

"First Person"

Sylvia Rozines

July 31st, 2019

BILL BENSON: Sylvia, Rozines, was born Cywia Perlmutter, to Jewish parents Isaac and Hawaii on January 20th, 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 three years old, when this photo was taken.

In September 1939, when Sylvia was four 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 --

(A pause).

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BILL BENSON: 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 out 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 ghetto.

Sylvia's family, relocated to a displaced person's camp in Germany. In this photograph... we see Sylvia, who is circled at the displaced person's camp in 1947. Sylvia eventually lived in Paris, until emigrating to the United States, in 1957.

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>> Ladies and gentlemen, please silence all electronic devices. Our program will begin in just a moment.

BILL BENSON:

Good morning. Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I am Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. This is our twentieth year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is **Mrs. Sylvia Rozines**, 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 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 next Thursday, August 8th. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Sylvia 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 Sylvia 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.

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 20th, 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 three years old, when this photograph was taken.

In September 1939, when Sylvia was four years old, Germany invaded Poland, officially beginning the second world war. Within seven days German troops entered and occupied the city of 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 out the ghetto. They hid Sylvia in a cellar, along with eleven other Jewish children, whose parents remained working in the cleaning out of the ghetto. In January of 1945, the soviet army, liberated the 800 remaining Jews from the ghetto. Sylvia's family relocated to a displaced person's camp in Germany, in this photograph, we see Sylvia, who is circled, at the displaced person's camp in 1947. Sylvia eventually lived in Paris, until immigrating to the United States, in 1957.

After ten years in France, as I mentioned, Sylvia and her father immigrated to the United States, joining, Dora, and her husband, Jack, who had moved earlier to Albany, New York. Sylvia got a job in a dress shop marrying David Rozines, who is also a Holocaust survivor in 1959, he worked in sales, their son Greg graduated with a degree in engineering from the state university of New York at Binghamton, Sylvia went to night school and went to work for the New York public schools, where she worked for 24 years.

Sylvia's husband, David passed away in 1993 at age 69, Sylvia moved to the Washington, D.C. area to be close to her son, Sylvia has two grandchildren, Jeffrey, 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, about what she went through in the Lodz ghetto, and is now speaking in local schools, such as Montgomery college, as well as at senior centers, she also speaks to groups here at the museum. In collaboration, with her niece, Jennifer Roy, Sylvia's story was published with the title ""Yellow Star"" her book, which is now sold more than 150,000 copies, it used widely in schools, and has been published in a number of countries, including Brazil, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, and now Italy, and Poland. I would like to let you know her son Greg is sitting in the audience, with us today and following today's program Sylvia will sign copies of "Yellow Star", please join me in welcoming our "First Person"... Ms. Sylvia Rozines

[APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: Sylvia, thank you for joining us and your willingness to be our "First Person" today.

You have -- Sylvia, you have so much to share with us, we have such a short period of time so we'll start right away if that's okay.

You were not yet five years old when Germany invaded Poland, September 1st, 1939, starting the first world war.

But before we turn to the War, and the Holocaust, first, tell us what you can, about those first years of your life, and your family, before the war began, what was their life like?

>> Sylvia: Before the -- the war, I remember, we had a nice life.

I remember family dinners, holidays, my mother was the best cook, so everybody came to our house.

I remember very little, but I do remember, we used to rent a summer home, and I have those pictures always in -- I see, in the back yard, trees, so, we

used to spend the summer, my father used to come out for the weekend.

And we had -- I remember, always, a good time.

BILL BENSON: You shared with me that, you know, your mother was a good cook.

>> Yes

BILL BENSON: She also liked American silent movies.

>> Sylvia: Yes, yes, she used to go to watch American silent movies

FBLT that is correct.

>> And your father had served in the Polish army earlier hadn't he?

>> Sylvia: He only went -- he didn't fight the war but he just did his military duty

BILL BENSON: Military duty in the Polish army, how large was your extended family? Did you have a large family?

>> Sylvia: Yes, yes, and they all lived not too far from each other. We all lived -- my mother, also had brothers and sisters

BILL BENSON: So that meant you had lots of aunts uncles and cousins?

>> Sylvia: I did

BILL BENSON: Of course, September 1st 1939 Germany invades Poland and within seven days the German army had occupied your city of Lodz, beginning the Holocaust, and all the horrors that would follow.

Tell us, what you can, about that period, after the Germans came in, but before you were forced to go into the ghetto. That period of time. It didn't last long, but what happened in that period?

>> Sylvia: The only thing, I remember, we happened to live, near that

area

BILL BENSON: Okay.

>> Sylvia: So we didn't have to move

BILL BENSON: Okay.

>> Sylvia: But other people came in and it became very crowded and we were -- four, the apartment was very small, even before the war. We had a very large room, and -- and a kitchen, and another family came to live with us.

So -- there were three more people so it was seven people

BILL BENSON: Let me ask you just a couple of questions before we turn to what it was like for you in the ghetto.

When the Germans came in, you -- your family, left, tried to go to Warsaw.

>> Sylvia: Oh, yes, when the Germans came in they decided they didn't want any Jewish people in the city of Lodz.

So we had to leave. Everybody left.

My father -- what I remember -- rented the horse and buggy and a driver, and we were four -- and it was two other children and husband, drove to Warsaw, but when we arrived Warsaw was bombed

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Sylvia: The whole streets, all the -- many sections -- there was not a house, we couldn't find where to live. And my father he couldn't find work, so he decided to go back, which was a very good decision, he made

BILL BENSON: As it turned out, although you wouldn't quo that for a long time.

>> Sylvia: Yes, right

BILL BENSON: And it was in that period, I think that you were first forced to start wearing the "Yellow Star", which is the title of your book.

>> Sylvia: Yes. When the Germans formed the ghetto, they put barbed wire, and German soldiers stood all around, to make sure we don't escape.

Also, we were forced to wear the "Yellow Star", one in the back, one in the front, and we have to give up all our valuables, all the radios, we had -- many people had radios, so for six years, we didn't know what was happening.

In Germany, we didn't know what was happening in the world, at all.

How long -- we didn't expect that it's going to last six years.

BILL BENSON: No. A moment ago, you began to tell us, about what it was like, in the ghetto; how crowded you were -- all of you living in two small rooms, one of the things you shared with me, was that, you -- of course, you didn't have a toilet in there, the toilet was --

>> Sylvia: Outside, outside

BILL BENSON: You described in your book, as a five-year-old, how -- how frightening that was to you to have to go out by yourself in the Courtyard.

>> Sylvia: Yes. When -- before the war, I had my mom, who took care of me.

And -- but after the War, what was -- I want to explain -- I was left after a while, alone, my mother and father -- what the Germans did, that city had many factories before the war. That's why they chose the city to make the ghetto, and put the people to work.

But I was too young, but -- my sister, even she was 11 and 12 children went to work.

In the factories.

So I -- after a while, I was left alone, but the couple, who moved in, had a little girl my age, so I had a little girl, a friend, and across the hallway, there was

another -- a little bit older little girl, maybe 7.

And she had a baby, brother, in the crib; so we all gathered and stayed there. Until our parents came back from war

BILL BENSON: Just you four children?

>> Sylvia: Yes, and we were not allowed, we were told to go out so we stayed the whole day and waited for the parents to come home, and cook some meals.

Now, can I talk about food?

BILL BENSON: Yes.

>> Sylvia: Food was the most important thing.

Mostly, we were always hungry. We received very little food.

After work, my mother and father had to wait in line, to get some food.

So there was always a long line, I remember, and sometimes, when you arrive, at the window to get the food, it was gone.

So hunger was the worst part of what I remember.

We received -- I remember -- one bread and had to last us for a week, so, every day, you only could have one slice.

But I had wonderful parents.

When my sister and I were hungry, they gave us their piece of bread.

I am here, because my father had the courage to do many things. But he was not allowed -- and -- to save me

BILL BENSON: Tell us about your father sneaking or bringing some flour in.

>> Sylvia: Yes, my father, they always ask the Germans, what was your profession before the war?

If the person was a shoemaker they put them to make shoes in a factory.

Or, a tailor, my uncle was making furniture -- everything, what was made, was sent to Germany.

And working, you receive a little soup, and another slice of bread. Mostly the soup, was water. If you -- you were happy to have a few pieces of potato and some cabbage in the soup.

But... my father, used to sell wholesale, flour and sugar.

And it happened that my father was very strong, and you have to carry hundred kilos -- pounds of flour on your shoulder, they delivered -- a horse and buggy, to the bakery.

And sometimes, a little flour got spilled; so each -- there was a group of men, who were assigned, certain streets to deliver the flour; and that helped us, with the flour, sometimes you could bring home.

But what was nice, there were maybe -- I don't remember -- four or five men, sometimes one man, couldn't get a little flour.

So... if three men got it, they went to a house, and you have to be very careful. Nobody could see -- and weigh it and divide it between the -- the --

BILL BENSON: And they would secretly --

>> Sylvia: Secret pockets, they were wearing, like, white.... shirts.

And... make secret packets, it was used a little bit, but that little bit, helped us, with the hunger.

BILL BENSON: What work were your mother and your sister forced to do.

>> Sylvia: My sister and my mother worked in a factory, for women's undergarments

BILL BENSON: And those, of course, were sent to Germany.

>> Sylvia: Everything that was made, was sent to Germany. We were not allowed to take even -- if the Germans would find you, you wanted to bring something home -- they just could kill you.

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Sylvia: When the barbed wire -- if you walk next to the barbed wire, sometimes you had to go to work -- was very close to the barbed wire; and if the Germans felt to call you, and just -- so you have to go over to the -- he could just kill you for fun.

BILL BENSON: So you mentioned the two friends you had. I think they were Hava and Itka.

>> Yes

BILL BENSON: In the spring of 1941 you already had been in the ghetto for more than a year at that time. -- you said in your book you wrote that Hava was missing and that was very traumatic for you.

>> Sylvia: She was -- this this happened, later on, when they had to leave.

I don't want to -- in 1944, they liquidated --

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Sylvia: That's why they all left, Hava and Itka -- the reason is...

They chose the 800 people to clean up the belongings, who were able to carry the furniture.

BILL BENSON: Like your father --

>> Sylvia: Like, my father yes

BILL BENSON: We'll come back to that in just a minute.

>> Sylvia: Yes, yes,

BILL BENSON: As awful as things were in the ghetto for you: The hunger and the terrible living conditions -- sanitary conditions -- things turned terrificly horribly worse in 1942, when the deportations to the Chelmno, which was a killing center, began.

>> Sylvia: Yes, and the people didn't know where they were going

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Sylvia: The Germans advertised -- they had better factories in Germany, and there's going to be more food; and some people thought they were going to a better life. But most of the people were afraid of them, though. And that was -- well, it was my father

BILL BENSON: And in 1943, the Nazis targeted children.

>> Sylvia: Yes

BILL BENSON: How did your father --

>> Sylvia: This was my worst part, when I speak, I sit at the desk every Monday -- and people come up and I tell the story.

And that was my worst part, because -- I couldn't work, so my parents had to degive me away, and, of course, my father wouldn't do it. And my mother.

So the ghetto was quite large.

He found places, where to hide me.

But the Germans after a while found those places.

So, that was my personal tragedy, which, I -- it stayed with me for a long time.

Because the last place he hid me was one of the worst places.

BILL BENSON: Was that the cemetery?

>> Sylvia: Yes, there was a cemetery, there was a brick wall, and very

tall, and behind was a cemetery.

And that day, the Germans came at night, because during the day, they used to barricade certain streets. People ran away, to -- someplace else, grabbing the children.

It happened to my aunt.

She thought they're going to come -- she lived in the same apartment house we did. And she thought, they're going to come to our street.

And she went to her sister on a different street; and they didn't come to us, and they came there; and they -- she had to grab -- she had a small child, and maybe, not two years old -- and they grab from her hand the child. It was tragedy for the mothers to give up the children.

Fathers.

BILL BENSON: Can you say a little bit more about what it was like for you to be hidden in a cemetery?

>> Sylvia: So this is my worst part. So my father climbed the wall; and I remember, because I was already -- almost 8 1/2 or 9, in 44, and I started to cry. I don't know, I didn't know, exactly, what would happen to me if the Germans would take me away, but I just started to cry, they're going to kill me! They're going to kill me! So my father grabbed me and we climbed that wall.

And threw me over, and he dug a hole. I don't remember -- if he had a shovel. Excuse me.

But I could only stay, I couldn't sit in the hole. I remember just staying, and he covered me with grass and there was some straw.

And he told me to wait, until he would come back, and I had to be quiet.

And that took the rest of the night and the next day, next day, late

afternoon, finally -- the Germans went away, and my sister, came to tell us -- my father stayed around there. But not near me. Like, he made believe he's cleaning up.

And after coming out from the hole, I became really scared for everything, and it lasted a long time.

Even when I was an adult, even -- I lived in France for ten years, I didn't speak after the war about what was happening, to me.

I didn't have help from psychologist, or psychiatrist, which I needed. To get over the fear.

I always imagined, they're going to come and grab me. I had this dream for 14 years, that I'm in the hole, and the German comes and kills me. He stays with the gun.

But thank God, when I came to America, the dreams stopped. And when I started volunteering five years ago -- and I was afraid this is going to come back, but it didn't. So that was a --

BILL BENSON: Sylvia, as it turned out, there were other people hiding in the cemetery too.

>> Sylvia: Yes, children, too, but they were not in a hole, they were just sitting there, in between the stones.

BILL BENSON: At some point the Nazis realized that.

Where did your father hide you after that?

>> Sylvia: After that, the Germans make a new law, you could have one child.

Per family. And my sister, she was working, so I was the only child.

And when they used to come, we used to -- everybody had to get out of

the building, and stay in the courtyard. So I had a -- I remember, was a pink slip, once we showed the slip, I was okay.

But my father had a good friend, to work with him. And I remember, when the law came out, to give -- you can only have one child, he had a boy and a girl.

And he -- I remember, sitting -- I was nine years old -- and the wife came, what should we do? They always -- my father was, like, the leader of the group.

And they always ask him advice.

And he came to our house, and they were crying, we don't know to give away the boy or the girl.

And I remember my father saying to them, "You don't give away no children. Go downstairs, with the girl." And he took the boy, in our apartment we had a large armoire, where you put your clothes, he moved that furniture, put -- he thought the little boy would have more courage than the little girl. I don't remember -- there were maybe, like, two years difference between them.

And... he -- hid him there and made believe, like, he's going out from the room and he came back and said in German, everybody out! Everybody out. And the little boy didn't move.

And they survived, they are here in United States. Someplace.

BILL BENSON: Sylvia, your parents were able to keep you hidden, under unbelievable circumstances.

But it became even more difficult --

>> Sylvia: Yes,

BILL BENSON: When they decided to liquidate the ghetto.

>> Sylvia: When they liquidated the ghetto they needed people to clean

up the belongings.

The people who left, could only take a little backpack and a bottle of water.

So they had beautiful furniture.

They had all these nice things, and what the Germans wanted, is -- the 800 people to go house to house, the ghetto was, like, a ghosttown, and pick up the belongings, and take them to the train. I think on a horse and buggy, there were no trucks.

And everything went to Germany.

So they chose the people -- all the people who work with my father, because they were used to lift heavy things. And other people who were well. So they made the selection, and I remember, staying.... outside.

I don't remember, exactly, where people were standing, and the -- leader of the ghetto, who was a very, very vicious man -- came very close to me.

And he had a leather strap. And he was wearing leather boots and he was knocking that strap on his boots; and being nine years old, I -- he was so close to me, that I thought he's going to hit me.

So he looked at my father, looked at my mother; and my sister.

And he said, "Three of you can stay. But this little --" he called me a bad name, in German, and he said, you have to go left, left means to go.

And if you were chosen, right, is to stay.

So here, was the dilemma: My father had to make a decision, for some reason, he made, during the war, the right decision. It's luck in making the right decision, he decided, that he's not going. And all his friends were looking at him, you know what's going to happen, they would kill the whole family.

So they put -- the 800 people, in two factories, one was men, and one for

women.

And my father went to look at the factory. He knew the city very well.

And he saw there was a basement. So he said to his friends, "I cannot tell you what to do. But I am going to hide my daughter and" he had a brother who had a little boy, who was three years old.

So he -- I took my cousin by the hand and we went down the basement.

And the other people had a dilemma: They didn't know -- they were afraid to do what my father -- but some of them decided. I don't remember exactly, how many children. I said 12 children, to my niece Jennifer Roy, in my book, but maybe, we were 11. Maybe 13 -- it was just a handful of children, because.... the other people had children, they didn't want to stay; and they were not on the list, my father was on the list.

And.... that's -- we stayed in that basement; not long.

I don't remember if it was a week, but there was no -- no place to sit. We had to sit on the floor.

And keep quiet.

In the evening... the mothers and the fathers brought us some food.

In that camp, there were -- the women organized a -- a kitchen; and when they went to the houses they found some food and in the bakeries, they found flour; and there were -- that was summertime.

So there was a garden. We all had a little garden in the back yard. So they picked up the vegetables, and at least the women cooked vegetable soup. We didn't have meat. And flour, I don't know what they did with the flour.

>> You got a little bit of food.

>> Sylvia: We were not as hungry as before, because we're 800 people,

and so we had soup.

BILL BENSON: If I could stop for just a second. To put it in context, for our -- for our audience, when -- when you were first forced into the ghetto there were 160,000 Jews.

When they liquidated it, in 1944, there were 75,000. Now there's 800 of you.

>> Sylvia: 800

BILL BENSON: And 10 or 11 children.

>> Sylvia. Maybe, actually,

BILL BENSON: That were left.

>> Sylvia: What happened was some people passed away, and at the end it was, like, 756, I know my niece found out

BILL BENSON: But a very small number.

>> Sylvia: A very small amount

BILL BENSON: At one point -- you children, because you were not supposed to be there, you're hidden in the basement.

>> Sylvia: Basement, yes,

BILL BENSON: At some point you the kids decided to go out.

>> Sylvia: We didn't. I'm sorry,

BILL BENSON: You didn't?

>> Sylvia: What happened, we were sitting very quiet. And one day, the door opened. And the Germans coming down the steps. They -- someone told the Germans, we didn't know who did it.

And the Germans took us out from the basement.

And made us walk -- the Germans stood quite far, from the camp.

And I remember taking my little cousin by the hand, and we walked.

And they were talking, making decisions. And at the end, they told us, they brought us back to the camp.

We, children, didn't -- didn't understand. We thought that they were going to kill us, the older kids

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Sylvia: But the reason, the Germans decided to do this, is because they were planning, soon, to kill all 800 people.

And killing just the children, would create chaos, the Germans always wanted everything to go smooth.

So.... just killing the children, would create a problem for them. There were not too many Germans in that house.

Guarding us. They were far away, but they had a telephone. And many people, asking, me, how come there were young men -- why didn't they kill those? I don't know if it was three, four, the most 5.

They had a telephone; and every day, came a call from Berlin, if everything is okay.

BILL BENSON: Uh-huh

>>SYLVIA: And if we would kill the -- the Germans, the Germans would arrive and kill us all

BILL BENSON: Right

>>SYLVIA: That's why I heard this, actually, from my father, when he was talking -- when someone asked him, why they didn't kill

BILL BENSON: After --

>>SYLVIA: So we came back to the camp, but by that time, we could hear

bombs falling, but, like, far away.

And one day I looked up in the sky -- there were so many planes, maybe 20 or 25, but they were, like, toys. They were observing where to go.

And the bombs were coming closer and closer.

So.... when the men dug the holes --

BILL BENSON: And talk about that. About the men digging the holes. Say a little more about that

>>SYLVIA: I just know my father came -- we had a secret door between the women factories and the men.

And they came, and they were not talking, and everybody asked what happened. And they told we had to dig three holes, and I think -- it's for us.

So we had a leader -- they just assigned this man, to keep everything quiet. If two people were fighting and he said the only thing I can do, is to open the doors for you.

And go hide yourselves.

The ghetto was a ghost town

BILL BENSON: Right

>>SYLVIA: And it was January.

The -- the snow, was up to our knees.

Where do you go?

You cannot go.... to the Polish part, because the Germans were still guarding us.

So groups were formed. And each group decided, they remember one house had a basement. And because we couldn't go out -- 756 people in one place, the groups for some reason, my father waited until the end. He could not

believe, at that time, this is going to happen.

But then.... from -- you couldn't walk on the street, but my father could walk to the backyard. And he and other men, went to the backyard, where the Germans house was, and there was, like, a big plaza, empty. And he saw all those cars, motorcycles -- so many Germans arrived.

When I am talking about Germans, I'm talking about Nazis.

The Nazis, did the killing.

But the German soldiers were soldiers.

And he saw all those Nazi arriving, because to kill, also many people, they needed

BILL BENSON: To kill the remaining 750

>>SYLVIA: Yes. So then my father decided, it's time to go and the group waited for him.

And we went to the backyard.

My father was very smart. He decided, to hide in the house across where the Germans were staying.

He -- he was thinking, once they go house to house, this is the last house they're going to be looking

BILL BENSON: The one right next to their --

>>SYLVIA: And he could see, there was a dark shape. He made a little hole for his eye, and he could what was happening there.

So we -- I remember my mother had a bread and she took and we just put our clothes and walked to that place.

And it was a big room, and we -- some people sat on the floor. I don't know how many parents had children, so the children, could sit or lay down, if it

was a bed there. I remember there was a bad. So -- and we waited. The bombs were coming closer and closer.

You could hear them, all around.

And... we were maybe there three days.

Because we couldn't cook. We couldn't make a fire, because the smoke would come out from the chimney.

And if Russia wouldn't come earlier -- I mean, later, I'm sorry.

We -- they would find us. They were --

BILL BENSON: Going from building to building, yeah,

>>SYLVIA: And one day, my father and the other men, looked out and saw a woman walking.

And oh, they said, we must be free.

Liberated. But my father said, "Let's wait, maybe she's a decoy and we would come out and the Germans would grab us" but no it was the liberation, January 19, 1945

BILL BENSON: Tell us more about your liberation. What -- what was that like, what do you remember of that?

>>SYLVIA: I remember coming out of the place.

And the bombs were falling all over.

Do I have time to tell this story?

BILL BENSON: Yes

>>SYLVIA: -- about that --

BILL BENSON: About how you were seen?

>>SYLVIA: When --

BILL BENSON: I wouldn't let you leave here without telling that.

>>SYLVIA: What time?

BILL BENSON: We're okay

>>SYLVIA: When the bombs were falling, I'm going back now and we were at the camp. We went out and laid on the ground.

With our -- on our stomach.

And the bombs were falling all around. And I remember hearing, the bombs first was, like, a whistle. And I was waiting for the big boom.

I was very scared.

And my mother said, "Don't lift your head. Just lay still! "

We were wearing, the star of David on the back too, the yellow star.

And this -- in American military, he would be a colonel. And he was flying one of the planes -- who -- who were bombing

BILL BENSON: One of the Russian planes, yes,

>>SYLVIA: Yes, he was a Russian, and he came to our camp at the liberation and told us the story.

Why they didn't throw a bomb on this factory, and where we were laying -- he happened to be Jewish. And he knew what the yellow star meant, so he told other planes, do not throw bombs on those people. They are Jewish people, in there, and be careful, so the bombs didn't hit us. And he came after, to our camp and told us the story.

So that was a miracle, because some other planes could throw the bombs and we could get killed even

BILL BENSON: So they spotted the yellow stars

>>SYLVIA: Everyone had them when we lay on the ground. And -- he saw the few children, he says oh, you're the first people we liberated; and he gave us -- he

had some chocolates and they had some food but they themselves, didn't have much food.

They had to go, after liberating Poland, to liberate Germany.

And he was very scared. He told us, we're going to have a big fight to take Berlin, because Hitler said, that all the Germans have to defend that city, because once they take the city, the war is over. They lost.

But... so he was worried, if he was going to survive. He says, I have a wife in Moscow, with two children, I hope I'm going to survive.

BILL BENSON: So, Sylvia, now that the Russians have liberated. They move on as they are advancing

>>SYLVIA: Yes

BILL BENSON: What did you --

>>SYLVIA: The Russians told us you can go to the -- any part of the city.

Any apartment which is locked, that means Germans live there, or Polish, who went with the Germans, you can ask the concierge to unlock, and you -- and that's what we did.

BILL BENSON: Uh-huh.

>>SYLVIA: But I want to tell a story.

Many -- for many years, I didn't tell the story, and I don't know if you have it.

When we were liberated, we went out of our camp, and stayed on the -- not on the sidewalk, and I happened to stay there.

I -- the next day, that was the next day -- I became ten years old.

And my only language, at that time, was Polish.

And the -- the Polish people came in, they broke the wires, the Germans

ran away and we didn't clean up all the belongings, and there were factories, who still had clothes, and fur coats we were making; and they came in and... went to all those places, and I saw them carrying, clothes, a piece of furniture; and they were walking in the middle of the street.

And I was staying on the sidewalk, just happy to see people.

I was ten years old.

And I never had any schooling.

My sister did teach me the alphabet and adding some numbers, and how to sign my name.

But... I remember this nice-looking blonde lady walking and she was carrying our belongings, and she looked at -- maybe we were 100, to 200 people, staying; and she looked and she said -- and I heard the -- the voice was quite loud -- look at how many are still left over!

And that -- a 10-year-old, hit me. I understood exactly, what she meant, and in my mind, of a 10-year-old, I thought they were going to be happy to see us.

This is -- it's never going to be a war anymore.

BILL BENSON: Because of events like that and others --

>>SYLVIA: Yes, this stayed in my mind forever

BILL BENSON: And as a result of that --

>>SYLVIA: Yes, I was very -- shocked. To hear her saying that

BILL BENSON: Horrible.

So your parents made the decision, to leave Poland

>>SYLVIA: No. We -- no. Before we found a nice place, and I went to school; the school was very close, where we lived in a nice neighborhood; and because

of the school was closed -- and you have to go where there was an apartment and it was a beautiful area.

And my father started his business, he did very well.

And we started... a new life. We got the place had furniture.

But we made new clothes, we bought... you had to go to a dress-maker, but material, my father made money.

And life started going back to normal.

Until... a group of clans formed and they came to people and started to kill us.

And in one city they killed 800 people.

BILL BENSON: 800 Jews

>>SYLVIA: Jews, Jews who -- some of them came back from concentration camps and that was the day my father said we had to leave. The problem was we couldn't take any suitcases.

This was a -- an apartment house, had a concierge, and he watched -- he had a little booth and he watched who was coming in, who was going out. And we didn't know if he was a good person.

So, my father decided no suitcases, no packages.

There was a -- in Poland, after dinner, some people just went for a walk.

And that's what we did. We took the money and our clothing, the pictures, what you show. -- and some.... paperwork.

But -- my mother put, like, two blouses and a suit, and a coat, but nothing else and I got really upset, because I liked one tablecloth, my mother used to use for the holiday. The Germans didn't take away, our clothes, tablecloths or sheets; they were only interested in valuables. Like, jewelry or painting, special

things.

So we still had this from before the war. And we have to leave it.

Just lock the door.

And go for a walk, to a train station, and from there, we went near Germany border and we had to walk to the border. But we were lucky, my father found a man who was driving, with a truck, to deliver gasoline, and he hid us behind the gasoline, and... I became very ill from that smell. Now, I get carsick, but he had to go through the forest, he couldn't go on the main road.

So it was a bumpy ride. And we arrived in.... in Germany.

And in Berlin, there was a displaced camp

BILL BENSON: Displaced persons

>>SYLVIA: A displaced persons camp, excuse me, and they assigned, they gave us -- American side, Berlin was decided between American, Russia, English --

BILL BENSON: French

>>SYLVIA: -- parts, and they treated us very nice, the MP was there, and took us in, showed us -- and we got shots not to get sick, and then we were assigned another displaced... persons camp.

Near Munich.

And we stayed there, waiting for a country to take us in.

America, only allowed people who had relatives.

If you didn't have relatives, that was 1947 -- they -- you couldn't come.

No country allowed -- wanted us.

So.... in 1950, Eisenhower, the president, they decided to let in the -- let in the people from the displaced camps. Jews or not Jews. There were Jewish

and not Jewish. They were gypsies, any religion could come in, as long as you were checked out and to come if you didn't have relatives. That was 1950, '51, and I don't know, at that time, in 1947, my mother found out she had a brother in Paris, from before the war. He lived there for years, and we decided -- we wrote a letter and he said to come over.

So we had to find a guide and pay him, to take us to the border, at night.

And we arrived in Paris.

And finally:

I didn't mention much about the Polish school. The children were awful. Once I said I'm Jewish. In the beginning I was afraid to say I'm Jewish.

They had religious classes.

And that's what created the problem.

Once the nuns came in to religious classes and they learned... they still believed that we killed Jesus. So the kids were hitting me, ripping my clothes, and I used to come crying home.

And my sister, experimented in high school, she was already -- and she also had a bad time; but once I arrived in Paris, and went to the French school, everybody welcomed me.

They didn't even ask me about religion.

This was 47, they just wanted to know from which country, and what language I speak, and I was the only little girl, 10 -- I was 11, by that time.

Who didn't speak French.

And everybody helped me; and I -- being young, I learned fast, and I finally had a normal life. My father had to learn, a new profession.

The beginning was very, very hard.

For my parents. But eventually, things were getting better. I was 16 years old. My mother gets cancer.

And dies, and I was devastated. Surviving a whole family, the War, and then she dies after -- became very ill. And I had a sister married already in America, because my brother, born in America and the parents went back to Poland, so she came to take care of me.

With a little baby girl, maybe 18 months old, and she told me how nice, it's to come to America, and -- I really didn't want to -- leave -- live -- leave another country, and I had to learn another language.

But she taught me -- it was only my father, and I, and we -- we decided, when she -- went back, she started to make papers; but being that I was born in Poland, the American consul in Paris, wouldn't give me the visa. We waited almost six years.

Because by that time, Poland became communist, but when he looked -- I told him, when we left, I was 20 years old -- I remember I used to go often -- why -- we are not receiving the visa, he said, we don't have for Polish citizen, but we left before the communists.

I didn't even know what was a communist at that time.

But... finally, someone told us to reject our citizen -- in a matter of months, we got the visa, so I was also angry, why didn't I know to do it earlier? I could have been here as a teenager. But we came in 1957

BILL BENSON: Your father --

>>SYLVIA: With my father.

And I had to learn, another language. Now, English, was -- I never went to school in America -- I -- night school, for a little while, because I had a job, in

Albany, New York, and I couldn't make it to night school. We were only three people at that time. In Albany New York, night school. But I learned, there was already television. And... my niece was 4 or five years old and she had baby books, so she asked me, to read her, the books.

And I read it the French way, so she used to tell me, don't say it this way, say it this way. That was my first lesson, to learn English

BILL BENSON: To learn English

>>SYLVIA: And I was eager, but knowing French and knowing some German, I just didn't pronounce, the.... the right word, it was written the same, as French; so I had to learn to pronounce it the American way.

But it was not -- not long, I learned to speak. And then I met my husband, David.

And we got married, in Albany, and had a baby boy. And... because of my husband's profession, we moved, most of my life, I lived in Rochester, New York.

The reason I came to this area, is because my son lives here.

After I lost my husband, in 1999, that was another tragedy for me.

Losing him.

Young.

He was -- I was the sick person always. He was the healthy person, he gets leukemia, at 64.

So that was a big tragedy for me. More than the Holocaust.

That I lost my soulmate. And my friend, and my chauffeur, everything.

[LAUGHTER] because I never learned how to drive. And I have two grandchildren, Alyssa, is a teacher.

The second, and Jeffrey is a professional, all went to college, of course, because I missed that.

So I had to educate myself.

BILL BENSON: And you've done a remarkable job --

>>SYLVIA: Thank you

BILL BENSON: Thank you for being up here. I'm going to turn back to Sylvia in just a minute to close our program

>>SYLVIA: If people want to ask me questions

BILL BENSON: I think we're not going to have time for that

>>SYLVIA: Oh...

BILL BENSON: I would like to thank you all, for being here, remind you we will have three more programs, tomorrow and then, next Wednesday and Thursday.

But all of our programs, are on the museum's YouTube page, and Sylvia's will be posted on the YouTube page as well. So you can view any of our programs, and we'll resume, "First Person", in March of 2020. So we hope that you'll come back, sometime.

Before Sylvia closes our program, two things: One, when she's done, she's going to go up and sign copies of her book. "Yellow Star", also an opportunity, to ask her a question, and say Hi, to her there

>>SYLVIA: Yes

BILL BENSON: So please do that. I think you -- you can sense that there was a great deal that we could not get to. We could have sat here, with Sylvia for the rest of the afternoon

>>SYLVIA: Yes

BILL BENSON: The other thing that will happen is our photographer, Sarah who

is here, is going to come up on the stage after Sylvia's done and she's going to take a picture of Sylvia, with you as the background.

So we ask that you stay with us, so that we can get that photograph for Sylvia.

So it's our tradition at "First Person", that our "First Person" has the last word. So with that, I would like to ask Sylvia to close our program

>>SYLVIA: Okay. Being -- my volunteering at the museum is very important.

Being a survivor, I am a witness to the Holocaust. When I speak to the schoolchildren, I always tell them, never to hate.

Be kind to each other.

BILL BENSON: Thank you, Sylvia.

[APPLAUSE]