

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON SYLVIA ROZINES
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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. Sylvia Rozines, whom you 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 website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

Today we are live streaming this program through the internet which means people across the country and throughout the world can tune in. We do know that we have a class from the Gene M. Reed Elementary School in Allen, Texas, with us today. They will be viewing along with many others, we hope, across the world.

Sylvia 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 her questions.

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

Sylvia Rozines was born Cywia Perelmuter to Jewish parents, Icek and Chaja on January 20, 1935, in Lodz, Poland. Her father worked in a wholesale flour and sugar cooperative and her mother cared for Sylvia and her sister Dora, who was seven years older. This photograph of Sylvia was taken around 1938.

On this map of Poland, the arrow points to Lodz.

Here we see Sylvia on the left, her father in the middle, and her older sister, Dora, on the right. Sylvia was about 3 years old when this photo was taken.

In September 1939, when Sylvia was 4 years old, Germany invaded Poland, officially beginning World War II. Within seven days German troops entered and occupied the city of Lodz. This historic photograph shows German troops entering Lodz.

In February 1940, German authorities established a ghetto in Lodz. Jews lived isolated from the rest of the city in an area enclosed by barbed-wire fencing. The sign in this German postcard of Lodz reads, "Jewish residential area -- entry forbidden."

German authorities began deportations in 1942 from the ghetto to the Chelmno killing center. The deportations targeted children in 1943, but Sylvia's father managed to find different hiding places for her. Then in 1944, most of the remaining Jews in Lodz were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Sylvia's parents and sister avoided deportation because they were

chosen to clean the ghetto. They hid Sylvia in a cellar along with 11 other Jewish children whose parents remained working in Lodz. In January of 1945, the Soviet Army liberated the 800 remaining Jews from the Lodz ghetto.

Sylvia's family relocated to a displaced persons camp in Germany. In this photograph we see Sylvia, circled, at the displaced persons camp in 1947. Sylvia eventually lived in Paris until emigrating to the United States in 1957. After living 10 years in France, Sylvia and her father immigrated to the United States in 1957 joining Dora and her husband Jack who had moved earlier to Albany, New York.

Sylvia got a job in a dress shop. She married David Rozines, who was also a Holocaust survivor, in 1959. David worked in sales. They had a son Greg, who graduated with a degree in engineering from the State University of New York at Binghamton.

I'd like to mention that Greg is here in the front row with Sylvia.

Sylvia went to night school and then went to work for the New York Public Schools, where she worked for 24 years. Sylvia's husband David passed away in 1999 at age 69. Sylvia moved to the Washington, DC area to be close to her son. Sylvia has two grandchildren, Jeffery and Alyssa.

Sylvia began volunteering with this museum's Visitor Services in 2014. You will find her at the Information Desk on Mondays. Sylvia only recently began speaking about what she went through in the Lodz ghetto and is now speaking in local schools including Montgomery College. She also speaks to groups here in the Museum.

In collaboration with her niece, Jennifer Roy, Sylvia's story was published with the title "Yellow Star." Her book, which has now sold more than 150,000 copies, is used widely in schools and has been published in a number of countries including Brazil, Belgium, the

Netherlands, Germany and Spain. Following today's program, Sylvia will sign copies of "Yellow Star."

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

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, thank you so much for joining us.

We are going to start, because our time is so limited, so let's start first with your very early years in your family. You were not yet 5 when Germany invaded Poland September 1, 1939, starting World War II. Before we turn to the war and the Holocaust, tell us a little bit about your family and your community from what you know in those years before the war began.

>> Sylvia Rozines: We had a very nice life. The family was always together celebrating the holidays. And we were very happy until the Germans invaded Poland.

>> Bill Benson: Before we talk about that, tell us a little about your mom and dad. For one thing, you told me that they loved theater, loved dressing up. Your mother liked silent movies.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. My mother loved the American silent movies. She was a terrific dancer. Every Friday night they went dancing. They loved to be dressed up all the time. And I can see on my pictures how nice they dressed me and my sister. I had a very lovable mother and father.

>> Bill Benson: Your father served in the Polish Army.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know anything about that period of his life?

>> Sylvia Rozines: No. No. That was before he got married.

>> Bill Benson: Ok. How large was your extended family?

>> Sylvia Rozines: I had many, many uncles and aunts and we all lived almost in the same area.

>> Bill Benson: So a large extended family living close by.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And you had said to me that yours was a very close family. You lived close but you were also closely knit.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes, yes. We helped each other. We love each other. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: And Dora, just a little bit about Dora, she was seven years older than you so she remembered a great deal about those early years.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Actually, my sister didn't talk about it. So when I needed some information about the book, she didn't remember as much as I did because she put it away. Once you stop talking -- I also did it, but when I arrived here in Washington and we started to write the book, things came back to me.

>> Bill Benson: And we're going to hear hopefully -- not all but many of the things you were able to write about in the book.

As we noted earlier, when we were showing the slides, within seven days of Germany occupying Poland they occupied your city of Lodz and they unleashed the horrors of the Holocaust on your family and the nearly 250,000 Jews that lived in Lodz. Tell us what you can about what happened to your family when the Germans occupied Lodz but before they put you into the ghetto. What was that period like? Do you know?

>> Sylvia Rozines: This period I don't remember before but I remember being in the ghetto and I remember the barbed-wires, and soldiers standing all around guarding us so we couldn't escape on the Polish side. It was very crowded.

>> Bill Benson: Before we go to the ghetto, just a couple of comments. In your book you wrote about when the Germans first came in, you and your family left in a buggy.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Oh, yes. The German decided to make the city of Lodz a German city. All the Jews had to leave. So my father hired horse and buggy. It was wintertime. We went to Warsaw with our uncle and his two children. So we were two families with two children. And when we arrived in Warsaw, everything was bombed, the houses. We couldn't find a place to stay. And that was one of the best decisions my father made, to return to Lodz. And when we returned to Lodz, then they decided to make the ghetto. That city had many factories. There was not much bombing. The factories stayed intact. And they decided to put the people to work. It depends on your profession. They assigned you make clothes if you were a tailor, a shoe maker.

My father, they asked what you were doing before the war. He said he worked with flour and sugar. So the good part, they made him deliver flour -- there were bakeries, to bake the bread. Of course the flour was very -- it was not really the good flour but we have happy. Working with flour, sometimes it spilled a little bit. The older people used to grab a little bit. And at the end of the day the whole group who worked together divided. So everybody could have a little bit of flour. So that helped.

>> Bill Benson: And when they did that, they were not supposed to do that, right?

>> Sylvia Rozines: No.

>> Bill Benson: So that was a clandestine thing they did.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. They wore white uniforms. And they had packets made special. You only could take a little bit because they weigh it. And only very strong men could do it. You had to carry a bag of 100 kilos of flour to take it off the buggy and bring it to the bakery.

>> Bill Benson: When you first entered the ghetto, when you were forced to go in there with your family and all the other Jews were forced in there, you shared with me that as you went into it, you remember holding Dora's hand.

>> Sylvia Rozines: She always watched me. But I don't have recollection going into. It may be maybe we lived there before because some of the streets people lived and some people didn't have to move. The people who were in a certain section where the German didn't want, you moved. And after a while they put another family with a little girl who became my best friend, in our apartment. So we lived seven people in a room and a kitchen.

>> Bill Benson: One room and a kitchen, seven of you in there.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Right.

>> Bill Benson: And then you got another friend. You had two friends. Right?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Once the parents went to work, the children were left alone. And we were small children. In the beginning my sister was the babysitter but then she was old enough, they took even 10 years old to go to factories to work, maybe younger. But then I was left alone.

So we got in one of the other little girl's -- the other little girl lived just across. Her name was Hava. I found out she was two years older than me. She had a little brother. We stayed in that apartment till our parents came from work. All the toys we had, I had a beautiful doll and carriage which I remember because of a picture with them. Everything was sold. In the beginning we could exchange with Polish people. We only wanted food, so we gave the toys, clothes, at night you made the exchange. After a while we didn't have anything else.

>> Bill Benson: So you would swap a shirt for a little bit of food until you ran out.

>> Sylvia Rozines: We had to give -- my father, I remember, told me, he gave a suit and two pair of pants just for a pound of butter. You had to give a lot.

>> Bill Benson: To get a pound of butter.

>> Sylvia Rozines: And that was the last time I ate butter. And I don't remember the taste of it. Many foods after the war I didn't know what they were.

>> Bill Benson: What work was your mother and Dora made to do?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yeah, Dora went to a factory with my mother. They were making lady undergarments.

>> Bill Benson: And who were they making them for?

>> Sylvia Rozines: For the Germans. Everything was sent to Germany. They received a little soup and a slice of bread. And the soup was mostly water. But if you're hungry, everything tastes good.

Also, we had rations to get food for the week. You had to go to certain stores. You had a little booklet. You had to wait in line. And sometimes by the time your turn came, the food was out.

>> Bill Benson: You wrote in your book -- this was about the winter of 1941. You said, "Winter erases whole families. It also erased the vegetables that we grew."

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. We could make little gardens. In the backyard, the courtyard had cement but we ripped out the cement to plant. The only thing I could remember my father planted during the summer is potatoes because we didn't have seeds and beets. We were happy. In the summer we had a little bit more food. The winters were terrible because they stopped giving us wood to make our apartment warm. We had ovens. You had to make a fire and cook. And little by little we used furniture.

>> Bill Benson: For fuel?

>> Sylvia Rozines: For fuel, yes. And then it was getting harder and harder.

The food -- being hungry, most of the people thought about it. When you hungry, how to make different recipes what they gave us. I remember whatever they gave us you had to find a way how to fix it because you just had some oil but the oil was such a poor quality. I thought the oil was used for machine.

>> Bill Benson: And that's what you had for cooking.

>> Sylvia Rozines: For cooking, just to have a little grease. But people were getting thinner and thinner on the streets. I could see people dropping on the streets. There were children, older children, who had a job to pick up the dead people and put them on horse and buggies and bury them.

>> Bill Benson: The children were doing that.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Sometimes children, sometimes grown-up.

>> Bill Benson: As terrible as the conditions were that you've just given us a glimpse of in the Lodz ghetto, they, of course, became so much worse once the Nazis began deporting Jews out of the ghetto and sending them to a killing center, Chelmno. The Nazis were intent on getting all the kids and taking them. Tell us what your life was like once those deportations -- especially when they were after the kids.

>> Sylvia Rozines: That was my worst time, when they decided, and the parents had to give up the children. But they made it sound so good, that we are going to camp, to Germany, and the children going to have food. Give away your children. Here you go to work; the children are staying by themselves and there is no food. And some people believed because they couldn't see the children starving.

But I had a very courageous father. He wouldn't give me away. Each time they came to get the children, he used to hide me. My worst memory was the last time -- he couldn't find

places anymore. So he decided there was a cemetery behind our backyard. There was a big wall. He decided to hide me in the cemetery. There was a raid at night. And I remember waking up and screaming that I don't want to die. We really didn't know that we were going to die because they said they were going to send us to camp and we were going to have a good time there. And my father grabbed me -- it was during the night. They barricaded certain streets because they couldn't get the children. So they arrived. We didn't know that night they were going to come. Sometimes we knew but this time we didn't. So my father grabbed me, and we went down I think the window and we climbed that wall and he made a hole and put me in the hole.

>> Bill Benson: In the cemetery.

>> Sylvia Rozines: In the cemetery. And covered me with grass. We stayed there more than 24 hours, till my sister came and told us they are gone and you can come out.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember how frightened you were?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. Because I was already, at the time -- that was -- I was like 8 or maybe older.

>> Bill Benson: When that happened.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Right. That's why I remember. This incident left me for life. Years and years after, I had this dream. It came very often. I lived in France 10 years. And all through that time maybe once a month I had this dream of I'm staying in the hole and the German, I look up, standing with a gun, and my father next, and I said "He's killing me" and I wake up. It was the same dream. Until I came to America in 1957, for some reason the dream stopped.

>> Bill Benson: But you had it all those many years.

>> Sylvia Rozines: But I live always with fear. I knew I'm in America. And I knew there were no Germans. But I always was afraid to stay by myself.

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, you also shared that I believe you lost your friend, Hava. She disappeared. Then you lost your other friend, Itka.

>> Sylvia Rozines: That was when they decided in 1944 everybody has to leave. They left -- I remember very well, they left by train and they only could take a little knapsack and some water. And Hava and her mother were very sick. My father helped them to take them to the train. I know she didn't make it. Itka, I don't know.

I remember Hava second names. I put a memo -- in Miami there is a monument for children, children are climbing to escape. And I put her name. Because I knew -- I found out the date she is born and I knew the second name. Itka, I could not remember her second name. You cannot give just the first name.

I remember them well. We were very good friends. We played together. What did we play? A lady made from sheets little dolls and from a pencil she made the eyes and clothes. And all three little girls were baby-sitting the little brother who was sick in the crib. We played with this. There were no schools. And children didn't learn. So my sister, who was hold -- older, she taught me the alphabet and the numbers and how to sign my name.

>> Bill Benson: So Dora was happy to educate you.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. She was very bright. She helped me to learn at least the basics.

So now we are coming --

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to ask you one more thing. You described in your book -- referred to the deportations as wedding invitations. In the book, that was the phrase that was used. Somebody got a wedding invitation. It was the order.

>> Sylvia Rozines: And once the people -- some people wanted to go because the situation in the ghetto was so bad, they thought maybe they going to go to other factories. That's what the German propaganda announced: we going to send you to factories; you're going to have more food. We had no idea what was happening in Germany. We didn't have no radios. They took everything away, first our valuables and then -- one family they found a radio and they took the whole family, the grandma, grandpa, the parents, and they killed them right there.

>> Bill Benson: Because they had a radio.

>> Sylvia Rozines: So people were afraid. If people had radios, they just broke into pieces and threw them away. So we didn't know what was happening in Germany.

My father felt he didn't know what was happening. So it scared him not knowing. So he stayed as long as he could stay. Luckily they needed people to clean up the belongings from the people who left, I'm talking 1944.

>> Bill Benson: So the people that were deported, they wanted to clean up all of their belongings.

>> Sylvia Rozines: The German wanted -- there was beautiful furniture people left and clothes. Everything was sent to Germany. There was one train still working. The people, like my father and mother, were chosen to stay and do that work. But when he looked, the German leader -- maybe you heard his name. I hate to say his name. He just looked at me and he said, "She cannot work" and used very bad language. And you have to go left. Left was to go. Right was to stay. They put 800 people in two factories.

>> Bill Benson: So this is the 800 remaining Jews.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. The ghetto became a ghost town. Everybody left. And I remember the summer time. People left their window open. You couldn't walk on the street because it was

empty. But every morning, the 800 people went to work, assigned streets, went to clean up, put them on horse and buggy, and took the belongings to a train.

Now, we supposed to go but my father went to this factory and he saw there was a basement there. He decided -- I was already a big girl. He says, I am not going, my name is on the list, and I will put my Sylvia in the basement. And his friend heard about and they looked at him he's crazy; you're all going to get killed. He says, I have a feeling, a premonition to do this. I cannot tell you what to do but if you want to, you can put your child. So his brother, my cousin, who lives now in Toronto, Jack, his father listened to my father and he put him -- and he was a younger child than me. I was watching over him. And other people.

So I actually didn't remember how many children, maybe 11, maybe 13. So I put in the book 12. And we stayed there. And every morning they went to work and they used to -- it was in the summer. The garden had vegetables. They created a kitchen in the camp. The women cooked. And in the summer we had all of those vegetables. Used to find in the rooms any food they brought back to the camp. And the women cooked.

After a while the Germans found out about us 12 children.

>> Bill Benson: That were hidden in the cellar.

>> Sylvia Rozines: They came to the cellar and told us follow them in that house where the German lived. They talked. I couldn't understand at that time what they were saying. After a while, they sent us back to the parents. And the parents were so happy to see the children back. Little did we know that they were planning to kill everyone. A couple of days after they took all the men in the cemetery and dig three big holes. And the men knew when they came from work -- they were sad, this is for us. But still my father couldn't believe it; they are going to kill us one time.

At that time we were only 745. Some people passed away. We could hear already the bombings falling. We were happy. We saw little tiny plane in the sky, like toys. We didn't know from what country they were. Then slowly they were coming down and the bombs started to fall. We could hear.

So one day the bombs were really falling close so everybody decided to go from the two factories to lay on the ground.

>> Bill Benson: While the bombs --

>> Sylvia Rozines: The bombs were falling. We thought maybe they would hit the building and we were going to lay. So we lay on our stomach, for some reason. I know next to my mother, and the bombs were falling all around. Suddenly we saw this light up from the sky came, like it was daytime.

We found out later on Russia liberated us. So one came to our camp, saw all of those people. He was in the plane, Who are those people? And we were wearing the yellow star on the back. And they realized they were Jewish people.

>> Bill Benson: So this is one of the pilots in the Russian planes?

>> Sylvia Rozines: That's why they didn't throw on the factories bombs because they realized that we were Jewish people laying there.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to go back a little bit if I can, Sylvia. You told me about your father rescuing a cousin of yours, Mena. That is such an astonishing thing.

>> Sylvia Rozines: He helped. Her father and another man -- my father wasn't the only person. They needed to walk on the street. When they took the children, they put them in the hospital. It was a big building. And from that hospital trucks were coming and would take them to the train. My aunt couldn't find -- they found her in a hut and took away. That was the only

daughter. She came to our apartment crying help, help me, to my father, they took Mena. And he got papers they could walk on the street. How do you get to the hospital? The Germans see you. It's a ghost town.

So the father knew somebody who was cleaning the chimney. And she was my age but she was very tiny little girl. They went to the building. He said I have to clean the chimney. They took her out in a basket. She lives now close to New York City. She survived.

But in 1944, they were sent out with other people to leave the ghetto. And they really could stay with the 800 people but they decided maybe it's better over there. Luckily when they arrived in Germany -- not in Auschwitz. Because they were taken away. They assigned my aunt and her with gypsies in a camp with gypsies. And gypsies were allowed to keep one child. So that's how she survived. It wasn't a long time when she was liberated by the Americans. I think American or English.

>> Bill Benson: Thanks for telling us about that.

Before you were liberated, Sylvia, when you were describing in the cellar with the other 11 children, what do you remember what it was like for you to be in the cellar with just 10 other or 11 other kids while your parents are being forced to do the work they were doing?

>> Sylvia Rozines: We had to keep quiet. The parents were bringing us the food down in the evening when they came from work. It wasn't easy because some children couldn't stay quiet. But we were not there a long time. I remember -- I don't even remember weeks. Right away the Germans found us.

>> Bill Benson: Will you tell us -- before we go back to that. At some point in the cellar you decided to come out. And this is the story with a pear.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Oh. After they found us, they decided to put us to work. And the Germans lived in a place where there were gardens. There were pears. I was almost 10 and the other children were maybe 9, 10, 11, 12. First they made us bring up coal from the cellar to warm their oven.

>> Bill Benson: This is your job as kids.

>> Sylvia Rozines: My job. That was not an easy job because it was wintertime. But then they said pick the pears. And the pears, as we picked, we could eat. But I saw other children taking a pear or two hiding behind the clothes and I said I would like to bring back to the camp for my sister. I was petrified if they opened my coat and my pocket if they found the pears but finally I decided to do it.

So many children are writing me letters when they read my book. I have hundreds and hundreds of letters. And I have even a picture of a child, young student, of the tree, how I picked the pear and hide the pear; how brave I was to steal that pear for my sister.

>> Bill Benson: And kids are writing you about that. Absolutely.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. Yes. The pear, mostly -- it's very important to them, that time when I took that pear.

>> Bill Benson: Also, I would like you share with the audience, before the bombing occurred, I believe, and before you were liberated, while you were still hiding you ended up hiding very close to where the Germans' offices were, where they were headquartered. Tell us about that.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. When the men dig the holes, we knew they going to kill us next day. So the person who was in charge of the 800 people opened the door and they said go hide yourselves. Where can you hide yourself? It was January, snow up to the knee.

>> Bill Benson: And horribly cold, brutal winter.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Empty houses. So my father decided -- he was very, very smart to do this, to choose the house across from the Germans. He figured they going to go house-to-house and that's the last house they going to --

>> Bill Benson: The one right next to their headquarters.

>> Sylvia Rozines: And we were there maybe three, four days. I remember my mother only could take one bread. We were cold. We couldn't make any fire. Because the German would see the smoke. So we stayed quiet there. And the bombs were falling louder and louder. And we knew that any day maybe we would be liberated.

Then one day we saw a lady walking, a blond lady, on the street. The other people said let's go out; we are free. But my father said let's wait, maybe she's a decoy. Maybe we are not and the German want us to come out. But it was the liberation. And we came out.

After we came out, the bombs were falling. We almost got killed. My father managed to get a horse and buggy and we went back to our camp where our clothes were. We were staying on the street, watching the Polish people carrying our belongings. We didn't have time to clean up all the apartment. So they were carrying the clothes or some furniture.

And it didn't occur to us go back right away to see if you can -- we had nothing but we were so happy to be liberated. And some of the Russian major and a colonel came and talked to us. Whatever they had -- they had some chocolate. They saw the children. They gave us the chocolate. And all the food they had they gave it to us. And they said, "You are the first Jewish people we liberated but now we're going to take Berlin." And that colonel was very worried because it was very hard to take Berlin. Many soldiers died. And he was telling, "I have two children in Moscow and I hope I can go back." I remember this.

>> Bill Benson: You remember him saying that.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. He was very nice.

>> Bill Benson: You explained to me when we first talked that as happy as you were with liberation, you said people even began -- you got chocolates, people began to dance, but you said the jubilation was short-lived when your father -- and you put this in your book -- told you the horrible news. Do you remember? Your father said there are no Jews left. And it really --

>> Sylvia Rozines: That's what we thought. That's what we thought.

>> Bill Benson: That's what you thought.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Everybody thought we were the only ones left and we all started to cry. We the only ones. But we didn't know what was happening in other countries. Until we saw -- after we found an apartment -- Russia said you can get any apartment from German lived in that city. Well, they left. And you can open the concierge and you are allowed to live there. We found a nice play place with nice furniture.

>> Bill Benson: When you went back to your own apartment to see what was left --

>> Sylvia Rozines: There was nothing left.

>> Bill Benson: You found -- we saw some photographs.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yeah, the photographs.

>> Bill Benson: A few photographs. Tell us about the photographs.

>> Sylvia Rozines: The photographs were laying on the floor. We had two big pictures, my sister and I. Because the frames were so beautiful, they took. And they must have just threw out --

>> Bill Benson: The photograph.

>> Sylvia Rozines: The photograph was on the floor and they stepped so some are damaged. They are here at the Holocaust museum. The museum gave me very nice copies. And my son is still angry at me why I gave away the original.

>> Bill Benson: That's the reason you have those few photographs.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. We couldn't find -- the furniture was gone. Everything was gone. The Polish people took the furniture. Because we were cleaning, we didn't want to clean our own place, we left them so maybe after the war we could come back there. But we never went back to live in that ghetto. We could live wherever we wanted.

>> Bill Benson: But you ended up deciding to not stay in Poland for very long. Tell us why.

>> Sylvia Rozines: We wanted -- my father started a good business.

>> Bill Benson: So he started to work again.

>> Sylvia Rozines: He opened up his own business. He was selling wholesale sugar and flour and we did very well. We got new clothes. We had food. Everything was going pretty good till some people started again coming at night and killing us, certain Polish people.

Finally -- I remember my father was saying we survived and now we are going to get killed. So we decided one night to leave that apartment but we couldn't take a suitcase. We were afraid the Polish people would see us and can report to the other people who were doing those bad things. And the concierge watched you coming in and out. So we just put clothes on and coats and we hid money -- we had quite a bit of money by that time -- in our clothes and put maybe double blouse and took the pictures and papers into the clothes because it was --

>> Bill Benson: That's all you took, nothing else.

>> Sylvia Rozines: My father says if they see us carrying a package -- because in the evening, that was the style. People went for walks. And we went to the train station. It was already dark.

We went to the border of Germany. We were going to go to Germany. We hired someone with a truck who was delivering --

>> Bill Benson: Gasoline.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes, gasoline. He hid us behind. He went through the woods.

>> Bill Benson: He hid you in the back of the gasoline tank truck.

>> Sylvia Rozines: We were five people. Our uncle also lived with us. He didn't go to -- it was very bumpy. Since then I have motion sickness. And the smell is horrible.

>> Bill Benson: You said to me that getting gas at a gas station brings back -- makes you nauseous even to this day, the smell of that.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes, I remember that.

We arrived on the American side. Berlin was divided. There was displaced persons camp. And the soldiers, MPs, directed us where to go. They gave us shots not to be sick. And that was a place where they assigned you where to go. And then they assigned you a place to go near Munich. And we stayed there.

They made schools there --

>> Bill Benson: In the displaced persons camp.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yeah. And we had plenty of food. And even some people -- clothes were sent, people from America, Jewish people sent lots of their clothes. And life started again. There were dances.

But my father became restless. He says, How many years are we going to live in one room? But was a large room.

>> Bill Benson: In a large displaced persons camp, refugee camp, essentially.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yeah. And the place where we stayed, Nazis, schools for them. So we had showers. It was quite modern. Some of the camps were not as nice.

We found out -- my mother had a brother in Paris, France. My parents made the decision to go to France, but we hired someone to take us. We had to pay someone, a young French man, to take us to the border. And this time we were walking. When I watch television, I see the refugees walking, it reminds me we were walking like this. And we arrived in Paris. We stayed with my uncle for a while.

And then it was starting a new language. I went to French school. And the children were so nice. The teachers were so nice. I was the only child who was not speaking French there. And I was very embarrassed because in order to learn how to read they had to put me for a couple of hours with 6 years olds. But they put me in a classroom with my age, the grade I should have been. But I learned -- you're young, you learn the language. It's a beautiful language. And I was very happy. I made friends.

Another tragedy happened. My mother dies from cancer when I was 16.

>> Bill Benson: While you were still in Paris?

>> Sylvia Rozines: In Paris. And my older sister was already in America with her husband. Because they had relatives in America. His mother was actually born in America. But the parents went back and he had lots of relatives. They sent papers. She loved it the minute she arrived. She started to talk to us to send papers for us. And in between my mother passed away so she came back to take care of me because I was very, very sick, depression, losing my mom at 16 after we survived.

>> Bill Benson: After going through so much.

>> Sylvia Rozines: It took a long time, five years, to get a visa because we were born in Poland. In 1957 my father and I came to America.

>> Bill Benson: And you had to start over again.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Another language.

>> Bill Benson: Another language to learn.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. And I am very happy that I came to America. This is the best thing what we did. I think America is still the best country to live.

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, I think we have time for some questions from our audience. And if we don't have questions in the audience, I have many more for you. But I think we're going to turn to our audience and see if you have some questions. We do have time for that.

We're going to ask you to please remain through the question and answer period because to close our program, Sylvia will share with us some last thoughts for today. So please stay with us.

We have microphones on both sides of the aisle. We ask that you wait until you have the microphone to ask your question. If you can, make it as brief as you can. And I will do my best to repeat the question just to make sure that we all hear it the right way, we hope. And then Sylvia will respond to your question.

So we welcome anybody who is on the internet, if it's possible to ask a question, I think -- I think we've got a question. We'll take that one first coming in. Is this from Allen, Texas?

>> Yes.

>> Bill Benson: It is. Ok. Allen, Texas, from the elementary school. They can hear us. They can see you. They can see you in Allen, Texas.

>> Ok. One of the students wants to know, How long did it take you to feel comfortable sharing your experiences from the Holocaust?

>> Bill Benson: So one of the students at the elementary school is asking how long did it take you to feel comfortable enough to share what you went through during the Holocaust.

>> Sylvia Rozines: It took me a long time. I am here 60 years in America but I started, I would say, like five years ago speaking to children. It was easier for me to speak to children, sixth and seventh graders in Montgomery County, in Maryland. Then I spoke to groups of women. Little by little, I was asked to volunteer at the museum. And I said I would try. I was at the Information Desk in the beginning. And now I'm sitting at the desk and people come to me to hear my story. So it took me a long time. For many years I didn't talk about it.

>> Bill Benson: Did your parents talk about it? Well, your mother passed away when you were young.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. No, not really. I think in the 1970s the first movie came out about the Holocaust and my son was a teenager. I think he was 16. And he watched with me. And then he asked -- he started to ask questions. He knew a little bit about it but he didn't know exactly the story. But after, he asked the story. And believe me, now he knows more than I what was happening in other countries in Europe.

>> Bill Benson: Ok. Let's see if anybody in our audience has a question. See if there's a brave soul to come forward.

We have a question there I see in the back.

>> I just wanted to know, Did you have any other family that was out of the country other than Poland?

>> Bill Benson: Did you have any other family I think who survived and went to other countries. Who else in your family survived? Am I getting that right?

Thank you.

>> Sylvia Rozines: I had this uncle in Paris. And I had another uncle in Romania and he survived.

>> Bill Benson: But that large, extended family.

>> Sylvia Rozines: The other ones, when they were sent -- some of my cousins came back. They were sent to Auschwitz, in different camps. But that was '44 and they were liberated '45. So they were not like years. Some people spent -- I have a brother-in-law who was in Auschwitz three years. He just passed away. But the youngest -- some of the cousins survived but the parents, no, no. The minute you looked a little bit older, you went right away to the gas chamber.

>> Bill Benson: We have another one here I think.

>> You said that you were with other children in a cellar, in an internment camp. Were you able to reconnect with any of the other children later in your life?

>> Bill Benson: From the displaced persons camp or in the cellar?

>> Either is fine.

>> Bill Benson: Were you able to reconnect at any point with any of the children that you were with in the cellar or even later when you were in the displaced persons camp?

>> Sylvia Rozines: The sad part is I couldn't because they stayed in the DP camp and we left. At that time it never occurred to me to take their address. Because all of those people were going to different countries and we didn't keep in touch.

My two little girlfriends, they passed away. But in DP camp, people were coming and going so I didn't have close friends. But the two little close friends, they didn't survive. The minute they arrived with the mother, they never separated the mother from the child. When a mother was holding a child, they always put you -- the Germans didn't like chaos. There would be crying and screaming. The mother went, even when she was young and could work, they put the mother and to the gas chambers, and the child.

>> Bill Benson: Any other questions? You have a couple of minutes to think about it.

Sylvia, I want to ask you -- [off mic]

Thank you.

With your niece, Jennifer Roy, you wrote your memoir, "Yellow Star". Tell us about the book and what it meant for you to write that book.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Most -- we met one time, because she lives upstate New York and I live -- and mostly we did it on the telephone. And every time she wrote a chapter, she used to send me. For some reason I can tell my story but reading the book is very hard for me. So I started to cry reading the chapter. So many things are a little bit wrong but it's my fault. I never read the chapter and I said that it's ok because I couldn't. Even when the book came out, I read it -- this book you can read in two hours. I said to myself I should read it again. I have a hard time when it's written down to read but yet I'm ok to talk about it.

>> Bill Benson: Incidentally, it is a marvelous book, "Yellow Star".

Is my memory correct that you were with us with *First Person* one other time, two years ago, and I think there was a lady in the audience who had read your book 22 times.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes, a little girl. She was only 8 years old.

>> Bill Benson: That's right! 8 years old, she had read it 22 times.

>> Sylvia Rozines: And she was so shy. She couldn't ask me questions.

>> Bill Benson: Ok. I think we have another question. Yes, sir?

>> Thank you for your time. You were persecuted for your religion when you were younger. How has your faith changed over the years? Were you able to practice in France and how is your faith now here in America?

>> Bill Benson: You were persecuted because of your faith. How is your faith today? What has changed, if anything, with respect to your faith?

>> Sylvia Rozines: When I was a little girl, I didn't know much about religion because the ghetto was almost six years. So I was not educated and my parents didn't have time to teach me. In the beginning when I heard Jewish, I didn't know what it meant. What it mean? Why am I persecuted because I'm Jewish? But when I came really to America, I started to practice Jewish religion. And I do practice right now.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Sylvia.

Thank you all for your questions. We're going to close our program in a moment. I'll turn back to Sylvia. I want to thank you for being with us today, remind you we have programs each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August. We hope that you can come back this year. But if not, we'll do *First Person* again next year so I hope you might make another trip us.

When Sylvia finishes, she's going to leave the stage and we're going to try to get her up as quickly as possible so she can sign copies of "Yellow Star". That's an opportunity for you to also say hi to her and get your picture taken with her if you would like to do that.

Also, when Sylvia finishes, our photographer, Joel, is going to come up on the stage and he's going to take a photograph of Sylvia with you as the background. So we want you to stay here. It makes a wonderful -- yeah, going to get right to that.

So with that, thank you, Sylvia. It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person gets the last word.

>> Sylvia Rozines: I just feel because since I started volunteering my volunteering at the museum is very important. Being a survivor I am a witness to the Holocaust. And thank you for coming.

Thank you.

>> [Applause]