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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
First Person Series: Dora Klayman
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>> BILL BENSON: Good morning, and welcome to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I'm 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 today. Our First Person today is Mrs. Dora Klayman, who you shall meet shortly.

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 serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid August. The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

Dora will share with us her First Person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Dora a few questions towards the end of the program. 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 the hashtag #AskWhy. You can also find the hashtag on the back of your program.

A recording of this program will be made available on the museum's YouTube page. Please visit the website listed on the back of the program for more details. What you are about to hear from Dora is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

Dora Klayman was born Teodora Basch in 1938 in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. You can see her sitting on a park bench with her brother Zdravko. On this map of Yugoslavia in 1933, the arrow points to Zagreb. We see Dora on an outing to the zoo with her parents, Salamon and Silva. Salamon ran a brush making factory, and Silva was a teacher.

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

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

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

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

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

Dan passed away in 1992. Both of their children live in the Washington area. Wanda is deputy executive director of an international association that deals with transportation issues. Elliot is a freelance videographer and owns a video and film production company. He is married to Iona and they have three children, ages 23, 21, and 14. And I'm pleased to say that Wanda is here today with Dora.

After Dora retired from full time teaching in 1999, she became active as a volunteer with this museum. Her work here consists primarily of translating and helping to research material from the Holocaust written in Croatian, Bosnian, and Serbian. Her original project was connected to the Jasenovac archive. As we will hear later,

Jasenovac was a major concentration camp in Croatia. Other projects for Dora included the translation of a booklet that accompanied a 1942 anti-Semitic exhibit in Croatia, and the translation of the captions on a large archive of photographs that had been gathered during the post World War II trials in Yugoslavia.

To add to her language skills, Dora continues to learn Hebrew. She volunteers weekly teaching English to recent immigrants at a Jewish community center. Dora also enjoys traveling. She has been to Israel several times where she was happy to reunite with her cousins and their families. Some of her travels are connected to learning more about the events and the aftermath of the Holocaust. She has attended several conferences of the International Organization of Child Survivors, including in Poland in 2011, when she visited Auschwitz for the first time, and in Berlin in 2014, where she was impressed by the efforts made by that country to teach about and remember the Holocaust. In 2013, she visited the memorial site of the infamous concentration camp Jasenovac where most of her family perished. Just this month, she returned to Croatia, this time visiting the cemetery of the former concentration of Djakovo, most probably the site of her mother's death.

Besides First Person, Dora speaks publicly in other settings including to small groups here at the museum. She recently spoke to students in several schools and members of the community in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Dora Klayman.

[Applause].

Dora, welcome and thank you so much for joining us today and willing to be our First Person. You have so much to talk about and such a short period of time. We'll just get started right away.

You were three years old when World War II came directly to Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941 when it was attacked by Germany. Before we turn to the horrors of the war and the Holocaust, tell us first a little bit about your parents and their life in the prewar years.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Well, as you noted, I was born in Zagreb. And this is where my parents lived after they married. Before that, my father actually, that family, was in Zagreb. And what I haven't thought about previously is that they actually came to Zagreb sometime during my father's early teens, I think. And they came from further northeast in Serbia. And my grandfather died there of natural causes, of course, in 1932 and was buried there. And this strip of mine included finding and visiting that grave site, which was quite a thing because none of the family had been able to locate that grave before that.

So the family apparently moved to Zagreb through Bosnia through Zagreb, and this is where my father grew up and eventually ran this small factory of brushes. And there was very little that I really know about their life in Zagreb except that they were a religious family and followed, you know, the usual orthodox laws and rules. And one of my uncles worked at the Jewish Community Center. So much about that.

Family. My mother's family, I know much more about because they lived in the small town of Ludbreg where I ended up eventually. My grandfather and grandmother obtained their already -- with their two youngest really early teenage children from Slovakia, and they were invited to come because my grandfather was a rabbi, as you mentioned. And there was a Jewish community in Ludbreg, not a very large one, but obviously wanting to have a rabbi. So that's how they ended up in Ludbreg. And after that, they had two more children, my mother being the youngest. So the oldest

daughter ended up being 15 years older than my mother, and that sort of played in their relationship.

>> BILL BENSON: Your father, as we mentioned owned a brush making business. But his vocation was a canter, and that was related to how he met your mother, I think.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yeah, I think so, because they all were trained in -- they all had good voices and they were all trained, the boys, male members of the family were trained in leading Jewish services. And so that is, I think, how they met when my father came to Ludbreg where my mother had at that point already finished teacher's college and was teaching in elementary school.

>> BILL BENSON: And your Aunt Giza and uncle Ljudevit, they were essential to your survival. We'll hear about that. Tell us a little bit about them and what you know about their early years.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes, it was very important, yes, in my survival and a life generally in Ludbreg. My aunt worked in the local bank, and the Ljudevit was the vector of the bank. And it's a small bank, and that is how they met, of course. But it was actually a community where there was much mixing of social -- social mixing and very interesting photographs of their both being on a tennis team and so on. So they met over and over again, and they fell in love.

>> BILL BENSON: And he was not Jewish, right?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Definitely not. He was a member of a long standing upright semi -- somewhat aristocrat. They were not a high aristocracy, but they were an aristocratic family. And they had many children, all of whom somehow died of one thing or another except for one very early. And so their relationship, Giza and Ljudevit's relationship started there, but they weren't married because of the differences of

religion, I would imagine, though when I questioned him after the war, he said, she was happy living with my family and I was fine living with my mother's. I took it with a grain of salt.

>> BILL BENSON: Right.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: [Chuckling]. Anyway, by 1939, they knew what was happening in western Europe, and they decide they would marry because it was known that it was possible for a non Jewish member of the family to save the Jewish member of the family, one spouse saving the other space. And so they went to Hungary to get married, reason for it no civil ceremony in Croatia but it was possible in Hungary. So they were married. Neither would have to convert, yet the marriage is acknowledged by the government.

>> BILL BENSON: When Germany launched its attack in Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, you were away from Zagreb and on a visit with relatives in Ludbreg. Tell us what you can about the circumstances, as best you know them, that caused you to be away from your family, and what happened once the Germans entered Yugoslavia in April of 1941.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Well, by -- so I was born in 1938. By 1941, in January 1941, I was happy to receive my baby brother. And so he was born in January, just like I was. And there was a three year difference between us. And I think at that point, soon after his arrival, we had a visit from neighbors from Ludbreg. And some friends of my grandparents. And they offered to take me to my grandparents to visit. Now, I'm not sure -- and I probably never will be -- whether it was my mother just saying, well, she needs a little rest from a three year old when she has a baby, or whether they knew something about what was happening. I would imagine that it wasn't planned because of the war.

Anyway, I left the neighborhood and I have a memory of being with them on the train and being exciting. That was the last time seeing my parents. So I was three. There must have been fairly soon after my brother's birth because Germany attacked April 6, 1941. And at that point, I know I was in Ludbreg because I sort of remember everybody being upset and crying, and it was so cold I sort of have --

>> BILL BENSON: You can remember that.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes, uh-huh.

>> BILL BENSON: Do you know up until that point, had your parents made efforts to try to leave Yugoslavia?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Not that I know of. I think there was a sense by people there was really nowhere to go. There was one way of going someplace, and some people managed to go, including my aunt and uncle. They had passage to go. Even though the Ustasha, the right wing Nazi followers within Croatia, they ran the government when the war started, they took over and they ran the so called independent state of Croatia.

>> BILL BENSON: But completely a puppet government.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes. They did not have all of Croatia. The southern part was occupied by Italy. And the Italian zone apparently offered some help to Jews. They were intern, but not in [Indiscernible] they were sequestered and sort of kept in a camp, but it was not dangerous. So my aunt and uncle and their two cousins somehow thought that they would go there. Unfortunately, they also were very attached to their home and to the business.

>> BILL BENSON: Which they had left to go there.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes. And they were offered by the government -- there was an offer that anybody that returned would be safe. So they unfortunately returned.

It's interesting that going through my papers recently, I found the passes which I'm about to give to the museum. I found the passage that they -- all four of them -- to go to Italy. But obviously, they were not used.

>> BILL BENSON: And they returned home.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yeah. So that's all I know of any possibility of people leaving. I know people who had survived in the Italian zone, and once Italy capitulated, some of them were actually able to go with the Italian forces to Italy and survive in camps there. And some of them went to the [Indiscernible] into the mountains, and that included an aunt of mine and two of my cousins.

>> BILL BENSON: Who went with the partisans.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Who went with them as they stayed in the mountains. It was not an easy way to spend the next few years, but in the mountains with very little food and cold and being outdoors and so on. But they made it, and they survived.

>> BILL BENSON: And of course as you were telling us, you were -- when the Germans occupied, you were in Ludbreg. Your Aunt Giza and uncle Ljudevit and other families in Ludbreg learned that your parents were sent to a concentration camp but that your brother who was with your parents was safe from deportation, tell us what you can about your parents, what happened, and then what happened to your brother.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: My parents were deported very -- quite early. And my brother was still a baby. And they were being held in a -- in a transfer camp in Zagreb. It was a police organized gathering and from then on they would be taken to Jasenovac, the camp, the major camp. But our house keeper followed them to this transfer --

>> BILL BENSON: As they were being taken?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: As they were being taken. And she asked me -- the police if she could have the baby. And my mother handed her the baby with the hope, of

course, of saving his life. And so then the house keeper called this uncle of mine in -- Ljudevit in Ludbreg and he and my Aunt Giza came and got my brother and brought him to Ludbreg and from then on until the end of the war, we were together.

>> BILL BENSON: And I think you told me you actually remembered them coming back with your little brother.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yeah, I remember them coming back because I was being very much pampered by everybody, my cousins there. I was much younger than they were. And now all of a sudden, there's this baby. And I remember him crying and I sort of said, what in the world is this? So I just have a memory of his arrival. And from then on, you know, we were together as the war proceeded.

What I probably should have mentioned is about my uncle Ljudevit. I called him [Indiscernible], which is uncle in Croatian, a sort of diminutive. He was sort of a very special and unusual person in that, as I said, he came from this family that was a Catholic family with many children. But he had so many talents. He was a violinist by vocation. He had a group going, which was a chamber music group and had a choir going and was teaching people how to sing or play. And that played a major role later on for him. And he was really well known in this town. And this is what, of course, enabled him also because he was -- he had this fairly high standing in the community that enabled him to get my brother.

>> BILL BENSON: He was a pillar in the community.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: He was.

>> BILL BENSON: Yet in 1942 he was arrested and he was sentenced to the Jasenovac concentration camp, and you and your brother remained with your Aunt Giza. Tell us about your uncle's imprisonment at Jasenovac and as a result of that what happened to you, your brother and your Aunt Giza.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Well, by the time he was sentenced, by the time he left, all the rest of the Jewish -- all the Jewish population had already gone. They came one day and went down the list and arrested everybody. And I have a fairly vivid memory of their saying good bye to me.

>> BILL BENSON: All the various family members.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: All the family members were gathered in the Ludbreg house, him and Aunt Giza's house. People were carrying satchels and pillows and whatever and crying and saying good bye and I was left behind. So that was -- that's what happened already before he was deported. What happened -- for a while, we were just saying. My brother and I, that was all that was left.

>> BILL BENSON: And your aunt was somewhat protected --

>> DORA KLAYMAN: They didn't pick her up. They didn't pick us up, which was of course a total miracle why they didn't pick us up. And we were in this small town where everybody knew who we were.

>> BILL BENSON: Everybody knew.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Everybody knew who we were. So the question was, of course, why didn't they pick us up, also? One of the thoughts was that they didn't have us on the list because there was a list of Jews of that town. And of course we came from Zagreb. We weren't local, in quotes. So we were left behind. And Aunt Giza because she was married to a Catholic, so we were left behind.

But another thing that was happening around there, and that is that by the time -- by 1945, fairly early, actually, certainly by 1942 when he was arrested, there was a fairly sizable and getting stronger and stronger partisan force. This was a partisan uprising of people who did not want to be part of the regime. They did not want to serve in the Ustasha army. Ustasha had a fairly strong army which was now fighting the

partisans. And the partisans would then attack and take some of the arms and this is how they became armed with time. And this is, like, all across Yugoslavia that was going on. And they were led by the Communist who were able to sort of organize things. And of course at that time, we didn't know what communism was, but --

>> BILL BENSON: But they were fighting the Nazis.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes, the Russians were fighting the Nazis, too. Anyway. At one point, the partisans would be winning and the Ustasha would get very -- well, they would get a little bit over the fact that they would be losing battles. So they thought, well, let's arrest anybody that might have been helping them. So they came and arrested people who were citizens of Ludbreg, Catholics, all Catholics. There were no Jews left at this point. And they would just -- they picked up well, my uncle, and the fellow who ran a bookstore, anybody. And a number of people, about five, I think, who were sort of the leading citizens of that town and sent them to Jasenovac. And as you mentioned, they were given sentences because that was the way the political prisoners were treated.

>> BILL BENSON: As opposed to Jews who were not sentenced. They were just sent there.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: The Ustasha had all the so called enemies that the government had because they were sending Jews, Roma, and political prisoners, of course, anybody that was connected to the partisans, but also served. And that was really one of their major purposes is to make Croatia what they -- what these days call ethnic cleansings and they were trying to get all the Serbs out. So in sending these people, the political prisoners, they would give them a sentence, and he had a ten month sentence, and he found himself in Jasenovac.

>> BILL BENSON: I didn't know of Jasenovac until I met you, and my guess is many people in this room have not heard of it either. A notoriously awful place I've learned since then.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes, it was one of the most notorious places. People don't know the name Jasenovac, but I so often meet people who ask me where I survived the war. When I tell them Croatia, oh, that was a terrible place. They seem to know without knowing the individual things. But there were about 25 camps in Croatia -- within Croatia. Some didn't exist for a long period of time, some did. Jasenovac was -- existed for practically the entire war, and it was really brutal. It was definitely a killing town. They did run things -- workshops and created things that they could use in their functioning or in their war. They were making chains and they were -- there was a panning of [Indiscernible]. But the prisoners were given practically no food. The tortures were unbelievable, and people would be just killed out of hand, not in an organized sense. When you think about Auschwitz where people were numbered and, you know, separated into groups and so on, this was a free for all of total cruelty. And I was told by witnesses, my grandfather, for example, who was fairly elderly and had a stroke by the time he got there, he was hit on the head with a shovel at the entrance to the camp.

>> BILL BENSON: Just random, hit him in the head.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Just random, yeah. So my father was definitely there and he --

>> BILL BENSON: And you know that because your uncle saw him, right?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yeah, my uncle saw him. He was working very hard and having very little nourishment. But he was young and strong and he was surviving. My uncle would have never survived if he had to do what my father was doing because he

was that much older. As I mentioned, my aunt was 15 years older than my mother and he was 10 years older.

>> BILL BENSON: He was born in 1885.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: 1885, yeah. And he came from the family and so many of them had all kinds of lung problems and other health problems. He would not have survived if not for the fact that they knew he was a banker and they needed somebody with some brain to do their accounting. And so they put him in an office to do some of their work, some of their office work, and that of course saved him because that kept him in a place that wasn't freezing and was out of the elements.

And also, they had the desire to be entertained and they knew that he could put on shows. And so he was told to put on shows. And so he gathered a number of people who were --

>> BILL BENSON: Prisoners.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: All prisoners, including, actually, two of his sort of distant relatives, nieces of sorts. And he put them together and they had a choir and some musicians were put together and they actually put on shows. And that kept everybody -- several hours of, again, being in a place where they didn't have to carry rocks and -- Jasenovac wasn't built by professionals and it was not originally some kind of an organized place. So the prisoners actually built much of it, too. They -- and of course they dug their own graves, too. It was just an awful place.

>> BILL BENSON: And while your uncle's there and your father, as your uncle found out, you were -- and your brother of course -- were with your Aunt Giza. But in early 1943 while Ljudevit is still in Jasenovac, your Aunt Giza was denounced and deported to Auschwitz. Tell us what you know about what happened to Aunt Giza and what happened to you and your brother who are now without your Aunt Giza.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Well, as I mentioned, the town of Ludbreg was incredible because everybody knew who we were, and yet we were not denounced after that point.

>> BILL BENSON: To that point.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: But at some time that time, someone fingered her and denounced her. And they came and picked her up. As they were doing that, she was running -- there were two buildings next to each other with a big yard all around it. And one of the buildings we lived in, our house, and the other one was unfinished, but it was supposed to have been a two story building. And the bottom was done. It had an apartment and a store in front. It was my uncle's store. My other aunt and uncle. But the upstairs was unfinished. She was apparently running to hide upstairs. And when -- the family that was occupying the small apartment that was renting from us, a smart apartment in the backyard. And it was a [Indiscernible] family. And she asked them to take care of us and left them with us and tried to hide, but they caught her. And they caught her. She ended up in Auschwitz, and we know that. We always sort of knew that. My uncle tried to follow the trail and tried to save her because he in the mean time was released.

>> BILL BENSON: Almost at the same time.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Almost at the same time. He was released and tried to find her, but he couldn't. And he was told that she went to Auschwitz. But actually, I didn't know that for sure until fairly recently when the large archive from Germany, the [Indiscernible] archives came to the museum, and I actually have a card that testifies to her having been there and when she died, supposedly, of typhus or some intestinal problem, probably of duration.

>> BILL BENSON: So Ljudevit comes back, Giza is gone, his wife is gone. He tries to find her.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: We're all by ourselves with the Runjak family. That was a wonderful Catholic family that took us in. It was a very small apartment. And they had three children of their own, older than we were, quite a bit older than we were. And we had to pretend that we were their children. Of course, the people in Ludbreg knew who we were, but the armed forces that would come, they would -- they actually [Indiscernible] in our backyard.

>> BILL BENSON: Literally your backyard.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Literally in our backyard. They took the space and one point. And so we of course had to pretend that we were the Runjak children. And I knew to call Mrs. Runjak mom any time anybody was around.

>> BILL BENSON: And you knew.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: At that point, I was 5, and I knew when to call her mom and when not to call her mom. My brother, who was younger, didn't make any distinction. He learned how to call her mom, and that was it. He called her mom for the rest of the time. Well, so we were with the Runjak family. And often, even before that, we were taken in sometimes by other families within Ludbreg, so a lot of other people had been kind to us.

>> BILL BENSON: At one point, you were actually baptized as Catholics.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yeah.

>> BILL BENSON: Why was that?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Because there was a local priest who came to Mrs. Runjak, who was a religious Catholic woman, very kind. She ran a -- she ran a trachoma clinic. There was a lot of trachoma eye problem. Not glaucoma, but

trachoma, which is a disease, and somehow was rampant there. So she worked really hard. He was a house painter, not any kind of a special family. They were hard working people, very nice. And the priest came to her and said, what are we going to do with these children? Sort of like a veiled threat. They're next. And so they thought that probably would be a good idea to baptize me, us. So when my uncle came back, actually, I was baptized, 1944.

>> BILL BENSON: 1944. You described to me the time in Ludbreg after your uncle Ljudevit returned from Jasenovac. Until the end of the war in May 1945 as a time of constant fighting between Ustasha and the partisans that were all around Ludbreg where you were. What was that time like for you? Because you have a lot of memories about that.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: I have a lot of memories for that because as a child, it was sort of unbelievable, you know. You had to -- you would go to sleep in the evening and then gun fire would start and things would go crazy. Sometimes, we were lucky, and we were told ahead of time that they would be -- or we knew ahead of time or it started and we thought we had enough time to run to the basement. Now, the basement was not an American style basement with a wine cellar. You had to go outside of the house and down the stairs to the area that housed giant barrels of wine. There were shovels with fruit drying and things of that nature. Dirt floors, small windows high up, sort of damp. There were frogs jumping around. And we had [Indiscernible] down there. There were long periods of times that we slept there because it was a protected area from all the fighting that was going on outside.

But sometimes, the fighting would start and it would be too late, too dangerous to go outside.

>> BILL BENSON: To go down to the cellar.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: So we stayed in the house. It had thick, thick walls. This was an old house built in the 1800s. There were thick walls, but of course there were windows. So you would kind of hide in a corner where there were no windows. And there was a time that I was stuck in sort of in a corner where it was safe, but I was afraid. I was crying, and I called for my uncle, and he came to comfort me from another place and was very lucky for all of us because bullets came through the window and landed exactly where he had been before. So it was -- it was terrible because there was a battle when the Ustasha was on one side and there were people walking in our yard. And across the way were the partisans and they were in a second story house and they were shooting at one another, and we were in the middle of it. And the bullets would go through the windows. And we had these big armors with sheets and things inside and bullets would pierce through that. Later on when you take out a sheet or towel it would be sort of a child had taken a napkin and made lace.

>> BILL BENSON: Because of all the holes.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Uh-huh. So the armors were pieced.

>> BILL BENSON: I was struck when you told me that for you, the worst part of the time was living through battles and being afraid of being shot as opposed to being deported and sent away because that was so tangible and real for you.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Exactly, exactly. And it was very tangible because you ended up in the -- in the morning, you would look out to see who was there. And if it was the partisans, you were safe. There were two pretty long periods of time that we were under partisan control. It was okay. But when we were under the Ustasha control, I learned how to pretend I wasn't who I was. And I would have to wear a hat. Sometimes if I went outside because I was a flaming red head. So was my brother. It's

unusual in Croatia. There weren't any red heads. I would just stand out. Someone would talk to me, and you didn't want anybody to talk to you.

>> BILL BENSON: Didn't want to draw attention to you in any way.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yeah. And there were horrible times. The partisans would lose. And I remember very well one time for some strange reason, one of our -- we had someone helping us in the house because right now, we were just -- my uncle and my brother and I. And we had this woman who was cooking or something and she decided to go to some movie or something and she took me with her. And I have this memory of her trying to hold her hand over my eyes, but I could tell what was going on. On the main square, as we had to pass it, there was a partisan hanging off each tree. And so they caught those and they hanged them. But they were also -- there was also a time when they caught a whole group of partisans in my street, at the very end of the street. They were surrounded. And they were -- this was actually the leadership of the particular brigade, and they were held up in the house, and there was no escape. They threw a bomb among themselves and committed suicide. So we always knew about that happening. And even as I was growing up, I remember going by that house every time y would think about that.

>> BILL BENSON: Dora before we turn to the war's end and a little bit about after the war, two questions: One, did you ever learn subsequently how or who denounced your aunt? Because you had been known who you were in that little tiny town.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yeah, we did know. His name is Rachszech [phonetic], and he was taken to Austria after the war. We found out who he was. And there was no way of doing anything about that.

>> BILL BENSON: And your uncle, since he had already been arrested earlier by the Ustasha, when they took control of Ludbreg at that time, do you know why they didn't arrest him and send him back to Jasenovac or do worse to him?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: No. No, it's just one of those things, miracle of time. Just don't know why things -- you don't know -- there was such uncertainty. You don't know why. I have no idea why they wouldn't take him again. Different people, different groups came. And the lucky thing was the town because nobody then went and said, hey, guys, there is --

>> BILL BENSON: You're still sheltering those Jewish children.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: And now we were Catholic.

>> BILL BENSON: Now you were Catholic children. With the war ending in 1945, you were alone with your brother and uncle Ljudevit. With the end of the war, what did your uncle do with trying to rebuild a life? And now he's got to two of you in his care.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Well, we had a succession of housekeepers. And that's how life went on. It was difficult post war period. And the very sad thing that happened is that in 1946, very, very early, my brother contracted scarlet fever and died very, very fast. So at this point, it was just my uncle.

>> BILL BENSON: So he was what? 5?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yeah. He was born in 41, so -- the other thing that was happening was you expected somebody to come back. And people would always ask me, are you still -- you know, in 1946, 47, people still stopped me in the street and say, are you still hoping -- people who didn't know he at all, just curiosity, are you still hoping that your parents would come back?

>> BILL BENSON: They would stop you and ask you that?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes, I remember. Not very many times, but I remember being asked that. I think there was -- we're now in the Communist period because once the war ended the Communist party took over and now we have a Communist government. People remember. So different order of things. And there was a sense that some people had been sent out east in the camps and that maybe my parents would have been sent to Russia, [Indiscernible], for example.

>> BILL BENSON: So they might think back.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: I never did think so.

>> BILL BENSON: You didn't?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: No. And then two of my uncles returned. These were my father's brothers. I'm sorry. One of my father's brother and one of my mother's brother. This is the only person in my mother's family that survived.

>> BILL BENSON: This one brother.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: This one brother. And he came back to Ludbreg. He came over to see whether anybody there survived. And he then remarried very quickly another widow whose husband had died, was killed in the war and two children. They very soon left -- by 1948, everybody was leaving to go to Palestine, to Israel.

>> BILL BENSON: While they could still leave you.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: While they could still leave you. And the other -- the other person who came back was one of my father's brothers. And he came back and he very much wanted me to go with him. And there was -- there was some difficulty between my uncle Ljudevit and my returning uncle. There were a number of things that was the problem. One was these uncles wanted me to go with him. But in the mean time, my uncle had actually adopted me illegally, and that's how I ended up with the name [Indiscernible]. That was his name. We were both adopted, both my brother and

I. And so then my uncle said, okay, let's -- the child should decide what she wants to do. So age 7 --

>> BILL BENSON: You were to decide?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: I was to decide where I was going. And I decided, of course, you can just imagine, I've been living with my uncle Ljudevit who was a fantastic person, a wonderful person, very kind. And he was all I had at that point, and the same is true for him. He has no family at this point. All of his siblings and mother had died, and he had no other relatives. And so this would have been very difficult. But anyway, I made the decision without blinking an eye. And said yes, I will stay. I was staying. So my uncle left, and he also married and left and also went to Palestine to Israel.

>> BILL BENSON: And sometime after the war, I think, soon after the war, you learned that your father had lived at Jasenovac where he was sent almost until the end of the war.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes. Actually, practically through the end of the war. And at the end of the war, the Ustasha tried to -- they tried to destroy Jasenovac because it would be a testimony to their cruelty. And they tried to -- before -- and they were trying to kill everybody. So there was a break out. And my father was among a group, small group that managed to break out and escape. But unfortunately, as they -- after they escaped, they were in someplace hiding in the forest, they stumbled on to a German patrol. And all but one person was killed. My father was killed. That one person who managed to survive somehow testified to that. That's how I know that.

>> BILL BENSON: When did you find that out?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Many years ago.

>> BILL BENSON: Many years ago? So there you are with your uncle in Yugoslavia. It now is a Communist country. And you would remain there until in 1957,

more than a deck aid after the end of the war, 12 years, you would leave there to attend university. In the time we have left, tell us how you managed to do that and what that led to for you.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Very quickly, before that, like in 1956 -- sorry, 54, I was still in high school and I went to a very good high school in a close by town. I was -- I had had correspondence with another brother of my father who survived. And he survived on [Indiscernible]. That was a very interesting for many people. Might want to look into that. He was on something called the [Indiscernible] train.

>> BILL BENSON: Oh, he was?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: And out of Bergen Belsen, he was rescued, he and his wife were rescued into Switzerland. He wrote to me during the -- during my childhood every once in a while.

>> BILL BENSON: Your childhood after the war?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: After the war, of course. After the war. And sort of while I was in junior high, I would hear from him sometimes. And by 54, they asked if I would come and visit. 54, which was very unusual for anybody to leave Yugoslavia. It was a Communist country. You didn't go to Switzerland. But I was allowed to go because I was called -- I was labeled a victim of fascism. And as such, I was allowed to go.

>> BILL BENSON: That was a privilege.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes, victim of fascism. I was given a visa. And the Swiss gave me a visa after a long time. For the first time, I actually got to see some of my family in Switzerland. And they had two young children. And we got along very well. It was very emotional to find my uncle, the only family that I saw since I was a very young person.

They said, why don't you come back to the university. That's what happened in 1957. After I finished my first year of university as an English major, I was going back to Switzerland to study, I thought I was going for a year to study, and then come back.

>> BILL BENSON: And were you about to leave to study also because you were a victim of fascism?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Yes, same thing. Once you come back once, then obviously, you are not -- you weren't trying to escape. So I was given another visa. I don't know which point you want me to tell you --

>> BILL BENSON: Yes, we're at that point.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: How I found myself on this train. I find myself on the train to Switzerland, and there were -- it was 1957, fall of 1957, and there was -- there were a number of young people in the train in the hallway of the train. There were three gentleman, actually. And they were discussing in English something that was happening in the United States. And it was what was happening in little rock, Arkansas. The governor was not allowing African American children to enter high school. It was -- it was seen for what it was all over Europe, and the Europeans of course were stunned by much of it, especially in the Communist world, they exploited it, too. Such things happening. And so one of these three people was a Yugoslavia, must have been a Communist because otherwise, why would he be going out of the country? He would not be allowed to go. And then a gentleman from -- there was an Englishman and American. The American was being attacked to as to what kind of a country is this and what is going on? And he was trying to explain how not everyone in the states feel that way and how he's sure things will improve and Eisenhower was about to send troops to Arkansas and so on.

After that broke up, I was very anxious to get into a conversation because I had been studying English for all these years and I had not had the opportunity to speak or to listen to people speaking English. And so I took a little trip back and forth. And this gentleman said something about my pretty red hair. This time, my hair came in handy. [Laughter].

>> BILL BENSON: He didn't think you understood though, right?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Well, he didn't know whether I understood or not. But I smiled. And he said, oh, so you understand English? And so we continued to talk. And we talked about everything under the sun for the next few hours. He was getting off in Venice, which was on the way, and he had just come from, as you mentioned in the introduction from the post war, to India, such a long way home. And we parted and we exchanged addresses. And then he wrote, and then I wrote. And then he wrote that -- he asked me why I was in Switzerland and I explained. He told me he was Jewish, too. At that point, my aunt got very, very happy and made me -- made me write. I was slow. We wrote back and forth with greater and greater frequency. And he came back by mid August. And we were married in September. And then I came to the states.

>> BILL BENSON: And your uncle Ljudevit, of course, how did he accept the fact that not only were you marrying this fellow from America, but you were moving to the United States in light of all you've been through?

>> DORA KLAYMAN: He acted as always as a loving and very gentlemanly person. I wrote to him that this was happening, that I've fallen in love and I want to go. And I made great promises. The promise was -- the one thing he always insisted -- well, there were two things. One, I was to finish university. That was very important. And the other thing was I needed to always have my musical studies going.

And so this time, I promised that yes, I'm getting married, but I promise I'm going to finish university. And he wrote back and said, well, it depends on my uncle with whom I was living in Switzerland. If they think it's a good idea, he will go along. And so that's what happened.

So unfortunately, he couldn't come for the wedding because I had to get married in Switzerland. I got married, by the way, in orthodox Jewish ceremony. But he couldn't come because obviously, that would have been a difficulty in terms of how to get a visa and so on.

>> BILL BENSON: Right.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: But also, he had already -- his health wasn't great, and he was older already. And so he didn't come. But after I was married, I managed to go with my family twice.

>> BILL BENSON: To see him.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: With my husband and two children to see him. So he -- he was -- he understood that this was going to be -- that this meant a better life for me than if I had returned to Yugoslavia.

>> BILL BENSON: Dora, thank you so much. As you can see, we probably could have kept here for a good while longer to hear so much more, not only about what Dora experienced during the war but also after the war years and building a new life here. We're going to close the program in just a moment. I want to thank all of you for being with us. Remind you that we all have programs twice a week until the middle of August. If you can't come back, you can view them on the YouTube page. Please do that if you have the opportunity. I'm going to turn back to Dora in a moment to close our program. Two things I'd like to mention. Our photographer Joel will come on stage and take a photograph of Dora with you as the background. Please stay for that if you

would. And secondly, because there wasn't time to ask questions of Dora -- Dora doesn't know this yet -- but when she's finished, we're going to have Dora come to the atrium area and be there to meet you, if you want to ask her a question, please do so, or say hi and have your photograph taken with her. So we really urge you to do that if you'd like to do that. It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person gets the last word. And so with that, I'm going to turn it to Dora to close our program.

>> DORA KLAYMAN: Well, first of all, thank you for allowing me to share some thoughts with you. And as you have heard, I've just returned from another camp, the camp of Djakovo. I was told my mother was there and was killed there. And it's a well known camp. And one of the reasons that it stand out as a terrible concentration camp, at one point, there was 50 children sent there from Serbia, actually, sent there and just killed. Just brutal. It was a very brutal thing that happened. And the fate of those children, and then of course thinking of my brother, being separated from my mother, was still on my mind when I came home, when I returned just two weeks ago. And usually, when I come back to the United States, I feel just some sense of relief, you know. I feel I'm home. This time, I was -- I wrote down how I felt because I didn't want to say things half way. So when I came back, my home coming was marred by the shocking events on our southern border. Young children were being separated from their parents. All my memories flooded back and all I could say is -- and all I could think of was, not here, not in this country. It seems fortunately that somehow we're coming to an end of this practice and hopefully the family will soon be reunited. And I'm very grateful that at least some of it testifies that we still have a civil society. And I'm grateful for the many people who spoke up and protested.

As a survivor, I find it imperative to join those voices and to ask for a humane treatment for those who seek our help. I hope that a reminder of the cruel past that was

the Holocaust may inspire us to see the tolerance, compassion, empathy, and respect for others makes for a better world for all of us. Thank you.

[Applause].

[End of event]