

Good afternoon and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson and I am the host of the museum's public program First Person. Thank you for joining us. We are in our eighth season of First Person. Our first person today is Mrs. Manya Friedman, who you shall meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust and as survivors. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. With the exception of August 1, we will have a First Person program each Wednesday through August 29. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org-- that's www.ushmm.org-- provides a list of our upcoming First Person guests. This 2007 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Doris Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring this year's program.

Manya Friedman will share with you her first-person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 50 minutes. Before you are introduced to her, I have several requests of you. First, we ask that if possible, stay seated throughout our one-hour program. That will help minimize any disruptions to Manya while she's speaking.

Second, we hope that we'll have time for questions and answers at the end of our program. If we do and you have a question, I ask that you make your question as brief as you can. I will repeat the question so all in the room, including Manya, hear it. And then she'll respond to your question.

Finally, if any of you have a cell phone or a pager that's not yet turned off, we ask that you do so now. I'd also like to let any of those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition know that they are good for the balance of the afternoon. So you can stay with us until 2:00 and then go to the permanent exhibition.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims-- six million were murdered. Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny. What you are about to hear from Manya Friedman is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Manya's introduction. We begin with this portrait of Manya Moszkowicz, who was born in Chmielnik, Poland in 1925. On this map of Europe, we see our arrow points to the location of Poland. Manya's father owned a furniture shop, and her mother took care of the home. This is a photograph of Manya, Manya's parents-- Gedaliah and Malka-- that was taken before the war.

Manya had two younger brothers, David and Mordechai, and was surrounded by many close relatives. This is a portrait of Manya, her cousins, and her aunt, who is in the middle with a circle around her. Other than Manya, her aunt is the only person in this photograph who survived the Holocaust. Manya, who is approximately four years old in this photograph, has a circle around her in the lower left-hand corner.

In 1938, Manya's family moved to Sosnowiec. And our arrow points to the location of Sosnowiec, a larger city, located near the German border. There, she had her first experience with antisemitism. Signs were posted, urging Polish citizens to boycott Jewish businesses. When German troops invaded Poland in 1939, Sosnowiec was occupied. Under German occupation, Manya's parents experienced persecution, forced labor, and were arrested for curfew violation.

In 1941, Manya was forced to work for a German company that produced military uniforms. In March 1943, she was taken to the Gogolin transit camp and from there to the Gleiwitz forced labor camp. Our arrow points to the location of Gleiwitz. Manya's family was deported to Auschwitz. She never saw them again. Our green arrow points to Auschwitz.

In January 1945, as the Soviet Army approached, Manya and other prisoners were evacuated on a death march. They were transported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. And the arrows show the approximately route of the forced march that Manya was on. Later, Manya was taken to the Rechlin camp, where she was rescued by the Swedish Red Cross in April of 1945. In 1950, Manya emigrated from Sweden to the United States.

We close our slide presentation with this contemporary photograph of Manya. Today, Manya resides in the Washington, DC area. She has two children-- a son and a daughter-- and a 19-year-old grandson, Joey, who is a college student in Florida. Manya volunteers here at the museum with visitor services and as a translator.

Manya also speaks frequently on behalf of the museum about her experience during the Holocaust, including two children's groups. She has spoken, for example, to such groups as visiting delegations of teachers. She spoke at an event at the Newseum about genocide sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars that was aired on the television station C-SPAN. She has spoken to a group from Princeton about Dachau and genocide. Recently, she spoke at three high schools and three colleges in three days in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. When she recently spoke at Georgia Southern College, her host predicted a crowd of about 100, turned out to be 500.

I'd like to also mention that Manya was one of our two pilot First Person guests when we began the program in 2000. And at the time, it was her first time publicly speaking about her experience during the Holocaust. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mrs. Manya Friedman

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you, Manya, welcome. And we're glad to have you with us for First Person. And if you don't mind, I'd like to acknowledge your son Gary is with us today. Gary, if you wouldn't mind raising your hand. So welcome, Manya. Thanks for joining us.

That was a surprise to me too. Well, I would like to thank you all for coming to visit the museum and to learn about the Holocaust. You probably noticed that this museum is unlike any other museum. Most of the museums try to portray what human contributed either to arts or sciences. This museum is trying to convey to you what hate, discrimination, racism, disregard for human life can do.

And we speak-- it's also a cautionary warning to all humanity. You see, after all, the Holocaust didn't happen in the Dark Ages, committed by uncivilized people. It took place in the 20th century, committed by the most cultural nation in Europe. Although Hitler's and the Nazi Party's aim was to extinguish all European Jews, they also managed to murder millions of others, like Mr. Benson already mentioned. And among those were more than a million children.

When you think of it, they weren't murdered for what they have done, but because of who they were. And when we think of millions, we see a number with a lot of zeros. But please, keep in mind that all of those numbers represented somebody's dear one-- a father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife. Well, I'm not an educator. I'm not a scholar. I can only share with you my own experience during the Holocaust.

Thank you, Manya. Manya, you spent most of your early years in Chmielnik, where you were born, but then moved to Sosnowiec in 1938, the year before the Germans invaded Poland. Let's start today with you telling us a little bit about your community, your family, and yourself in those years before war broke out.

Well, I had a life before the Holocaust, though it was a short one. As it was mentioned, I was born in central Poland, in a small town. I lived there with my parents, two younger brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, host of relatives-- even people I was not related to were almost like relatives. Because when you live in a small town, everybody knows everybody.

I think I led a normal life. I attended in the morning a public school and in the afternoon Hebrew school. Although sometimes, I argued with my father why I have to go to Hebrew school when my friends were out playing. My excuse was I wasn't going to marry a rabbi, anyway. But Father insisted. You see, in those days, the prayer books were not translated. You had to know Hebrew in order to read the prayer books. Anyway.

And as it was mentioned, for some reason, my parents decided to move to a large city. I really don't know was it for a personal, for a business reason, or cultural reason. It so happens, the city was not far from the German border. And as we all know, on September 1, 1939, it happened to be a beautiful Friday day, Germany invaded Poland. That evening,

my parents and their friends got together to decide what to do.

Everybody was convinced that Hitler would be stopped before reaching central Poland. They believed that the mighty powers, like England, France, Russia, and the United States will intervene and stop Hitler. But as it turned out, although England and France declared war on Germany because they had a pact with Poland-- but they didn't do much. Russia, as we know, made a pact with Germany to divide Poland among themselves. And the United States at that time was not inclined to find fight somebody else's war across the ocean.

Well, anyway, as I said, everybody was convinced that the war-- that the Nazis won't reach central Poland. They decided to send the wives and children back to their small town. And of course, the men had to stay back because if you had a shop or a business, you just couldn't walk away. So the next morning, we got-- to tell you the truth, we children were quite excited about going back to that small town. We knew very little about what war meant.

As a matter of fact, I remember, back in my hometown, there was a chart on the wall. And we were collecting every week \$0.05 to buy gas masks because everybody was convinced that it will be like the First World War. So I'm trying to give you an idea how much we were educated what the war was going to be.

So the next morning, we got up, we got dressed in our best clothing, and headed for the railroad station. The place was mobbed. The train was late, everybody trying to get out. And we were worried that we might be separated from Mother. But somehow, Father managed to put us on the train. And we traveled five miles, eight kilometers, to the next town.

And the railroad tracks in front of us were bombed. So you can imagine the commotion, everybody trying to get off the train, being afraid that they might bomb the train. In the meantime, we had the packages that we took with us. But Mother decided that since it was only five miles from home, that we should walk back home. But we had to get rid of our packages. Mother was afraid to drop them in the middle of the street, of being suspicious. I remember how she knocked at somebody's door and begged them to take those things from us so we could walk home.

I assume we were wearing, probably, our new shoes. So by the time we got home, our feet were blistered. But we were happy to be back at home in our own beds with Father. And at that time, we thought that that's the worst thing that could ever happen to us. Of course, little did we know what lay ahead.

And Poland was invaded on a Friday. On Monday, the Germans already invaded our city. At first, some shots were fired. They took everybody out from that building, including people that were hiding in the bunker. And everybody was shot. Among them happened to be a brother-in-law of my uncle, a couple that got married only a few months before. The same thing was repeated on a neighboring street.

And in the afternoon, they ordered everybody to step out from the houses. They selected all the Jewish men, marched them to the city hall, put them in a windowless, airless basement, and they demanded that the rabbi should step forward or 10 people would be shot. It so happened, the rabbi was not among them. But an elderly Jew, in order to save 10 people, stepped forward. He said that he was the rabbi. They took him out, pulled out half of his beard, beat him up, and threw him back into the rest and ordered the rest of the men to recite the mourner's prayer because they were all going to die. So you can imagine the expression on their faces when they heard this.

And in the meantime, the German soldiers were taking pictures, and filming them, and having a good time. The reason I know all this is because my father happened to be among them. And in the morning, they marched them to one of the factories in the city. On the way, they ordered the barbers to go home, and get their equipment, and to be back within 10 minutes or they'd be shot. Any insignificant thing was a matter of life and death.

And they put them all in a factory. And again, they didn't give them any food or water. We brought food, but there was a tall wall around that building. And we could only throw everything over the wall. They selected some people for work. Some people, they let go. The business people, they put in jail. Some later managed to get out for big bribes. The rest were executed.

And we were waiting at the gate because a lot of people were still detained. We had no idea what happened to them. But

it was getting already late, and we had to leave. And I remember walking with Mother home. It was almost like walking at a funeral because we had no idea if we'll ever see Father again or not. As it turned out, he did come home later. It seems they detained some people to build latrines.

And from that day on, there was really no peaceful moment. As I mentioned before, any insignificant thing was a matter of life and death. All kinds of restrictions right away went out. Jews had to turn in all their valuables, even radios and telephones. A Jewish doctor couldn't even have a telephone. And restrictions went out. Jews had to move out from the main street and could only take with them whatever they could carry. Later, orders went out that Jews were not even allowed to walk on those main streets.

Orders went out that Jewish children no longer allowed to attend school. Sometimes, I speak to youngsters, especially from this area, and I remind them when there is a snowy day, they have off from school, or if there is a teacher's conference, they're happy there's no school. But believe me, young people, it's different. It's a difference when you are told that you are not allowed to go to school. Of course, there were people that were tutoring at home. But that was also a crime because you were not supposed to gather together in one place.

Ration cards were given out. Jews were not allowed to have anything else but was given on the ration cards. And on the ration cards, we got some bread, some margarine, some marmalade. Jews were not allowed to have any eggs, or milk, or meat. Sometimes, ladies would be stopped on the street and their pocketbooks inspected if they carried a few eggs. And to be shot on the spot was no big deal.

Also, the synagogue was burned down. And they would not allow the neighbors to get out and extinguish the fire. At first, we thought, maybe it's a coincidence. But nothing with the Germans was a coincidence. Everything was very well thought out. Because later, we found out that the synagogues in the neighboring towns were also burned down.

Then orders went out that Jews had to wear a white armband embroidered with the Star of David. There was also a streetcar especially for Jews that was running on limited hours. The thing was our city was composed of two parts. It was the old city and the city. So in order to get from one place to the other, it was quite a chore.

It so happened my father happened to get a job in the other part of the city. And sometimes, he was detained at work and he could not get on that streetcar that was especially for the Jews. I cannot describe to you at what fear he removed that white armband and got on the streetcar for the rest of the population. And it is indescribable to tell you the anxiety every evening, sitting at home, and waiting until everybody was safe at home.

And life went on. It also so happened that in the beginning, when the war started, a lot of young people, especially men, ran east-- some of them to get away from the Nazis, others hoped to get through to Russia and be saved. But some of them could not get through. Others maybe realized that they had left families behind and wanted to come back. See, I didn't mention that since our city was not far from the German border, it was right away annexed to Germany. And we became part of Germany.

So in order to get around, you needed special passports. You needed special papers. And those people that wanted to come back to their family didn't have those passports. One day-- it so happened whatever they did to the Jews, most of the time, it happened on Jewish holidays. So one day, two Jews were hanged in the center of the town. Whoever was on the street had to stop and watch. They were accused of making false passports.

Not long later, four men were hanged, also accused of making a false passport. And among them was a father and a son. I think that almost in every Jewish home, somebody lit a candle in their memory. And after a while, orders went out that instead of the white armband, Jews had to wear the yellow Star of David. Those had to be permanently sewn on to the garment.

And in the meantime, the deportation was going on. At first, they sent young people. Actually, yes, I forgot to mention that the Jewish committee was formed. But the Jewish committee wasn't there to help the Jews. The Jewish committee was formed to do the dirty work for the Germans. The Germans gave out the orders, and the Jewish committee had to execute them.

So in the beginning, they first sent away young people. And the Jewish committee even encouraged that people should young men should volunteer because the promise was that it's only for six weeks. And in the meantime, they could save maybe the rest of the population. But everything with the Germans was-- of course, was not true. Our city was composed of-- do I give you a chance to--

Oh, no, no. Please go. You're ahead of me on everything I would ask. So please go.

Oh, well, thank you. I forgot where I was. The-- what was I going to--

I think before long, you eventually would end up being forced into a ghetto.

Yeah, well, that's-- no, the thing is with-- our city was composed of 130,000 inhabitants. Among those were 28,000 Jews. But since the city was the largest city in the area, they also brought in the Jews from the neighboring towns because it was easier to take care of them. So by the end of 1940, about half of the Jewish population was already deported. Jews started to think of ways to be useful to the Germans and still remain at home.

They suggest that maybe if we make uniforms for the military, boots. At first, they rejected it. They didn't want to hear a proposition from the Jews. But then they realized that they could probably get big bribes. And if they will be needed, they maybe won't be sent to the front.

So in March of 1941, the first shop opened. I happened to get employment at that shop. But my parents had to give a sewing machine for me to be accepted. To tell you the truth, I wasn't much of a seamstress. But I was lucky. I was sitting between two ladies that were professional seamstresses.

And like everything else with the Germans, there had to be a quota. There had to be a quota how many people to send away. If they didn't have the quota, they would take out the people from the hospital or the children from the orphanage to make up that number. Well, we too had to make a certain number. Well, I guess those two ladies beside me felt sorry for me. And for them to make that number, that quota was not a big deal. So they helped me out. I hate to admit, I became proficient enough I could do it myself. Normally, I probably would have been proud that I could accomplish this. But that work was done with sweat and tears.

The thing was the payment in those shops was minimal. You really could not survive on it. The only thing-- because often, girls would be-- girls were fainting at work from lack of nourishment. The only thing was we got that employment card. The Germans called it a Sonderkarte. We called it a way to life. Because right in the beginning, if they caught you on the street for deportation and you could provide that employment card, they would let you go. As a matter of fact, we had the manager of our shop, an elderly gentleman, that constantly reminded us how lucky we are and how thankful we should be that we won't be deported to Germany.

Well, it lasted to 1943. At that time, as our shift was about to leave, and the other shift was waiting to take over, the SS surrounded the building. And we were all taken for deportation. My parents were still at home there with my two younger brothers. They came to the place where they were keeping us. They brought me a suitcase with my personal belongings.

But we could not really communicate because we were on the second floor. And there was such a big commotion, everybody talking. But as I so vividly remember my parents standing there, and in front of me, I think they aged maybe 20 years. And I assume that each one of us probably had the same thought, will we ever see each other again? And as it turned out, that was the last time I saw my parents and my two brothers.

And from there, we were taken to a temporary camp in Germany, where the buyers came to select us. We were taken to a factory, which actually was a brand new factory. And it was actually owned by private Germans. We were on a lease from the SS. That factory was producing soot carbon. And the Germans were in desperate need of that product because from that, they were making synthetic rubber, and from the rubber, the tires on which the Wehrmacht or the military was running.

So for a while, we still had our things from home. It was a brand new camp and clean. And well, we were thinking, maybe, there'd be a chance to survive. But again, the food-- we couldn't-- it was hard to survive.

When you got-- most of the time, you didn't have to make any decisions in camp. But still, when you got that portion of bread, you had to decide, should I eat it now or maybe save it for later? And the same thing was in the evening, when you got that bowl of watery soup. Should I try to get ahead in line and make sure that I get that bowl of soup or maybe wait for later and be lucky enough to find maybe a piece of potato or turnip? Sometimes, your luck ran out.

And of course, in camp, every morning at dawn, you were awakened regardless if there's summer or winter. And for some reason, they could never get the numbers right. They were counting us and recounting us. And people-- girls were fainting from exhaustion. They had to be supported.

And we went-- we worked in that shop on three separate shifts. You can imagine how the girls looked, their appearance, working in a shop that produced soot. But later, I found out, it wasn't just an outer appearance. After the war, I found out how it affected also our lungs working in that shop. And we worked in the shop.

Eventually, we were taken over by the SS. They installed barbed wire around the camp. We were given the striped dresses. We had to go through showers and inspection section. And naked, we had to walk in front of a bunch of SS men to have our arms tattooed. My number was 79357.

To this day, I cannot forget that embarrassment. Don't forget that it isn't like now, younger sophisticated teenagers. In those years, I don't think I even got undressed in front of my own mother to take a bath. That's how bashful I was. And from that day on, we were not called by our names, but by our numbers. But believe me, they took away much more than our numbers-- than our names. Well, life went on in camp like this till January 1945.

Manya, before you continue on with the events after January 1945, you've told us that you were working in a factory that manufactured soot for the military. Tell us what that involved for you. That was extremely hard labor. Tell us what that meant.

Well, I happened to get a job. We were standing. And one of the supervisors from the factory came and selected us for different parts. I happened to work in the first department, which wasn't so much the soot, but that we had to fill the tanks with oil. And the oil was burning. And the fumes for the oil, we were constantly inhaling.

Because from those fumes, I would have to-- if some of you are engineers, I have to explain to you how that thing works. You see, the fumes from the oils went into the machines. The machines had burners with valves turning. And the soot was settling on those valves. And there were knives that scraping off that soot. And that went on the ground to the packing station. I was in the first. I wasn't so much involved with the soot, but with that-- all the smell from the burning oil.

And then we also had whatever was left over from the burning oil, we had to empty it every hour or so and keep records. And then were girls working on another part of the factory, which was having those machines with the burners constantly. The heat over there was unbearable. And then that went to the packing station. So you can imagine the soot coming in with-- in tubes into bags to have to pack. I don't think those people ever got faces or the clean-- the skin clean.

Manya, if I remember right, you told me that you essentially would get a Sunday off every three weeks.

Yeah. Every-- we worked around the clock. So every third week, we got one Sunday off. But we had to work a double shift in order to get that Sunday off.

And you said-- you told me how you spent your, quote, "free time" on that one Sunday was essentially trying to clean yourselves.

Clean, brush you, wash you underwear. Sometimes, it was still damp in the morning. You still had to put it on. You had no choice.

And Manya, if I also remember correctly, at some point-- and you were a very shy young person-- you were selected to be in charge of your shift. And that was a very frightening experience for you. Will you say a little bit about that?

Well, now, when I start speaking, I don't even let Mr. Benson ask me a question. I don't stop. But you might not believe it. I used to be a very shy person. And I was a young girl. I was hiding between the tall person not to be noticed. But I don't know, for some reason, the director from the factory elected me to be in charge of the eight girls. And of course, I had to go in every time with the records what we kept and to explain to the boss-- to the German boss what it was. Sometimes, there was a discrepancy I had to explain.

And later on, when we were taken over by the SS and we had the German kapos, the German overseers, once, she went by and she saw me in the office explaining to the boss, to the German boss that record what we kept. And I probably was bending over to show him on the things. Well, I was supposed to stand at attention when I spoke to him. So when I came back to camp, I got a good lesson from her for because I bent over it to show the boss what it is. That's how life was.

And Manya, you started to tell us that, of course, all of this would change even more dramatically, if that was possible, in April-- I mean, in January of 1945.

Yes. It was in January 1945, I happened to work on the night shift. I came up in the morning. And there was a big commotion in camps. We are being evacuated. Apparently, the Soviet Army was coming close. And they decided to evacuate us to central Germany. We didn't know where to or what to. Each one of us was given a blanket and a portion of bread.

The thing was I had make a very serious decision. My best friend was on the infirmary. And I had to decide, should I leave her there or take her with us? The thing was at first, I thought, maybe I should leave her. And she would be rescued by the Soviets. But there was also a rumor in camp that they were going to burn down the camp. So I convinced another girl. She lived in New York now. And between the two of us, we took her out from the infirmary. And we marched to the railroad station.

There was no train. The tracks were bombed. If you go upstairs, the ones of you that were not yet to the permanent exhibition, you will see a car, a railroad car, where they transport people either to the camps or to the gas chambers. Well, we were not put in cars like this. We were put in open cars, the type that you transfer coal. And that was in the middle of January. And all we had was a blanket. I had to take my friend in the corner of the car and with my arms was holding onto that metal railing and with my back pushing away the crowd so she wouldn't be squashed.

This was your friend Lola, right?

That's my friend Lola. And we traveled like this back and forth. Wherever we went, the railroad tracks were bombed. I assumed they used the better tracks, probably, to transport the military. So later, I found out, our destination, if you saw on the map, was northwest, not far from Berlin. But we wound up in Czechoslovakia. And if you know geography, Czechoslovakia is to the south.

The Czech people were very nice. They would come to the station, bring water and bread. But the guards would not let them give it to us. They were even shooting at them. Sometimes, the Czech people would go where there was an overpass and would throw down some bread to us. And we were traveling like this back and forth, wherever we went, back and forth, I think about 10 days. The snow that fell on our blanket served to quench our thirst.

And it so happened in the car next to us was the nurse from our camp. At one of the stations, she climbed up on the railing with a tin cup and begged one of the guards for some water because one of the girls fainted. And instead, he pulled out his gun and shot her. And she fell down between the two trains. And as I said, those trains kept going back and forth. We could see her laying there, not knowing if she was still alive or dead.

And at the end, we wound up in Ravensbrück. We came to Ravensbrück in the middle of the night. They could only put some of us in the barracks because the rest, they would have to put on the lights. So they put us in the showers. And knowing what showers meant, you can imagine how we felt. I remember sitting with my friend, and holding on to each other, like saying goodbye. That's it. That's the end.

But luckily, we survived the night. At dawn, we saw the light coming through the shades. And we realized that we survived the night. And the morning, they put us in the barracks. I mention many times when I speak, Ravensbrück was like hell. There were so many different nationalities, maybe 20 different nationalities. It was so overcrowded. The field-- the sanitary conditions were indescribable.

And again, every morning, we had to get up at dawn to stand and be counted. I remember, in the center was like a fountain with dripping water. All you could do when you get up, to run to the latrine and put on your hand to catch a few drops of water to apply to your face to wake up. And in the meantime, you were stepping on corpses, people that expired during the night. And the thing in Ravensbrück was-- there was really indescribable.

You see, all along, camp was good to have a friend. Because as though we were young and we wanted to survive, we-- but still, there were times that we just couldn't take it anymore. We just wanted it to end-- we didn't care how, just to end. But when you had a friend, whenever you gave up, your friends would hold you up and say, you have to survive. We have to survive. And I remember standing in line in Ravensbrück.

You see, Ravensbrück has a crematorium. They were wheeling by carts with corpses. Only the skin was holding the bones together. And once in a while, one of the corpses would fall off or another one. They would just pick it up like a piece of wood and throw it on top of the pile. And I remember standing in that line at that time and saying to myself, no, I'm not going to wind up like this.

Well, luckily, we were not long in Ravensbrück, only a few months. From Ravensbrück, we were sent to a smaller camp, which was a subcamp of Ravensbrück. Over there, we fixed the runways on the airport. This was a small airport. And we fixed the runways. Whenever a house was bombed, we cleaned the bricks, whichever were more useful or so. By that time, we could already sense that there is a change because the constant alarms.

And whoever was watching us were either elderly Germans or very young German-- young German boys. Some of them hardly needed a shave. But they were all-- they were already invalids of the war. And every time we heard the planes go by, of course, they-- the Germans would hide under their helmets and so. And we were just laying with our eyes open, and hoping, and waiting for something to happen. And we were so disappointed every time those planes went by and nothing happened. Well, again--

Manya, you told me that one of-- your only satisfaction was to watch the Germans scramble to hide during the air raids. And that's why you'd be disappointed when they would drop.

Yeah, but still, we were disappointed that nothing happened.

Nothing happened.

So then again, in that Rechling, the sanitary conditions were, again, indescribable. I think we spent every free moment trying to eradicate the lice, which we were unsuccessful. And one day, while we were standing in the morning in line to be counted, one of the kapos, which is a German overseer, and one of the military men walked up to our group-- it was a very small camp-- and pointed a finger at about a dozen or so girls to step forward. I happened to be among them. I took a quick glance around. Why me? How do I differ from the others?

See, in camp, a selection never meant a better lot. So they marched us later to the gate. Outside was standing a white covered truck. And there were some kapos and military men and ordered us to step onto their truck, although the tailgate was down. But we could not manage it. We were so weak. And all of a sudden, a crate appeared for us to step on that crate and to get into the truck. We thought we hallucinating. We never saw such a gesture from the kapos. But later, we

found out why.

Then when we went on the truck, each one was given a care package. I think those were donated by the Canadian government. It was food. We didn't even know what it was. We tore this open. There was powdered milk, and cocoa, and sardines, and crackers. We ate it all at once. It was food. We didn't even care if that's our last meal. Of course, some of the girls got sick, not being used to food like this.

And we kept going in the truck, resigned. We-- I don't think we even talked to each other. I guess each one of us was preoccupied, thinking what will the future be. Will there be a future? And we landed in Copenhagen. You see, that white bus was from the Swedish Red Cross. And the reason that kapos were so nice to us to provide a crate for us to step on it, they wanted to show the personnel from the Swedish Red Cross how humanely they treated us.

See, Denmark was still under occupation. But the Danish people were very nice. They provided a place to rest for us and some food. And from there, we were taken to Malmo to Sweden. You see, that fact about being rescued by the Swedish Red Cross is a very little-known fact. It took place at the end of April-- to be exact, April 28, 1945, when Germany was still at war.

At that time, the chairman from the Swedish Red Cross was in Germany, negotiating with Himmler, who was the head of the SS, the release of the Norwegian and Danish POWs because Denmark and Norway were under occupation. And since it was the end of the war, and Himmler realized that Germany had lost the war, Bernadotte insisted that he should release some prisoners from Ravensbrück. As it turned out, after the war, I found out, Bernadotte saved about 20,000 prisoners, and among them, about 5,000 or 6,000 Jews.

That expedition was actually called the White Buses because most of the people that were from Ravensbrück camp were going by buses. Since we were a small camp, we were on that white truck. And that's why when I speak to people, a lot of people are surprised because you don't know. And it's not a well-known fact. Well, from there, we came to Sweden to Malmo. There was a big reception, a lot of dignitaries, clergymen, even the general public waiting for us.

But we just could not comprehend that we are free. We-- I sometimes I tell about it. I felt that I'm not involved in it, like I'm standing aside and watching all this. Or sometimes, I say, it seems like I was looking at it like through a sheer curtain. We could not comprehend that we are really free.

And of course, they took right away the sick people to the hospital. But we were very suspicious when they took us for disinfecting and all kinds of things. We wouldn't go step into the shower. One of the personnel from the Red Cross had to go into the shower to show us that it's water really coming out. So you can imagine how we felt. Later, they put us up in a school. Each one of us got a mattress with there. It felt luxurious.

Of course, we went through disinfecting. We got clean clothing that was donated by the Swedish government-- by the people, not by the government. And the garments felt like they were made of pure silk after getting rid of those lice-infected garments. But at night, if you woke up, there was always somebody at the window, still looking out to make sure that we are not in camp any longer.

The thing was a few days later-- that was in the middle of the night-- the students came running up the stairs, yelling, the war's over. The war's over. We didn't have any pajamas or nightgowns. We ran out in our underwear. We were hugging, and kissing, and jumping up the walls over. And of course, that was everybody's hope, since we survived, that somebody from the family survived too. Well, you already know that unfortunately, the war was over, and I was left all alone.

Manya, in the little time we have left-- and we may have a time for just a couple of questions from our audience-- but tell us-- it took several years before you were able to come to the United States. Tell us what it took for you to get over here.

Well, being in Sweden, I was not-- you see, people that remained in Germany in this place camps, they, I think, had priority to come. Being in Sweden, I had to wait for the Polish quota. And since at that time was such a demand from

Polish people to come to the United States, it took me five and a half years to come to the United States.

Well, some of you may wonder why we do this. Because after all, every time we talk about those atrocities is like to reliving the horrors again. But we are the only ones that can bear witness. And unfortunately, our number is diminishing. We are doing it in the memory of the millions that were murdered by the Nazis. We have an obligation to them to teach you what hate and discrimination can do. We are doing it for you because with all the atrocities going on right now, we have to take a lesson from the past and try to do something. Speak up.

The thing is, besides, Hitler had his collaborators, but they were also the bystanders. So don't be a indifferent bystander. Speak up. Fortunately, we live in a country where we do have a voice. It's the best country in the world, even with all its shortcomings. So do speak up when you see injustice done.

Manya, before we wrap up, I'd like to ask the audience if you have a couple of questions. We have time for a few questions to ask Manya before we formally close the program. Yes, ma'am, right here in the front. And remember, I'll repeat the question before Monica answers it.

I know that you have family that did not survive. But I was wondering if any-- if you have any friends from either before the war or from your concentration camp experiences that survived?

The question is, Manya, whether-- she lost almost her entire family-- whether or not she had friends from either before the war or during the Holocaust that survived.

Well, I have friends from the camp. You see, one thing was when we were in the first camp, one good thing-- well, it's good if it was good-- that we were all taken from that shop from the same city. And it was very important in camp to be with people that you knew because sometimes, you went-- you have to watch if you put something under your head, you got up in the morning, and it was gone. And on the other hand, you can't even blame people. Everybody was trying to survive. So I do have some-- first of all, I have that lady that helped-- that woman in New York I mentioned that helped me with my friend. And by the way, my friend did survive.

The one that you protected?

The one that was so sick, she lives in Israel. I have visited her about six times. She was here once. And we often, after so many years, still talk, still reminiscing about the time in camp. I'm sorry, did I answer your question?

Yeah, totally.

Yeah. Sometimes I go off. Yeah.

We have time for another. Do we have another? Yes, sir, back there.

Have you been back to your home?

The question is have you been back to your home?

I've been back to Poland in '88-- no, in 1989 with my daughter. She wanted to go sees. That happened to be-- Poland was still on the-- occupied by Russia. That was the time when the first President Bush was in Poland, and when Russia was leaving Poland, and Poland really became independent.

I'd like to thank all of you for being here, and of course, to thank Manya for offering us, in a very short period, what is only a glimpse, but a very powerful glimpse of what she went through during the Holocaust and as a survivor. I'd like to remind all of you that we will have a First Person program each Wednesday until August 29, with the exception of August 1.

Next Wednesday, June 27, we'll present another First Person, when our first person will be Mrs. Louise Lawrence-

Israels. Ms. Lawrence-Israels, who's from Poland, survived the Holocaust and the war because of her family's decision to go into hiding in Amsterdam. So we hope that you will have the opportunity to come back on another Wednesday or make plans to visit us next year when you're here.

It's our tradition at First Person that our first person has the last word. If you would like to say anything further otherwise, Manya will be available over here by the podium after we finish. For any of you who want to ask her a question, come up and say hi to her or whatever you'd like to do. So Manya, if you have any other thoughts to end with, please.

Our hope is that after you go through the permanent exhibit, you listen to a survivor, that you'll be more tolerant of others. Don't judge people by the color of their skin, their ethnic background, or their religious beliefs. And do make some commitment to prevent such atrocities to happen again, to prevent with all the atrocities still going on right now in Darfur, so many people being killed. So try to make some commitment to prevent such atrocities to happen and another Holocaust to happen. Thank you.