REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON SYLVIA ROZINES
JUNE 28, 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.* Thank you for joining us today. We are in our 19th year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Sylvia Rozines, whom 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.

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 Sylvia 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 the #AskWhy. You can find the hashtag on the back of your program, as well.

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 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 Perlmutter to Jewish parents Isaac and Haya 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. This German photograph 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 her 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. 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. Silvia moved to the Washington, DC, area then to be close to her son. Silvia has two grandchildren, Jeffery and Alyssa.

Sylvia began volunteering with the Museum's Visitor Services in 2014. You will find her at the Information Desk on Mondays. Sylvia only recently began speaking publicly about what she went through in the Lodz ghetto and is now speaking in local schools including Montgomery College, as well as at senior centers. 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: Thank you, Sylvia, for joining us and for being willing to be our First Person. We are so excited to have you with us. And I know that we have such a short time and you have so much to tell us, so we'll get started right away if that's ok with you.

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 and what happened to you and your family, tell us, first, just a little bit about your family and your community before the war.

>> Sylvia Rozines: We had a very nice life. My father and mother were wonderful to us. We had a nice apartment, beautiful furniture. We went to school, especially my sister. I was too young yet. We had friends and holidays. Always the family came to our house because my mother was the best cook. And we enjoyed life. We used to rent a cottage. All of those pictures, what I have in the woods next to the cottage, for the summer. And we never expected that the war is going to change all our lives.

>> Bill Benson: You shared with me, Sylvia, that your parents, before the war, liked to get dressed up.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother loved American movies.

>> Sylvia Rozines: American movies, the silent movies. They used to go dancing. There were theaters. We really had a nice life.

>> Bill Benson: And, of course, all of that changed so dramatically with the start of the war. Within seven days of the Nazi invasion of Poland, they occupied your city of Lodz and unleashed the horrors of the Holocaust for your family and the nearly 250,000 Jews that lived in Lodz. Tell us what happened to your family once the Germans came in but before you were forced into the ghetto.

And maybe I can have you start with you shared with me that your father said that he had had several premonitions and one of them was at that time about leaving.

>> Sylvia Rozines: My father and his brother decided to escape to Russia. They went to find a place for us to live. He was walking to the train station. He had already the ticket. And something told him not to go. So he said to his younger brother, "I feel like staying here." So his younger brother said, "Ok. I will go and I'll find a place. I will come back and we all will escape."

By the time he wanted to come back, the war started and the border was closed and he was sent to Siberia to work in a factory. The first people the German took away was the women whose children didn't have husbands so his wife and son perished right away. They sent them to Germany.

>> Bill Benson: The tight title of your book is "Yellow Star." How quickly were you forced to wear a yellow star?

>> Sylvia Rozines: I remember right away when we were in the ghetto they made us wear the yellow star, and formed on the back. They also came to each apartment and took away every valuable. We received cards. We only could get a little food each day. We had to wait after the person came from work to wait in it line to get some food. Sometimes by the time your turn arrived, the food was gone.

But Lodz ghetto had many factories from before the war. And it wasn't bombed much because the Germans decided to make this a city to belong to Germany. So they put the people to work. My mother -- my sister was 13 years old. Even children 10 years old, as long as they could work, they were safe. They put -- my father was a very strong man. He could lift heavy equipment so they made him deliver flours to the bakery. And other men did this.
>> Bill Benson: I was going to ask you one thing. You're starting to tell us about being in the ghetto. That happened in early 1940, when of the Jewish population 160,000 were forced into the ghetto. You wrote about in your book you remember walking into the ghetto with your family and I think you were holding Dora's hand. You wrote about that. You wrote that you were afraid of the crowds and being tram trampled.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. It became very crowded. My sister was older. She watched over me.

In the ghetto, life was very hard because there were so many people. They put another family -- the apartment was only one room and a kitchen. And they put a mother and father and a little girl, which I became -- she was one of my best friends. Her name was Itka. At least I had someone to play. But her parents also had to go to work. And we were left alone, little children. I think she was my age.

But across from the hallway there was another little girl with a little boy who was in a crib. He was a sick child. And we got in her apartment because children -- we were children baby-sitting a baby. The parents, every parent, had to go to work.

All our toys, I remember, I had a gorgeous doll and carriage. Everything what we could in the beginning we sold under the barbed-wire to the Polish people just to get food. Food was the most important thing on our minds because when you are hungry, that's what you think about.
>> Bill Benson: Am I --
>> Sylvia Rozines: A lady down the hallway, she must have been a dressmaker. She saw us. We had nothing to do during the day, was long, she made us little dolls out of sheets. She put faces with a pen. And that's what we had to play and wait for our parents to come to make us some food.
>> Bill Benson: Am I right in because you were too young to be forced to work, the Germans allowed some rations for those who worked but you didn't get a ration because you didn't work.
>> Sylvia Rozines: I really don't recall.
>> Bill Benson: You don't recall that. One of the things that you wrote about, too, because food was so scarce --
>> Sylvia Rozines: I know that my parents -- a bread had to last you a week. And I know that my parents gave us, my sister and me, their --
>> Bill Benson: Their share.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Their share. Because you could only have one slice of bread. And we could not understand why. Why we couldn't have more.
>> Bill Benson: And your father, the job he was forced to do, was to work delivering flour. Do you remember what you wrote about how the men would hide some flour?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. Sometimes the bags were made out of material and sometimes there was a little hole or they made it. They only could take a handful because once it was delivered to the bakery, they weigh it to see if it was correct. So each time he could take a little bit and that helped us a lot.
>> Bill Benson: A little handful of flour. And they would all do that.

One of the things that I was really struck by, because you were forced -- lots of you

were forced into a little place, there was no indoor toilet. And as a little girl of 5, you talked about how scary it was --
>> Sylvia Rozines: To go -- there was a little house in the courtyard.
>> Bill Benson: And that's where you had to go out as a little 5-year-old girl.

Were there other relatives in the ghetto with you?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. Before the war we all lived in the same section but then we wind up living on the same, walking distance, relatives. Some survived; the younger Ones, not the mothers and fathers.
>> Bill Benson: Do you remember -- your father was delivering flour. What was your mother and your sister made to do?
>> Sylvia Rozines: My mother and sister worked in a factory. They were making women undergarment. Everything what was made in the ghetto was sent to Germany. If you were [Indiscernible], they sent you to a factory making uniforms. My uncle happened to be a furniture maker, making furniture. So everybody who had to go to work. If you didn't, that was the problem. They send you away. They made it, oh, there is some nice places in Germany you could work there. And little by little they were taking away people. Each factory had to give a certain amount of people because they were told they were going to work in Germany but this was all a lie. All of those people went directly to the gas chamber when you were a little older or you were sick.

There was a hospital but we were afraid to go there because they used to come to the hospital and pick up all the people, the sick people. So mostly if you were sick, you stayed home. There were Jewish doctors but they didn't have any medication to help us. Typhus was the worst. It happened in the ghetto. People were dying. And I could see on the streets people dying.

And young boys, that was their job, to pick up on a carriage -- the two boys were like they would be the horses carrying the dead people and burying them. That was a terrible job for young boys to do.
>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, as terrible as the conditions were in the Lodz ghetto, as you were just describing some of them, they, of course, became far worse when the Nazis began deporting Jews from the ghetto and sending them to Chelmno, the killing center. They started doing that when you were 7, 1942. By 1943, the Nazis were intent on taking all the children in the ghetto.
>> Sylvia Rozines: This really was my tragedy. Personal tragedy, when they decided to take away the children who couldn't work. They used to come -- we never knew which street barricade with police and take the children. And if the mother was carrying the baby and she wouldn't give it away, like my aunt, they would kill you, the mother and the child. And this was a terrible tragedy for the parents to give away the children.

I had a very courageous father. He knew the city. He lived there. My grandparents were born there. So he knew every place. And he always found places to hide me.

My worst memory lasted me 10 years. I had the same dream. Behind our courtyard was a cemetery. There was a brick wall, very tall. My father climbed the wall and threw me over and digged a hole. And the hole -- I don't remember if he had a shovel or he did it with his hands. I couldn't sit. He covered me with grass and some straw so I had enough room to breathe and I had to stay there for 24 hours. This raid was a long one. The Germans stayed, went room to room to search. And after it was over my sister came and told us it's over.
>> Bill Benson: How scary was that?
>> Sylvia Rozines: That was really scary because it stayed with me for 10 years. I lived 10

years in France. And every so often I had this dream being in the hole and the German soldier is shooting me. And it was this same dream. But I was so happy, when I came to America the dream stopped and I never had it again.

I live always in fear. I was a very scared little girl and a very carry young woman even. Middle age, I couldn't -- if anyone said something bad to me, I couldn't answer. I just took it because I was very shy and always scared. Even after the war I was always afraid the German are going to come and take me away. I lived with this for a long time.

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, when you hid in the cemetery that one time, as you said, 24 hours but you also hid there other times. Do you know if any other children were hidden in the cemetery?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. I saw some children sitting next to the stones their parent left them there. But I was the only one with my father put in the hole, as far as I know.

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, you mentioned a little while ago, you mentioned you had this friend, Itka. You also had another friend, Haya. They were your friends. What happened to the two of them?

>> Sylvia Rozines: They did not survive. I want to continue my story. How did I survive? The German decided to leave one child per family. So my sister was working, so I was the only child. And they gave us a paper. Each time when they came we had to go down to the courtyard and I was safe showing the paper. But we had dear friends with a boy and a girl and for the parents was a horrible time to make a decision which child to give away. It was a terrible time. But for me, I was safe.

And then in 1944, they decided liquidate the ghetto. Everybody had to leave. They left 800 people to clean up the belongings because the people could only take with them a little knapsack, they gave to us, and a bottle of water. And we were ready to go already to the train. Because of me, my father was on the list because he was strong, he could lift furniture. Because there was beautiful furniture to send everything to Germany. So the name was on the list.

But when the leader of this ghetto, the SS-- I remember him still now -- he came over to me very close and he said to my parents, "You can go to work" and even my sister. She looked older than she was. But when he looked at me, he said, "This little" -- he used a very bad name -- "she cannot work." Because of her the whole family had to go -- left was to leave and right was to stay.

So we had to go. But again my father felt not to go. So they put the people in factories. Those two factories were together building one the men stood and one for the women. And every morning people were assigned which streets to go and clean up the apartment. But my father noticed there was a basement there where the women were standing. So he decided he is going to hide me in the basement and bring me food. And he also told his brother, who had a little younger child, a boy of 3 years old, and I would be the one taking care of him. And he told his friend what he's going to do. And they looked at him that he was crazy. Once the German would find me, they would kill the whole family. But he said, "I cannot tell you what to do but this is what I'm going to do."

And some of his friends decided if he had the courage to do it, they did it. I don't know exactly how many. It was a handful of children. So in my book I put 12 children. Maybe it was 11, maybe 13, but not too many. Some of the people wanted to go because the German advertised they going to have food there and it's nice places to work. So some people just wanted to go.

We never realized what was happening in the other parts. We were not allowed to

keep any radios. And one family kept -- just after they occupied, they found and they killed the whole family. But we didn't know. But my father was afraid of the unknown. If you don't know what's happening, for some reason he had a feeling to stay. [Inaudible]
>> Bill Benson: Speaking of your father, if you don't mind I want to go back a little bit. I'd like you to share something. After your father learned that your cousin Mina had been taken by the German soldiers, your father did something remarkable.
>> Sylvia Rozines: He helped -- it's her father and another man but my father gave them -- he knew somebody. You couldn't walk on the street at night. It was deserted. So the Germans would kill you. He got papers they were allowed to go.
>> Bill Benson: After they had taken Mina, right?
>> Sylvia Rozines: They were taken in a building. They put all the children in a building. So he got them the permission to walk at night. She was a very small child. Even now she's very short compared to me. They went to that building and took her out through the chimney. They were carrying some kind of a barrel.
>> Bill Benson: Like a wheel barrel?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Wheel barrel and covered her. That's how she was saved.
>> Bill Benson: So they sneaked her out of the building.
>> Sylvia Rozines: But yet at the end they had to go to Germany. The reason she survived, it was already late 1944, and for some reason they put my aunt and my cousin Mary -- were gypsies and gypsies were allowed to keep children. Her father went to concentration camp. And because it was a short time, they were liberated. They survived. The father didn't know if the wife and child survived. So he came back and that's how they found themselves. They stayed in our apartment with us for a while.
>> Bill Benson: So now with a small number of children, 11 or 12 children, you're hidden in the cellar while the adults had to go this very difficult job of cleaning up the ghetto. What was it like for you and these children in the cellar?
>> Sylvia Rozines: As far as I remember, we were not there a long time because we had to keep quiet and in the evening the parents brought us some food. Now, the food -- we had a little bit more food. As they were cleaning the apartment, they found some food and it was summer time so everyone had a little garden in the courtyard. So they picked up the vegetables. And my father knew where the flour was. So the women formed a kitchen in the camp and they were cooking soup. And we had bread. We didn't have any meat. But in the summer it was summer time so it wasn't as bad as before. Every day we had a nice soup. Yet when the German were there, they were giving us mostly water. If you found a piece of cabbage or a piece of potato, you were lucky.

So as far as food, it was better for that time.

>> Bill Benson: At some point --
>> Sylvia Rozines: At some point, we don't know who told the Germans that there were some children hidden. And the German came in and took us out from the basement and marched us to the house where they were staying.
>> Bill Benson: I'll interrupt you again if you don't mind, Sylvia. Say a little bit -- the Germans didn't just take you out. They dragged you out. And you remembered that. You wrote --
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes, yes. Of course the children were crying. We were afraid what's going to happen to us. But we had to walk. Or they would hit us with leather, they had leather straps.
>> Bill Benson: You wrote in your book that you were dragged like a sack of potatoes and they pulled you up by your hair out of the cellar.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. Some children didn't want to go. And they were pulled. And finally we arrived there. And that I recall because I was almost 10 years old. Not yet, maybe 9 1/2. I heard them talking and talking. At that time I couldn't understand the German. And after a while they decided send us back. And the parents were so happy when they saw us coming back and we were happy. They put the girls with the mothers and there were some boys with the fathers. I had to sleep with my mother. There was not another bed there. And the boys slept with the fathers. They were like Army cots.
>> Bill Benson: Do you know why they sent you back?
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. We realized later. A few days after, they made the men dig three big holes. And when the men came back from work, they were so upset. And the women, we had a secret door between the two factories. We realized those holes were for us.

At that time my father couldn't believe but when he went to work, he noticed the place where the German were standing, the parking lot and he saw all of those cars with soldiers to kill almost 800 people, maybe we were less. Some people passed away but I don't know how many. It was hard, they needed that many soldiers.

By that time we could hear already bombs falling afar away. I remember one time looking up in the sky. I saw little planes, like toys, maybe many, maybe 25 but they were very high. The war was coming to the end. And bombs were already falling. And that's why the Germans didn't want to leave us alive.
>> Bill Benson: So they were making plans to kill you before they left.
>> Sylvia Rozines: And the leader from that camp, who was Jewish -- they always needed a person to take care if people were to fight, to keep peace. He was a very nice man. He opened the doors and he said, "Go save yourself."

Where do you go? We couldn't go behind the barbed-wire. The German were still standing. So groups formed. There was a basement in this building. And we had to separate. We had to make small groups because you couldn't stay in an apartment more than maybe 20 people.

So my father decided to hide ourselves in the house across where the Germans were living. He realized they're going to start searching houses house by house. And he thought this is the last house --
>> Bill Benson: The one right next to where they were staying.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Was just across. And there was black shades. So he made a little hole so he could watch what was going on. And we only took -- I remember, we had bread. We couldn't make any fire to cook. So we didn't have any food. We only stayed maybe three nights, maybe four days. The bombs were falling. Closer to closer. You could hear like all around us.

And we were waiting to be liberated. And one day we woke up and we saw this lady walking. We were afraid to come out from that apartment. We thought she was a decoy from the Germans so we could come out. But it was a Polish lady. They cut the barbed-wire. And they came into the ghetto because some of the factories were not cleaned up and some of the apartments so I could see them carrying furniture, clothes, dishes from us, walking in the middle of the street. We went back to the camp and we were so happy to be liberated that it did not occur to us go right away to get some furniture.
>> Bill Benson: I want you to tell --
>> Sylvia Rozines: Russia?
>> Bill Benson: Yes, absolutely.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Russia, the soldiers came to the camp and they said you're the first people we liberated, Jewish people. And they gave whatever they had, some of the soldiers had some chocolate. They saw the children. They gave us -- they had some food. They gave it to us.

One of the soldiers, he happened -- he was a pilot. He was like the leader of the planes. He would be like a general. And he explained to us why they didn't drop bombs on us. When the bombs were falling, usually we went out to the courtyard and laid down. I don't know why -- on the stomach. And we had the star, the yellow star on the back. And he told us they didn't know who are those people laying. So they sent flares up and it became the courtyard so light so they could see who was there. And he happened to be Jewish. And he knew who we were. He told other planes not to throw bombs.

>> Bill Benson: So from the air they could see the stars on your back.

>> Sylvia Rozines: I could hear the bombs falling, the noise. But it was all around us. They saved our life. Knowing the yellow star, saved our life. That's why I named my book "Yellow Star."

I want to show the book, how it looks. They're selling it here in the bookstore. It's now a paper book copy. And my niece, Jennifer Roy, did a wonderful job because she wrote it not as a story. It's like a dialogue. And the teenagers just love it. All in the United States they're using this book in school to learn about the Holocaust.

>> Bill Benson: Sylvia, miraculously that's how you survived. And once you realized you were liberated, what did you do then?

>> Sylvia Rozines: My mother told me the next day I became 10 years old. I didn't even know what a birthday was. Because I don't remember before the war. And during the war we couldn't celebrate any birthday, any holidays we didn't have -- with what to celebrate.

So I stood and I saw the people walking, carrying our belongings. Eventually we decided to find an apartment. And we wind up we went back to the nice part. And the Russians told us if any apartment is closed, locked, you have the right to break the lock. That means German people lived there. And that's where we find some people went to the buildings. There were quite a few apartments.

We started a new life. And finally I went to school. I only knew the alphabet. My sister taught me because my sister was older and she went to school so she taught me the letters and some numbers and also how to sign my name. And I started school.

I thought life was going to be wonderful because my father started his little business selling wholesale flour and sugar and he was doing well. We got new clothes. Life started a little normal but it wasn't because in school that was the big problem. My sister and I experienced antisemitism. They were teaching once a week religion. And I was afraid to say I'm Jewish. So I learned -- you have to say your prayers every morning. So I learned how to say.

But eventually I told the nun that I'm Jewish and she was very nice. She says, "You don't have to take this class. Why don't you sit in the back of the room and do your homework?" But the children were very mean to me and they were hitting me, tearing my clothes, certain passages in the Bible. And I didn't know anything about any religion, even my own. Because I never had any schooling.

At that time, antisemitic Pogroms started and people were getting killed, after the war. So we had to escape. This time we couldn't take any belongings, not even a suitcase because the apartment house had a concierge and you were not sure if he was a good person or he can call the people who were killing us. So we left for a walk. We just took some papers

and some pictures which I have and the money in our clothes hidden. It was a start to go after dinner for a walk. We walked to the train station. And we wind up on the border. We were going to go to Germany. And we found --
>> Bill Benson: I'm going to ask you before you tell us that -- when you walked out of that house to leave Poland because of all the violence that was continuing against Jews, you did not have many personal effects left though but you told me that you had had this table cloth that had been in the family.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. It was a beautiful table cloth. The Germans were not interested to take like sheets or table cloths. They just took the valuable. I said to my mom I want to take this table cloth. I would hide it under my coat. But it would show up. My mother said you cannot have it. So everything was left. We just locked the door. We didn't even lock the door. Because we knew we were not going to come back.

So the concierge didn't see us. Eventually I'm sure he went in and got all of our --
>> Bill Benson: But one of the things you did take were some photographs which are the photographs we saw today.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: How did you have the photographs? I think you went back and --
>> Sylvia Rozines: We went back to the apartment. Everything was gone but the photos were laying on the floor. Some of the Polish people stepped on it so some were damaged.
>> Bill Benson: Had mud on them and everything.
>> Sylvia Rozines: We picked up only the photographs. That's all we had left.
>> Bill Benson: So once you took the train to the border, your ordeal was not over. Tell us how you got across the border.
>> Sylvia Rozines: So we were lucky to find -- my father was really unbelievable. This Polish guy was going to deliver some gasoline. And the gasoline was in a big barrel. He put us end. And he went to the woods. It was a very bumpy ride. The gasoline spilled. And I became violently sick. Up to this day when I smell gasoline, I feel I'm getting car sick.

We finally arrived in Germany. We went to Berlin to a displaced camp, American side. The American I remember MPs took us in. They were very nice. There was food light -- right away. We got the shots not to get sick. And they assigned us another camp near Munich and we stayed there waiting for country to take us in.

At that time my father got restless. He says, How many years am I going to sit here waiting for a country? And he wanted to live a normal life. We found out that my mother had a brother in Paris, France. Someone went there and found the address. And he said come to France. But this time there was no passport. We didn't have any papers. So we paid a young man to take us to the border from Germany. We walked -- like you see sometimes people walking through the border. But we went walking in fear to be caught and we had to do it at night.
>> Bill Benson: And this is 1947, after the war.
>> Sylvia Rozines: So we arrived in 1947 in France. And finally I started school and had to learn a language, French, which is my second language. And the children were wonderful. What a difference. I was the only little girl who didn't speak French. The teachers were wonderful. And being young I learned French and I finally started school almost 12 years old.

The beginning was very hard because the children were dressed nicely and I didn't have those clothes until later on. I wanted to fit in. Any teenagers want to fit in. And finally I made friends. And I learned about art. In France they taught us in school how to behave, how

to eat, how to dress even. And we went to the museum. My parents always went to theater.

And suddenly I had another tragedy. When I was 16, my mother gets cancer and dies. And I was very angry. Teenagers. I couldn't understand why we survived, our whole family, and she dies like five years after. I had already a married sister in America.

>> Bill Benson: So by that time Dora had gotten married.

>> Sylvia Rozines: Dora got married in Paris. And she married also a survivor who was three years in Auschwitz. His mom was born in America. They went back to Poland but she sent right away papers. But by that time Poland became Communist and the American consul wouldn't give us a visa. You couldn't come to America if you didn't have a visa. And someone had to sign for you that they would take care of you. And we had to sign a paper that we will never ask the government for any help.

Finally after five years we heard you should reject the Polish citizen and we became stateless. In a matter of months we received a visa. And I came to America 1957.

>> Bill Benson: With your father?

>> Sylvia Rozines: With my father. And I had to learn another language. And this language I didn't go to school. I had to go to work. After six months I could speak very bad but I find work and I learn all by myself from reading and there was television already. And I met my husband, David. And we got married in Albany. And my son, I had a son and I have two grandchildren. A boy, Jeff, and a girl, Alyssa. The future.

>> Bill Benson: We have time for a few questions from our audience. But before we do, I want to ask you two questions. Did other members of your extended family survive?

>> Sylvia Rozines: Yes. I had some cousins. They were sent away in 1944, three brothers survived but not the mother and the younger sister.

When they came to Auschwitz -- they were sent to Auschwitz in 1944. They made the selection. They never separated the mother if she had a younger child. Germans didn't like chaos. The mother would cry. So right away they put them left. That means they went to the gas chambers. Right away. And the people who could work, the boys were 17, 18 and maybe 16, they went to work and they survived.

>> Bill Benson: And the other question I was going to ask is, after the war, and particularly after you left Poland and made it to France, did you and your family talk about what you went through and share that with others?

>> Sylvia Rozines: No. We didn't talk about it. When I came to America, in a sense I didn't talk about, my girlfriends. They knew I'm from Poland and there was the war because in France it was the war, too. And they didn't have food. Even when I came to France, only children, in 1947, were allowed milk to buy because it was not enough food. But later on we had plenty of food and everything was very nice. But in the beginning Europe was hurt, all the countries were in bad shape.

>> Bill Benson: Let's turn to our audience and see if they have any questions for you.

We have two microphones, a microphone in both aisles if you have a question, we would like you to use the microphone, that way we can hear it and everybody in the room can hear it. If you have a question, please make it as brief as you can and I will do my best to repeat it just to be sure that we get the question right before Sylvia answers it.

So if anybody has a question and you feel like getting up and going to the mic, please do so. Otherwise I'll continue to ask a few more questions until we close our program. So while somebody -- oh, here comes our first brave soul. Here we go.

>> So I was just curious at what age or at what time did realize the people that were leaving

ghetto and going to Germany or the concentration camps were going basically to the gas chambers?
>> Bill Benson: At what point did you realize that those that were being deported from the ghettos were actually going to be murdered at Auschwitz and other places?
>> Sylvia Rozines: After the war when people were coming back. My uncle came back with the striped uniform. And we were there already. So he lived with us. And they started to tell us what was happening.
>> Bill Benson: And I think we have one more here. Then we'll move to close our program shortly after that.
>> Thank you. I'd like to hear how you talked to your grandkids about forgiveness.
>> Bill Benson: The question is how you talk to your grandkids about what you went through including if you discuss the issue of forgiveness.
>> Sylvia Rozines: The truth is that I didn't speak even to my son until 1970. He knew bits and pieces. But 1970, the first movie came out. It was called "The Holocaust." And then we watched it on television. It was a movie on television. Two parts. And then he started to ask questions. And then I told him everything.

And right now -- he's supposed to be here but he couldn't make it. He had an important meeting at work. He knows more than I about Holocaust because of the internet, all the information. And, of course, his memory is better than mine. But my grandchildren, I didn't speak to them much. My grandson was 16 and my granddaughter was maybe 12 when the book came out.
>> Bill Benson: When your book came out.
>> Sylvia Rozines: "Yellow Star." And then my granddaughter couldn't read it until she was 14. It bothered her. She didn't like to hear my suffering but eventually she read the book. And then she came to listen to my story. She knows now.

And I always tell them when I am asked this question, I sit at the desk, do I hate the German? And I said to them, I don't hate. I don't like to live with hate but I would never forgive them.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

We're going to close our program a moment. I'm going to ask you to stay with us until we finish because I'm going to turn back to Sylvia to close our program. And when Sylvia is finished, our photographer, Lolita, will come up on the stage and take a picture of Sylvia with you as the background. So we need you to stay here until we get to that point.

And then as soon as that's happened, Sylvia will go on up to the atrium where she will sign copies of "Yellow Star", and that's also an opportunity for you to ask Sylvia another question, get your picture taken with her if you would like to do that. So we welcome you to do that.

I just have to add one other thing. Tell me if my memory is correct. When you were here your very first time with us in 2015, I believe, there was a young girl in the audience, Vivian was her name. She was 8 years old. She had already read your book --
>> Sylvia Rozines: A little girl came, 8 years old. She memorized my book, 22 times. And she happened to be there.
>> Bill Benson: She had come to hear you speak. I love that.
>> Sylvia Rozines: And I have another little girl, Mary Alice, from Chicago. I have a minute to tell about my Mary Alice?
>> Bill Benson: Yeah.

>> Sylvia Rozines: She was 10 years old. And I didn't volunteer at the museum yet. She saw this book in a bookstore. She bought it. And she got so impressed with it. And she didn't realize how children were suffering during the war. So she said to her mom, don't buy me any gift for Christmas. Let's go to Washington and meet Sylvia. So they all came, nine people came. And now we are friends like family. She's -- what she's doing since she's 10, she does activities with her friends to collect money for the hungry children in America. School in Chicago, the children stay longer. They don't get a snack. She collects the money and now when they get snacks, she also sends to different states where children are hungry. So this is her. She does it in my name because I was hungry for six years almost. And that is her.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you for sharing that.
>> Sylvia Rozines: I love that. And we keep in touch. We talk to each other. And she tells me what she's doing every year. She gave money to the soup kitchen. She's a wonderful person.
>> Bill Benson: Mary Alice.

I want to thank you all for being with us. I remind you that we have programs twice a week until the middle of August. If you can't come back, our programs are available on the museum's YouTube page so you can see not just Sylvia's program again if you wanted to but you can see all of our other programs, both earlier this year and yet to come.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person gets the last word. So with that I'm going to turn back to Sylvia to close our program today.
>> Sylvia Rozines: Because I am a survivor I am a witness to the Holocaust. Many people don't believe it happened. And I also want to say I hope one day war will become peace and there will be no more war and children wouldn't be hungry, going hungry anymore.
>> [Applause]