UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
Rae Goldfarb
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Remote CART Captioning

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Bill Benson: Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today. We are in our 18th year of *First Person*. Our *First Person* today is Mrs. Rae Goldfarb, whom you shall meet shortly.

This 2017 season of *First Person* is made possible Through 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 volunteers 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.

Rae will share with us her *First Person* account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have time at tend of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Rae some questions. Today's program will be live streamed 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 the hashtag USHMM. USHMM. And we invite those who are here in the auditorium today to also join us on the web whether the rest of our programs in April and early May will be live streamed. 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 Rae is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

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

On this map of Poland the arrow indicates the location of Dokszyce. As part of an agreement with Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union occupied Dokszyce in September 1939.

Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. When German SS and police began mass killings of Ray's brother was discovered by Germans and killed. Rae and her mother sought shelter in the ghetto in Glebokie, a town North of Dokszyce. The second arrow points to Glebokie.

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

After liberation, Rae and Dina left Poland for Italy where they stayed in the Santa Cesarea Displaced Persons Camp. The arrow points to the location of the Santa Ceseara Displaced Persons Camp, as you can see, in the lower boot of Italy. Here we see Rae and her mother in the Santa Cesarea Displaced Persons' Camp.

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

After arriving in the US in November 1947, Rae and her mother came to Washington, DC but later moved to Brooklyn where Rae finished high school. Rae went to work for the Washington, DC court system after graduating from high school and attended George Washington University and Baltimore Hebrew College at night. Rae married Harry Goldfarb, a Holocaust survivor and a US Army veteran. They have been married 65 years this year. Rae went back to court after her daughter Lynn was born. When her son Barry was born, Rae became a stay-at-home mom. She then went to work in the Hebrew afternoon school system. Rae started a career in real estate in 1978, and retired 33 years later in 2011. Rae and Harvey's two children, Lynn and Barry, are both architects and live in the Washington, DC area. Rae and Harvey have two grandchildren, twins who will be 15 in August, and Rae's son Barry is here with us today. Both Rae and Harvey have led active lives. Rae played tennis weekly until recently, and Harvey, who is 92, ran six miles daily until he was 80. Rae says she is now "fully engaged with the Museum." You will find Rae here on Wednesdays volunteering with Visitor Services. Rae recently spoke to cadets at the U.S. Naval Academy. Among the audience was a young woman cadet who turns out to be a relative of Rae's. She has spoken at such places are retirement homes and local schools. And in 2016 she spoke at major conferences about aging to relay her experiences as a survivor, resiliency, and now facing her own aging.

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

(Applause)

Rae, thank you so much for joining us today and being willing to be our *First Person*. We have just an hour, so we won't be able to cover everything, but I know that you'll share with us as much as you possibly can in this time. And we're going to start first, though, Rae, with before we talk about the war and the Holocaust, tell us a little bit about your life before the war, your family, your community, what it was like.

Rae Goldfarb: I lived in a very small town which was on the Russian border. Poland was a democracy at the time. Dokszyce had liberated the area and Poland became a democracy. We were on the border with Russia. The town was like four kilometers from the Russian border and there was a military installation there of the Polish Army. Life was very pleasant. As far as I remember I had all the conveniences and lived in a household that had a lot of help. Both my parents were in business. My mother had a fabric store and my father

was supplying the Army garrison and also exporting to Germany. Life was good and I started an early education. I had a nanny, or at that time they called them a governess, that taught me to read and to speak Hebrew and, of course, Polish and the native language there was Belarus. I did not expect to be in the circumstances that eventually evolved. My father died in 1937 after a trip to the German border to deliver some goods. At that time there were some Jews that were deported from Germany, Polish Jews that were considered non-citizens. They came to better their lives in Germany because it was a much more progressive country and they were deported when the Hitler regime came into power. He went to visit them and got some sort of an infection. Could not find the -- any medication for it, could not find any help for him, and he died. My mother took over both businesses and was very much engaged in the business. Needless to say, my upbringing was mostly by the help in the house. So was my brothers. My brother was three years younger -- three or four -- between three or four years younger than me. The war broke out --

>> Bill Benson: Rae, one other question before we turn to the war. Your father, as I said, died when you were young. Do you have memories of him?

Rae Goldfarb: Only the memory of the picture and I remember certain incidents. I know he was tall because when he put me on his shoulders I almost reached the chandelier and was a high ceiling. The reason I remember that is because electricity was installed in the house, which wasn't very prevalent in that part of Poland. And I remember that particular incident. Other than that, I remember very little of my father.

Bill Benson: And I was going to also ask you, tell us about the interactions between your family and other Jews with the Christian community in Dokszyce.

Rae Goldfarb: Well, both my parents were in business, so they had a lot of contact with the farm population. The general population had to buy fabrics in order to make their clothes. They didn't go to a department store like you do now. And mother not just had a store but she also distributed to smaller stores. She did kind of wholesaling because she would buy the fabrics in bolts and needless to say it was too much fabric for her store, so she would sell it to other stores.

The farmers would come and the general population from town would come to buy the fabrics. As far as I can remember she was the only fabric store in the town and in the surrounding area.

My father, again, had a lot of contact because he bought up produce, he bought up animals, he was involved in the slaughter of animals and providing the meat for the Polish Army, and supplied the meat also for the Jewish population. There was a quota. You could only slaughter so much for the Jewish population which required a special way of slaughter. He got around it by having it all slaughtered the humane way which would consider the way the Jews are required to slaughter an animal so it does not suffer and the town was very prosperous. There were between 2,500 and 3,000 Jews in the town and general population of the town was about 6,000. Aid lot of interaction with the community outside because I remember taking matza to the Greek orthodox -- well, he called them the (saying foreign word). I guess he was calling the priest. And he would give me honey. He was producing honey. And I remember decorating a Christmas tree with a family in the -- an outlying village. The ornaments that were made was to make a hole at the top to have egg and the bottom of the egg and blow out the contents and then paint a face on it, attach a hat with a string to hang on the Christmas tree.

Bill Benson: You remember that.

Rae Goldfarb: I remember that. Silly things I remember. Important things I'm not so sure.

Bill Benson: September 1, 1939, Germany invades Poland, starting world war --

Rae Goldfarb: No, no, Russia invades Poland.

Bill Benson: No, September 1, Germany invades Poland and Russia comes --

Rae Goldfarb: My part. I'm only concerned with my part.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: So there's an agreement between Germany and Russia.

Rae Goldfarb: That's right.

Bill Benson: Two weeks later the Russians come in and occupy your town.

Rae Goldfarb: They came in at night -- well, most of my memory from those things are my mother's description of things. The Russians came in at night. The tanks rolled in without any notice, no war declaration, no notice. Germany had declared war on Poland, but our part, there was -- which was a long distance from the German/Russian -- from the German/Polish border T Russians just marched in overnight and took over half of Poland. And that became an occupation that lasted for two years.

Bill Benson: So tell us what life was like under the Soviet occupation, under the Russians during those first couple of years of the war.

Rae Goldfarb: The Russian system believed that any kind -- anybody who was engaged in commerce was not a suitable profession. Everything was owned by the state. My mother very quickly distributed the contents of the store to friendly farmers that she had contact with, with the agreement that they would provide us with some food in exchange for the fabrics and to use whatever they needed. She also hid some of even our clothing, her coats, our better coats, with the farmers for the simple reason because the Russians looted. The soldiers would come in. And one of the things that she always told about and laughed about is that she had some silk nightgowns and the Russians had confiscated those and some of the women were marching around with them in the street.

Also, that I remember is that we had an alarm clock, which wasn't really small. It was like the small bin that is I've seen here in this country, and a Russian soldier actually strapped it on his wrist

Bill Benson: Like a watch.

Rae Goldfarb: Like a watch. That was a big possession. It was called "chasy." We had watches. They were good sized, they weren't tiny watches, that my mother and father wore, but those they had hidden, of course.

Bill Benson: They had those hidden. And you were forced to go to Russian school once the Russians were in, right?

Rae Goldfarb: I went to a Hebrew parochial school that my father started and I actually was enrolled in the school at the age of three because they needed a certain amount of students. When the Russians came in of course any of the parochial schools, whether they were Christian or Jewish were closed and everybody had to attend the public school, which was Russian indoctrination. That's best way I can describe it. And as I told you, Bill, one of the achievements that I thought at the time was a big one, anybody who did not belong to the Communist Party or had associated with them was not allowed to reach -- well, there were certain requirements in order to get into the lowest branch of the communist hierarchy and that was called the pioneer. And in order to become a pioneer either your parents had to be socialist, communist, or you had to achieve a high grade in your marks in school. And like all

kids, and I'm sure I was no different than a lot of the kids here in the United States that wanted to belong to some sort of a group, I had to achieve to get the red kerchief with the hammer and sickle that held it together. And I was so proud of it. And of course when I came home, my mother said oh, boy.

Bill Benson: And what's your family was considered -- because they had businesses and were considered bourgeois, your family was fearful that you would end up getting sent to Siberia.

Rae Goldfarb: Correct. Many of the wealthier people in town, they would come at night, just tell them to take whatever they can with them in hand, a bundle, and they would deport them to Siberia. Actually it would have been a blessing had we been deported. My mother had a backpack -- here you would call ate backpack. At that time it was a bag with things, ready in case they came at night. Because she was a widow I guess she wasn't one of the first ones considered for the deportation.

Bill Benson: As you said a moment ago, you would have wished you had been sent.

Rae Goldfarb: We wished we had -- we would have had a better chance for survival, the whole family.

Bill Benson: Speaking of that, in June 1941, Germany turned on the Soviets and quickly conquered all the territory that the Russians had in Poland. The German Army entered your town in the late summer of 1941. By the end of 1941 the Germans forced you and the other Jews into a Dokszyce to a ghetto. Tell us what you recall about that.

Rae Goldfarb: What I recall the first thing is we had to wear an insignia. I'm sure many of you have heard of the yellow star. We had to wear it on the clothing front, on the left front, right back, on inner and outer garments, needless to say for a kid it was considered a badge of shame. Also, we were not allowed to -- if anybody walked on the sidewalk, we had to step off. And considering that in the part of the country that I lived snow started to fall in October and stayed on the ground until Easter. There was no mode of communication. Communication was by horse and buggy or horseback. Needless to say the streets weren't very clean. When one was pushed off into the street I hate to tell you what I came home smelling like and that was a badge of shame. And of course felt much, much depressed. Before the winter set in the Jews were all collected into a ghetto. The ghetto was not what you consider here a ghetto where it has a certain segment of the population living and called a ghetto because it's inhabited by a group associated with each other sort of. The ghetto was like a prison. One side of the ghetto, I don't know if you have the picture --

Bill Benson: We aren't able to show it here.

Rae Goldfarb: Okay. One side of the ghetto was a river. One side of the ghetto was the Main Street and actually our house fell into the ghetto because the houses on that street all had gates that closed the yards, sort of blocked off from the street and the rest of it was fenced. There were guards around it. People were not allowed to go out and in at leisure. They were only allowed out when Germans took people to do some labor for them or during market day which the farmers could come to a certain gate in the ghetto to barter food with the ghetto inhabitants. Also, the first thing that they did is they had everyone to come to an open area and counted the population. Everything was accounted for. The ghetto, they appointed -- Jews even during non-occupation time, had what they call the committee council that was working with the Jewish population there for charities, for people that needed help, interceding between people and with the government, and they appointed those people to intercede with the Nazi government. Those people were supposed to supply the Nazis with

first they wanted gold and silver. They call it for the benefit of the German armies to conquer Russia. That was the --

Bill Benson: That was the line.

Rae Goldfarb: That was the line. Needless to say, a lot of it ended up in their own pockets. Silver, gold, it was like a ransom. Every so often they required a supply of certain things. It also came down, not just to gold and silver and money, it came down to utensils of copper and even iron and that was all for the war effort.

Bill Benson: So literally pots and pans.

Pots and pans. Pots and pans. Anything they consider a value actually.

Bill Benson: Right.

Rae Goldfarb: The population was used as forced labor. The German Army was stationed in the barracks where the Polish Army had before and the German armies were more motorized than the Polish armies were, so they needed work on cleaning the stables, doing their laundry, doing their cooking, whatever menial jobs they had, and also for roadwork. So they would take a number of people out in the morning, bring them back at night. Everybody was counted and the population had to report back and the same number that they left.

At one time a few younger people had managed to escape and the count was not full. They brought the committee out and asked them to present those two people. Of course they couldn't because they had escaped. The retribution was ten for one. They would not allow that committee to offer themselves as hostages. Some of the people, some old men came out and said their life wasn't worth much anyway and they're willing to be counted as the hostages. But that was not acceptable to them. What they wanted is for that committee to select ten for each, 20 people in all, young men of the same age, of the same health, to be presented to the Nazis. That was a very difficult task for them. How do you give somebody up? They took those people and they shot them in front of the whole population of the ghetto. They just gunned them down. Needless to say A lot of people considered escape as a sentence of death to others, so very view have tried to escape. A few of them managed to escape, though, but not many

Bill Benson: Rae, you said that it wasn't long after the German occupation that in your words they started diminishing the ghetto.

Rae Goldfarb: Yes. Within several months, under the disguise of resettlement, they said they were going to take the Jews to a larger ghetto so that they would have consolidation. And at first they asked everybody to come to the -- to the area, the open area and they selected people. They selected a lot of young ones, a lot of children, and some older people, too. A mixture. They did not take them to any larger ghetto. They took them to a pit and gunned them down. Word came back about it. People started to build hiding places, plan for hiding places. So the second time around there were not so many people that came out to the area when they called for resettlement, the second time, so they basically went house to house and pulled people out. Those that had hiding places of course hid. Our family house and warehouse were L-shaped and between the warehouse and the family house there was a space between the walls. From what my mother told me it was used as basically a safe. We didn't have iron safes but this was --

Bill Benson: A hiding place for valuables.

Rae Goldfarb: -- a hiding place for valuables, right. For any accounting books and so forth. Things that they needed in the business. And it was covered with -- by the same route,

so it was a continuation route, it didn't look like there were two different buildings. And there was access to an attic in that area and that became the hiding place. So when word spread and when it was -- became obvious that they were again looking for people supposedly to resettle, we went into that hiding place. Eventually -- this time of the year, it was after Passover that the ghetto was shrunken to such a point where we knew that was the last thing. And Mother tried to find places -- ways to actually get out before, but it was impossible. We -- the final closing of the ghetto, we climbed into that hiding place. There were food provisions and water provisions there, very little sanitation available. We climbed into that place and we were hiding there.

Bill Benson: And who was with you? Tell us who was with you in that hiding place.

Rae Goldfarb: My mother took of course me and my brother in. I know my grandmother was there, and there were some other people. I don't remember who.

Bill Benson: But your grandmother was with you.

Rae Goldfarb: My grandmother was with us and basically saved us eventually. But we hid in that place. From what my mother told me, we were there between eight and ten days. Conditions became horrible and we had to -- some of the people couldn't stand it anymore. If you are enclosed with no light, the only thing you could hear was what was going on outside because the houses were not built of -- not too many with much brick. It was mostly wood. So sound penetrated. You couldn't even speak loud. You had to speak in whispers. Some of the people just couldn't stand it anymore and came -- went out. They were caught but they never disclosed who else was hiding. At the end, from what my mother told us, well, I know my mother, my brother, and I and my grandmother were there, there were several other people. We climbed out. My mother was first and of course had to help us down. Me and my brother and my grandmother and some of the other people, there were a couple of children, I know that, that came out with us, we thought that it was all quiet for a certain amount of time but obviously there were some looters that thought they might find something. And all of a sudden we heard voices. It was nighttime. We hid -- there was another place in a pantry that was a root cellar that was a hiding place. Mother took us quickly to that root cellar. Grandmother was behind us so she covered us with a cover and she acted crazy. When she was asked was anyone else here she said I don't know anything. I was laying there, I was half out, and I don't know much. And she acted crazy. They took her away. My mother heard her be taken away.

We stayed until the next night and we ventured out. Mother figured the best way to cross was across the river. I remember the name of the river, it was the Berezina, and it started -- it was still pretty narrow at our place and not too deep, and we waded the river and were met by two guards. Mother knew them, they knew my mother. Everybody in town knew my mother. She had told them to put their rifles on their back. They knew that she had valuables. She said she'll give them whatever she has to let us run. Little did she figure that eventually they would tell on us anyway. She had a watch with a gold chain that she put into the hands of one of them and kind of wrapped it around his wrist so he wouldn't lose it. And she gave some trinkets to the other guard. She told him to put out his hands so she can put the trinkets in. By the time it took them to dispose of those trinkets to put them away in the pockets, we were able to run.

We ran to a village where we used to go at Christmas time to help decorate the Christmas tree. My father's best friend. He agreed to hide my brother and suggested that his sister, who had a daughter my age, that she would be able to hide me. My mother left my

brother with him and we went to his sister's house. She fed us, of course, and we got to clean up a little bit, and word came to her that they were beating up her brother. His mother-in-law told on him because she would get ten kilo sugar for disposing -- exposing a Jew. So she was willing to risk that. They beat up her son-in-law until he finally told them where my brother was hidden. However, he had enough sense to send his own son to his sister's house just to tell her that the Germans were trying to take my brother away and they were beating up on his father. Needless to say, his sister packed us up very quickly and sent us off.

She sent us to hide in a bathhouse. There was a stone bathhouse at the end of the village. The villagers did not, needless to say, have showers and bathtubs or bathrooms -- one or more bathrooms in the house, and so they -- on Saturday they went to clean up for church and they would go to the bathhouse to take their baths. And we hid there overnight. And then we ventured off.

The next place we basically everything on foot. By night we walked, during the day we hid. And we got to the house of the woman that took care of my brother. She hid us and she went off to town to find out where my brother was. Unfortunately had we gone there first, I don't know, maybe my brother would have been alive because she wanted to see if she could get my brother. She had no children and she would have raised him as her own. However, she found out that he was shot. And that was May 8, 1942.

Bill Benson: And he was six or seven years of age?

Rae Goldfarb: No, he was four years of age.

Bill Benson: Four years of age.

Rae Goldfarb: Four years of age. No, I'm sorry, he was --

Bill Benson: He was six.

Rae Goldfarb: He was six or seven years of age. He was four when the picture was taken.

Bill Benson: Right.

Rae Goldfarb: By the way, that picture you saw first, that's the only possession I have and the only memory I have of my brother. The only possession I have from -- from my home.

Bill Benson: So once your mom got this -- your mom got this horrible news, what did you do then?

Rae Goldfarb: Well, my mother decided that the safest place was to get to the larger ghetto. And so we went again to a farmer. We had many farmer friends, but everybody was afraid. They were afraid because anybody could expose them and that meant death to their families. And to us, of course. This particular woman was a widow whose husband had died a few years back and my father basically helped her save the farm. He extended funds to her so she could continue on and she hid us overnight. The next day was market day, and the farmers would take their -- whatever produce they had to sell to the market. She loaded the wagon with the produce and instead of herself and her son and daughter going to the marketplace, she dressed me in her daughter's clothes, my mother in her clothes, and the son drove the wagon and we went to this larger city where there was a ghetto still with Jews.

With the crowds we managed to steal into the ghetto and of course the son sold his produce and went back home. In the ghetto it was the same arrangement and you had -- in this larger ghetto you had to have documents. Because you could not even move around in the ghetto without documents. My mother was able to obtain documents for me and myself. That's when I became born in 1930, even though I was two years younger. It also qualified

me --

Bill Benson: Was that just accidental or was that a deliberate decision?

Rae Goldfarb: I don't really know. That's the document she was able to obtain.

Bill Benson: Okay.

Rae Goldfarb: And it's of little consequence to me other than the fact that I was able to go out with the workforce.

Bill Benson: Because you were two years older.

Rae Goldfarb: Because I was old enough to do some work. All I can tell you is that if you couldn't get out to work, the next time they came to shrink the ghetto, you were one of the selected people. My work was -- and that I remember -- tying -- in a spinning wheel, tying the wool threads that had broken. I had to be very quick and fortunately I had nimble fingers. My mother was taken out as a laundress. So we had the ability to leave the ghetto with the workforce. With my mother's contacts during market days, she was able to connect with a friend of my father's who smuggled a gun into a basket of eggs to my mother. Supposedly he was selling her the eggs. And she had something to offer. She knew there were Russian prisoners of war that managed to escape the Germans who mistreated them badly and formed themselves into a resistance to slow the progress of the Nazis to the front lines. And so she had something to offer. And one day, with the workforce going out to the assignment, we walked out with the farmers --

Bill Benson: To go to your jobs.

Rae Goldfarb: We walked out to go to the jobs, but we walked out of the city with the farmers returning. Some of them would come by wagon and some of them would bring produce on foot. The ones that the village was closer would bring produce on foot. So this is how we got out of the ghetto.

Bill Benson: So you're out to have ghetto. Your mother has taken you to sneak into the ghetto and now you've gotten out of it.

Rae Goldfarb: We snuck out. We had the clothing, the farmers' clothing that we could blend into the farm population and could walk out.

Bill Benson: Your mom's objective now was to link up with those partisans.

Rae Goldfarb: The partisans. She actually had plans before, they built a tunnel under the barbed wire fencing. Somebody got word of it, some young man, and they used the tunnel before the time and they were caught by the Germans. And so that route was closed to us.

Bill Benson: So from there, Rae, your mother and you make your way into the partisans in the forest. And so in a -- give us a sense of what that was like. It's hard to imagine. Here's your mother, escaped out of the ghetto with a young child going into the woods, finding a group of resistance fighters, the partisans, and joining up with them. First, how did she even get welcomed into the resistance?

Rae Goldfarb: Well, that was her idea. She had the gun. The Russian prisoners of war were marched -- that's what she told me, to the town and even when some of the non-Jewish -- well, the Jewish population couldn't but the non-Jewish population would offer them water, they would hit them with the rifle butts and would not let them accept the water. They got so disgusted of course and saw that there was no -- no avenue of escape for them. They started to escape en masse. Some of them were shot and some of them, of course, got away. The area is surrounded by forests, pine forests. Any of you have gone to cut your own Christmas trees? You have seen how low the pine -- the pine branches are? Well, that's how

we could hide. I slept many a night under those pine branches and hopefully not a cone under my back. They escaped en masse and gathered in the forest. They had no guns to protect themselves or to do any harm to the progress of the Germans to the front lines. At first they laid down their rifles and became prisoners of war and then we had to fight their way to remain alive. And so they would try to catch some soldiers who were out on assignments. However, they did not shoot them, because then, you know, they would -- they will get a force coming to fight them. So what they did was, is they would take away their rifles, take away their clothing. In the first place they had some Nazi uniforms, the German uniforms so they could disguise themselves to do their work, and they would leave them in their underwear and tell them -- tell them that the farmer caught you with his daughter so he made you run so they could save face. They had the rifles and they had some German clothing so they could infiltrate and they could also start fighting back. Most of the work of the partisans was to disrupt the progress to the front lines, the German progress to the front lines, to fight the Russians.

The work was to dislodge -- excuse me. The work was to dislodge the railroad ties so the trains would derail. Needless to say, they could collect some ammunition from the trains and use that ammunition to blow up some of the roads. They weren't -- they were mostly cobblestone roads. There were some roads that were paved as the Germans progressed and they used the labor of the population. So this way they -- they could slow the -- the lines to the front

Bill Benson: So Rae, tell us what your mother and you were doing with the partisans.

Rae Goldfarb: Well, basically Mother was cooking the soup. Mostly potato soup.

Bill Benson: She was their cook.

Rae Goldfarb: She was their cook. Mother didn't cook at home.

(Laughter)

But she learned. She was a good observer, and she knew if you fried onions that they make the soup a little better. And so they loved the soup. Also, the farmers had to give the Germans a certain amount of their produce and sometimes they would come and take their cattle, their cows, and of course their horses were all taken. And they would -- the farmers finally drove the livestock into the forest -- further into the forest for grazing and the partisans were the guards. So -- and the Germans were afraid to go into the forest because they would encounter the resistance.

As the front lines started to move forward, the Russian armies kind of joined up with some of the partisans. They didn't really join them but what they did was is they supplied them with ammunition, basically grenades because that would blow up railroad cars and some ammunition for the guns. They would drop it and the partisans really organized themselves as an Army. And the Russians dropped some people of rank that could manage them. They also set up a hospital, and I wound up in one of them because I got sick with typhus. Mother managed to get me to that hospital because we were with a forward group. You would call it a reconnaissance group, at the edge of the forest. And we wound up not with our group but all the way in the back of the forest in the hospital. By the time the Russian armies were pushing the Germans out, they had a front line to -- to consider and then the back line. The partisans were kind of surrounding them, so they started to fight the partisans. And the partisans dispersed. Mother and I, of course, were stuck in the hospital. I was well enough to walk, however, I -- my head was bald. It was shaved. My hair was shaved because the -- typhus was spread by lice and of course everybody tried not to have any hair.

That's where they hid the most

Bill Benson: You mentioned a little while ago that you slept many nights under pine needle branches in the pine forest.

Rae Goldfarb: Oh, yes.

Bill Benson: But really the conditions were really tough. You were living in the woods, food was meager, the weather was awful at times, it was a really very harsh environment for you.

Rae Goldfarb: It -- it was a very harsh environment. But the farmers -- the farmers were mostly -- they were cognizant of the fact that the partisans were there and to some degree the partisans did not loot them. The partisans did not take away their grain that was next year's crop basically. They could -- they could sow their grain, their seed. And their animals were kind of preserved. So they were willing to supply some of the things to the partisans, basically foodstuffs. But at times when -- when the Germans came into the villages and since we were a forward group, we were more exposed to them, we had to hide and then we would run into the forest.

Food was scarce. Potatoes -- Belarus is known for its potatoes so potatoes were pretty plentiful and also root vegetables. And of course there were mushrooms in the forest. I knew which mushrooms to eat and which not to. And there were cranberries because there were marches

Bill Benson: Lived off the land, to some extent. In the time we have left, I there are some things you want to tell us. You were caught by the Russians with the partisans and then had a very narrow escape. Tell us about that.

Rae Goldfarb: When the partisans dispersed and we were with no group, basically we were caught up with the farmers, with the population. And the population was taken out of the villages and brought -- well, the closest place was our hometown and they put us in a warehouse. We were caught with the population. At one point they started the -- Nazis were famous for separating females from males, even children. Female children from male children. And there were no young -- not too many young men because the young men were afraid. Either they were taken into the German armies or they basically had to join with the partisans. So they started to separate the females from the males, and I had no hair and I was dressed like a boy and I was being separated from my mother. I was sent with the boys.

Since I knew Yiddish which is a very similar language to German, they were debating whether I was a girl or a boy because the features looked more like a girl but the dress and no hair prompted them to think I was a boy. And I said the only word that would get me back to my mother which was "mechen" which meant girl. And they -- some of them decided I may be Jewish because how would I know the word, the German word. Most of the farmers were very illiterate and did not pick up languages. Mother got word of it, because she was hiding. She was in her hometown with the population that knew her very well, and she came out and approached the Germans and said that I was her daughter. They had gallows set up. They were famous for hanging people. They put me under the gallows and they said to her, we won't touch you, but tell us is this a Jewish child? And my mother said no, she is my daughter. She is not Jewish. She knew a few words of German because I was doing your laundry. And I am slow, I can't understand, I can't learn a language, but she's a child and she learned a few words. And they decided if my mother offered herself to be hung first and they did not recognize her as Jewish then she's probably telling the truth. And they let us go.

Bill Benson: So then you rejoined the partisans after that.

Rae Goldfarb: Well, what happened was they sent the villagers back to their villages and we had no village to go to. Mother gave them the name of a village. She knew the area very well, of a way distant village so that we kind of had to pass and stop at many villages, different villages. We finally came to a place where some of the villagers couldn't go any further because of the front lines and somebody recognized my mother. However, there was another woman that heard about it and she did not have any ill feelings towards Jews and she knew my mother for the type of person that she was and she came over to her and she says look, I recognized you a long time ago but I kept quiet. But there's a murmur that somebody said they think they recognized you and they know that you're Dina, the fabric store owner. So I would suggest that you make yourself scarce. Mother took me and we ran again. And at that point we were able to find some of the partisans. We ran basically toward the front lines because we knew that that's my mother, I didn't know anything, my mother knew that that's where probably the partisans would go and that's to help the Russian armies. And so we did get with the partisans and we were liberated by the Russians.

Bill Benson: And tell us about your liberation.

Rae Goldfarb: Oh, after -- well, when we were liberated, we went to live in the bigger city where we were in the second ghetto because we heard that some of the Jews managed to escape that ghetto and gathered there. Mother went to our hometown to see who survived. You go to the place where you come from, if you're looking for someone. A neighbor gave her the photograph that you saw on the screen. She picked it up from the garbage. She told my mother she did not loot her house. She invited her to her house and said look at my house, I have nothing from your house. You were a good neighbor and a good friend. I picked up the picture as a memento of you. But I would suggest that you don't spend the night because I would love to have you as my guest but both you and I would not survive the night. She gave my mother some bread and food and of course the photograph, and mother came back to the bigger ghetto, basically again, walking with 30 kilometers. It wasn't an easy walk.

Bill Benson: Rae, I think we have time to turn to our audience to ask some questions.

Rae Goldfarb: Okay.

Bill Benson: But before we do, I would like you to, if you would, talk about your mother was just an extraordinary woman in every way.

Rae Goldfarb: Mother was -- she was smart, needless to say, but she was also very resourceful and she could look ahead and see what to do next. She always planned, and I guess it was easy for her to plan ahead. I don't know. I guess all of us plan ahead.

Bill Benson: Tell us about her -- at the end of the water, you were liberated in the summer of '44 but the war went on, of course, until May of '45.

Rae Goldfarb: Correct.

Bill Benson: Your mother was able to get you on a train fixing water towers.

Rae Goldfarb: Mother enlisted. As a partisan --

Bill Benson: She enlisted in the Russian Army.

Rae Goldfarb: She enlisted in the Russian Army as a worker and we -- we got lodging in a boxcar and traveled with the train to fix water towers. We got as far as Prussia where conditions were awful and she managed to get our train car attached to a train that was heading south to a city called Lublin where there was -- it was a big city and it was very close to one of the concentration camps, and that's where the survivors gathered. We got -- I'll make it short now. We got to that city and they had already some establishment with the

Jews in Palestine where they sent groups to try to bring the Jews out of Poland into what was then called Palestine and now is Israel. And we basically -- I learned my geography on foot. We walked, rode, until we got to Italy. We were caught at one point we thought we were in the Russian -- the American zone, we ended up in the British zone, they sent us back to the Russian zone and eventually went through the alp passes, the Alpian passes into Italy. The first city we went into was Padua, then Modena, and then we ended up in Santa Cesarea.

Bill Benson: The very end of the boot of Italy.

Rae Goldfarb: The very end of the boot of Italy with the hope of crossing the Mediterranean into what was then Palestine, being Israel. However, I'm sure all of you have heard, or maybe the adults have heard about the exodus, the ship that was caught and the people taken off at Cyprus and became kind of imprisoned there. We missed that ship by this much. Mother started to look for my aunt and uncle who immigrated to the United States and she had memorized the address. The only thing she forgot was the two letters after Washington. She wrote the letters to Washington but it went to Washington State.

(Laughter)

The letters came back, and of course it had to be Washington, DC but she put an ad in a Jewish newspaper and my uncle saw it and contacted us, went and made out -- for making out immigration papers. He had to promise to support us, provide lodging, food, clothing, medical, and education for me and deposit $5,000 in 1947, which was a fortune. He mortgaged his store -- he had a grocery store -- in order to supply the guarantee for us to come to the United States.

Bill Benson: Rae, we're going to turn to our audience, but is my memory correct that you -- you couldn't get over here because the -- the Polish quota for coming here was so -- so restrictive so you were able to end up getting on a Russian quota which allowed you to get here. And the other thing I want to say is that because your identification papers had you two years and you really were, when you came here, you were -- you were officially 17 on record, you were really only 15, but you were 17 but they put you here in school in kindergarten or first grade.

Rae Goldfarb: Elementary school.

Bill Benson: Elementary school at age 17 but you quickly made your way up. So let's turn to our audience. And we will hear again from Rae to close our program. But we do have a couple minutes for some questions. I'm going to ask you to make your question as brief as you can. We'll have mics in the aisle. Please wait until you have a microphone in your hand to ask the question. Keep it brief. I will repeat the question to be sure that everybody, including Rae, hears the question and then she'll respond to it. And I'm going to turn first, if I can, to Kai here because she's getting questions on the Internet from people who are tweeting and on the Internet. Kai, you have a question.

>> Yes, good morning, Rae. The question we have via Twitter is while volunteering at the museum and sharing your story, can you tell us about your most memorable visitor that you've met?

Bill Benson: Tell about the most memorable visitor that you have met here at the museum. Your most memorable visitor.

Rae Goldfarb: Most memorable visitor. My most memorable visitor here at the museum was actually somebody who was from Belarus. I was surprised because we have many visitors from many countries, South American countries, even as far as Australia, New Zealand, from Africa, and here somebody shows up from Belarus. And he says how did you

survive?

(Laughter)

I said well, there was some good ones.

Bill Benson: Uh-huh. Was he living here or was she actually a visitor --

Rae Goldfarb: No, he was living here. He escaped too.

Bill Benson: He escaped too. Okay. All right. Do we have anybody who has a question, and I'll try to spot you, but I'll ask the ushers to help me do that.

Rae Goldfarb: Actually there was one more that I wanted to mention.

Bill Benson: Okay.

Rae Goldfarb: There was a gentleman -- that was a while back -- from Cambodia that was very much surprise that had he saw the exhibit on Cambodia at the Holocaust Museum. And of course I told him that we're concerned with all the atrocities that happen anywhere, this museum, sure, is -- commemorates the Holocaust because that was the most horrible, the biggest extermination of people for no other reason but because the Nazis instilled so much hate into the public against the Jews and against other segments of the population that with their lives we were able to inflict so much unnecessary pain and destruction of human life. And he was impressed with the fact that Cambodia, which had a much smaller atrocity, was commemorated here. Not only that, he took out his wallet, he became a member of the museum, and gave $100 --

Bill Benson: No kidding.

Rae Goldfarb: -- donation. He said I'm sorry, I don't have any more right now to spare. And I thought, you know, for a moment there, I forgot about it.

Bill Benson: Thank you for sharing that one. We have a question right here.

Audience Member: Hi. Hi, Rae. Thank you. So impressed with your life and the strength of your -- your story and that of your mom. How -- when you came back over here, how long did your mother survive?

Bill Benson: Tell us how long your mom survived is the question.

Rae Goldfarb: My mom lived to the ripe old age of 99 1/2.

(Applause)

She died of a massive stroke. And amazingly enough she died on the same English date as my brother was shot. It was -- it was amazing that she survived. The doctors couldn't understand how she was holding on. And yet, on the morning, 8:00 in the morning, on the same date, I got word from the hospital that she had passed away.

Bill Benson: Wow. That was in 2006, wasn't it?

Rae Goldfarb: 2006.

Bill Benson: I think we have time for one more question. Okay. And let me just mention, I should have mentioned this before, Rae -- after she finishes in a moment, Rae will stay up here on the stage and we invite anybody who would like to ask her a question that didn't get a chance to do so or meet her or have your picture taken with her. Absolutely feel free to come up on the stage afterwards. We welcome that. So let's take our last question here.

Audience Member: Thank you, Rae. So I have a question about the beginning of the war. Were you expecting like all the Nazis to invade?

Bill Benson: Were you expecting there to be an invasion of Poland when you were young? Was your family expecting the Nazis to come in or the Russians?

Rae Goldfarb: I wasn't expecting anything. When -- when you are that age, all you're

interested in is your friends, your studies, and even though conditions were bad in the ghetto, was still -- my mother had always had a tutor for us and she encouraged me, even during hiding, she was very good at math and she used to teach me math, with the potatoes.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: With the potatoes.

Rae Goldfarb: With the potatoes. And you don't expect anything like that. You don't anticipate because if people would have anticipated. But the other thing is that we couldn't go anywhere. Without -- without papers, my husband's family had papers to immigrate to the United States. He actually came here on a Visa that was issued before -- before the Nazis occupied Poland, but they just didn't get on a ship. We wouldn't have been able to come here if my mother couldn't have convinced the American council that she really was born when it was Russia because she named all the areas around it. And she was born before the first world war and that was Russia. And we came here on a Russian quota. Otherwise, people had to wait years in order to come to the United States.

Bill Benson: And it still took until 1947, two years after the war ended.

Rae Goldfarb: Two years, that's right.

Bill Benson: We have a tradition at *First Person* and that is that our *First Person* has the last word. And so before I turn back to Rae for her last word, I want to, one, thank everybody for being with us today. Remind you, we'll have a *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August and invite you to come back. Again, Rae will remain on the stage when she finishes, so absolutely, please come on up, and then I think -- I think that's probably it. I'm going to turn to Rae for her closing words.

Rae Goldfarb: The only thing is that over the years when I have spoken about the Holocaust and kind of looked back at it, it was lies about segments of the population that instilled hate in others. I couldn't imagine why I was hated because I was Jewish. We lived a quiet life observing the rules of the country, didn't do anybody any harm, and created so much hate against us. I was many times asked by students and by adults, don't you still hate the Nazis? I hate their idea of what they did to us, of what they instilled in people. Almost 11 million people lost their lives. About 6 million of them were Jews. For no apparent reason, because hate was instilled against them.

Bill Benson: Thank you, Rae.

(Applause)

Rae Goldfarb: Thank you all.

Bill Benson: Feel free to come up if some of you would like to ask Rae another question. Absolutely feel free to do that. Thank you, Rae, so much.