

REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON JULIE KEEFER
MAY 3, 2018

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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*. We are in our 19th year of the *First Person* program. Thank you for joining us. Our First Person today is Mrs. Julie Keefer, whom you shall meet shortly.

I apologize for my voice. I have a little laryngitis. If it completely falters, we have a Plan B.

This 2018 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 twice-weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serve as a volunteer here at this museum. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Julie 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 Julie a few questions. If we do not get to your question today, please join us in

our online conversation: *Never Stop Asking Why*. The conversation aims to inspire individuals and new generations to ask the important questions that Holocaust history raises, and what this history means for societies today. To join the *Never Stop Asking Why* conversation, you can ask your question and tag the museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and #AskWhy. You can find the hashtag on the back of your program, as well.

Today's program will be livestreamed on the museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the museum's website and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. A recording of this program will be made available on the museum's YouTube page. Please visit the *First Person* website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

What you are about to hear from Julie is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

Julie Keefer was born Julia Weinstock to Jewish parents in Lwow, Poland, on April 19, 1941. This photograph of Julie is the only one that exists from her time in hiding.

On this map of Poland the arrow points to Lwow, where Julie was born.

In this photograph, Julie's father, Herman, is the man farthest to the left in the back row and her mother, Sala, is the woman farthest to the left in the front row. Julie's parents also would have a younger daughter named Tola.

In June 1941, Germans occupied Lwow. German and Ukrainian authorities forced all Jews into a ghetto, including Julie and her family. On this map of Lwow, the white arrow points to the location of the ghetto. Julie's grandfather, Aizik, was arrested and made a forced laborer. After working at a lime quarry, they moved him to Janowska labor camp, indicated here with the red arrow. He escaped from this labor camp. Learning that the Lwow ghetto would be destroyed, he helped Julie and her parents and her sister hide in a bunker in a nearby forest with 30 other Jews from Lwow. He then moved Julie and her sister to live with his non-Jewish friend, Lucia, because he feared the girls' crying would give their hiding spot away.

In March 1942, the Germans deported thousands of Jews who had remained in the Lwow ghetto to the Belzec killing center. They boarded trains from the Kleptarow train station indicated here with the blue arrow.

This photograph shows Lucia Nowicki on the left and Aizik on the right. Aizik assumed the identity of Lucia's husband, and they introduced Julie and her sister as her nieces. Aizik traveled back and forth between Lucia's house and the forest to help the people in hiding there. At one point Lucia was arrested by Security Police. With Lucia in prison, Aizik hid Julie's sister in a Catholic children's home. When Lucia was released from prison, she returned home and cared for Julie.

One day while Aizik was visiting Lucia in town, the Germans found the bunker in the forest and killed everyone hidden there, including Julie's parents. At the end of the war, as Soviet troops approached, the Germans evacuated the Catholic children's home where Julie's sister lived. Aizik and Julie were unable to find Julie's sister after this.

This photograph shows Julie, the older girl on the left, Aizik, Lucia, and Julie's friend in a Displaced Persons camp after the war.

Aizik sent Julie to America in 1948, hoping to join her later. Julie lived in a children's home for six years until a couple from Cleveland, Ohio, adopted her. Aizik married Lucia and they eventually immigrated to the United States and settled in New York.

Following Julie's adoption by Thea and Fred Klestadt at age 16 in 1957 and her

graduation from high school, Julie attended Oberlin College in Ohio where she majored in French with minors in Spanish and art. While at Oberlin Julie met Larry Keefer whom she married on June 24, 1962, 56 years ago. Julie furthered her education with a Master's degree in special education to work with emotionally disturbed adolescents and did Ph.D-level study in human growth and development. She studied psychology at the University of Nebraska. After Julie and Larry moved to the Washington, DC area, she continued her studies at Bowie State University and several other academic institutions.

Julie spent 29 years with the Montgomery County, Maryland Public School System retiring in 2001. Over the course of those three decades she held a number of key positions including Mainstream Coordinator working with special needs students and teachers at several high schools, and participated in teacher training programs, some in conjunction with American University. All of them dealt with education equity. Among her many accomplishments she created LUPE, an anti-gang program to improve academic performance among Hispanic students at an area high school. A memorable occasion was a visit by President Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to a high school where she was the Administrator-in-Charge.

Julie's husband, Larry, is a Ph.D. chemist who worked first at the Chicago Medical School and the University of Nebraska Medical School before joining the scientific staff at the National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute here in the Washington, DC area in 1971. Much of Larry's career has been devoted to cancer research and cancer-related drug development. Larry retired on October 1st, 2015, after 44 years with the NIH/NCI. Larry is here with Julie today.

Julie and Larry have two children, Steve and Simona, and three grandsons. Their son Steve, a former Army Ranger, received a dual degree in economics and Japanese from the Wharton School of Business and the University of Pennsylvania. He now owns two businesses. Steve is also here as well as several other friends.

Steve's oldest son has just returned having recently spent time working with sheep in Norway, with reindeer in Alaska, and learning French. Their daughter is a fine artist and after a career in photography, painting and glass work is now a businesswoman. Her son is about to complete his Junior year in high school in Maryland, plans to study chemistry and has an internship this summer at the NIH. As Julie noted to me with pride, "We got really lucky on kids and grandkids."

Julie has worked as a volunteer at the membership desk of this museum where she has shared her story with visitors. With that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mrs. Julie Keefer.

>> [Applause]

>> Julie Keefer: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness today to be our First Person. We have such little time. You have so much to share with us. We're just going to start right away if that's ok.

World War II began with Germany and Russia's invasion of Poland in September 1939. When you were born in April 1941, the city where your family lived was under Soviet occupation. I know you know very little about your family and their lives prior to your birth but to the extent you can, share with us what you know about your family during that time before your birth.

>> Julie Keefer: Well, Larry and I went back to visit in October of 2013 and I saw the apartment building where I was born. Although it's being renovated it's still standing. I also saw -- well, our

first hiding place, which was in a special compartment in a barn, in the ghetto.

What I realized was that although my birth mother was a Jewish opera singer, in order not to be imprisoned as being bourgeois, she was listed as a factory worker. So she was a factory worker. My father was a tinsmith or plumber, I'm not sure. We were probably middle class at that point. But under the Russians, they tried to marginalize everyone so there were not middle classes or whatever. I don't remember that period at all. What I know about it is from my grandfather's diary, what I was told.

>> Bill Benson: You did share with me that your mother had been an opera singer and you shared with me that there is a particular song that you've heard that evokes for why your mother's presence.

>> Julie Keefer: There is a song. It's actually a Yiddish song. I don't know how to say it exactly. But when I hear that tune, I remember -- although I don't remember much about my mother, I remember that she felt soft and I remember her voice singing that particular song to me. And I remember her smell, which was kind of milky because while we were in hiding, in the ghetto, my baby sister was born.

>> Bill Benson: And Julie, you shared with me that you really have no memory whatsoever of your father.

>> Julie Keefer: Not really. Nothing about my father. Except what my grandfather told me and what my grandfather told me was that my father was very generous; that he would give you the shirt off his back, which my father thought was -- grandfather thought was bad. Because he expected much more of a macho guy and not somebody who was so generous. He wanted a great businessman for my mother and she didn't marry a great businessman. So to my grandfather, she married beneath her. But I guess once we were born, became ok.

>> Bill Benson: Nazi Germany turned on the Soviet Union in June 1941, just months after your birth. Within days the city of Lwow was occupied by the Nazis. Your family was forced into a ghetto. What did that mean for your family including your grandfather, Aizik?

>> Julie Keefer: What it meant was that we gave up everything we had. The ghetto was in a place in Lwow that used to be slums and Jews were just told to leave their apartments, leave everything, and go into the slum. Many, many families in one room. The conditions became worse and worse and worse. And living in the ghetto was like a progressive noose that became tighter and tighter around your neck as more and more laws were passed. First no Jew could leave the ghetto, to practice medicine, nothing. No non-Jew could enter the ghetto to practice medicine or anything else. Then there was a tax. Then there was another tax. Then it went on progressively. So that eventually people were shot when they went to get food. Bodies were piled up. Typhus was rampant. And we were in hiding in this special kind of compartment.

>> Bill Benson: So you actually went into hiding in the ghetto itself?

>> Julie Keefer: In the ghetto. My grandfather and father built this special compartment in a barn that hid us, yes. And I don't remember it at all.

>> Bill Benson: At some point your grandfather, Aizik, was taken by the Nazis to the forced labor camp where thousands of Jews were killed. Do you remember how your grandfather ended up being taken there?

>> Julie Keefer: This was the second labor camp he was in. First one was Jaktorow. And then Jaktorow was closed because everyone got Typhus. So all of the inhabitants, everybody, were sent to various hospitals. And then there was some kind of a trick. And the railroad car that was supposed to take prisoners back to Jaktorow, they paid off the driver and stuff and the

prisoners wound up back in Lwow. So my grandfather went back to the ghetto and to our hiding place. Then he went out of the hiding place to go visit some friends in the ghetto and the friends had no special hiding place and he was picked up again. This time he was sent to Janowska.

>> Bill Benson: And for the most of us, we've never heard of Janowska, an especially brutal place.

>> Julie Keefer: It was known as the Harvard for teaching Commandants how to kill and torture. 200,000 Jews were killed in Janowska in two years. It was the most brutal labor camp in Poland. We don't know much about it and one of the reasons is that unlike other camps, Janowska was liberated by the Russians. It was liberated in 1944. Then Ukrainians -- well, the Russians made it into a prison and then the Ukrainians kept it as a prison.

>> Bill Benson: And your grandfather, while he was there, he was severely beaten. Wasn't he?

>> Julie Keefer: He was beaten black and blue, yes. Because he dared to say to the Commandant that these bunks could never fit 16 men but eight at most. And the Commandant was so upset that a Jew dared to offer an opinion that was different from his own so he had him beaten within an inch of his life. And my grandfather was kept alive by fellow prisoners who got wet rags and put them on his body. And the next morning when he got up for [Speaking Non-English Language], which is the head count, the Commandant came up to him and said, "You dog. How is it that you're still alive?"

>> Bill Benson: And sometime after that your grandfather actually escaped from Janowska, which is really remarkable. Tell us about that.

>> Julie Keefer: First of all, to escape, when one person escaped, 10 to 20 prisoners were shot in revenge. So it was very difficult to escape and very, very, very few managed to escape. My grandfather was one because he became so weak from no food and terrible, hard, harsh labor and beatings that he lost close to 100 pounds.

There is a song, Janis Joplin, way before all of your time, used to sing, "Freedom's just another name for nothing left to lose." And, of course, my grandfather had nothing left to lose. His own wife had been sent to Belzec and exterminated. He didn't know about anybody else in his family. But he decided nothing could be worse than staying here. So he decided he would escape.

As the new prisoners were being in, the gates were opened and he ran down, down a hill side, and then across the street. This camp was called Janowska after Janov Street. He crossed the street. There was a huge drop-off at that point where on the bottom a train ran. So he managed to cross the street, raised his arms to jump, and just as he raised his arms, he was shot in the right hand.

This was late November in Poland. It was brutally cold and snowing. He was wearing a thin concentration camp uniform with a Jewish star sewn on his jacket and on his pants which he ripped off, and bare feet. Because when prisoners came to Janowska, their clothes and shoes were taken and they were given a uniform to wear and wooden shoes but my grandfather had very big feet and none of the shoes would fit so he was barefoot. So picture in this snowing condition, very cold, running away in this thin costume, no shoes, feeling alternately hot and cold, cold from the weather but hot from having been shot and this wound on his right hand.

But he ran with the train for a while and it happened to be a Nazi munitions train which, of course -- does anybody know what munitions means?

>> Bill Benson: I think some do, yup.

>> Julie Keefer: Ok. Well, munition, if you put an am in front of it, you'll know ammunition. Ok? So he ran with the train and then eventually he stopped at the hut of a Mr. Bereczki, a small Polish farmer who cleaned him up, bandaged his hand, and then helped him. He gave him food and warm clothes and took him to a nearby forest, the Brzeznicza Forest and gave him a shovel so he could make a ditch for himself to shield himself from the weather but also from the Nazis.

>> Bill Benson: And after Mr. Bereczki did that, your grandfather is in the forest and eventually joins up with a group of other Jews in the forest, 30 of them, that not only go into hiding but began to engage in acts of sabotage and resistance against the Nazis. Tell us what you can about that and then how you and your family became part of this group in the forest.

>> Julie Keefer: My grandfather had built a ditch and pretty soon in a couple of weeks -- he describes this in his book. He heard some people speaking. And they were speaking Yiddish. So he knew they were Jews. He came out and one of them had a gun and was about to shoot him. So my grandfather said, "Don't shoot. I'm a Jew". Then grandfather showed him the hiding place.

And because he had had military experience in World War I, he became the leader of these men. And it was mainly men. They took the gun and they then started shooting the tires of Nazi munitions trucks at night. They would bring uniforms and armaments, grenades, pistols, guns, everything, and bring it back to the tunnel. They would also raid the Ukrainian complicity police quarters and get uniforms, get water, get food, and bring it back to this tunnel in the woods. And, of course, they made the tunnel much bigger. And that is my actual first memory, is of that tunnel.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us how you got to the tunnel, how you ended up going to the forest.

>> Julie Keefer: My grandfather found out that the Nazis were going to burn the ghetto in 1943. He found that out because Mr. Bereczki was taken as a political prisoner and then was sent home from Janowska. And he was sent home because the Nazis said that they were going to burn the ghetto and they needed to make room for more workers, namely Jews.

So my grandfather, finding that out, decided that he would come and get us out of the ghetto. So he commandeered a Nazi car and asked for a couple of volunteers. All the men wanted to go. He took just a few. They all put on their Nazi uniforms. He told them to stay at the edge of the woods. Since he knew exactly where in the ghetto we were hiding, he came and got my mother, my father, my now 5-month-old baby sister out and took us back to the tunnel.

He had originally had a plan with Mr. Bereczki to hide my mother, my baby sister and me in Mr. Bereczki's barn in a special part that they made a hiding place, but my mother said: No, I'm not leaving what family I have left. I already lost my mother. I'm not going to lose my father. I don't want to be separated from my husband and my children. So all of us went to that tunnel.

>> Bill Benson: As you started to tell us a moment ago, Julie, that's your first actual memory. You remember the tunnel. What do you remember about it?

>> Julie Keefer: What I remember about it is with the eyes of a child. So to get into the tunnel I remember a tall ladder which with my adult eyes I'd imagine was no more than maybe five feet high, out of wood to get into the tunnel. And I remember that the walls were kind of damp, cold, mud. I remember walking around and touching the walls. I remember the smell of candle wax because as you walked around to this so-called room made out of cold mud, which was probably maybe 12 feet long, at the opposite end of that room was a round wooden, splintery

table with a fat candle sitting on top. It was many, many years later when I was an adult and I saw tables like that in the United States and they were the kind of table that had electric wire in them. It was this, oh, that's what it was. Anyway that table. Then you kept walking and there was an archway and then another room that was considerably smaller and totally dark except from the light from that candle. What I remember about that is I remember walking around and touching -- about to touch something and my grandfather yelled. Now, my grandfather never yelled at me much less laid a hand on me but he was about to smack me. And I was shocked. So it stopped me in my tracks.

Can you kind of figure out why he was going to yell at me?

Well, I'll tell you. Because I was going to touch the place where all the guns and grenades were because they were shiny and interesting looking so I wanted to touch and feel them. And he was afraid that something would go off.

>> Bill Benson: And Julie, this tunnel you describe, your grandfather and the others with him had dug that all out themselves.

>> Julie Keefer: Yes. And they kept extending it as more and more -- they were not all from Lwow but they came from around the towns that were near the forest.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know if there were any other children in there?

>> Julie Keefer: There were two teenage girls. They were like 15 and 16.

>> Bill Benson: At some point your grandfather made the decision to take you and your sister out of there. Can you tell us about that?

>> Julie Keefer: The thaw was coming. So people would become very, very nervous and frightened that the Nazis would find us. It was a very difficult place to be, living underground. You could not bathe because you could not heat water. And you had to save the water that you got for drinking. So everybody got lice. We were always scratching. I was almost 3 so when my father said be quiet, I was quiet. But my baby sister was 5 months old. My mother would put her hand over her mouth to keep her quiet. And she almost smothered her. But how do you keep a 5-month-old quiet? So we made noise and my grandfather felt that everyone has a right to live and that his grandchildren cannot cost everybody their lives. So he decided to take us out. He took us out dressed as a Polish peasant.

>> Bill Benson: This was you and your sister, not your parents?

>> Julie Keefer: Not my parents. He took my sister and me. Yes. My parents stayed. He went to the central market disguised, a big beard and everything, one of those jackets, sheep skin jacket, that helps hide your face. He went to the central market looking for a doctor who was a professor of pediatrics, a pediatrician, who ran a Catholic children's home. He could not find him.

He describes in his diary that he became so desperate that he thought, well, because he was our grandfather, that we were little and cute and that somebody would take us and if he lived after the war, he would come and get us. And just as he was about there, he saw a woman who used to be a next door neighbor of his, a Polish Catholic woman, Lucia Nowicka. He, his wife and Lucia and her husband were very great friends and would help each other a great deal. And Lucia's husband was missing. When she went looking for him, she was told by the Nazis, "Lady, stop looking." So she knew what that meant and she had to stop.

Now, the Russians had had such high taxes on people who owned buildings, as she did, that she could not afford to live where she was and she had to give up her home. She became a live-in housekeeper to a retired Polish engineer and his wife. And they lived way in and out what you would call a suburb of Lwow but they were very anti-Semitic, members of a

political party that was very anti-Semitic. So when my grandfather asked Lucia, "Lucia, could you take the children?" She said, "Aizik, I don't own my home anymore. I live as a live-in housekeeper."

ut they made up a story between them. And the story was that she and my grandfather were a married couple. And suddenly Aizik Eisen, Jew, 6'2", 225, 250, became Stanislaus Nowicka, 6'2", 225, 250. And Aizik took Stanislaus' identity papers and he could pass. So he was her husband. And he had a copy of the marriage certificate. Then my baby sister and I were supposedly her dead sister's children; that her sister, she claimed, who was Polish and Catholic, had died in a nearby town and that Lucia had to take us to save us and bring us up.

>> Bill Benson: So with those false identities and these circumstances, your grandfather now leaves with you Lucia in the home of this anti-Semitic family. He returns to the forest, to the bunker.

>> Julie Keefer: Well, not yet. He works for a while as a day laborer around to try to bring anything he can in the way of food. Then he comes back to the house periodically. Lucia then is taken for questioning by the Gestapo. Because someone down the street said that Lucia Nowicka was harboring Jewish children. So Lucia was taken away.

Now, there was an interesting thing about this house. Where the Swierczynskis lived that house was right next to the home of the Nazi governor of Lwow. So there were soldiers all over the place. So there I was hidden in very plain sight.

And by the way, I should tell you a little story. That first picture of me that you saw when I was 3, that is not curly hair that you see in that picture. I was following Lucia. She was going to the woods to try to find mushrooms, anything edible but first she was teaching me how to pick dandy lions with long stems so she could make me a wreath. So she did. She made me a wreath and I thought I was gorgeous. I looked ridiculous. But to me I was gorgeous.

>> Bill Benson: So Julie, she was taken for interrogation, Lucia, by the Nazis what happened to her?

>> Julie Keefer: She was tortured. And she never told that she, in fact, was harboring Jewish children that my grandfather was a Jew, that she knew about the Jews who were hidden in the forest. She never cracked.

And my grandfather asked Mrs. Swierczynski, who was a friend of the governor's wife and who knew Lucia because Lucia would do some cooking and the governor's wife liked her cooking, so Aizik asked Mrs. Swierczynski to intercede with the governor's wife who then went to her husband and said, you know, Lucia has been accused of taking care of Jewish kids which is absolutely nonsense because they are members of this party; they would never have Jews so can you help? So he got in his command car, went to Nazi -- to Gestapo quarters and said "I want Lucia now." So Lucia was told to clean up and she was sworn to secrecy and she was brought back.

>> Bill Benson: So once she's brought back she's now taking care of you and Tola.

>> Julie Keefer: No. There was one thing I forgot to say. While she was gone, Mrs. Swierczynski had had to take care of this big house --

>> Bill Benson: Plus the two of you.

>> Julie Keefer: Plus a 3-year-old, almost 3-year-old, and a 6-month-old baby and she couldn't do it because she was old and she had everything to do including cooking and all. So Mr. Swierczynski was a friend of the doctor's.

>> Bill Benson: Who ran the children's --

>> Julie Keefer: Ran the Catholic children's home. So he wrote a letter to his friend would he please take Antonina Novicka, Catholic child of 6 months old, blond hair, blue eyes -- because she looked like my father. So my grandfather took her to the children's home and paid for three months in advance. He thought, wow, at least now at least one of us would live. He felt pretty good. And now Lucia had come back. So he felt that at least his two granddaughters were fairly safe and he would go now to the woods and check on everyone in the woods.

He went to the woods and he noticed that the opening to the tunnel had been disturbed. Then he thought, well, maybe our own grenades had blown up or something. Then he noticed all of the bodies. Then he noticed that every body had bullet holes. So he realized that she had been betrayed and everyone had been shot.

>> Bill Benson: Including your mother and father.

>> Julie Keefer: Including his daughter, my mother, and her husband, his son-in-law. So he said a prayer over the dead and he buried everyone back in the tunnel. And there they remain in that tunnel somewhere in the Borszczowice Forest, in an unmarked grave.

When Larry and I went to visit this woods, we kept looking for depressions. Well, there were depressions all over the place. So we never did find where in fact, they were buried.

>> Bill Benson: After your grandfather found what you just described. What did he do then?

>> Julie Keefer: He went back to where the Swierczynskis were. Lucia had her own little apartment there. And this was in April, right around my birthday. I used to wonder, as I was growing up later, why every time on my birthday grandpa would have tears in his eyes. And then I realized that's when my parents were killed.

And this was in April. In June of 1944, the Russians came and liberated us. So then we started various DP camps DP stands for Displaced Persons. Remember countries kept changing borders? So the country where you were born, like Poland, was no more. It was now the USSR. And then on and on. So we were people without a country. So we were put in displaced persons camps.

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us more about that, after your liberation, tell us about Tola.

>> Julie Keefer: Tola was my baby. You know, some people had dolls. I had my baby. I really -- I just remember adoring her. And I remember that suddenly she was gone. I remember asking, "Where is Tola?" Well, Tola is sick so we had to take her to the doctor. Ok. A few days later no Tola. "When is Tola coming back?" Well, the doctor decided that she needs to go to a hospital and when she's all better, she'll come back. I kept waiting for her to come back and she didn't come back.

But meanwhile, the Swierczynskis had this huge German Shepherd, huge dog. This was not a dog bred to be friendly. This was a guard dog. But I missed my baby sister. I didn't have anybody to play with. All of these adults were around. So one day I decided that I would approach the dog. Now, this dog got fed with a long pole and his dish was pushed on that long pole to him. He lived outside. He did not live in the house. And he was chained to a dog house. Well, as I say, I was lonely. So I went up to the dog. And Lucia saw me approaching the dog and was about to scream. And Mrs. Swierczynski said, "Lucia, you have to stay calm. You don't want to excite the dog."

Well, meanwhile I decided I would pet the dog, was petting the dog. And he began licking me. And we became very close friends. And I would get on his back and he was my pet and my pony and everything. So I would just go riding around on this dog.

And an interesting point. When the Nazis came, my job was to take him under the kitchen table and keep him calm and quiet. And I never thought of it until I became an old lady. Who were they trying to save, the dog or me? I don't know. I really don't.

>> Bill Benson: You mind if I ask a bit more about Tola?

>> Julie Keefer: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: Your grandfather tried very hard to find what happened to her. What do you know if anything?

>> Julie Keefer: I know that he went to every Western country.

>> Bill Benson: And the reason is because they hoped that the children were taken out of the orphanage and taken elsewhere. Right?

>> Julie Keefer: Well, he was told at the first orphanage that the allies had bombed the roof so the children were moved. He went to the second place where they were supposedly moved to and was told he was a little bit late, that six months before he came the children were divided. There were 80 total divided into two groups of 40 each and the nuns. 40 of them were taken to Western Europe. 40 of them were taken to Hungary.

Now, at that time you could not get in or out of Hungary. It was shut tight. So he could not go there. But he went everywhere trying to find her. But how do you find a 6-month-old child whose name and religion were changed?

>> Bill Benson: Julie, you've said that --

>> Julie Keefer: Many years later --

>> Bill Benson: You hope she's still there somewhere.

>> Julie Keefer: I hope so. I hope so.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about your grandfather and Lucia.

>> Julie Keefer: My grandfather was an amazing, amazing man. Not only did he have to go through an awful lot but he had an ability to love which at this time of turmoil and every upheaval was very rare. He later could laugh and say: I am so rich. I have you. I have Larry, Steve, Mona. I am a wealthy man. And here's a man who lost everything and almost everybody. Being able to live life, being grateful for the little he had, and starting life over completely including another language at age 62.

>> Bill Benson: So after the war he marries Lucia. So it's Lucia, your grandfather, and you.

>> Julie Keefer: He offered Lucia a lot of money because he was working and -- selling clothes and stuff. He made quite a bit. He offered her money and she said, "Aizik, we've been a family. I want to stay a family."

So they were in one of the DP camps. He's Jewish. She is not. She's Catholic. In order to marry her she has to convert. So this little rabbi in the camp said, ok, she'll convert which means she has to shave her head to get into a ritual bath to purify, be purified. So she went to Aizik. She said, "Aizik, I don't have a lot of hair. I have very little hair. And I don't want to lose that little hair that I have." So Aizik Eisen, is this great big guy. He could look menacing. He went to the rabbi and said, "Rabbi, this woman is more precious than gold or silver or diamonds. And we should feel proud that she wants to be a Jew. She doesn't want to shave her head, Rabbi." "Ok, Aizik, she won't shave her head." So she became a Jew. And didn't shave her head.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, in 1948, when you were 7, in the little time we have left, your grandfather sent you to the United States. Tell us what made that possible and what you might recall what that was like for you but also what it was like for your grandfather.

>> Julie Keefer: It was very, very hard to get visas to come to the United States, especially

from Eastern Europe. There were quotas you could almost never get a visa to be able to come. However, every once in a while there was a strange exception. One exception was if you were an orphan born between this year and this year, you could come on an orphan's visa. So I qualified. My grandfather decided that living in a DP camp with no running water no electricity, occasional heat if you could get the wood, food if you could get it, was not a place to grow up. And the United States was, of course, the place to be. It was wonderful. It was everything. So he decided he would send me to the United States.

And I was put into various orphanages, have to have this shot and that shot. I remember feeling terribly, terribly lonely for my grandfather and also feeling betrayed because I remember we were walking by one day and it was a gorgeous spring day and we saw all of these flowers and then we saw this, like, fence, very high fence, like a wire fence, and noses peeking out of that fence. They were all of these children. They were obviously living there. And I remember taking my grandfather's hand and saying, "Dziadzia, promise me you'll never leave me there." And he said, "I promise." And like a couple of days later they took me there and left me off. And I remember being so homesick that the nuns were afraid I would die because I stopped eating. They called. They decided to call my grandfather and say you have to come, the child is very upset. So they came.

I remember Dziadzia gave me a China doll. It was the first toy I ever got. And he brought a bunch of oranges which he gave to the nuns. He found one girl who was about five years older than I and said, "Would you please take care of my granddaughter? She's little and she's all I have" and the girl said ok. So she would try to do my hair. She would try to take care of me. And she became kind of like my big sister. She was very, very special. Unfortunately I cannot remember her name. But, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to have to close the program now. I wish that we had more time. There's so much more you could not only tell us, that you had to skip over, but coming to the United States took until you were 16 and then you were adopted by a wonderful family. Lucia and your grandfather would immigrate to the United States. And, of course, you built this wonderful life and family.

But we're going to close the program now. We don't have time for questions from our audience. But when she finishes, I'll turn back to Julie. When she finishes, she will remain on the stage. We invite you come up on the stage.

>> Julie Keefer: I'd love it.

>> Bill Benson: Come up on the stage. She would welcome that. Ask her questions you didn't get to ask or just give her a hug.

>> Julie Keefer: Please. [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Or take a photograph, whatever you want to do. We want you to feel welcome to do that.

I want to remind you that we'll have programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. We hope you can come back.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. So on that note, I'd like to turn back to Julie to close our program. And, again, after she finishes, I invite you to come and join her if you wish.

>> Julie Keefer: You know, for many, many years I did not want to talk about my experiences. It's a whole lot of pain. But I decided that there are six million of my people who were forever silenced and in my own small way I had to speak for them and say yes, first of all, the Holocaust did take place, because I was in it. And second of all, I don't want this to happen to

any other child, ever, because it was very, very painful.

Above all, I really like speaking to young people because you are remarkable. You're not afraid to take a stand and stand up for what you believe. And that we have to have. You have to take a stand. You cannot turn the other way when you see injustice and unfairness.

I'd like to end with a quote you'll see all over this museum. It was written by a Lutheran pastor.

First they came for the communists but I was not a Communist so I didn't do anything.

This is, by the way, loosely translated.

Then they came for the trade unionists, but I was not a trade unionist. So I stayed there. Then they came for the Jews. But I was not a Jew so I didn't do anything.

Then they came for me. And there was no one there to stand for me.

Now, just more concretely, if you see bullying and you witness it, the strongest thing that you can do is make a friend of the person who was bullied because they are all alone and everybody has picked on them and you are taking a very courageous stand. You are going against the crowd. You are doing a right thing. And you have to do what you know in your heart, in your mind, is the right thing because you have to look at yourself in the mirror every day. And I know you will do that. I'm so proud that I get a chance to at least speak to you all.

Thank you.

>> [Applause]

>> Julie Keefer: Now can we invite them up?

>> [Applause]