

## REALTIME FILE

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
FIRST PERSON: JULIE KEEFER  
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>> Ladies and gentlemen, the program is about to begin. Please remember to turn off all electronic devices

Thank you very much.

>> Bill Benson: Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson, the host of the museum's public program *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today. This is our twentieth year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Julie Keefer, whom you shall meet shortly.

This 2019 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 support.

*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 August 8th. The museum's website, at [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org), provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

Julie will share 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 on-line conversation: *Never Stop Asking Why*. The conversation aims to inspire individuals to ask the important questions that Holocaust history raises. You can ask your question and tag the Museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and

the hashtag #AskWhy.

Today's program will be livestreamed on the Museum's website meaning people will be joining the program online and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. We invite everyone to watch our *First Person* programs live on the Museum's website each Wednesday and Thursday at 11:00 AM EST through June 6th. 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 blue 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, 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 white 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, almost 57 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 was devoted to cancer research and cancer-related drug development. Larry retired on October 1st, 2015 after 44 years with the NIH/NCI. Larry is recovering from an illness so could not accompany Julie today. She is joined today by her close friends.

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's oldest son is working in Los Angeles as a tennis pro. His younger son is a senior in college. Daughter Simona after a career in art is now a businesswoman. Her son who is just about to graduate from high school in Maryland, will attend the University of Maryland Baltimore County this fall. 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 would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Julie Keefer.

>> [Applause]

>> Julie Keefer: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Julie, for joining us. And for your willingness to be our *First Person* this morning. Thank you so much for that. We have a really nice audience here for you today.

>> Julie Keefer: I see.

>> Bill Benson: You have so much to share. We have a really short hour, so we'll get started right away.

World War II began with Germany and Russia's invasion of Poland in September 1939. When you were born, 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 maybe we can start with a little bit to the extent that you know about your

family in the time before your birth.

>> Julie Keefer: When the Nazis came, they kicked out my grandfather and grandmother from their home and moved them into the ghetto, did the same thing with my parents. My grandfather and my father built a special compartment in a barn in the ghetto, and that's where my mother, my father, and I were hiding. My grandfather left to visit friends, and he got taken. He was taken to his first concentration camp.

>> Bill Benson: Julie before we go on about the ghetto, maybe a couple of questions before that.

>> Julie Keefer: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: You lost your parents very young. What do you know about them?

>> Julie Keefer: What I know is that my mother had a very, very pretty voice. I remember the sound of her voice singing me lullabies and I remember that because I remember asking Lucia, who was my aunt, to sing to me and she had this horrible, croaking voice.

>> [Laughter]

>> Julie Keefer: And she had a wonderful heart, but she o could swear in every language. Couldn't read or write in any. A very, very courageous woman.

And by the way, her name is amongst the righteous amongst nations. If you look under Poland, you will see Lucia Nowicka Eisen.

>> Bill Benson: You shared with me that even today there are certain songs that when you hear them, they evoke the feelings and memories of your mother.

>> Julie Keefer: There is one. I can't even pronounce it. It's a lullaby. My mother used to sing it to me. And when I hear that, I have recollections, brief ones, of my mother who felt soft and smelled milky because while we were in hiding, she gave birth to my baby sister.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, Nazi Germany turned on the Soviet Union in June 1941, just months after you were born. Within days, the city of Lwow was occupied and your family was forced into the ghetto. Tell us more about that. You explained that your father and grandfather had built this hiding place inside the ghetto. Tell us more what you know about your life in the ghetto.

>> Julie Keefer: Now, what I tell you about my life in the ghetto is mainly from my grandfather, his diary, because I have no memory except little tiny vignettes and those are moments of real fear. I remember certain smells, the iron smell of blood, the stench of dead bodies that were all over the ghetto because people were dying at a very, very rapid pace. There was nowhere to bury anyone. That was pretty awful.

>> Bill Benson: Your father -- excuse me. Your grandfather was taken by the Nazis to Janowska, forced labor camp, where thousands of Jews were killed. How did your grandfather end up in Janowska?

>> Julie Keefer: He went to visit friends, again, who had no secret bunk every, nothing. All of them were taken. And they were taken to Kleptarow Station, and that's where the Nazi commander of Janowska would stand and put people in two lines; to the right were those who were in any way frail, old people like me, and children who were too young to work, women who were pregnant, and people who had no special trade. In other words, they saved women who could sew Nazi uniforms. They saved musicians because one of the Commandants loved to hear music as people were marched to the back to be shot and killed. This was a pretty awful place.

This camp was one of the biggest in Poland and was known as the Harvard of concentration camps. Commandants were sent here to learn how to kill and torture. One

man -- again, this is from my grandfather -- who was a commander, would stand at the balcony. And if he didn't like the way the Jewish star was sewn on your jacket or pants, he shot you in the head. So, it was a pretty brutal place.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what your grandfather -- because he was a very strong man from what you know, he was selected to do very hard labor. What was he made to do?

>> Julie Keefer: To cut stones and then haul them.

>> Bill Benson: He was at one point very severely punished for some infraction.

>> Julie Keefer: The infraction was he dared to tell the Commandant that the bunks could fit at most eight men but not 16 and for this he was beaten black and blue by the Commandant. It was his fellow prisoners who got wet rags and put them on him at night to ease the bruising that he got. And the next morning when he dragged himself to the head count, the Commandant said, "You? You pig. I didn't expect you to live. But it's all right. I'll get you."

>> Bill Benson: And your grandfather, just amazingly, was actually able to escape from Janowska. How did he manage that?

>> Julie Keefer: He was told -- he had gotten very weak and he had lost a lot of weight. He was told by one of the Jewish honchos that he would be shot the next day. There's a song that's much older than all of you here, Janis Joplin sang it, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." And in fact, what else did he have to lose? So, he decided he would run away.

As the guards were letting in new prisoners, he ran -- his work was at the top of the mountain. Janowska was on the mountain. Well, a hill. Sorry. A hill. And he took off, and the new prisoners were being brought in so he managed to run down the hillside and cross Janowska Street and then he jumped because there was a huge -- ravine -- thank you -- and at the bottom of that ravine was a railroad track. As he got to the other side, a railroad came by. And that railroad was carrying ammunition. So, the Nazis didn't dare shoot because what would happen if you shot at an ammunition train? Anybody?

>> [Away from microphone]

>> Julie Keefer: Yes. It would blow up. Right. Ammunition was precious.

So, my grandfather had a thin concentration camp uniform, cotton, and bare feet. He was 6'2", 250 -- well, much less then -- and his feet were very large. Prisoners had their clothing taken away when they came into the concentration camp and were issued the uniform and wooden shoes. His feet were too big. He couldn't wear wooden shoes, so he was barefoot.

Now, this was the end of November in Poland, very cold, snowing. Well, he was at this point both hot and cold, hot because of the hand and cold because he was physically cold, so he alternated. He went to the home of a Polish small farmer or peasant, Mr. Bereczki. And Mr. Bereczki helped save his life. He fixed his hand, cleaned it, put mercurochrome on it, gave him food and let him clean up and put on warm clothes and wrapped his feet in rags. And the next day he took him, with his shovel, to a very large woods nearby, the Borszczowice Forest. That's where my grandfather dug a ditch to hide himself from the elements built also from the Nazis.

Now, as he was hiding there, one day he heard people talking, three men. They were speaking Yiddish. He went out very, very ecstatic. And they were going to shoot him because they didn't know who he was. And he said stop, in Yiddish, "I'm a Jew." And they said, Oh.

And those men came, and people came from all kinds of little towns all around to escape being taken off to various camps. They made the bunker much bigger. My very first memory is actually of that bunker. That I can visualize. But, remember, I was almost 3, so I remember it with the eyes of a child. Eventually he found out that the Nazis planned to burn the ghetto. And, of course, my mother, my father, my baby sister was born there, and that's where we were still hiding.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to stop you for a second. While you're still hiding in your grandfather's -- and your grandfather's hiding in the woods and being joined by others, up to 30 individuals eventually, your mother gave birth while hiding in the ghetto. That must have been extremely difficult.

>> Julie Keefer: I can't imagine how she did that. Typhoid was rampant. Dead bodies were everywhere. There was no medicine, no food, no nothing. I marvel at her being able to do that.

>> Bill Benson: So, with the Nazi intent to destroy ghetto, your grandfather learns about it and decides he has to come and try and save his family.

>> Julie Keefer: Now, one thing you need to know is that the men had one gun. And since my grandfather had had a lot of experience in World War I, he became the kind of leader. The men would go out at night and they would shoot the tires of Nazi munitions trucks and take out anything, guns, bullets, grenades, uniforms, everything they could get. They would also rob the depots of Ukrainian complicitary police and would take any kind of food, water, back to the tunnel.

>> Bill Benson: So, your grandfather, what does he do then when he realizes he's got to get to you? He makes his way into the ghetto.

>> Julie Keefer: He asks for volunteers. He takes a Nazi command car.

>> Bill Benson: That they had stolen from the Nazis.

>> Julie Keefer: Of course.

>> Bill Benson: In one of their raids.

>> Julie Keefer: Yes, in one of the raids they had stolen. He asked for volunteers. All the men volunteered. He said, no, he would take four. And he had them wait in a nearby woods, and he decided to go to the ghetto himself because he knew exactly where we were. He came and got my mother, my father, my baby sister and me out.

I always felt very, very special about my grandfather. We were very, very close. And the first word I said was grandpa and not mommy. My mother was not happy but she kind of went with the flow. But my grandfather and I were just a team. That's all there was to it.

Anyway, I remember him as always very, very special. One day -- oh, do you want to hear about that tunnel where --

>> Bill Benson: Yes, we would like to hear about the tunnel. Yeah, very much.

>> Julie Keefer: Well, we were hidden in the woods. Now, remember, I was almost 3. I remember that it was cold and damp mud on the walls I remember a very tall ladder, wooden ladder, to get in. It was probably no more than six feet but to me it seemed very tall. And I remember walking around and feeling these mud walls and going, exploring my way, to the end of that particular room. At the end of it was a splintery wooden table. I remember just touching it and then not touching it anymore. There was a candle, a fat candle, sitting on top of this roundtable. And that was the only light.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, at some point -- one other question. Were there other children in the group, in the tunnel?

>> Julie Keefer: There were two teenaged girls, uh-huh. In the tunnel, of course, betrayed.

>> Bill Benson: Before we come back to that, at some point your grandfather made a very tough decision and that was to take you and your sister out of the hiding place in the tunnel and to take you hiding elsewhere where you end up with Lucia. Tell us what you can about why he took you out and then about his return to the bunker, which you began to tell us about.

>> Julie Keefer: He took us out because my baby sister cried a lot.

>> Bill Benson: She was an infant.

>> Julie Keefer: I tried to cry, but my father could say "Hush." And I hushed. But how do you stop a 5-month-old baby from crying? My mother would put her hand over her mouth. People were afraid -- well, my grandfather was afraid that my mother would smother Tola, so he decided he had to take us out. And Tola was my baby. You know, some people have dolls. I had my baby. So, I guess he took me out so that I wouldn't feel so lonely and also for safety.

Well, he took us to the central market of Lwow. He was dressed as a poor Polish peasant. He went to the market and looked for the doctor, a professor of pediatrics, and a pediatrician, and he ran a Catholic children's home, but he could not find him anywhere. He was desperate.

So, he talks in his diary about leaving us, wanting to just leave us there. He was our grandfather, so to him we were cute. And he would just leave us there and somebody would take care of us and if he lived after the war, he would come and get us.

Just as he was about to do that, he met Lucia Nowicka who had been a neighbor of his. She was a Polish Catholic woman who lost her husband in one of the mass reprisals that the Nazis did. Couldn't find him anywhere and now was working. He said, "Lucia." And she was shocked to see him alive, but very happy. And he said, "Can you take my granddaughters and save their lives?" And she said, "I no longer have my own home. I work as a live-in housekeeper to retired Polish engineer and his wife, so I would have to ask her."

Now, this couple were members of a political party that was very anti-Semitic. So, my grandpa and Lucia made up a story. Aizik Eisen, Jew, became Stanislaus Nowicka, Polish, Catholic, 6'2", 2-something, and took pictures and a copy of the marriage license. And we, my baby sister and I were supposedly Lucia's dead sister's children. Her sister lived in a small nearby town and had supposedly died. And Lucia had to take care of the two children, my sister and me. And she said, yeah, you can have them as long as you get your work done, sure. So, we went. And that was my third hiding place.

And what was interesting about this hide hiding place was the home of the Swierczynskis was right next to the home of the Nazi governor. So, there were Nazi soldiers all over the place. So, when you talk about being hidden in plain sight, that was me.

>> Bill Benson: And yet, even there it wasn't long before Lucia herself was in trouble and arrested. Tell us a little bit about that.

>> Julie Keefer: A woman down the street told the Gestapo that Lucia Nowicka, housekeeper to the Swierczynskis, was harboring Jewish children. So, she was taken away for questioning, which, of course, meant torture so she would admit.

Well, and while she was gone, Mrs. Swierczynski couldn't cope with a 6-month-old baby. So Mr. Swierczynski, who was a friend of the doctor, wrote a letter to the doctor --

>> Bill Benson: Who ran the Catholic orphanage.

>> Julie Keefer: And Tola became Antonina Novicka, Catholic child and was put in this Catholic home. And my grandfather paid for three months in advance thinking, ahh, at least I can save one, somebody, from my family.

Meanwhile, I was -- I don't know if you remember the picture of my grandparents with a little dog that was furry. That was little Remy. Remy was named after the dog that the Swierczynskis owned. It was a huge German Shepherd and vicious. Matter of fact, that dog never came into the house. He had his own house. And he was fed with a long pole that would push his dish of food and of water towards him.

Well, I was now 3. It was boring, all of these adults all over the place. My baby sister was now -- my baby was gone. I kept hearing that the doctor had to take her to a hospital and when she was all better, she would come back. But nobody ever told me when she would come back. So I decided, well, I'm going to approach this dog, who was Rex. And Lucia saw this and was about to scream. Well, Mrs. Swierczynski said, "Lucia, you don't want to scare the dog or startle the dog in any way. This dog has already taken a part of a Nazi leg." So Lucia was quiet.

I went up to the dog. I started petting him. And then he started licking me. And licking me. And I got up on his back. And I was riding around on him. And that made me very happy.

So, now, my job was to take Rex and put him under the kitchen table with a long table cloth and keep him calm if any Nazi stepped into the house. It was only when I became an old adult that it occurred to me, who were they trying to save, the dog or me? And I still don't know.

>> [Laughter]

>> Julie Keefer: You know?

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned Lucia and Rex. Lucia, who had been taken away by the Gestapo, was able to -- she was released. And so she came back to the Swierczynski house with you. How was she released?

>> Julie Keefer: My grandfather went to Mrs. Swierczynski and asked her to intercede with her husband. Because Lucia was a great cook. She would make food for the governor's wife and for the governor, so they liked her.

>> Bill Benson: Plus, she believed the story that you were her nieces.

>> Julie Keefer: Yes. Absolutely. Right.

>> Bill Benson: So she interceded because of her connections and brought her back. So with Tola in the orphanage, you with Lucia and Mrs. Swierczynski, your grandfather returns to the forest.

>> Julie Keefer: This was -- my birthday was in April. I used to wonder why people got teary-eyed at my birthday. I mean, gee, doesn't make you feel very special when people start crying on your birthday. Well, it turns out that my grandfather returned to the tunnel to see how everybody was and he found that the opening was disturbed. He thought, well, maybe our own grenades blew up or something. And then he noticed that every single body had bullet holes. So, he realized that everyone was dead. They had been shot.

He found out later from the underground that a man in that tunnel trusted a Ukrainian peasant because the Ukrainian peasant claimed he was a Communist. Now, the Nazis hated Communists and vice versa. So they thought he would be trustworthy. But, he went to the Nazis and for a handful of money and a bottle of vodka he said "I know where



Jews are hiding. Let me take you to them". So that's where 30-some people, all Jews, were shot including these two teenaged girls.

>> Bill Benson: And your mother --

>> Julie Keefer: And my mother and father. So, my parents lie, birth parents, in an unmarked grave somewhere in this huge forest. I went trucking after, trying to find all kinds of big depressions. Yes, lots of depressions, but.

>> Bill Benson: What did your grandfather do then?

>> Julie Keefer: Then he said the prayer over the dead. He buried everyone. And in June of 1944, the Russians came and liberated us. And then we moved from one DP camp to another.

>> Bill Benson: Before you go on, so your grandfather came back in the summer of 1944. The Soviets liberated you. Your grandfather returned to get you after the war and to try to also get Tola. What happened?

>> Julie Keefer: He found out that the roof of that Catholic home had been bombed and so the children were moved to another site. I can't remember the name. In Poland. So, he went there and found out that that place was evacuated and that 80 children were divided into two groups. One group and the nuns went to Western Europe and another group went to Hungary. At that time Hungary was a bad place to go to because it was like a trap. You couldn't get out. So, he went everywhere. Left me with Lucia while he went looking.

>> Bill Benson: Left you with Lucia.

>> Julie Keefer: Yeah. And couldn't find my sister.

The Red Cross -- when I was at the children's home, I got a picture from the Red Cross --

>> Bill Benson: At the children's home in Cleveland.

>> Julie Keefer: In Cleveland, yes. It was about that big, little, black and white. It was a picture of a girl who looked a couple of years younger than I, had light-colored eyes, and a great big white bow in her hair, like that. And the Red Cross thought this was my sister. I was ecstatic. I had somebody. I had a sister. And then my social worker at the children's home took me to Hannah House, part of University Hospital, for a blood test. Two weeks later she called me into her office and she said, "Julia, I'm very sorry. This child is not your sister. The blood doesn't match." And I remember I was pretty devastated at that point. And I decided I don't want to deal with another loss. I just can't. So, I remember I just took that picture and put it away and just tried not to think about it.

>> Bill Benson: After liberation and realizing that Tola was gone, it was your grandfather and you. And, of course, Lucia had been willing to and had taken care of you during that time. Tell us about your grandfather and Lucia.

>> Julie Keefer: My grandfather had suffered from lots of beatings, so he had a heart issue and his legs were very, very swollen. He was put in a hospital in the alps. Lucia would take me by those chairs, you know, that go on --

>> Gondola.

>> Bill Benson: Like a gondola?

>> Julie Keefer: Yes, kind of like that but it's an individual seat. And Lucia almost smothered me because she was afraid I would fall. We would go visit Dziadzia at his hospital.

And he describes in his diary that he had electric shock treatment. Well, who gets electric shock treatments for heart problems? So, I think he had some problems after the

war. And I would not be surprised if he were very, very much into a depression. I mean, he had to bury his own child and his son was gone and missing and we had to grandsons that were older than me and they all were killed.

>> Bill Benson: With all the losses that you experienced, in 1948, you were 7, your grandfather sent you to the United States. Tell us about that.

>> Julie Keefer: We were living in a DP camp.

>> Bill Benson: Which is a displaced persons camp.

>> Julie Keefer: Yes. But you can call it delayed pilgrims. I like to think of us as delayed pilgrims.

Anyway, we -- yeah.

>> Bill Benson: They sent you to the United States.

>> Julie Keefer: And the reason was that the DP camp we were in was very primitive. It was the largest of the three around and didn't have enough food, didn't have enough anything, so we had scarcity of wood or coal or anything. Each family got one room in a wooden barrack. Then you got the stove if you could find something to heat it with. And you had water outside. Fortunately, our barrack was the one that had the faucet for water. You could get the water and take it in. If you had coal or something, you could heat the water.

It was very, very primitive. And he was afraid that I would have absolutely no future -- no future. It was very difficult to get a visa to come to the United States, especially from Eastern Europe. But, there was an exception. If you were an orphan born between certain years, you could go on an orphan visa. So, I went. He sent me on an orphan visa, the youngest of a group of girls by five years, on a boat that took forever to come to America.

I remember that was a very tough journey for me. For one thing, since I was the youngest -- we had hammocks to sleep on. There were four. And because I was the youngest, I always got the bottom one. And that meant I felt all the swinging. And it really makes you seasick, you know? So, I was not a happy camper. Then I remember I had a tooth ache. I went to one of the nuns. And she gave me oil of cloves. Well, I smelled of oil of cloves, but it didn't do anything for my tooth ache.

>> Bill Benson: In the DP camp it was you, Lucia, and your grandfather. Your grandfather and Lucia decided to become a family.

>> Julie Keefer: Yes. My grandfather wanted to pay Lucia everything he had. He had made some money at this point. And she said, No, we're a family and I want to stay a family. So grandpa said, well, then you'll have to convert to Judaism. The rabbi said, yeah, ok, but she has to shave her head. So she could go into a mikva and have every part of her be purified. She was a bit of a feisty lady, Lucia. And she said, Aizik, look, I have so little hair to begin with; I don't want to remove my hair.

So, Aizik could look pretty menacing. He didn't do anything, but he could look big. And he went to the little tiny rabbi and he said, "Rabbi, Lucia is a good person. She's a wonderful person. We should be honored that she wants to become a Jew. And I know I feel honored because this wonderful person wants to become a Jew." "Rabbi, she doesn't want to cut her hair or shave her head." Rabbi said, "Ok, Aizik. She won't shave her head." So that was solved.

>> Bill Benson: And eventually they emigrated to the United States as well in the early 1950s, I believe.

Julie, we have time to turn to our audience for a couple of questions but before we do, one more question for you. To this day, to this day, you still hold on to hope that Tola is out there somewhere. And you continue the search. Because as an infant, she could have gone anywhere.

>> Julie Keefer: Anywhere. That's right.

>> Bill Benson: You want to take a couple of questions, two or three, I think?

>> Julie Keefer: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: We have microphones in the aisles. If you have a question, go to the microphone. Make your question as brief as you can, if you will. I'll repeat it just to make sure we hear it right. And then Julie will respond to your question. If you don't have questions, hoping somebody will, I got plenty.

While we're waiting to see if somebody comes up, how did -- you've mentioned several times, Julie, your grandfather's diary. How did you come into that? Tell us about it.

>> Julie Keefer: When he came to America, he started writing about his wartime experiences. And for our son's bar mitzvah, we had it translated.

>> Bill Benson: Another question I'd like to ask you. You came to the United States. You went to Cleveland. You were in a children's home in Cleveland for a number of years. And then at age 16 you were adopted. What was that like for you?

>> Julie Keefer: I feel I was the luckiest person in the whole world. How many people get to pick their parents? I adored them. And I had wonderful, wonderful parents. They were German Jews. They had no children of their own. And they were unbelievably brave to adopt a teenager.

>> [Laughter]

>> Julie Keefer: One who when they wanted to play Mozart in the convertible when they were driving me to Washington to see the monuments and all of that, I put a pillow over my head. I'm not listening to this. So, I wasn't the easiest person. But I have to say, they were absolutely magnificent. And I am so, so grateful. I had such fabulous luck. They were fabulous. My husband, pretty fabulous, too.

>> Bill Benson: And your grandkids.

>> Julie Keefer: And my grandkids.

>> Bill Benson: We have a question over here. I think one or two and then we'll close the program.

>> Thank you for being here today and sharing with us. My question is, after experiencing this today and hearing your story, what wisdom could you give us about how you feel about humanity. You've seen the worst. You've seen the best. What can you share with us about the -- what wisdom can you give us about humanity? How did you take what you saw and continue to live and be positive? Is there anything you can share with us?

>> Bill Benson: You got the gist of that?

>> Julie Keefer: Yes, I did. I can try. It may not be wisdom. I don't purport to be all that though I should be. But, I do believe that my experiences made me want to go into work that would prevent other children, whoever they might be, having to go through some of the pain that I did.

>> Bill Benson: You spent a career working with both special needs children as well as troubled youth in the public education system.

>> Julie Keefer: And I worked very much in educational equity, making sure or trying to that there is an even playing field of opportunity because often there isn't.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Julie in just a moment to close our program. I want to thank you all for being with us today. I remind you that we have programs every Wednesday and Thursday until early August. Our programs through June 6 will all be livestreamed, but all of our programs are recorded and will be available on the museum's YouTube page. If you can't come back and join us in person this year, there are plenty of opportunities to see some of our other programs. And then maybe you can come back next year when we resume in 2020.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. So with that, I'd like to turn back to Julie to close today's program.

>> Julie Keefer: If I give advice, it would be don't ignore injustice. Take a stand. Because your silence condones the act of injustice.

>> Bless you.

>> Bill Benson: Bless you.

>> Bless you.

>> Amen.

>> Julie Keefer: Thank you.

The other thing is if you all see bullying, and you will if you haven't, don't jump into and aggravate a fight by getting into a conflict cycle, but make a point of befriending the person who is being picked on. Now, that's very, very, very hard to do because your friends will say, ehh, I'm not going to associate with you because you're associating. But this is where your individual strength comes in and this is where the real you comes out. Because it's not your friends; it's you looking in the mirror every day where you need to take a stand. And that stand is standing up for someone. And what I really like about today's generation is that you're gutsy people. And I love that.

Thank you very much.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: We invite anybody who would like to come up on the stage and say hi to Julie, ask her another question, get your photo taken with her, get a hug. Get a hug. She welcomes that. We genuinely welcome that. Our only request is you come up and go down the stairs.

Thank you. If would like to do that, Julie will remain behind.

Here they come.