UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON THEODORA (DORA) KLAYMAN
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Remote CART Captioning

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>> Bill Benson: Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 17th year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Dora Klayman, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2016 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. I'm pleased to let you know that Mr. Louis Smith is here with us in the audience today.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: *First Person* is a series of 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 twice-weekly through mid-August. The museum's website, provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests. The address is www.ushmm.org. I believe that address is also in the program that you received today.

Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Dora Klayman's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave here today.

Dora 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 Dora questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Dora is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

Dora Klayman was born Teodora Basch on January 31, 1938, in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Here we see Dora sitting on a park bench with her younger brother, Zdravko.

On this map of Yugoslavia in 1933, the arrow points to Zagreb.

In this photo we see Dora on an outing to the zoo with her parents, Salamon and Silva. Salamon ran a brush-making factory and Silva was a teacher.

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

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

Later in the war Aunt Giza was denounced and sent to Auschwitz where she perished. Dora remained in Yugoslavia until 1958 when she emigrated to the United States.

We close with this portrait of Aunt Giza, Dora and Zdravko that was taken to be sent so Ljudevit in the concentration camp where he had been sent.

In 1957, as Dora was on her way to Switzerland, she met Daniel Klayman, who was returning to New York from a year of post-doctoral study as a Fulbright scholar in India. They were married in Switzerland a year later, and together they arrived in the United States in the fall of 1958. By the following year Dan and Dora came to Washington, DC, and Dan embarked on a career as a researcher in medicinal chemistry at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research; his work culminated in his expertise in drug development against malaria.

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

Dan passed away in 1992. Both of their children live in the Washington area. Wanda is Deputy Executive Director of an international association that deals with issues of transportation. Elliot is a freelance videographer and owns a video and film production company. He is married to Iona and they have three children, ages 21, 19 and 12.

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

Other projects for Dora have included the translation of a booklet that accompanied a 1942 anti-Semitic exhibit in Croatia, and the translation of the captions on a large archive of photographs that had been gathered during the post-World War II trials in Yugoslavia. To add to her language skills Dora continues to learn Hebrew.

Dora enjoys traveling. She has been to Israel several times where she was happy to reunite with her cousins and their families. Some of her travels are connected to learning more about the events and the aftermath of the Holocaust. She has attended several conferences of the International Organization of Child Survivors, including in Poland in 2011, when she visited Auschwitz for the first time, and in Berlin in 2014, where she was impressed by the effort made by that country to teach about and remember the Holocaust. In 2013 she traveled to her former home in Croatia. During that trip she accompanied the director of the Jasenovac archive to the site of the concentration camp to view their exhibit.

Dora just returned in late June from another trip to Croatia, to attend her high school's 60th reunion. Also, she visited the small town of Ludbreg where she spent the war years and much of her youth.

Besides First Person, Dora is speaking publicly more. She recently spoke to a large group in Arkansas, including a group of junior high school students who hope to collect six million pennies to represent each of the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Dora Klayman.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Dora, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our First Person today. We have a short period and you have so much to share with us so we'll just go right to it, if you don't mind.

>> Dora Klayman: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: Dora, you were just 3 years old when World War II came directly to Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941 when it was attacked by Germany. Before we turn to the horrors of the war and the Holocaust, tell us, first, about your parents and their lives and their community in the pre-war years, a little bit about them.
>> Dora Klayman: Ok. Well, the two families, my mother's family and my father's family, did not come from the same place. My father's family was living in Zagreb. The family had come there not a very, very long time ago. I am not sure exactly when but pretty much as my father was probably in his teens. There were six children in the family. By the time war came the father had already passed away but the mother, their mother, was living in Zagreb. She was eventually actually interred in the Zagreb cemetery and I just managed to visit her grave. She died of natural causes.
>> Bill Benson: I think, if I can just say, I think you told me that that's the only gravesite you have for any member of your family.
>> Dora Klayman: Yes. That generation. That generation, right.

So my father was, as you mentioned, running a small factory. He owned and operated it. But also in his extra time he was also very involved in being a cantor. They were a very observant Jewish family.

My mother's family, on the other hand, lived in a small town of Ludbreg, which is very far north, very close to the Hungarian border. It was a small community that had not a very large number of Jews. I think about 70 or 100 or something like that. The community had existed for some time but it didn't have a rabbi and so they found my grandfather -- I don't remember by what means, certainly not the internet in those days -- in Slovakia. And he and his wife and two children came to live in Ludbreg. They subsequently had two more children, two daughters, two more daughters, Blanka and finally my mother, Silva. And my mother, therefore, was 15 years younger than the older -- her older sibling, Giza, who played a role later on in my life.
>> Bill Benson: And because Aunt Giza and her husband, Uncle Ljudevit, played such an important role in your life, tell us a little bit about them.
>> Dora Klayman: They were both working for the Ludbreg bank. He was a director of one part of it and she was an employee. And, of course, they were of different religions because Ljudevit, like the rest of that town, for the most part, were all Catholic, Roman Catholic. The two of them fell in love. He was a very important member of that community. He had not only been working for the bank but also he was involved in just about everything. He was an honorary chairperson of the fire brigade. He ran a choir and a chamber music group. He played the violin. He was very involved in that community.

His was an unusual family in that most of his siblings -- and there were 12 siblings -- had all, except for one, preceded him in death. So by the time war came there was only one sister that was still alive. Everybody else had passed away.

Before the war, while his mother was alive, even though he and my aunt were in love they never married. They did marry but they did not marry for a long period of time. There was no such thing as a civil marriage in Yugoslavia at that time.
>> Bill Benson: So only in the eyes of the church?
>> Dora Klayman: Only in the eyes of the church or if he had converted to Judaism which was fairly unlikely in those days at that time. Then they could have been married by the rabbi but not -- they couldn't go to the City Hall and get married. So eventually, however, in 1939, I think, things were already on the horizon and they knew what was happening in Germany and so on, they went to Hungary and they got married in a civil ceremony there.
>> Bill Benson: It was allowed in Hungary.
>> Dora Klayman: It was allowed in Hungary. But one of the things I need to mention is that even though they were not married previously -- I don't know exactly what kept them from marrying for so long. And, of course, I asked him many times and he would always deny that the reason was religion. He would always say: Well, she was quite happy living with her family and I was happy living with my mother and there was no need to get married.

It's, of course, a way of looking at it. But I know that there was no great animosity in the families. Because if I look at the pictures, the photos, even the photo of one of my mother's sisters' weddings, he's always there. He had seemed to have been accepted as a member of the family even though they were not married for a long period of time.
>> Bill Benson: Dora, when Germany launched its attack on Yugoslavia on August 6, 1941, which, of course, was roughly 18 months after the war had begun elsewhere in Europe, you were away from Zagreb on a visit with relatives in Ludbreg. Tell us what you can, what you've been able to learn, about the circumstance that caused you to be away from your family at that time and what happened once the Germans came into Yugoslavia.
>> Dora Klayman: Well, my brother was born in 1941, January 1941. So that was very recent from the time that the war had started in Yugoslavia, which was April 6. So I don't know whether it was because my mother had a baby to deal with or it was just an opportunity but there were neighbors of my grandparents who had come to visit us in Zagreb and my parents decided to send me to visit my grandparents in Ludbreg. So I have memories of being on the train. That was very exciting, even though I was 3. But that basically is the last time I saw my parents. Because then as war began, I was at my grandparents' house. That was how I ended up not being with my parents at a time and I was not with them when they were arrested. And they were arrested very soon after the outbreak of the facilities and taken to a holding place which was in Zagreb where everybody was basically gathered before they were sent off to the concentration camp.

My brother, however, who was with them --
>> Bill Benson: Before we go to that, let me ask you a couple of other things if that's ok.
>> Dora Klayman: Mm-hmm.
>> Bill Benson: With war beginning in Europe, September 1939, and Germany attacked eventually in April 1941, Yugoslavia, do you know if your parents made any efforts to try to leave Croatia and go elsewhere during any of that time?
>> Dora Klayman: I don't have any notion that they did. It was, I'm sure, very difficult to leave. There were efforts by some people, I know, who left for an area held by the Italians, the southern part of Yugoslavia. When these divisions came about, Germany basically ceded one part of it to the Italians. The Italians were apparently known to have treated Jews better than either the local Ustasa, who ran so-called independent state of Croatia, which was a public element. And so many people did go to Romasia. I have a few friends who did do that, whose family did that. I was told that one of my aunts, my Aunt Blanka and her husband and children did make it. But then the head of the government decreed that anybody that returned would not be harmed and so they --
>> Bill Benson: Went back home?
>> Dora Klayman: They went back home.

My parents, I have no idea whether they ever made an attempt or not but they certainly did not succeed.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about the Ustasa, that you just mentioned. Who were they and why were the Nazis not running your part of Yugoslavia?
>> Dora Klayman: They were actually a nationalist group that had gathered in Italy before the war. The history of Yugoslavia is so complicated. There were so many changes. After World War I it became Yugoslavia. It was sort of an almost artificially created country because there were so many parts to it. The main parts were, of course, Serbia and Croatia. And there were nationalists within Croatia who wanted a pure Croatia, an independent Croatia. So they used the opportunity of the war to align themselves with Germany, with Nazis in exchange for running the country the way Germany wanted them to, they were able to secure the right to run it by themselves.
>> Bill Benson: So they had their pure country but it was a puppet state.
>> Dora Klayman: It was a puppet state of the Nazis. And they were basically running it the way the Nazis wanted. And that included everything that the Nazis had already perpetrated since 1938. Or earlier, even. Certainly all the rules and laws that govern within Germany and the countries which they have conquered since --

>> Bill Benson: Including the way they treated Jews, especially.
>> Dora Klayman: All the Jewish, all the questions of how -- what was banned to the Jews, anything that involved any access to public life; that included whether you sit on a bench in the park, whether you participate in an orchestra, whether you go to school, whether you --
>> Bill Benson: Work?
>> Dora Klayman: Work, whether you have access to food and shelter, anything, was banned. So the same laws -- and, of course to wear a badge that identifies you. So all of that was immediately perpetrated in Croatia. And Jews were immediately issued badges. Some of the badges are different in different countries. This one was a yellow silky-looking piece of cloth on which there is a Star of David. There is a picture I have. It is on the website of this museum so people can see it. My father, my mother, my aunt, another aunt, and one of my cousins are all wearing these. So, you know, lists of people. Everybody had to report. They would start taking property away. And they eventually sent people to camp.
>> Bill Benson: And of course, as you began to tell us a few minutes ago, your parents were arrested. They had your little brother with them at the time and they were sent to a concentration camp.
>> Dora Klayman: Right. I will get to my brother but I do want to say that one of the things that these Ustasa had in mind, they persecuted Jews as part of the whole thing that the Nazis perpetrated; however, they had another goal in addition to the goal that the Nazis had. The Nazis didn't care one way or another about a pure Croatia. And pure, to the Ustasa, meant not just pure of Jews but also Roma, which the Nazis perpetrated as well, but also pure of Serbs.

Now, the Serbs are part -- there are members of what is now Serbia but there were many Serbs within Croatia. There was a mixing of the society. And they had basically come through the years to live in certain parts that under the Austra-Hungarian empire. So their idea was to get rid of the Serbs. So the persecution was not just of the Jews but majorly of Serbs.
>> Bill Benson: So total ethnic cleansing.
>> Dora Klayman: Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us what happened to your parents and about your brother as well.
>> Dora Klayman: So my parents were taken to this -- basically to the jail, gathering place in Zagreb. They had my little brother with them who was at that time I think about 9 months old by the time they were taken. I don't know why I remember that number. Fortunately our housekeeper went there. Things were so chaotic. She asked if she could have this baby and they just said sure.
>> Bill Benson: Take the baby.
>> Dora Klayman: Take the baby. So my parents handed the baby to her. And then she called my uncle and my aunt in Ludbreg and they went and got him. I have a pretty good memory of his arrival. I remember him being at my grandparents and lying on the bed and crying and crying and crying. I have that memory of this crying baby and wondering what now.
>> Bill Benson: And you were already there.
>> Dora Klayman: I was already there.
>> Bill Benson: Did you know if your Aunt Giza or uncle had any idea what happened to your parents at that point?
>> Dora Klayman: Oh, I'm sure that everybody at that point had an idea what was going on. A lot of people already had an idea. A lot of people started fleeing to the mountains, not too high but to start fighting, many young people.
>> Bill Benson: To become partisans?
>> Dora Klayman: It was the beginning of the partisan movement, almost immediately. So this was the other group. There was this fascist group that had pulled itself together from Italy and come to run the place. At the same time, basically the Communist Party was the primary mover of some parts of the partisans and then other people just spontaneously went and joined because they didn't want to live under this system.
>> Bill Benson: So here's you and your brother now are with your aunt and uncle. In 1942 your Uncle Ljudevit was arrested and sentenced to the Jasenovac concentration camp and you and your brother

remained with your Aunt Giza. Tell us about your uncle's imprisonment at Jasenovac and then what happened.
>> Dora Klayman: By the time he was arrested, everybody else was already gone. So the first arrest was everybody else in the family except for him and his wife. There were some laws by which he could shield her because it was a mixed marriage. But by that time everybody else in the family, my grandparents, my other aunt, everybody, had already been arrested. I can go back to that if you want me to.
>> Bill Benson: Please do. Please do.
>> Dora Klayman: I have a memory of their being arrested and escorted.
>> Bill Benson: You remember seeing that?
>> Dora Klayman: I remember seeing that. This was, of course, a sort of -- it was nighttime. I have memory of that. There was everybody carrying packages. I remember people carrying a pillow, a small satchel or something, and everybody saying goodbye to me and my brother. I had no idea why lots of people -- why they were crying and what was going on but eventually they were gone and I was left behind. I was left behind with my brother and at Ludva and Giza's house. And the question always comes up how is it they didn't take me.
>> Bill Benson: Right.
>> Dora Klayman: I think, while I don't know for sure, my thought is -- you know, they had -- the Ustasa were not as organized, by far, as the Germans. However, they did follow certain things. For example, they had everybody registering.

You say, Well, why would you go register? But, you know, the system was such that the police always knew who was living where. The Jewish community had, of course, a list of people. My brother and I had come from another town. So I have a sense that we were not on the infamous lists. So when these Ustasa who were leading the raid, conducting the raid, they would come and, you know, take the list and take this, this, this, this and we were not on the list so off they went and we were staying behind.

That's the only thing I can think of. Because everything had been listed way ahead of time. People had to register all of their worldly goods. They had to register every little bit, you know, how many necklaces you had. You had a little gold necklace or you had two pairs of shoes or a coat --
>> Bill Benson: Everything.
>> Dora Klayman: Everything was registered. And this kind of registration is actually on pieces -- in forms, their forms. And some of those forms are here.
>> Bill Benson: Right. Right.
>> Dora Klayman: So by the time everybody left and we were left by ourselves, just Giza, Ludva and I and my brother, life was already very different. At that point, as you asked me, Ludva got arrested. And why? Because by that point the partisan force had already become a force and they were fighting the Nazis, fighting the Ustasa. The local populous, which was fortunately pro partisan and anti-Ustasa, which is why I suppose also we survived, because no one gave us up --
>> Bill Benson: No one denounced you.
>> Dora Klayman: No. The entire town knew who we were. My grandfather was a rabbi in that town for 40 years. Everybody knew who we were.
>> Bill Benson: There were no secrets.
>> Dora Klayman: But these people came from outside who led the raids and we were left behind. So at that point, however, many people who were sort of leaders in this city, in the town -- I shouldn't call it city at any point, a small town -- a number of people were accused by the Ustasa of helping the partisans, which, of course, they did but they were then arrested -- they didn't admit to it but they were arrested as supporters of the partisans. Therefore they were sort of political prisoners. And political prisoners were treated differently from Jews or Serbs or Roma in that they actually had some kind of a trial and they were given a sentence. So Ludva was given a sentence. He was, from what I understand, in this awful camp of Jasenovac for almost a year.
>> Bill Benson: So he had a defined sentence.

>> Dora Klayman: He had a defined sentence.
>> Bill Benson: And that's the same camp your parents were sent to?
>> Dora Klayman: The same camp. Mother was in an auxiliary camp. She already passed away by that time I think. But my father was actually in the camp of Jasenovac and Uncle Ludva actually saw him there. The situation in Jasenovac was incredibly difficult.
>> Bill Benson: You described it as an especially brutal --
>> Dora Klayman: It was a brutal, brutal camp. There are some attempts at revisions sometimes to say it was a work camp. Well, it was a work camp to the death. It was really a killing camp. People were killed in most brutal ways and treated in the most brutal ways. It was not organized ala people in Auschwitz where you had people separated and then they had ovens and so on. People were just being killed brutally in any which way, slashed with knives, hit with farm implements.

I'm told by somebody who witnessed it that my grandfather never even made it inside the camp because he was already elderly and had suffered a small stroke and one of the officials just took a hoe or something like that, something from a farm, farm implement, and hit him on the head and that was that. People were hanging all over the place, just all the trees were full, scaffolding. Then people were thrown into the river. The camp is right near Sava River, the biggest river in Croatia. There are pictures and pictures of bodies floating on the river. It was just an awful place.
>> Bill Benson: And your uncle saw your father.
>> Dora Klayman: My uncle saw my father who was working very hard. He was, of course, a much younger man.
>> Bill Benson: Right.
>> Dora Klayman: He remembered that my aunt was 15 years older than my mother and he was 10 years older than she. He was born in 1885. So he was not a young man. He had come from this family where everybody had died. And most of them of some ailment, some lung ailment. And he was not so well so that he would never have survived like my father if not for one thing and that is that different from my father who was being made to carry bricks an work very hard -- and work very hard. Uncle Ludva had, as I mentioned, been a banker. They needed somebody in an office. They put him in the office to run their books.
>> Bill Benson: In the camp?
>> Dora Klayman: In the camp. And that is what saved his life because he didn't have to work outside in all kinds of weather. So this is what helped him to survive.

Also, the other thing is that the Ustasa decided they wanted to have some entertainment and they knew -- they found out that he had been leading a choir and put on shows as an avocation and could play the violin. So they had him organize a choir and an orchestra. So that gave them also -- people that he would call to be in this choir, it would give them a few hours of respite from really, really hard work.

That's another thing. There was almost no food. They were just -- there are accounts here in the museum that I translated where people were eating grass if there was grass. That is when they went out on some kind of, you know --
>> Bill Benson: Work detail.
>> Dora Klayman: Work detail or something. It was just really, really bad.

The picture that is there of my brother and me with my aunt, we sent that -- we were actually allowed to send him packages. So we sent this picture. And one of the things that we used to send as packages was a mixture of fat and then you put flour in it and you made a very, very thick paste of that.
>> Bill Benson: Of flour and fat?
>> Dora Klayman: Flour and fat. So it would be almost like a brick made of flour and fat. We were allowed to send that. If he got it, which was not always, he would take a little bit of that and you put it in this water, which they gave you which was called soup, to make it a little more nutritious.
>> Bill Benson: To give some calories.
>> Dora Klayman: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: While your uncle is going through all you just described, in early 1943 your Aunt Giza, with whom you and your brother were living, was denounced and she was deported to Auschwitz. What happened to Giza? What do you remember of that? And then, of course, what happened to you and your brother at that point?
>> Dora Klayman: I remember when they came to get her. I don't remember seeing any people. I just knew that there was some emergency happening. I remember her going -- we had a building next door to ours. It was a building that two sisters and their husbands started building together. It was supposed to have – it had a store on the bottom and a little apartment in the back and unfinished apartment upstairs. They had not been finished at that point. She tried to get up there and hide but they found her. And on the way back she told the family that was living in the small apartment in the back, the Runjaks family, she asked them to take care of us. They took my brother and me in. We started now pretending that we were their children.

My aunt was taken to Auschwitz. And when my uncle came back, he tried to follow the trail. He found out that she had been taken to Auschwitz and there was no way of saving her. We remained with the Runjaks family until he returned. I always knew, because I was old enough at that point, that this was not my mother.
>> Bill Benson: Mrs. Runjaks?
>> Dora Klayman: Mrs. Runjaks. But I was to call her mother when anybody was present, anybody we didn't know. But my brother, because he was three years younger, he didn't even figure that out. They were nice to him so he just always called her mother.
>> Bill Benson: You were conscious.
>> Dora Klayman: I was conscious of what was going on. I was conscious that it was dangerous and that I needed to say that this was my mother, yeah.
>> Bill Benson: I think, if I understand correctly, you only recently learned with certainty what happened to Aunt Giza.
>> Dora Klayman: Right. When the archives from Germany arrived here --
>> Bill Benson: That's within the last five or so years.
>> Dora Klayman: Yes, yes. Arrived here. It's now -- all of these records that the Germans had made that were stored have been digitized and are now available through the museum. We have it. It's not easy to access. You have to ask somebody to do it. But for people, if they have a name or something to go by, our researchers are very kind and will try and find that person. So they actually found my aunt's -- there is a card that says that she came at such and such time and died at such and such time, very shortly after she arrived, supposedly of intestinal ailments. Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: So your uncle, because he had a defined sentence --
>> Dora Klayman: He was let go.
>> Bill Benson: Sentence is up.
>> Dora Klayman: And so did everybody else in Ludbreg. There were around four, five people arrested at the same time and were all let go.
>> Bill Benson: So he comes back. As you described, he tried to use his influence to find Giza but he couldn't. He was too late.
>> Dora Klayman: Right.
>> Bill Benson: So now it's Uncle Ljudevit and you.
>> Dora Klayman: And my brother, yeah.
>> Bill Benson: What happened then?
>> Dora Klayman: Basically just we tried to stay low and survive. It was a very difficult time because this was a time of battles between the Ustasa and the partisans. The battles were fought all around us and in that town. We tried at times to hide before the battle. If we had any inkling that something would be happening, which sometimes we did, we would run into our cellar. And the way to get to the cellar is you had to get out of the house and then down. We had a vineyard nearby so we had barrels of wine that were kept there. It was a low ceiling, dirt floor, damp with tiny windows on the top and shelves full of apples. Apples had to be separated so the business of one apple spoils the rest is true. So there

were apples, vegetables kept in the wintertime, carrots, root vegetables. There were frogs jumping everywhere. We had some kind of cots down there. Sometimes you would spend many nights down there because the partisans would attack during the night. If they didn't win, they would try to withdraw.

Where Ludbreg is situated, it's just at the foot of hills and then mountains, not very high mountains but it's mountains. So sometimes we didn't get to escape into the cellar in time so we would be inside the building, inside the house and bullets would be flying through the windows. You just would try to sit in the corner. This was a house that was built by Ludva's parents. So it was very thick walls. So the bullets did not penetrate the walls but they would penetrate through windows.

>> Bill Benson: You told me about an incident you remember with a very close call with your uncle where a bullet struck where he just was.

>> Dora Klayman: Yes. It was one of the battles where one Ustasa force I think was in our backyard and the partisans were on the second floor of the house across the way and they were shooting at one another. Of course we were in the middle. I was still lying in my bed, which was very well placed in a corner of one of the rooms so that it was not near a window. I was crying. I called for my uncle who had come from the next bedroom which did have a window that overlooked the beds. So he came to comfort me and a bullet went straight through the windows right to where his pillow was. So in a sense I saved his life accidentally. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: You had said to me -- you're still a little girl. The worst part of that time for you was, quote, living through battles and being afraid of being shot rather than of being deported because being shot was so imminent and real. You could grasp what that meant.

>> Dora Klayman: Right. Being deported meant nothing, just go away.

>> Bill Benson: You disappear.

>> Dora Klayman: You disappear. But being shot was -- because in the morning when we would get up, you wouldn't know what was happening. Sometimes you'd peer out the little window in the basement. I remember carts going by, being pulled by horses, full of dead bodies.

There was one particular time there was a terrible battle on our street that ended up with Ustasa surrounding the partisan force and they couldn't escape and they threw a bomb among themselves and were killed. From then on that street was called the one -- the 17th Brigade because the 17th brigade perished there.

So that kind of thing -- you know, I remember very well when the mills were burnt. And the partisans burned the mill because they were trying to get everything away from the Ustasa, any kind of thing that they could sustain themselves with. Of course, this also meant that people -- there was a mill on the small river we had there. This was in a rural area. And all the people had brought their wheat to be milled. The smell of it, the fire of it was just horrendous. I remember that well, and all the people screaming and shouting and being very upset. But that was the kind of thing that was going on back and forth with the partisans and the Ustasa.

>> Bill Benson: And, of course, the war ended in May 1945. So Dora, with the war's end, you're alone with your brother and Uncle Ljudevit.

>> Dora Klayman: Mm-hmm.

>> Bill Benson: What did your uncle do then to try to build a life with his niece and nephew that he was now completely in charge of?

>> Dora Klayman: For one, we were waiting to see if anybody will return. No one was coming. People would ask me for many years, after many years, certainly months and years afterwards, whether I'm still hoping that my mother or my father would come back; maybe they are in someplace in Russia. I don't know where people had this idea.

>> Bill Benson: Did you think they were going to come back?

>> Dora Klayman: There's always some sense of that but I really lost hope fairly early. The only people that did return were two of my uncles on my father's side. One uncle was arrested. Well, both of them -- one on my mother's decide, one on my father's side were serving in the Yugoslav Army when Germany invaded. They were taken by the Germans as prisoners of war. And they both survived, not

together, separately, as prisoners of war. And they both returned. They came to this town of Ludbreg to see if anybody was there of my mother's family. They only found me with Ludva.

By that time, they wanted to have me go with them. Both of them had married almost immediately after the war. They were both headed -- one of them married. The other remarried his wife -- the one who is in the picture with the star and the daughter were both killed. So he now married a widow with two children, a war widow. So they were all headed for Palestine. It was before Israel became Israel. And they came to see me and wanted me to go with them. By that time, I had also -- what we hadn't mentioned before, during the war they baptized me.

>> Bill Benson: I was hoping you might mention that.

>> Dora Klayman: Yeah. There was a time that Mrs. Runjaks was told by the priest, what are we going to do with these children; if not, something would go with them, too. So they baptized me.

>> Bill Benson: In order to protect you.

>> Dora Klayman: In order to protect me. Whether that worked or not I don't know but I'm alive, so it might have worked.

So there was this problem that not only that but he also immediately went ahead and adopted both my brother and me officially. And so here I was now being torn between these two uncles who returned and my uncle with whom I had spent this very difficult, very -- time, who was extremely kind to me, was a wonderful, loving, exceptional person. He loved me and I loved him. So when I was asked by my uncles to go with them, they essentially asked me what I wanted to do and I said I wasn't going; I was staying with my Uncle Ludva.

>> Bill Benson: What a tremendous choice for a young child.

>> Dora Klayman: It was a choice. By the way, by the time I made that choice my brother was no longer. In 1946 he contracted scarlet fever. It was right after the war. We did not have penicillin. Three little boys in town came down with scarlet fever. Two of them survived. My brother did not. The doctors said he must have had a weak heart. But he died within three days of contracting.

So it was a tremendous blow to my uncle. He adored my brother. He adored us both. He had really no family now. All of his siblings were dead, his wife. And so it was basically now -- by 1947, 1946 even, late 1946, it was just he and I. We had sometimes maids, sometimes lucky, housekeepers who were sort of nannies.

There was one in particular who had lost everything also in the war. They had taken away her pension. She had been married -- in the olden days to an Austra-Hungarian officer. So when the Communist government came about, that was a no-no and they took things away from them. Eventually it was returned. But in the meantime she came to be with us. She was a highly educated lady who taught me to play the piano. She was my first piano teacher, my first German language teacher. Her family, she had a daughter-in-law who was still alive and a granddaughter. And they used to come to Ludbreg often. We became friends. And this granddaughter I just visited while I was in Ludbreg. So we kept the friendship going.

But that is basically how we lived after the war. It was not an easy time for anybody after the war.

>> Bill Benson: And, of course, you're under the Communist government.

>> Dora Klayman: Right.

>> Bill Benson: And you would stay living there with your uncle until 1957. Tell us about leaving Yugoslavia and what you did.

>> Dora Klayman: Well, in 1954 I went out the first time. An uncle who survived cia Bergen-Belsen, escaped to Hungary, took the train to Bergen-Belsen, ended up in Switzerland. They eventually wrote and found me. And in 1954 I was allowed actually to go out to visit him.

>> Bill Benson: You have to explain why you were allowed to leave. You couldn't just leave a Communist country.

>> Dora Klayman: No. The Communist country, you couldn't go out at all. So I was given a title of victim of fascism. And as a victim of fascism, I was allowed to go out.

>> Bill Benson: Temporarily.

>> Dora Klayman: Temporarily. I was allowed to go to visit. I got a visa. I got a passport and a visa from the Swiss which took some time also. And I was allowed to go. And, of course, it was also expensive. Fortunately we still had some things from before the war and so on. Of course my uncle was now, again, working as a bank director in town. So we had something still to sell to buy a ticket for me. I was allowed to take $5 worth -- $5 in foreign currency.
>> Bill Benson: $5? Even in `54 that was not a lot of money.
>> Dora Klayman: Exactly. So I got on this train all by myself at the age of 16 and went to Switzerland. My uncle was waiting for me at the border. They also couldn't come. They had no citizenship at that time either. They were stateless. So for the first time I saw someone from my family.

It was a very emotional moment. We went to his house to his apartment. His wife was there, very lovely, also from Zagreb. They had survived the war together. They had two little children. It was a wonderful reunion. They were very kind, very lovely. We got along very well, right away. But what's interesting is that they were religious, Orthodox Jews, and I knew absolutely nothing -- I knew I was Jewish. I always knew who I was. I always knew who my grandparents were and so on. But I never knew anything about Judaism. For one, during the period of Communist rule, nobody knew anything about any religion. I mean, we certainly -- nobody went to church. Nobody went to synagogue. There were no synagogues. The synagogue in Ludbreg was totally destroyed down to nothing. They kept horses in there during the war. And then it was totally leveled. There's nothing there now either.
>> Bill Benson: To this day?
>> Dora Klayman: No, to this day.

So it was an emotional time in Switzerland. But we got along very well. So after a month I went back. They said, well, why not come back once I finish high school and I'm at the university. So I did. I managed to get -- I finished high school. It was a wonderful high school I just came back from a 60th reunion. It was a very small academic high school. I was studied English. Really loved it. So I spent a year at the University of Zagreb as an English major. And then after that year I went to Switzerland once again to my aunt and uncle with the idea of studying French at the University of Lausanne.
>> Bill Benson: I think we're going to stop there. I wish that we had more time. I think you can tell that we really had to jump over an awful lot. We could have kept you all here this afternoon and you might have liked it. I know I would have.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word so I'm going to turn back to Dora in a moment and have Dora close the program. When Dora finishes two things. One, Joel will come up on the stage and take a photograph of Dora with you as the background. So I'm going to ask you stand at that time. And because we didn't have a chance for you to ask Dora some questions, Dora will remain up on the stage here. We invite you to come up on stage and say hi to her, ask her a question, take your picture with her, whatever you would like to do. We'd like you to do that if you'd like to do so.

One of the things I regret not having time to get to is, and this might embarrass Dora, but how she met her husband because she had learned English overhearing a conversation on a train with an American, a Russian, I think, and a Brit.
>> Dora Klayman: And Yugoslav.
>> Bill Benson: It is actually a wonderful love story. But we'll leave that at that.

Thank you for being here. We hope you can come back to another *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. And we will resume again in 2017.

With that, Dora?
>> [Applause]
>> Dora Klayman: Well, I just want to say that I just came back from being in Croatia again and every time I go I have this strange sense of being at home and not being at home; being at home because there are friends, people I know, and not being at home because the United States has really become my home. I've lived here most of my life and have been very happy here.

It's disturbing sometimes to see how things are not improving in the way that I would like to see them improve. Instead of people being aware of how terrible it is when there are wars and animosities and singling out groups of people to decide that there shouldn't be here or they shouldn't be where they want to be or express what they want to express or practice religion they want to practice. It's very difficult for me to see that because of my experience and knowing how hurtful and how useless such behavior is.

So both in Europe and the United States now I find language that I find hurtful and upsetting. And in Europe it's sometimes as if they have forgotten what they went through. And here I think we should also remember the language we use, the sentiments we express that might be hurtful to others. This is what I'm leaving everyone with: tolerance, sense of the importance of human spirit, and goodwill to all men.

Thank you for being here.

>> [Applause]