UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON DORA KLAYMAN
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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 18th year of *First Person*. Our First Person today is Mrs. Dora Klayman, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2017 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. 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 serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue twice-weekly until mid-August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

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

Dora 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 Dora questions.

Today's program will be livestreamed on the museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the museum's website and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. Recordings of all *First Person* programs will be made available on the museum's YouTube page. We are also accepting questions from our web audience today on Twitter. Please use #USHMM. And we invite those who are here in the auditorium today to also join us on the web when the rest of our programs in April and early May will be livestreamed. Please visit the First Person website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

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

Dora Klayman was born Teodora Basch on January 31, 1938, in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Here we see Dora sitting on a park bench with her younger brother, Zdravko.

On this map of Yugoslavia in 1933, the arrow points to Zagreb.

In this photo we see Dora on an outing to the zoo with her parents, Salamon and Silva. Salamon ran a brush-making factory and Silva was a teacher.

Pictured here is Dora's maternal grandfather, Rabbi Josef Leopold Deutsch. In April 1941, when Dora was visiting her maternal grandparents in the small town of Ludbreg, Germany invaded Yugoslavia. Ludbreg became part of a puppet state run by the Ustasa, Croatian fascists.

In June 1941, Dora's parents and her brother were arrested. Their housekeeper got baby Zdravko out of prison and from then on Dora and Zdravko were sheltered by their mother's sister, Giza, and her husband, Ljudevit. On the left we see Aunt Giza. On the right we see her husband, Ljudevit. The photo of Ljudevit was taken many years after this one of Giza.

Later in the war, Aunt Giza was denounced and sent to Auschwitz where she perished. Dora remained in Yugoslavia until 1957 and in 1958 emigrated to the United States. We close with this portrait of Aunt Giza, Dora, and Zdravko that was taken to be sent to Ljudevit in the concentration camp where he had been sent.

In 1957, while on her way to Switzerland, Dora met Daniel Klayman, who was returning to New York from a year of post-doctoral study as a Fulbright scholar in India. They were married in Switzerland a year later, and together they arrived in the United States in the fall of 1958. The following year Dan and Dora came to Washington, DC, and Dan began his career as a researcher in medicinal chemistry at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research; his work culminated in his expertise in drug development against malaria.

After the birth of their two children, Wanda and Elliot, Dora resumed her education, getting degrees in French and in English as a Second Language. She then taught in Montgomery County, Maryland, Public Schools, including 23 years at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, where she headed the English as a Second Language Department.

Dan passed away in 1992. Both of their children live in the Washington area. Wanda is Deputy Executive Director of an international association that deals with transportation issues. Elliot is a freelance videographer and owns a video and film production company. He is married to Iona and they have three children, ages 22, 20 and 13.

I'm pleased to say that both Wanda and Eliot are in our audience today.

After Dora retired from full-time teaching in 1999, she became active as a volunteer with this museum. Her work here consists primarily of translating material from the Holocaust written in Croatian, Bosnian, and Serbian. Her ongoing project is connected to the Jasenovac archive. As we will hear later, Jasenovac was a major concentration camp in Croatia. Other projects for Dora have included the translation of a booklet that accompanied a 1942 anti-Semitic exhibit in Croatia, and the translation of the captions on a large archive of photographs that had been gathered during the post-World War II trials in Yugoslavia.

To add to her language skills Dora continues to learn Hebrew. She volunteers weekly teaching English to recent immigrants at a Jewish Community Center. Dora also enjoys traveling. She has been to Israel several times where she was happy to reunite with her cousins and their families. Some of her travels are connected to learning more about the events and the aftermath of the Holocaust. She has attended several conferences of the International Organization of Child Survivors, including in Poland in 2011, when she visited

Auschwitz for the first time, and in Berlin in 2014, where she was impressed by the effort made by that country to teach about and remember the Holocaust. In 2013 she traveled to her former home in Croatia where she accompanied the director of the Jasenovac archive to the site of the concentration camp to view their exhibit. Last summer Dora returned to Croatia for her high school's 60th reunion. She also visited the small town of Ludbreg where she spent the war years and much of her youth.

Besides First Person, Dora is speaks publicly in other settings including to small groups here at the museum. She recently spoke to students and the faculty at King University in Bristol, Tennessee, as well as to members of the community at a local church.

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

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Dora, thank you so much for joining us today and agreeing to be our first person. We'll start, if you don't mind, with your family in the prewar years. You were 3 years old when World War II came directly to Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941 when it was attacked by Germany. Before we turn to the horrors of the war and the Holocaust, tell us what you can about your family and your life in those pre-war years.

>> Dora Klayman: Well, my father's family had not been in Zagreb for a very long time. They had originally come from the South. My father was born in Romania but as a child already they had left and they had come to Zagreb and established themselves there. By the time the late `30s came about, my grandfather had already passed away. So it was my grandmother there. And there were six siblings in that family. My father was only one of the siblings who was fairly involved in cantorial music. As such, he eventually, even though he ran the brush making factory, he ended up making, I think, visiting my mother's hometown.

So my mother's family --

>> Bill Benson: He was a cantor there.

>> Dora Klayman: Was a cantor. I think just for the holidays.

So my mother's family is from Ludbreg. And my mother was born there. But that family, too, had come previously from actually Czechoslovakia, from Slovakia, where my grandfather became a rabbi -- trained to be a rabbi. They had two children when they came to Ludbreg, where there was a small Jewish community that wanted to have a rabbi. So he came with two children and subsequently they had two more children; one of them was my mother. The oldest daughter in that family, Giza, whom we saw in the photo, was actually 15 years older than my mother and was sort of a surrogate mother which, of course, made me be almost a surrogate grandchild.

The family was well integrated in Ludbreg. From the photos that I see, because I certainly don't have memories of the time before the war, from the photographs and from what people told me, my grandfather served in the public schools to teach Jewish children. And then there was a priest who taught the Catholic children, in the same school.

And I think there were sort of afterschool classes but there is a photograph. I've donated to the museum, so it's online. It's very interesting to me because you see the priest on one side and the rabbi on the other side and the rest of the faculty. So that kind of always makes me think that relations in the town were good. It's a practically totally Catholic part of the world. And then the Jews had come in fairly recent times.

So that was that family. And then another person that plays a role in that family was the Ljudevit, the director of the savings & loan bank. And one of his employees was my aunt Giza. And there was a longtime relationship, if youI want to call it that. They were in love

between Ludva and Giza, but they did not marry for a very long time because -- well, I would imagine that one of the problems was that he was Catholic and she was Jewish. And there was a 10-year difference between them, but that wouldn't have mattered. Pretty common in Europe to have a 10-year difference.

When I questioned him about that, 10 years -- many years afterwards, he said, well, there was no need to get married. She was quite happy living with her parents and I was quite happy living with my mother, so it's ok.

I have a feeling there were other things in play. And, of course, there actually was no civil ceremony, a civil marriage.

>> Bill Benson: So only religious marriages.

>> Dora Klayman: So at one point when the war was getting very close, it was '39, I think, and they already knew what was happening and they knew that Christian-Jewish families could sometimes survive that the Christian mate could shelter the Jewish one, they went to Hungary and got married.

>> Bill Benson: And that's because Hungary recognizes civil ceremony?

>> Dora Klayman: Right. So that's pretty much how things stood.

>> Bill Benson: And, of course, all of that changed so dramatically when Germany attacked Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, 76 years ago tomorrow. When they attacked, you were away from Zagreb on a visit with family in Ludbreg. Tell us what you can about the circumstances that caused you to be away at that time from your family, as best you know, and then what happened once the Germans occupied Yugoslavia.

>> Dora Klayman: Well, I don't know exactly why I was in Ludbreg at the time staying with my grandparents but I have a very vivid memory of being on that train with my grandparents' neighbors. And I have a feeling that the reason was -- I've often been asked whether the reason was that my parents were trying to shelter me. But I have a feeling that it was just before the war that I left and before the attack and that my parents just had the opportunity to send me to my grandparents with the neighbors who happened to be in Zagreb. I don't know that for a fact but I sort of also have a memory of when I think my parents were taken away because I remember sort of people shushing and talking and keeping things from me. But I have a feeling that's the reason they sent me.

Also, my brother had already been born at that point. My brother was born at the end of January 1941. So my mother had the baby. And it's potential that they just sent me to my grandparents so she could have a bit of respite.

>> Bill Benson: Did your parents or any other family members try to leave Yugoslavia before the Germans came in?

>> Dora Klayman: Yes. Actually, one of my mother's sisters, not Giza but Blanka and her husband and two of my cousins also lived in Ludbreg. And that uncle of mine ran a store. They had two lovely children. They apparently tried to leave and go to the South, to an area which was under Italian rule. It was a fairly safe place to be. The Italians ran sort of a camp but it was not a concentration camp. It was a killing camp. So it was a safe place to go.

Fairly recently, and I have not yet given it to the museum, but I will, I found in a box that was in my house passes for all four of them to go. Now, I have been told that they actually went at one point. I think they didn't go all the way because that's why the passes seem brand new. I mean unused sort of.

I think they must have gone as far as Zagreb because you can't go to Domatia [ph] without going to Zagreb first. And they returned. Why did they return? Because there was a

proclamation that any Jews that had left and would return will not be arrested. Home, store, family, they returned. They did not last very long.
>> Bill Benson: So it was all lies.
>> Dora Klayman: All lies, big lie, yes.
>> Bill Benson: You mentioned Ustasa. Ustasa, it was they who ran -- tell us about Ustasa.
>> Dora Klayman: They ran Croatia. They were a super nationalist group who had tried for some time to get political power. Some of them had been in Italy for a while and just waiting for the opportunity. They made an arrangement with the Germans that would allow them to run Croatia in exchange for -- the government didn't say so but they established that they would run the government according to German wishes in terms of persecuting Jews, Roma, whoever else the German wanted persecuting.

In addition -- and this was really their main thrust -- they wanted to create what they called ethnic cleansing. They wanted to get rid of the Serb population within Croatia. And so they seized the reigns of the government and they ran the government as what they called an independent state of Croatia. They immediately started doing -- started running all their laws according to German wishes. So persecuting Jews, which is what concerns my family. That meant losing jobs, not being able to go to school, not being able to have a business, and confiscations.

In the museum there are records of my families where they had to declare absolutely everything they owned. That comes down to even the ridiculous. Like my young cousins who were early teens had to declare things like a dress, one necklace, one winter coat.
>> Bill Benson: Literally everything they owned.
>> Dora Klayman: Everything they owned. Right.
>> Bill Benson: Your aunt and others learned your parents had been sent to a concentration camp but that your brother had been saved from deportation. Tell us what happened to your parents and what happened with your brother, how he was able to not be deported.
>> Dora Klayman: So my parents were deported fairly early. And there was a holding area in Zagreb. This is where they were taken. They were, of course -- as I mentioned, my brother was a baby at the time and they took the baby along to this gathering camp. They asked the Ustasa who were running this camp if she could have the baby. They generously gave her the baby. I'm being facetious, of course. That's one of the things that I can't imagine what it was like for my mother, to hand the baby, but she did.

Then the housekeeper called my Aunt Giza and her husband and they came and got him. They brought him to Ludbreg. That's one of the memories that I have. I have a memory of that baby arriving and crying. Of course, I was a spoiled little 3 1/2-year-old.
>> Bill Benson: You had been staying with her.
>> Dora Klayman: It was at my grandparents that he came. I remember that. That's one of those memories.
>> Bill Benson: You remember him coming to the house.
>> Dora Klayman: Yeah. So from then on he was always with me.

I don't know whether you want me to continue what happened to the rest of the people in Ludbreg. But in 1942, everybody was deported.

That's another memory. At that point, I remember being in Giza and Ljudevit's house. And it was sort of evening. And everybody was there gathered, everybody crying, carrying bags and pillows, I remember, and saying goodbye to me, saying goodbye to me and my brother. At that point he was already walking. He was a little boy. Everybody, in 1942,

everybody was deported except for my Uncle Ljudevit, who was Catholic, my Aunt Giza, and my brother and me. We were left behind.
>> Bill Benson: But the rest of the Jewish population in Ludbreg was gone?
>> Dora Klayman: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: And that scene, here, I believe in 1942, then your Uncle Ljudevit was arrested and sent to the Jasenovac concentration camp, and that meant you and your brother were still at home with your Aunt Giza.
>> Dora Klayman: Yes. And it was later. And the reason for that is -- I think I need to mention why he was deported. Almost as soon as the Ustasa took over, there was a slow but consistent uprising in the population. Part of the population was willing to go along with the Ustasa who now had an armed force. But the other part were people who joined the partisans. There was a partisan uprisings, beginning of a fairly extensive part of fighting. And that fighting was fairly extensive around Ludbreg, very frequent.
>> Bill Benson: And this is between Ustasa --
>> Dora Klayman: And the partisans, yes.

So the reason why my uncle was arrested at that point --
>> Bill Benson: As you said, he was not Jewish.
>> Dora Klayman: He was not Jewish. He was Catholic.
>> Bill Benson: But he was arrested.
>> Dora Klayman: He was not the only person arrested. There were other people who were sort of the leading citizens of the town. And he certainly was. Not only was he a bank director but he was also -- the family was an old Ludbreg family. It was a minor aristocracy. He had been involved in just about anything civic one can think of. He had been a mayor at one point. He was instrumental in putting together an orchestra.
>> Bill Benson: Truly a leading figure in town.
>> Dora Klayman: Just a leading figure. And then other people -- he was particularly involved in music and that was helpful later on.

The other leading figures, people, you know, somebody that owned -- wasn't a bookstore exactly but sort of the Staples of the time. A number of people who were leading figures in that town were arrested. And the reason was that they were accused of helping partisans, which, of course they were doing. And the Ustasa then used them as an example, arrested these people and sent them to what was the most notorious of camps, and this was the camp Jasenovac.
>> Bill Benson: Until I met you, I had never heard of Jasenovac and possibly that's true of most people in our audience. You said it was an especially horrific, brutal camp.
>> Dora Klayman: It was. It was a very brutal camp that was different from something like Auschwitz, that was ran in some sort of a very organized manner but it was equally brutal. It was run by people who just had absolutely no respect for human kind. They were using often primitive implements to kill people, not to speak of the fact that people were starving, exposed to the elements and just hanging, killing with knives, throwing people in the river next door. It was a very brutal camp.

And Jews, Roma, political prisoners like my uncle, and a lot of Serbs perished there.
>> Bill Benson: What do you know about your uncle's time while he was there?
>> Dora Klayman: Well, he was -- he wasn't as young as my father, for example. He came from a family that somehow seemed to not be in very good physical shape. So this is how he lost almost a dozen of his brothers and sisters by the time I knew him. So he would not have

really been able to withstand the treatment there. But they found out -- the Ustasa knew he had run a bank so they put him in an office to run their paperwork. And that is how he managed to survive.

The other thing they wanted him to do, they knew that he could organize an orchestra or something and they wanted to be entertained. He played the violin. He put together a group. He used to tell me how he would take as many people as he could to save them from having to work outside in the cold and rain and snow and organized them to be in a choir and then they would perform for the Ustasa. And all of this kind of allowed him to stay alive.

He also, I think I mentioned to you that he saw my father while he was there. My mother had already passed away, I think. But my father was still there. Actually, we know that my father survived to the end of the war.

>> Bill Benson: In Jasenovac?

>> Dora Klayman: In Jasenovac, yeah. But at the end there was a breakout and he was among those who broke out of the camp and was caught and shot. But he was there -- he survived through the very end.

My Uncle Ljudevit saw my father there and he talked about it, how they were carrying bricks and rocks. He worked in an infamous factory that they had there for making chains or something like that.

>> Bill Benson: While your uncle's there, in Jasenovac, you and your brother are at home with your Aunt Giza.

>> Dora Klayman: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Until early 1943.

>> Dora Klayman: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Your Aunt Giza was denounced and deported. Tell us what you know about that and then what happened to you and your brother.

>> Dora Klayman: Well, one of the things I must say is that in all of this -- well, the town was shocked that all of these Jews were one day gathered and deported. They were not deported by local people. There was Ustasa that came from elsewhere. But at one point somebody pointed out that my aunt was there, somebody denounced her. The rest of the town was always very sympathetic to us and did not give us away but there was somebody that pointed at my aunt and so she was taken. She was deported to Auschwitz.

Now, before -- and I know that for a fact because we have documentation here in the museum now in the archive and there is a card for her.

>> Bill Benson: In great detail describing --

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah, saying, you know, she died of intestinal problems. Of course, in Auschwitz you would die of intestinal problems.

>> Bill Benson: Why do you think you and your brother weren't taken at the same time?

>> Dora Klayman: Well, I think -- I never know why we weren't taken. It's sort of an enigma. I would imagine it was because -- there were two possibilities. One that they didn't seem to bother with children. They didn't know -- you know, why bother? You know, little children. They took my cousins who were teenagers. But I think the other reason is that we always happen to somehow be in the right place at the right time.

The other thing, because we came from Zagreb -- I take a look and there are books now with lists of Jews in that town. We are not on the list. And the reason we came from another town. We were not part of that community. So if they went through the lanes collected everybody, we were not on the list.

So what happened when they took my Aunt Giza, is that -- I sort of remember it but most of it was told to me later. She was rushing out and trying to hide. Next to our house there was another house that my two uncles -- my two aunts, Giza and Blanka were building. And we had renters on the ground floor. The upstairs hadn't been finished. So she tried to go upstairs and hide. But on the way she told the neighbors on the ground floor.
>> Bill Benson: The renters.
>> Dora Klayman: The renters. She asked them to take care of my brother and me, and they did. So this was the the Runjak family. They were a family with three children. The oldest one was already a teenager. They were all older than ourselves. Mrs. Runjak worked as a nurse. She was particularly involved with taking care of people with glaucoma. Her husband was a painter. So it was just an ordinary local Catholic family. And they were willing to take us. And it was a very small apartment. We all crowded into one bedroom, sort of. They shared whatever they had with us. So that is where we were until my uncle happened to return from Jasenovac.
>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about that, you and your brother were possibly and probably the only Jews left in the town. And, again, nobody denounced you in that town.
>> Dora Klayman: No.
>> Bill Benson: Said the Runjaks were hiding two little Jewish kids.
>> Dora Klayman: That was the amazing part. That's why people said, you know, you can't expect people to do things like that because they were in peril but this whole town was really remarkable in that they didn't give us away.

After my aunt -- which unfortunately we knew who that person was. After the war, the one who denounced her. And after the war my uncle, her husband, tried to find him but he had escaped to Austria. That was the end of that.
>> Bill Benson: As you just started to tell us, of course, your uncle was released but he was released after your Aunt Giza had been taken to Auschwitz.
>> Dora Klayman: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: What happened when your uncle came home?
>> Dora Klayman: Well, he tried to actually go after her and find her. I think people still believed that they could do something. I think he still believed that maybe he could get her out and save her. That was impossible.

But the other part, which I'm not so sure I ever mentioned before, is that my Aunt Giza, they still all believed, even the Ustasa, they believed there was some kind of sense in this world. She actually wrote a letter while my uncle was in Jasenovac, actually wrote a letter to the government asking that her husband, who was such a good citizen, be released. I mean, I would imagine she would have been scared to death to do such a thing, to even announce her existence but she did it. People had enormous courage sometimes.
>> Bill Benson: And some sense of hope.
>> Dora Klayman: Right.
>> Bill Benson: So your uncle comes home.
>> Dora Klayman: Uncle comes home and collects my brother and me. And now we are with him.

One other thing that I want to mention is that while we were still with the Runjak family, that family, as they were renters in our house, was all connected with the same courtyard. The Ustasa at one point were in that courtyard. So here we were totally exposed in a sense, you know, hiding in full view.

We learned very well to call Mrs. Runjak mother. And I knew well enough at that point, as they told me even later on, I would call Mrs. Runjak mom whenever it was necessary because there would be someone present who was not to be trusted. My brother was very devoted to her and she to him. He called her mom to the very end of his life.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned earlier that, of course, in Ludbreg was fierce fighting at times between the Ustasa and the partisans. So when your uncle came back, you were, as you described to me, essentially living in a war zone. Tell us about that time.

>> Dora Klayman: Well, the partisans would be in the hills, in the forests. They were not very dense forests. They were just woods. But they would come down and attack the Ustasa who would be as constant in the town. Then there would be a battle.

And what happened during these battles, sometimes we would know ahead of time that something would be happening, so we would get out of the house and spend time in the cellar. And under the house that we were living in, which was an old house with heavy walls but underground there was a cellar where we kept caskets of wine, the family had the vineyard and there was wine down there. But it was dirt floor, small windows high up, lots of frogs on the ground jumping about. We would go and stay there. And there were times I remember that we actually had some kind of cots and we spent quite a few nights there when the battles were raging all around us.

But there was one time in particular that I remember that we couldn't escape into the cellar because you had to get out of the house to go in. And the battle had started and we couldn't go out. So at that point we had to stay in the house. I remember one particular time when the Ustasa were on one side and the partisans were on the other side of the street and they were shooting at one another and the bullets were flying through our windows. So you could be safe where the walls were but the windows let the bullets through. At one point I remember being very scared, being in one room. I was sort of in a safe area in the corner. My uncle was in the other room. And I was crying. And he came. And the bullet had gone through that bedroom window where he was and hit just exactly where he was. So in a sense, fact that he came to comfort me saved his life.

The bullets had gone through the closets. We had these armoires, made of nice walnut wood. And the bullets would go through and shatter the doors. And then you would see the bullets through. And later when you took out a table cloth or a sheet, it was all -- like when children take napkins and make little designs.

>> Bill Benson: You told me that the worst part for you as a young child, you know, about 5, 6, closing on 7 by war's end, was not fears of being deported like your parents or aunt, it was being shot to death by the war itself that was going on.

>> Dora Klayman: Yes because some of these battles were fairly fierce. There was one battle that was fought in our street which after the war was called the Street of the 17th Brigade.

>> Bill Benson: And this was your street.

>> Dora Klayman: My street. But now they named it back to what it was before the war. So it's back to Giva, I think.

There was a fierce battle. And the partisans were surrounded. And the last of them didn't want to give up -- didn't want to surrender so they gathered in one house and threw a bomb among themselves and committed suicide.

It was like everybody was just, you know in shock afterwards. Even though people tried to hide these things from me, it was impossible.

So with the Ustasa, I don't remember which battle but they had caught so many partisans -- we used to have maids who were taking care of me in the house. And one of them decided to take me to the main square at one point I think we were going to see a movie. And she was holding my eyes but I saw it. And there were bodies hanging from every tree in the square.

>> Bill Benson: That's something you remember.

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Dora, this would, of course, all continue until the war's end in May 1945. When the war ended, you and your brother, with your uncle, what then happened? What did your uncle try it to do to bring back some semblance of normalcy, resuming your life? What happened?

>> Dora Klayman: Well, we went to school. I went to school. The awful thing that happened, very shortly after the war, 1946, was that my brother contracted scarlet fever and died within three days.

To backtrack a little bit, before that happened my uncle was waiting for somebody to return to see who will return.

>> Bill Benson: Somebody from the family.

>> Dora Klayman: Somebody from the family. And actually my parents did not return, grandparents did not return. Actually almost nobody was there. So my uncle adopted my brother and me formally. This is where my name comes from. So we were formally adopted and then unfortunately my brother passed away. It was a tremendous shock.

>> Bill Benson: He was 5?

>> Dora Klayman: To me it was a great shock -- yeah, I was born in 1941, so, yeah. He was really very much loved by a lot of people. He was a very cute little boy, very clever. He used to recite poetry. He was just a very cute person, child. Even I had to admit it. [Laughter]

So it was a great shock to my uncle. Because at that point everybody in his family had died. And so he only had us and we only had him. Some of my family did return. Who returned? One of my father's brothers returned and one of my mother's brothers returned. They returned because they had not been in concentration camps. They were both in the Army and they were both taken prisoner of war by the Germans, when the Germans attacked. So they spent the war in prisoner of war camps.

So they returned. Their families did not. So my mother's brother remarried, married another survivor, a widow with two children. And my father's brother also came and he, in particular, came to Ludbreg and there was a bit of a problem because he wanted my brother and me. Actually, my brother may have been gone by then. He wanted me to go with him. And he was, again, going to marry another survivor and he was heading for what was then Palestine and then later Israel.

There was a dispute between my two uncles. I was asked to make a decision where I wanted to go. Of course I had no idea who this uncle who just came from Germany was and I adored Uncle Ljudevit who was a wonderful person, very kind and was basically my parent and so I said I'm staying. So that was that.

>> Bill Benson: And you did.

And in the little time that we have left, because we want to have a little time for questions from our audience, let's go forward a little bit. Of course, now you're living under the Communist authority in Yugoslavia. At some point it's time for you to move on with your education. Tell us what you did to actually leave Yugoslavia.

>> Dora Klayman: Ok. So I finished high school. I went to high school in a nearby town because Ludbreg didn't -- it's like 25-kilometers. Then I went to the University of Zagreb afterwards. But during the time that I was --
>> Bill Benson: All still under --
>> Dora Klayman: Oh, everything.
>> Bill Benson: You couldn't go anywhere else. Right?
>> Dora Klayman: No. But in 1954, I think -- I was also connected at one point with another member of my family that survived. Also my aunt survived with the partisans. One of my father's sister. She also went to Palestine. But one of my uncles and his wife survived. They went from Hungary on train, another story, and were rescued to Switzerland. They wrote to me when I was in high school or when I was in mid middle school. They asked me to come to visit.

So at one point when I was in the middle of high school, I actually went to Switzerland, which was quite a deal because in the Communist countries, you didn't just go to Switzerland. So I was allowed to go because I was regarded as what they called a victim of fascism.
>> Bill Benson: So that was a special designation, victim of fascism.
>> Dora Klayman: Yes. I got a passport. The Swiss allowed me to come. I uncle, Josef Basch, he came to the border to meet me. Because there I was a young girl on the orient express by myself. He came to meet me. And that's the first time that I had actually seen somebody of my family when I was more than a 7-year-old.

So, I found myself for first time in an Orthodox Jewish family. I had no idea. I always knew who I was. I knew I was Jewish. Even though I had been christened at one point during the war, with trying to save me. But I knew I was Jewish but I had no idea what that meant. I didn't pay much attention. Under the Communist system nobody was paying much attention to religion of any kind.

But anyway, I adored my uncle immediately and my aunt and my cousins. So they invited me to come back. So when I finished my first year at the University of Zagreb, I went back to Switzerland to study French in Lausanne.
>> Bill Benson: And you were able to leave again?
>> Dora Klayman: Yes. Once I went out and came back, it was ok. I could go back again. And I got the visa to go for a year to study.

And I think you want to hear whom I met on the train.
>> Bill Benson: You're reading my mind. I had to get that in.
>> Dora Klayman: He knows that story.

So on the train there was some young people speaking English. And I had been an English major. I had studied English all the way from I think eighth grade through high school. I was an English major at the university. And so I was dying to hear what they were talking about. And they were talking about integration in the United States and the problems that some young children had to enter a white school. And it was the time of all the efforts at Little Rock at integration. The governor standing at the door not allowing those children in.

So after that discussion ended, I continued to speak with this young man who was trying to defend the United States not defend what was happening but trying to explain that not everybody in the United States would act as the governor did and was very grateful that President Eisenhower had sent troops to create a better atmosphere. So I continued talking with him. And we definitely liked each other. We exchanged addresses.

Then he left to catch a ship that was going back to the United States. He was American. And I went on to Switzerland. I very soon got letters from him. And then I wrote back. And eventually, to make this long story short, he came back and we were married in Switzerland. And that's how I came to the United States.
>> Bill Benson: I wanted you to tell that story.

I think we have a couple of minutes for some questions from our audience. And I think we're going to start actually with the first question that comes from the internet, I believe, if I'm correct about that. Then we'll turn to our audience.

There's going to be some microphones in the aisle for you to use.
>> Good morning. Mrs. Hornicks class is watching in Iowa. They want to know at what age did you learn what really happened and at what age did you grasp what you and your family had experienced?
>> Bill Benson: It was hard to hear you. The question was, At what age did you grasp what happened to your family and to you?
>> Yes. At what age did really understand what happened to you and your family?
>> Bill Benson: At what age did really understand what happened to you and your family?
>> Dora Klayman: I think I grasped what happened as soon as freedom came and nobody returned. Whether I internalized it, that's another story. It was sort of -- I remember, you know, that people in the street used to ask me this question. People would stop me in the street and say, Are you still hoping that your parents would return? I -- it's amazing but I do remember people asking me that question. I would say, "No, they're dead". Sort of like -- they would say, but maybe they are someplace in Russia. I don't know why people had that sense. Because, of course, there were many people that had been taken to the Soviet Union at one point. And I understood that they were not coming back. And I was trying to be very brave about it.
>> Bill Benson: Let's see if anybody in our audience has a question. If you have a question, please wait for a mic to be handed to you. Make your questions as brief as you can. I'll repeat it so we all hear it. And then Dora will respond.

I think we have one over here. Thank you very much.
>> Hi. Good morning. I just want to say thank you for sharing. And I appreciate it. My name is Elan. My question is a little off topic.

After firsthand seeing everything, all of those atrocities, how do you feel about what's going on in Syria today? Do you feel like that's a genocide in itself? And do you think it's being handled correctly or do you think the world is turning a blind eye to it?
>> Bill Benson: I don't know if you heard the question. In light of what's happening in the world, including places like Syria, your thoughts about that.

I think one of the things that I'd like to say first is that, of course, this is an institution that is dedicated to educating and commitment to eradicating genocide so that's the mission of the museum itself, and reminding people forever that we had the Holocaust.

I don't know that you want to get into that particularly here but.
>> Dora Klayman: I can just say that, yes, it touches me very much, of course. It is impossible not to empathize and not to remember what happened to us and how not to think about people who are under such stress and strain, the peril of their lives.

I think there are sometimes -- I don't know why that picture of that little boy -- I'm sure it was -- it went viral, I think, the little boy sitting in a truck and just staring ahead. I thought, Oh, my God, he looks like my brother. It's just impossible not to feel for them.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Dora. We have one more.

Before we do that, I want to mention that we will close the program. Dora will remain on the stage. So please absolutely feel free to come up here, meet her, get your picture taken with her, or ask her a question. And that will be a good time to go maybe into other topics.

One more question.

>> Thank you very much for telling your story. I don't know if I'll pronounce this correctly. Do you know at all what happened to the Croatian Ustasa party after peace, after the Russians came in?

>> Bill Benson: The question is -- thank you for asking that because I wanted to. What happened to Ustasa after the war?

>> Dora Klayman: There were trials. There were trials. And many of them were executed and jailed. There are still controversies about some of what happened. To what extent, you know -- there were reprisals to what extent there were reprisals that were not exactly done in a totally judicial manner. But I remember there being trials and I remember reading about what happened.

And, of course, some of the Ustasa tried to escape. There is a still disputed time about an area of what happened where apparently partisans killed some of the escaping Ustasa. It hasn't been exactly decided whether that was done in a correct manner or not. So I'd rather not comment too much about that.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Dora.

I want to thank all of you for being here. I remind that you we have the *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August.

Before you get up, I'm going to turn back to Dora. It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. So Dora will say a few more comments. When Dora finishes, our photographer, Joel, will come up on the stage and take a video of Dora with you as the background. So, please, if you can stay seated for another couple of moments once Dora has finished.

And, again, Dora will remain on the stage. So if you'd like to come up here and ask her a question because you didn't have a chance to or just say hi to her, please feel free to do that.

>> Dora Klayman: So, just because I knew that I would be given this moment, I gathered my thoughts yesterday and wrote down what I wanted to say. So forgive me for reading it.

We are here in the most appropriate place, I think, to stop and think what happens when people yield to political expedience to demonizing those who seem different, to using hurtful language that can easily lead to painful consequences. We are living now in a difficult world. There are, again, people fleeing war and persecution, people who have nowhere to go. There are, again, some who out of fear would close the door and let them perish. But here we are gathered to remember those who lost their lives through prejudice and hatred and to honor those who often at their own peril sheltered others and that gives me hope. It helps me to continue believing that understanding tolerance and compassion can and will prevail.

Thank you for being here with me.

>> [Applause]