there were newspapers, and we knew, we found out what's going on actually. This gave us a little hope to go from day to day.

>> Bill Benson: You knew the Germans lost at Stalingrad.

>> Susan Taube: Stalingrad was lost and there always was a successful retreat, always successful.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Successful retreat.

>> Susan Taube: Successful retreat, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Then by --

>> Susan Taube: But the successful retreat didn't go fast enough.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: In the late summer of 1944, you were sent to yet another concentration camp, Stutthof.

>> Susan Taube: That's the last of the advance. Came summer, of 1944, and the ghetto was liquidated. We were all put on a boat, about 3,000, 4,000 people on the boat. Standing room only. No one outside on the deck, everything underneath. And put to sea.

We arrived at Stutthof concentration extermination camp. It was August 1944. We were unloaded, put on the -- there was a metal there. We waited on the metal. There was a little river there. Eventually there came barges, coal barges, then in these coal barges we were forced to go sit, we couldn't stand up. Eventually we arrived at the concentration camp, Stutthof. When we disembarked, we were all black.

>> Bill Benson: Covered in coal?

>> Susan Taube: Covered with black. Because they were coal barges. They transferred coal in there.

Well, Stutthof. We came to Stutthof. Beautiful flowers in the entrance. Beautiful. You march in, about 100 yards, you see the dogs, the gravel, you see people walking around. We had already got that before Kaiswerwald. The people moving around and looking down, nobody looked up. Everybody looked down. They pushed us in the bog. The bog had bridges. Just bridges. On each bridge, like sardines, one this way, one this way, one this way. No blankets, just straw. That's it.

In the morning, 5:00, the bell rang. You got out of the barracks, you had to stand and be counted, counted. Sick people were taken out who couldn't stand straight anymore. They were taken to the gas chamber. And the rest, we just wait around for the whole day. Came noontime, again stand up and be counted again. Again selection. All day long.

About 8:00 at night, finally we could go into the barracks. That was it. Since we couldn't sleep in the barracks and couldn't find a place there, there were five girls, at that time we kind of stuck together, we laid outside in the sand. That was it. We didn't even go into the barracks.

In the meantime, naturally, no showers, no baths, no change of clothes. We were full of lice. That wasn't a good thing either, because a lot of people got infections and started scratching and it was not good.

That was our entertainment also. We took off the clothes and we tried to kill as much as we could. Five girls, we were lucky. After two weeks concentration camp in Stutthof, again, they came, they counted 500 women at that time, just marched in front of the ghetto. We didn't know maybe going to the gas chamber, we didn't know where we're going.

Out of the ghetto. Took us to a train station. Regular train this time. We went in the train. About two, three hours later we came to a place called Sophia -- I forgot already.

[Laughter]

Good for you.

[Laughter]

Sounds good. Out of the train we marched about two, three kilometers, not too far. We arrived at a camp surrounded by wire. Sentries all over. Barracks made out of plywood. Little barracks made out of plywood. Each barrack 15 women. Only women at that time. 15 women in each barrack, covered only with straw, nothing else. One little window in the barrack. That's it. Straw.

And once we were in there, we had to assemble outside, the commandant talked to us: You are here not to party, but to work. Your work will be to build roads and housing for the military. If you

behave yourself, that's what you actually said, If you will behave yourself, will you be treated all right. So do your job. Do the best you can. And that's it.

OK. So the next day we received one blanket at that time. The next day we found out, they divided us in different workplaces to go to, we were about, I don't know, about 50, 60 girls and one commander, and we went and we had to dig out roots. They were building a road and they took down the trees, and we had to pick out the roots from the trees, put them on the Lori, push the lorry to a certain place. Then the lorry back, fill it up again, the roots, whatever it was.

>> Bill Benson: To pick out the roots, you were digging out the roots of trees. Extremely hard work.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah, it was, with picks and shovels. Sometimes we used our hands when we didn't have anything. So that was our job for the whole day. What was the privilege we had there? There was also the military, the military and supply for the military went by us. Not too far away.

As young people, we went down to the wagons and we got some food from there. Carrots, potatoes, whatever it was we could eat. Then the military didn't bother us. It was really something else. So at least we had some supplement or food in the morning, before we went to work, which I received a piece of bread, that was it, nothing else. Water for coffee. And when we came back, a bowl of soup, piece of bread, that was our nourishment.

Again, a lot of people got sick from starvation and died. All right, this lasted until it got cold, then we couldn't do the job anymore because it was too cold to dig and too cold to lay bricks for the houses. So they took us out from these barracks, these little tiny barracks, and they put us in the unfinished buildings. They weren't finished yet, but the basements were there, and resided in these basements. No floors. Just sand. No floors. But it was warmer. It was warm. It wasn't that cold.

We didn't work anymore. We just sat around talking. Just got a little piece of bread, a little bit of food, not much for the day. That was it.

Then came February. The Russian Army came closer.

>> Bill Benson: February 1945.

>> Susan Taube: We didn't know what's going on at that time in the world. We had no idea. Because the military, they didn't talk to us. But the Russian Army came closer, and one day they said, Well, you know, we cannot stay here. That's when we found out the Russians are very close. We have to take you away from here. We are going back to Stutthof. If you can walk, you have to walk. It will be about 100 kilometers. You can walk. If you cannot walk, stay here, somebody will take care of you.

Well, we five girls, we talked. People walked, but people were really ready to give up. They said no, we'll take our chance, we'll stay here. Whatever happens will happen. We never saw them again.

So we walked. Rain, snow, cold, icy roads, we walked. At night, when it got dark, they pushed us in the bog. If we found something to eat, we received something. Otherwise, we had nothing. Sometimes we found along the way a potato, whatever. Whatever was edible, we ate. We ate it. We didn't know if it was good or not. Naturally, people got sick.

After 10 days we came to a camp called Gudendorf barracks. Full of people already from all the other camps, because the Russians were really closing in.

>> Bill Benson: This we now call the death marches.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. And that was the death march. It was a death march, yeah. At Gudendorf we heard already shooting in the distance. Big bombs, cannon fire. We didn't know what's happening.

They came to us again, said, You cannot stay here. The Russians are right around. We have to leave. We cannot stay here. I don't know why they didn't eliminate us right there and then. I have no idea. Maybe they didn't have enough guns or whatever.

But we marched a whole night again. A whole night. Icy cold, cold, very cold.

>> Bill Benson: One of the coldest winters ever, that winter of 1944-45.

>> Susan Taube: 45 already, very cold. We marched the whole night. In the morning again, they pushed us in the barn, full of people already. Old people, whatever was there, it was full. We just sat down. That's it. I don't know what's going on. We had no idea what would happen.

Any Howe how, morning, big, big, big -- anyhow, morning, big, big, big booms. We heard they shoot down the bomb. But it just so happened it was the Russian Army that opened the doors for us and that was the end of our, what should I call it? Misery. Maybe.

>> Bill Benson: It wasn't the end.

>> Susan Taube: It wasn't the end of misery. At least we were not under the gun anymore.

>> Bill Benson: Not under the Nazis anymore.

>> Susan Taube: Right. We went out. There was a German town and the German population was ready to leave. Because of the Russian Army coming in. They all had their horses, whatever, wagons, food, clothes, everything. So that's where we got our own food, food. The first thing I ate was bacon. And sauerkraut. Sauerkraut. That's what I found. I didn't die then and there, why, I don't know. I still like my sauerkraut.

[Laughter]

Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Your liberation day was March 10.

>> Susan Taube: March 10, 1945.

>> Bill Benson: Just over 71 years ago, a couple weeks ago.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah, yeah. I celebrated my second birthday. My second birthday. I will be 70. But reality is 90. But the war was still going on. Where do you go? No place to go. The Russians were coming, they said hey, you can work for the Germans or you can work for us. They took us in a wagon, gave us a wagon, and they took us to a farm. Big farm in Pomerania. First, they cleaned us up. We got rid of all the lice. They gave us a few days, then we had to work for them. We cleaned up the fields from the debris. We had to -- from debris. It took about 4 weeks and that was done. Then they took us, the Russians, to the city of Kaiserswald, which was mostly evacuated from the German people, and we had to clean out the houses, what wasn't nailed down on the floor, on the wall or whatever. That was all shipped to Russia. Clothes, appliances, whatever could be shipped was shipped, taken to a warehouse and shipped to Russia.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, our time is growing short, and you know I'm going to ask you this. You have to tell us how you met Herman.

>> Susan Taube: Well, while we cleaned out the houses, there was also a big warehouse for medication. And --

>> Bill Benson: Bayer Corporation.

>> Susan Taube: Big warehouse for medication. We didn't cook for ourselves. We were five girls, we had a nice apartment and everything, but didn't get supplies to cook. We had a communal kitchen. We got breakfast, lunch and dinner.

One day I walk into the kitchen, and the manager of the kitchen was a Jewish soldier from Romania. He said -- and he had a very sick girl at that time. My future husband was a medic in the Russian Army. He was a Polish Jew, but when the war broke out he went over to Russia and joined the Russian Army. The Polish division in the Russian Army.

>> Bill Benson: Serving as a medic through that whole time?

>> Susan Taube: He was a medic. He came for the medication. The warehouse was right across from the kitchen. He walked into that kitchen, and he asked the manager what's going on. He told him that here are five girls, survivors of the concentration camp and one is very sick, maybe he could have some medication for her.

He went to see her. She had scarlet fever, actually. While he was there, I walked in too. I wanted to see how she was doing. And that's how we met.

>> Bill Benson: There's more to the story. If I remember correctly, there's legitimate concern about women being raped by the Russians, so with the sick woman with you Herman put up a sign saying "This place is quarantined because of typhus."

>> Susan Taube: So they didn't bother her.

>> Bill Benson: Then he had to get you out of there.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah. Well, first, it wasn't right away love at first sight. It was kind of whatever.

[Laughter]

He came back again for medication and we met again. So then we became more -- we became closer. And he said, You know, I'm leaving this place here. I'm going to go to East Germany, with my unit to East Germany. He asked if I would like to come with him. I said, Sure. Why not? What do I

have to lose?

[Laughter]

But he -- that was against the law at that time. So what did he do? He put me in a stretcher, covered me up, took me to a tank. There was a tank. Told the soldier, She's very, very sick. Don't you touch her. I have to take her to my hospital. That's how --

>> Bill Benson: He had to bribe a little bit.

>> Susan Taube: Had to bribe with vodka. Few bottles of vodka. Vodka paid everything. If you had it, yeah. That was life until life became a little more normal. From there we went to Germany, but it was just shortly after the war. Where do you go? My father was in America. I had kept his address in my head the whole time.

I looked for my mother. I couldn't find her. She was not here anymore. My sister was lost. My mother lost. My grandmother was lost. And so we moved, we went back to Poland actually, because he had a good education. He was almost like a doctor, but he had to get his full degree actually. So he wanted to go back to the university. So I went with him to Poland, to the occupied section of Germany, what became Poland eventually. Pomerania became Poland. We had a house there. It was very nice.

He studied and he practiced also already, because there was no other doctor. He had the experience from the war, plenty of experience. But then came 1946, and the Polish people didn't like when Jewish people came back. There was a big pogrom, survivors who came back occupied one house and the Poles came in and kill them all.

After that happened, we saw no future in Poland. My husband really wanted to stay in Poland. There was no future for us in Poland. So at that time there was an underground from Israel, at that time Palestine, who smuggled survivors to Palestine, and we were among them.

>> Bill Benson: How did you find your father?

>> Susan Taube: I found my father. Let me think a minute now. Yeah, we were back in Germany. Yeah, from Poland I couldn't send him anything. Then we were back in Germany, in Berlin, when we were smuggled out. I wrote a letter. His address I had in my head. I met a soldier, I had the letter prepared, and I met a soldier on the train station.

>> Bill Benson: A US soldier.

>> Susan Taube: American soldier. I asked him to please mail that letter for me. He put a stamp on it and mailed it. He said sure. But the address I had in my head. He didn't live there anymore. So the people at that time didn't know what was going on I guess yet, and they didn't forward the letter to him. He had moved two blocks away from them.

So I didn't hear from him. Then again, it was still, after the war, things were not normal yet, so I didn't pay much attention to it. I wrote another letter about two months later. Again, mailed it to him directly. The post office received the letter, by that time they knew what was going on and forwarded the letter to my father. That's how I found my father.

>> Bill Benson: When did you reunite with him?

>> Susan Taube: We reunited with him in 1947. My son was already born here, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, my last question of you, when did you learn what happened to your mother and your sister?

>> Susan Taube: We were separated in Riga. You know, you were not a name, you were a number. When we stayed one day to be assigned work, my mother and sister were sent to one place, I was sent to another place. That's how we were separated. But I knew where they were, she knew where I was. We knew. For a while, we kind of communicated through people.

But then she worked what was called, it was they made receiver for the Army, everything was Army oriented. That whole unit, the whole -- I don't know how many people were this that place, but they were evacuated directly, individually to open up a factory to start working again.

My mother, I found out later from somebody who survived, I don't know what it was, but she was 46 years old, so couldn't be too bad. My sister again also these people from that place were on the death march back to Stutthof, and my sister did not survive the death march.

>> Bill Benson: She lived all the way up to the death march?

>> Susan Taube: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to wrap up our program now. We don't -- there's so much more that Susan could have shared with us, so we don't have time for questions and answers with you. Susan's going to, when we finish, Susan's going to remain on the stage. You're absolutely welcome to come up here afterwards. Just say hi, ask a question, whatever you'd like to do. Please feel free to take advantage of that time with Susan.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* gets the last word. So I'm going to turn back to Susan to close our program. Before I do, I want to thank all of you for being with us today. Remind you that we have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle

of August. I hope that you can come back and join us another time. Thank you all for many here. With that, Susan?

>> Susan Taube: I prepared it. It is my commitment to speak to you about my life during the Hitler era today. Today is a holiday which celebrates the Jews of Russia triumphing. Throughout history we've been dealing with Adolph Hitler and others who tried to wipe us off the face of the earth. But we're still here and they're not. Hatred, racism, bigotry should never be a doctrine of nations, and we must remember that even in our own country. Keep your eyes open.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Today would have been your mother's 118th birthday, right? Yeah.

>> Susan Taube: I have three doctors in my family. I have three great teachers in my family. I have 10 children, great grandchildren. I love them all. They love me, I hope.

[Laughter]