UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES – SUSAN TAUBE
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Remote CART Captioning

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>> 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. We began the 18th year of the First Person Program yesterday and our first person today is Ms. Susan Taube, which we will meet shortly. This is made possible by the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of the First Person guests serves as volunteers here at the 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'll find in your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater.

In doing so you will receive an electronic copy of Susan's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave today.

Susan will share with us today 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 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, and

We begin with this portrait of Susan Taube, born Susan Strauss.

Susan grew up in the small town of Vacha, Germany, where her family lived 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 of the storefront.

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

In November 1938 the Nazis unleashed a wave of pogroms throughout Germany known as Kristallnacht or the "The Night of Broken Glass."

This photograph shows Germans passing the broken window of a Jewish owned business destroyed during Kristallnacht.

In Vacha, local party members damaged the family store and imprisoned Susan's father in the Buchenwald concentration camp.

In 1939, Susan, sister, mother and grandmother moved to Berlin.

Susan and her family were deported to the Riga ghetto in January 1942.

The arrow on this map points to Riga.

Eventually Susan and her mother were sent to the Kaiserwald concentration camp, which the first arrow points, to do forced labor. In the fall of 1944 as the Soviet army approached, Susan and her family were deported to the Stutthof concentration camp which the second arrow points to.

This is a photo of the Stutthof concentration camp.

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

Susan lives in the Washington, D.C. area, her beloved husband Herman passed away March 25th, 2014, three years ago next week.

Herman, who we miss, was a Holocaust survivor and a First Person guest. Susan and Herman ran their own small business, a store in Baltimore, for many years before moving to Washington, D.C. 42 years ago.

She co-authored several books with Herman who is a noted author and poet. Susan and Herman have four children, eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Five live in Israel. The oldest of the great-grandchildren is in college and the youngest is a year old.

Susan is joined today by her daughter Judy. We have Susan and Judy in the front row.

Susan is active with the Holocaust Survivors Association and volunteers here weekly at the museum. You will find her here on Tuesdays when she helps staff the membership and donor desk.

Susan has also spoken frequently at the museum. As an example, she spoke to a German group that promotes reconciliation. She has also spoken in other settings locally, including synagogues and schools and after we finish the program today, Susan is going to go back out through the doors you came in to the top of the stairs where she will sign copies of several of Herman's books. And with that I would like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Susan Taube.

[Applause]

Susan, thank you so much for being willing to be our First Person and joining us today. You have so much to share with us. We have just a short time, so we'll start right away.

You were just seven and living in the small town of Vacha, Germany, when Hitler came to power in 1933. After that, of course, your life and that of your families changed dramatically. Start by telling us about your family and your life in the years leading up to Kristallnacht, before then, what was your family's life like? Tell us about your family.

>> Susan Taube: Well, as you said, I was born in the small town in the middle of Germany. In the town there were about 30 Jewish families, and life was normal. Normal life. Very few children, because -- I started school in 1932, and in 1934, I went to higher education school, but then 1936 I had to leave school. No Jewish children were allowed anymore in the German schools. And I was sent to Frankfurt am Main and attended there.

In 1938 --

>> Bill Benson: Before we go to Kristallnacht, let me ask you some questions. What did your father do to earn a living? What was his living?

>> Susan Taube: My father had a family store for many years already. Actually, my grandfather on my mother's side died in World War I, he was a soldier in the German Army, fighting for Germany in World War I, and my grandmother was a widow and she ran a store. And my mother grew older, she helped and eventually my mother got married and the store went on until Hitler came to power.

>> Bill Benson: Speaking of Hitler coming to power, you told me about the family that were neighbors of yours, and you told me an incident about voting. Will you share that with us? Do you remember they went to vote?

>> Susan Taube: When Hitler came to power. Yeah, the elections in Germany, and we all had to go to the port, and whoever voted, you had to work for Hitler because you received a little... what you call it? Yeah, I voted for Hitler, and you would be -- even though caught without it on the street, without it, even the Jewish people voted for Hitler because nobody knew what was in store for them in the future, so... we all voted for Hitler.

>> Bill Benson: At some point I think even before Kristallnacht you started having vandalism done to your family business.

>> Susan Taube: Yeah, when Hitler came to power, then they were against the Jewish people. We had a display window in our business, big display windows and they were smashed in at night. And once we. Fixed them up again, they put the paint, and they put it on the house, and it was quite a few times we had to replace the windows. In the beginning, insurance paid for it and then insurance wouldn't pay for it anymore, we had to do it ourselves. But eventually we bolted up, that's it.

>> Bill Benson: Then you started to tell us about Kristallnacht. What do you -- you were still a girl. What do you remember about Kristallnacht?

>> Susan Taube: As I said, I had to live with my -- in the little town, I couldn't go to school anymore. I was separated completely from the other children, sitting on a bench all by myself right next to the door, the first one to leave and the last one to come in. My parents saw my mental situation became -- I don't know what you call it. Depression, I guess. So they enlisted me in a Jewish school in Frankfurt am Main, and I lived with complete strangers. In 1938, Kristallnacht happened. There was a young Jewish man in Paris -- in 1938, the Polish -- the Jewish people who were not Polish -- German citizens, born in Germany for generations already, you couldn't just become a German citizen because you were born there. You became -- you became a citizen from your parents. Living in Germany many years, polish children are still Polish.

Just picked up without any warning, put on a train and put on the border of Poland and Germany, and there's no place to go, no man's land.

So a young man who was studying in Paris at that time, he found out what was happening to his parents, he tried to bring the attention to what is happening. He went to the German embassy in Paris and killed one of the officers there. So when that happened, a few weeks later, they organized what they called a pogrom. It was just an excuse to demolish all owned by Jewish people or whatever was owned by Jewish people was demolished. And the men were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

And all the schools were closed, because all the teachers were arrested too. And I just went back home to my hometown at that time. My mother was there. She had to close the business up. It couldn't open up anymore. And my father was in a concentration camp for about four weeks. He was dismissed because he was in the World War I. He was one of the first one to let go.

How do you call it?

He had a job in certain time

>> Bill Benson: They would let him out of the concentration, but he had --

>> Susan Taube: They didn't want to spread the word what was happening.

>> Bill Benson: A veteran in the German Army.

>> Susan Taube: Luckily, we looked to immigrate already --

>> Bill Benson: Let me ask you another question about Kristallnacht. In addition to destroying businesses, your home was vandalized?

>> Susan Taube: Yes, I went to school in Frankfurt am Main and they just knocked down the door, came in and they destroyed the whole apartment, crying out from the couples, and everything was demolished.

>> Bill Benson: They knocked bookcases over.

>> Susan Taube: Busted out the windows. It was terrible. And they went from apartment to apartment and did the same thing.

>> Bill Benson: Before your father was arrested, if I remember correctly, he was -- he hid for a couple days and the Gestapo came.

>> Susan Taube: Gestapo came and said, if he doesn't give himself up, you have to take my mother into the camp. So my father gave himself up and they took him to Buchenwald, where he worked for four weeks, and let go because he was a World War I veteran. He had to leave Germany right away. He couldn't stay in Germany.

So we were ready to emigrate. Things became bad in Germany. We didn't see any future there anymore. But we had no place to go. We wanted to go to America. Relatives in America, somebody to vouch for you. And even if you found somebody to vouch for you, they had to put a certain amount of money in the bank and then you received a number and you had to wait for your number to come up. And a lot of people wanted to immigrate and the number was very high and when we found out how -- when it would be, they told us it would be about four years before our number would be called.

In the meantime, came Kristallnacht and my father was arrested, and he was let go, but...

>> Bill Benson: So you couldn't immigrate, you couldn't get out because of the delays and the requirements and all the things described. So what did he do? What did your father do then?

>> Susan Taube: He went over the border and he paid somebody to go over the border, without anything, a little suitcase and just what he had on his body, and a lot

of -- it happened to a lot of people at that time, and a lot of people went this way, left Germany this way, but the Jewish community in Belgium welcomed everybody, and they couldn't work or do anything like that, but they had soup kitchens there and people took them in and gave them food. So while in Belgium his number came up for immigration to America, and because he had left, the papers had to go to Belgium, and that prolonged the whole system about six months, eight months. And in the meantime the war broke out, so that stopped everything. But he made it out just before America went into the war, just before they invaded Belgium, just before they invaded Belgium, he made it out. He got to America in February of 1940.
>> Bill Benson: 1940, right?
>> Susan Taube: Something like that, yeah. 1941.
>> Bill Benson: So here you are with your mother and your grandmother, and I think you moved to Berlin to be close to the U.S. consulate in the hope that you might still --
>> Susan Taube: We might still go to America. So we moved to Berlin. My mother worked to sell the house. She was the only Jewish family still living in that small town, and life was just miserable for her. So she sold the property, almost gave it away. She never received the money for it because after 1938, after Kristallnacht, all the money was confiscated, and you received only a certain amount for your expenses, what you need for food and whatever. But only a certain amount of money. You couldn't have any more. And the money stayed with the government.

And then we moved to Berlin. We received -- my mother, my sister, my grandmother, father's mother still with us, and myself, and a lot of little towns where Jewish people moved away to bigger cities, so we were what you called...
>> Bill Benson: Crowded together?
>> Susan Taube: Crowded together, right. We had one bedroom, communal living room, communal kitchen, communal bathroom, just one private bedroom, that's all, and you all slept in one bedroom.

Life in Berlin, by that time I was a teenager. I had to go to work. So my first job was as a day care worker to take care of children. Because all had to work for the war effort. They all had to work in factories for the war machinery. And the children got up at 6:00 in the morning. We had to be there at 6:00 until morning until 9:00 o'clock at night when the last child was picked up. And we had to take public transportation. And also in 1939, it was, or '40 we all received the honor of wearing a nice yellow star, and we had to wear it on our outer clothes so we would be recognized for whoever we are. And that wasn't a very pleasant situation because we had to use public transportation at that time, and, you know, when you're young and branded like this, you tried to hide it. But if you were caught hiding it, you received a punishment too.

So anyhow, I worked in the children's home and they got dropped off in the morning and worked all day until 8:00 o'clock at night and then went home, and that was it. Seven days a week.
>> Bill Benson: And, Susan, the deportation started and you and your family were deported to Riga, Latvia.
>> Susan Taube: Started in the fall of 1941, and what happened there, we lived with -- there was another gentleman living and another lady, and the daughter of the gentleman lived a few blocks away and one day he tried to get in touch with her and there was no answer. Didn't know what happened to her. About two weeks later he

received a note from Poland, your father, due to circumstances, German citizen from Poland will be resettled to Germany. We are settled here. We are fine, don't worry about us. You will hear from us again. And that was the only time he heard from them, nothing else.

Then slowly deportation started and the next one I knew about was my best girlfriend. It became very organized then. You received a notice by mail, so and so, this day you be ready, you will be resettled to the east. You can take with you what you can carry. Everything else, what you would like to take, bigger items, you leave at a certain place and it will be shipped to your new destination. Never told where or where it goes to or where we are going or whatever. We were never told.

Our time came, my mother, my grandmother, my sister, myself, in the winter we worked actually in factories, and we thought if you worked for the war effort, you kind of exempt --

>> Bill Benson: Be exempt from that?

>> Susan Taube: But, no, that didn't help any.

>> Bill Benson: If I remember right you were in a factory making submarine equipment.

>> Susan Taube: Receivers for submarines. And the Jewish people, the Jewish employees were kept separately from the Christian people. The Christian people received lunches, food. We received nothing.

>> Bill Benson: And they received pay?

>> Susan Taube: Pay was not -- pay was nothing at all.

>> Bill Benson: And you were told that if you were suspected of any sabotage you would be executed?

>> Susan Taube: Better not, yeah.

So we worked -- where was I?

>> Bill Benson: Deportation to Riga.

>> Susan Taube: We received a notification to be ready on this and this day. You can take with you what you can carry. Everything else you bring to a certain place and it will be shipped to your new destination. So first of all we put a lot of clothes on. The Gestapo came and said it would come. Show us all your bank books, paper. Money you can take with you for transportation, public transportation. Everything you leave here, and this is it. You sign your papers, you sign the note.

So we took our little package. We couldn't take much. And we took public transportation in Kristallnacht, the point of concentration for all the people. It was Friday night, I remember that, and eventually, about 100,000 people. Children, young people, old people, mixture of population. And it became -- we had a lot of clothes on us. We figured what we have on us we can take. But anyway, they stayed in that place for about two or three days. You were registered. Again, we had one more ID left. So you would be recognized. Nobody has passports anymore, they were confiscated. That was taken away from us too. And then we found out we would be resettled to a place called Riga, Latvia. Okay, Riga, Latvia.

Sunday morning, we were assembled in front of the synagogue and we were marched to a station in Berlin, the capital of Berlin, and we looked for the train to be resettled to Riga. And what we saw was the cattle cars. Only cattle cars. The doors were opened and we looked inside and went inside and there were benches made out

of straw all around the wall, on each side of the end of the wagon. A bucket of water. That was it.

Once the train was full, everybody was in, we went, we traveled four days and four nights I remember. Very cold winter in January 1942. It was very, very cold. No heat in the wagons, nothing.

We arrived in Riga the end of January -- no, beginning of February, it was, end of January. I don't remember exactly the date. End of January, I think it was. And they opened up the wagons, out, out, out. Everybody out. You could hardly move because of the cold. You were stiff. Old people couldn't move. We were told if you can -- you have to walk about 10-kilometers, if you cannot walk, there are trucks, you can go in the trucks and we'll take you to your new destination. Well, the people who went on the truck, we never saw again. It was mostly older people, children, it was hard to walk for them. They went on the trucks and we never saw them again. My family, we walked. We walked 10-kilometers, slow in ice, very slowly. It took almost the whole day. And we came to a place in Riga, which was -- what was it called? A section of the city of Riga, a very poor section it was. We came to the place and they pushed us in apartments and no light, no heat, nothing. And we saw food laying there and clothes everywhere around the place. We didn't know what happened. But it was nighttime. We didn't give it much thought. So we found a place to sit and sat down and that was it. In the morning when daylight came we looked around, we went outside and a lot of ice and snow and force of elements. Terrible sight.

So we didn't know what happened. Back to the house, no food, nothing. Eventually we received a piece of bread. There was some food left in the apartment, which we eventually figured out we eat. And February 5th, I remember this like today, everybody out of the buildings, everybody assemble in the street. The place was surrounded, two times. Completely surrounded. You couldn't go out of the place there. And we were assembled and looked over and the trucks were staying there. And they looked us over and just like this, this, this... if you went this way, you went on the truck, and you went this way, you went back to the house. My grandmother was taken away from us. My mother, my sister and myself, we went back into the house.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, I remember you telling me that they would tell the elderly people that were with you who were going to put you in a fish factory where you can work indoors.

>> Susan Taube: The second time around, yeah. Well, in the meantime there came transports from all over Germany, Austria, back from Germany, Jewish people, transported there. And eventually the ghetto was overflowing, and in February -- end of February, again, everybody out of the house, selections were coming and people taken away, always taken away.

A lot of children they are taking away and invalid people. People they figured could work, they kept them alive for a while.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, you would remain in the Riga ghetto for 20 months, from the end of January, early February 1942 to December 1943. Tell us what your life was like in the Riga ghetto over those 20 months, what you were forced to do, and you touched on this a little bit, but the image you described of arriving in a place that is just covered in ice, indoors, outdoors, just a coating of thick ice on everything, and I think the very first job you were made to do was to --

>> Susan Taube: Go to the city of Riga and supplied us with --
>> Bill Benson: Like iron rods? Ice picks.
>> Susan Taube: Ice picks. We had to loosen the ice from the sidewalk so the citizens of Riga could walk on the sidewalks. We were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks. We had to walk in the streets. Before we went through, a piece of dry bread, nothing warm to eat all this time, nothing at all. Just bread. And that was it.

So we marched to the city and worked all day from morning, daylight until nighttime came, and back to the ghetto. Back to the ghetto there was nothing to look forward to. If you were lucky, somebody in the street gave you something to eat, actually. Some citizens of the street. And then eventually we received some food in the ghetto. It was organized. We received some rations in the ghetto, but no place to cook or anything like that, so people became-engineers, the people there, they found scraps of iron or whatever it is and they build little stoves from it. And while we went to work and found a piece of wood or something, we picked it up and took it home and that's how we cooked our stuff.
>> Bill Benson: You shared with me there was an attempt by all the Jews there to try to create some sense of a community while you were there, try to do some education if possible.
>> Susan Taube: The children still were in school, like the day care center. They were never allowed to go in the streets, the children. They were always supervised by old people in homes -- I mean, in rooms, wherever they were living. Or they had a day care center for children, and the towns had to go to work, and they had the children and dropped them off and they never could go outside. They were never allowed to go outside, the children.
>> Bill Benson: What was the other work you were forced to do while you were there?
>> Susan Taube: Besides shoveling snow, the next job I worked for the air force. That was a good job, because inside you are not exposed to the cold weather. And we sat in the basement and sorted out potatoes. They delivered the food to them, but everything was frozen. So we had to pick out the good ones from the bad ones. And that was good, because the bad ones we could take home with us. Actually, we were allowed to take home, but they tasted horrible.

But, again, you know, you work for the military, some people had a human heart. You could find some human beings among them. And I say that -- if you didn't have someone -- not to look out for you, but have a little bit of feeling what was going on and help you a little bit, that's life really.
>> Bill Benson: At some point you were forced to go outside the ghetto, I think, to dig...
>> Susan Taube: That was in the summertime. They called it peat moss, and they use it for heating and cooking, and so -- and they would take the young girls, mostly young girls and young men and send outside the ghetto about 40 or 50-kilometers outside the ghetto, and there were big fields and we had to dig out peat moss from there, and that was dug out and put on bridges and put on the lawn to be dried and turned over and dried up again, and then it was shipped into the city. And that was --
>> Bill Benson: Used as fuel for the citizens there?
>> Susan Taube: Yes. Not too bad, actually. We went swimming a little bit. You know, a reprieve of some sort for a while.

>> Bill Benson: Late August or September 1943 you were brought back into the ghetto and what you said to me was, we kind of knew what the ball game was then. That was a quote from you.
>> Susan Taube: Well, we heard news. We had some kind of -- we didn't have radios or anything like that. Nobody had a radio, but the places we worked had radios, and if you had a chance, you could always listen to the news, and there was always -- the good news was the Germans had a successful retreat, always a successful retreat. Very slow. In Riga, until 1944, the ghetto was liquidated and we all went to concentration camps. Actually concentration camp. Men and women were separated. There were no more children there. Everybody had to go to work. Mostly young people, no old people anymore. But, again, I have to say, I was lucky. Before the ghetto was liquidated there was an organization, and the German Army, they made bridges and we came to this place and we had to repair the boats.

The situation was also like a reprieve for us really, because the one who oversaw it was a civilian, a German civilian, and he was one of five sons. Four were already gone on the front. So anyone alive was made a director of the facility. I have to say he had a human heart. He could -- not help us, but make it more pleasant than it's supposed to be.
>> Bill Benson: He could have made it worse?
>> Susan Taube: He had a human heart, put it this way. But he couldn't help us anyway. And the Russian army came closer and we evacuated, the whole army, Riga, the German Army, so the ghetto was eliminated and old people disappeared. And people who were able to work were put on a boat.
>> Bill Benson: Before you go there, as you were being evacuated from Kaiserwald, you explained this was mid 1944, the summer of 1944, you said there was a period where you were just waiting, and groups of young people were sent out. Do you remember telling me that?
>> Susan Taube: You know, Riga had a very nice population, Jewish population at that time, but when they came in, all but 4,000 men eliminated. They kept 4,000 men to work, but all eliminated.

By the end, when the German and Russian army came closer, they wanted to get -- cover up what they did, I guess, and the people from Kaiserwald, they organized groups of 40 men each day. They had to go out. And whoever went on the job during the day, they never came back. They killed them there. Because they didn't want any witnesses.
>> Bill Benson: The next day another group of 40.
>> Susan Taube: Next day, another 40, another 40...

And what was left then, we were all deported on a boat and shipped to Germany, concentration, which was an extermination.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about Stutthof.
>> Susan Taube: Beautiful lawns, beautiful flowers. We thought we were in heaven. We walk in, the picture changed very quickly. Nothing but barracks. People walking around, hungry, miserable, shaved their heads. Our heads were shaved before we left Riga actually. We were all bald, no hair on our heads.

And life in Kaiserwald was in the morning, 5:00 o'clock. Just like sardines. At that time we had wooden shoes.

Luckily, I was only about two weeks in Stutthof. Stutthof, Germany, right? Yeah, Stutthof, they took us out. One day they counted and counted, counted 400 women, took us from the camp, put us on the train and sent us to a place called Sophienwalde. They arrived there, the camp was made out of plywood, little huts made out of plywood, and each hut pushed 15 people, only straw on the floor, nothing else. One blanket we had.

And so the first thing we didn't know what to do. The next day we had to get out. We were called out. The whistle blew and we had to get out and be counted. There were ladies from the SS, we had three, three ladies. Martha, Erica and...

One was a beast. One was more human. And the other one couldn't care less as long as she had a boyfriend. She was okay.

So that was our lives. So every day we had to go to work in the morning. We received shovels and picks and stuff, and we marched to woods and we had to take out the wood from the ground, because they were supposed to build a military exercise camp there.

>> Bill Benson: You had to dig out all the roots?

>> Susan Taube: We had to get all the roots out from the trees. It was hard work. It wasn't easy. We were girls, not men. We didn't have muscles. But we had to do it, pull them out and then we had to push them over to a dump where everything was dumped. Then back to the woods and fill it up again. And that was our day's work.

We received a piece of bread in the evening and a piece of bread when we came back from work, and if you had a bowl, if you were lucky and had a bowl, you received a bowl of soup and that was our nourishment

>> Bill Benson: In the late winter of 1945 as the Russians advanced, you were evacuated from there and forced to go on what is known as a death march?

>> Susan Taube: They took us to this unfinished building that we built, and in the basement, we were there. But, again, no heat, no nothing. Just one piece of bread and a soup.

February, Russian army came much closer, and one day the commander came and said -- assembled us and said, look, we cannot stay here. The Russians are here. We have to migrate from here. If you're able to walk, you sign up, you can walk. And if you are not able to walk, you stay here and somebody will take care of you.

Well, the ones who signed up, they marched out and the ones who stayed behind, we never heard from them again.

We marched ten days. Every day, kilometer, kilometer, wooden shoes, flimsy coat, not much.

>> Bill Benson: And especially brutal winter.

>> Susan Taube: 1942 --

>> Bill Benson: 1945?

>> Susan Taube: Terrible, terrible cold winter. Walking on ice and snow and walking through villages, and kids were throwing snowballs at us. It was just terrible. At night they put us in a barn and in the morning we march again. And that was it for ten days until we came to a place called Sophienwalde.

Sophienwalde we entered the camp. It was -- it used to be POW camp for Russian POWs, and they already evacuated too. So we went in there. Then we went there it was empty but eventually it filled up because people came from all over the

place. There were camps everywhere, where people worked all over eastern Germany, and from the camps, the Russian army came closer, we were all concentrated in that place. I don't know, I have no idea.

We went to this place two weeks, three weeks. Again, the Russian army came close. We heard the shooting already. And they assembled us, we cannot stay here. If you can march, we have to leave. And most of us went at that time. And we marched a whole night and we came to a place in the morning, and they put us in a barn and closed the door, and that was it. They left us there.

Well, we laid down. There were animals there, and just -- in the early morning hours, we heard big booms, and we said, oh, no, they're coming closer, they're meant for us. But it was the Russian army that was chasing the German Army. And we were liberated by the Russian army on March 10th, 1945.

The doors were opened. We went out. The German people packed their wagons because they wanted to go west away from the Russian army. And they packed what they could take with them. And we became -- what do you call it? Well, we had our first food, and my first food was a piece of bacon.

I got sick. I sure got sick.

Yeah. They told us, don't eat anything. We were told not to eat anything at all because our stomachs couldn't take any food. Just couldn't take food.

So the Russians took us to work. They said you could work for the Germans, you can work for us too.

So we were taken to a farm, German farm, where the people had left already also. And we had to clear the fields, put the seeds down, take care of the animals that were left there. But we were cleaned up. We got clean clothes, and we had food, potatoes in the morning, potatoes at noon, and potatoes at night. Potato was the mainstay. Soon enough we all looked beautiful.

>> Bill Benson: Speaking of looking beautiful, Susan, and I know our time is running short, that leads, of course, to you having to tell us how you met your future husband. Will you do that?

>> Susan Taube: Well, the farm was finished and everything was in the ground and taken care of, the next job was the Russians took us to a city called Kielce and the German population left and we had to clean out the houses and put them in whatever we found in the houses, went into warehouses and shipped to Russia. Don't forget the Germans -- it was all sent to Russia, and that was our job. We didn't cook for ourselves. We had a communal kitchen. At that time there were ten girls, all lived in an apartment, and ten girls, but we didn't cook for ourselves. There was a communal kitchen run by a Jewish officer from Romania, and one day we went there to eat and that was it. But the people ate there. And one day a young man showed up there and we have survivors here and we have some sick people here. How about you look after these people and take a look, if you can help a sick person.

So he went and he looked at my friend, and while he was a doctor in the Russian army, and that's how I met my husband, who was a doctor in the Russian army at that time.

>> Bill Benson: There's more to it than that, because -- if I can share a little bit, the young women were worried about the Russian soldiers that were around, so --

>> Susan Taube: We had to protect ourselves very much.

>> Bill Benson: Herman put up a sign saying, this group of women are under quarantine for infectious disease. And then the story continues. He did some bribing with vodka?
>> Susan Taube: And take me out of there...
>> Bill Benson: And got you in a tank that he had gotten somebody to drive with you in the tank.
>> Susan Taube: Out of the place, yeah. Then we went -- together we went to -- he was in the Russian army, a doctor in the Russian army, and we went and occupied east part of Germany. We were in eastern Germany for a while, and then we went back to Poland and we got married. And we lived in Poland for a while until 19 -- what was it?

The Polish didn't like very much when the Jewish people came back to the cities, which they occupied in the meantime, and they wanted the houses back. So they organized the pogrom in the city of Kielce, and killed all the Jewish people who came back from the camp. And that we wanted to stay in Poland. There was no future for Jewish people in Poland, and there were organizations, Jewish organizations that took people out of Poland and that's where we wound up in east Germany.
>> Bill Benson: Susan, in the little time we have left, how did you locate your father, as you told us earlier, had made it to the United States?
>> Susan Taube: My father made it out, just before America went into the war. And I kept his address in my head the whole time. I never forgot his address. And when we were liberated and back and forth, we didn't have anywhere to go, I had a letter prepared just in case I had an opportunity somehow. So one time along the way I saw an American soldier and I asked him if he would do me a favor and deliver this letter to this address. And he did. And that's how my father knew that I'm alive. But we couldn't correspond because I had no permanent address yet. So once I had a permanent address, I wrote to him again, and that's how we got in touch.
>> Bill Benson: When did you finally get to the United States?
>> Susan Taube: We came in 1947.
>> Bill Benson: Two years after the war ended.
>> Susan Taube: We went back to Poland. We wanted to stay in Poland, actually, but after that pogrom we left. So we went to Germany and at that time America opened up the doors, which were very closed before the war, but the doors were opened up and we came to America. Since my father was in America, he vouched for us too, so we came to America.
>> Bill Benson: Susan, when did you learn about what happened to your mother and sister?
>> Susan Taube: Well, we were separated in Riga. I went to one work camp, they went to another work camp. We had no control over our lives. After the war, I remember now I kept in touch with a woman who worked together with my mother in the last camp, and she told me what happened to my mother. My mother died actually of natural causes in that camp, from starvation. But she always taught me she was good. She had a job. She was the cleaning lady, so she didn't have to work too hard. And she also got -- typhus broke out and she died and so did my sister.
>> Bill Benson: We have questions from the audience, is that okay?

If you don't mind we have -- our ushers have microphones and we're going to

ask that if you have a question, please make sure you have a microphone so it will be passed down to you. Please make your question as brief as you can, and I will repeat the question just to make sure that we not only hear it here but everybody hears it in the audience. So who would like to ask Susan a question, if anybody would? We have a couple minutes to do this. We have one here. Thank you, sir.

>> How well were you received in the United States and how were you employed or your husband employed once you came back to the states?

>> Bill Benson: The question is: How were you received once you got to the United States and how did you basically financially manage, how did Herman find work and yourself?

>> Susan Taube: The Jewish community in America was very generous at that time, and they had sponsors, and they helped quite a bit. The Jewish community helped. Our first -- well, we came to my father. My father was here, so didn't have to worry too much with my family, but we received help. We did receive help, yes. And my husband didn't speak English. I spoke a little English, I learned in school, and his first job was in the Jewish bakery cutting bagels at night. That's what he did.

>> Bill Benson: And then he learned English?

>> Susan Taube: Night school. We all went to night school. Every night, night school.

>> Bill Benson: And when you --

>> Susan Taube: And wrote quite a few books.

>> Bill Benson: Quite a few books. We have another question. We have one right there in the middle. Yes?

>> Were you able to observe Shabbat or any of the holidays at all?

>> Bill Benson: Were you able to observe Shabbat or any Jewish holidays at all at that time?

>> Susan Taube: We had the synagogue in the ghetto. My mother used to go. I had to work. There was no choice. If you had to work, you had to work. My mother, she went. Yeah. Jewish life... we did have concerts, come to think of it. We did have concerts. The Riga ghetto was actually two ghettos. One was for the Latvian Jews and one for the German Jews. The Latvian Jews had artists in their group, and we had concerts actually. And listened to it. For free.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: I think we're probably ready to close the program. I am going to turn back to Susan to close our program, because it's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. So I want to make sure we do that. First I want to remind you we will have First Person programs each Wednesday and Thursday through mid-August, so I hope that you will have an opportunity to return, and as I mentioned earlier, the website has information about each of our upcoming First Person programs. When Susan finishes, she's going to step off the stage and make her way as quickly as possible, we hope, up the side and out. So let her get by if you can, so she can get to the top of the stairs and sign copies of several books of Herman's that are available. I hope you'll have a chance to chat with her there, perhaps, ask a question and get a book.

Susan...

>> Susan Taube: Well, thank God I'm here, I survived. It was a terrible time. It should never happen again. But reading the papers today, I think it's happening all around

the world. I have a beautiful family. I raised a beautiful family.

I hope so.

>> Bill Benson: You did.

>> Susan Taube: We have how many doctors in the family? Three doctors. Three teachers. CPA. Thank God for that.

I miss my family. The older I get the more I miss them really. But they're gone.

And I'm here and I do the best I can. That's it.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Susan.

[Applause]