UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON JULIE KEEFER
Thursday, August 13, 2015
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Remote CART Captioning

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings.
This transcript is being provided in rough-draft format.

>> Bill Benson: Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today. We are in our 16th year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Julie Keefer, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2015 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 and the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a twice-weekly series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand experiences during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our 2015 program concludes today. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our *First Person* guests and will have information about our program's resumption in 2016.

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 Julie Keefer's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave here today.
Julie will share with us her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows we will have an opportunity for you to ask Julie questions.

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

Julie Keefer was born Jula Weinstock to Jewish parents in Lwow, Poland, on April 19, 1941. This photograph of Julie is the only one that exists from her time in hiding.

On this map of Poland the arrow points to Lwow where Julie was born.

This photograph shows Julie's maternal grandfather, Aizik Eisen, as a young man wearing his military uniform.

In this photograph, Julie's father, Herman, is the man farthest to the left with the mustache and her mother, Sala, is the woman farthest to the left. Besides Julie, Herman and Sala also had a younger daughter named Tola.

In June 1941, the Germans occupied Lwow. German authorities, assisted by Ukrainian authorities, forced all Jews into a ghetto enclosed by a wooden fence. On this map the white arrow points to the location of the ghetto. Julie's grandfather was selected for forced labor. After working at a

lime stone quarry, he then worked at Janowska labor camp, indicated here with the red arrow. The nearby Kleparow train station is indicated by the blue arrow.

Julie took this photograph of the Kleparow train station in 2013. Thousands of Jews from the Lwow ghetto were deported from this station to the Belzec extermination camp, including members of Julie's extended family. Julie's grandfather eventually escaped from labor camp. He learned that the Lwow ghetto would be destroyed and helped Julie, her parents, and her sister to hide in a bunker in a nearby forest with other Jewish escapees. Julie and her sister's cries placed everyone at risk, so Aizik moved the girls to live with a non-Jewish family friend, Lucia.

This photograph shows Lucia Nowicka on the left and Julie's grandfather, Aizik, on the right. Aizik assumed the identity of Lucia's husband and Lucia and Aizik pretended they were their aunt and uncle.

Aizik traveled back and forth between the town and the forest where Julie's parents hid. At one point Lucia was arrested by Security Police. With Lucia in prison, Aizik hid Julie's sister in a Catholic children's home. Lucia eventually was released from prison and continued caring for Julie. One day while Aizik was visiting the girls, Germans discovered the bunker in the forest and killed everyone there, including Julie's parents. At the end of the war, as Soviet troops approached, Germans evacuated the children's home where Julie's sister hid. Aizik and Julie were unable to find Julie's sister.

Here we see Julie and Aizik in a Displaced Persons Camp after the war. Aizik sent Julie to America in 1948, hoping to join later. Julie lived in a children's home for six years until a couple from Cleveland, Ohio, adopted her. Aizik married Lucia and they eventually immigrated to the United States and settled in New York.

Following Julie's adoption by Thea and Fred Klestadt at age 16 in 1957 and her graduation from high school, Julie attended Oberlin College in Ohio where she majored in French with minors in Spanish and art. While at Oberlin Julie met Larry Keefer whom she would marry on June 24, 1962, 53 years ago. Julie furthered her education with a Master's degree in special education to work with emotionally disturbed adolescents and did Ph.D-level study in Human Growth and Development. She studied at the University of Nebraska but after she and Larry moved to the Washington, DC area, she continued her studies at Bowie State University and several other academic institutions.

Julie spent 29 years with the Montgomery County, Maryland Public School System retiring in 2001. Over the course of those three decades she held a number of key positions including mainstream coordinator working with special needs students and teachers at several high schools, and participated in teacher training programs, some in conjunction with American University. All of them dealt with education equity. Among her many accomplishments she created LUPE, an anti-gang program to improve academic performance among Hispanic students at an area high school. A memorable occasion was a visit by President Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to a high school where she was the Administrator-in-Charge.

Julie's husband Larry is a Ph.D. chemist who worked first at the Chicago Medical School and the University of Nebraska Medical School before joining the scientific staff at the National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute here in the Washington, DC, area in 1971. Much of Larry's career has been devoted to cancer research and cancer-related drug development. Larry plans to retire in September after completing 44 years with the NIH/NCI. Larry is here with Julie today.

Julie and Larry have two children, Steve and Simona, and three grandsons. Steve, a former Army Ranger, received a dual degree in Economics and Japanese from the Wharton School of Business and the University of Pennsylvania. He now owns two businesses. Steve's oldest son is a senior at the University of Maryland Baltimore Campus and his other son starts college this fall at Earlham College in Indiana. Daughter Simona is a fine arts artist and after a career in photography now has her own business. Her son will start high school later this month. As Julie noted to me with pride, "We got really lucky on kids and grandkids."

Julie is a volunteer with this museum where you will find her at the Membership Desk on Thursdays where she shares her story with museum visitors. She also spends time at the Information Desk.

In addition to Larry, Julie is also accompanied today by her cousin Suzanne Jonas of Santa Cruz, California, and her cousin Linda Schroeder and Linda's husband David Schroeder of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. All three are university professors. Also joining them is a family friend, Josephina.

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

[Applause]

>> Julie Keefer: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, thank you for joining us. It's a privilege to have you here as our First Person and also to see that we have your family here right in the front row. They can keep an eye on you.

Julie, we have just a very short hour together. You have a great deal to share with us so we'll start. World War II began with Germany and Russia's invasion in Poland in September 1939. When you were born, April 1941, the city with your family lived was under Soviet occupation. I know you know very little about your family and circumstances for them prior to the war but to the extent you can, tell us what you're able to tell us about your family before your birth.

>> Julie Keefer: My grandfather had two children. My mother was the younger. The man in the uniform, in the picture you saw, the Polish uniform, was my uncle whose name I don't know. The woman below him was his wife. They had two sons. I know they were killed. I don't know exactly where.

My parents, we were taken -- we had gone to Lwow in October 2012 and we visited the place where I was living with my parents, supposedly. Later, for those who are interested, I have some photos that we took so that you can see the apartment.

Then we were forced -- in July, my grandfather wrote -- my grandfather wrote all of these things in a diary after he immigrated to the United States in 1950. The original of that diary is in English translation in this museum.

Our grandfather was an importer of fruits and vegetables, pretty well to do. My parents were probably -- I don't know. My father was a tinsmith, my mother was a Jewish opera singer. When the Russians came, I think it probably was too bourgeois to be an opera singer so she was cited as working in a factory.

I don't know much else.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, one of the things you shared with me -- you really told me you don't really remember your parents but there is a particular song that you said that evokes a feeling or memory of your mother. Tell us about that.

>> Julie Keefer: There is -- of all things, I was brought up speaking Polish and some German but not Yiddish. And I only learned Yiddish in DP camp after the war. But this particular lullaby -- I can't remember exactly the name -- is a song I remember my mother singing to me. I heard a recording. It just churned up that memory of my mother.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, at that time you did have a few family members living in the United States. Is that so?

>> Julie Keefer: I had my grandfather's two sisters. He was the oldest of six. Then came Aunt Rosa, the second oldest. Then came three brothers. And then the youngest, Helen.

Before the war, long before the war, my grandfather's father sent the girls to the United States so they would not suffer during the Pogroms that were going on. They settled in Brooklyn. And when I first came to the United States, I lived with Aunt Helen who shared a duplex house, part of a duplex, with her older sister Rosa, who was a widow. And Aunt Helen had a daughter four years older than I was. Rosa had a daughter who was eight years older than I.

I also had my father's aunt, I called Tanta Sigel. I didn't like English very much so my father's sisters were called aunt and my grandfather's sisters -- my grandfather's sisters. My father's aunt I called Tanta Sigel. She was as warm as she could possibly be. She was this tiny, tiny woman with

high, high cheekbones and huge, bright blue eyes, a little Cupid mouth. She and Uncle Jake had two children, Adele and Marvin. Marvin was in the Army. Adele was newly married living with her husband in this tiny, tiny, one-bedroom apartment with Tanta Sigel and Uncle Jake.

I would go to be with them on weekends. I used to live for those weekends. They were so, so warm and caring. Aunt Helen spoke Polish. No one else spoke a language I understood. But apparently, what I was told, was that I was kind of this sad sack of a kid who with sit on the third floor of a walkup, tiny apartment, staring out the window, in the Bronx, looking at people walking by and across the street was kind of a ballpark where people played pickup basketball. And I would just sit there and not talk, not anything. He had won a teddy bear at one of the amusement parks and was saving that teddy bear for his first child. I guess he took a look at me and thought, hmm, this kid needs it much more than our first so he gave me the teddy bear. And I remember Tanta Sigel saying, well, what are you going to call the teddy bear? And I said, "Lalka" which, originally as it could be, it means doll in Polish. And I had my lalka.

>> Bill Benson: Nazi Germany turned on the Soviet Union June 1941, just months after your birth. Within days your city of Lwow was occupied by the Nazis and your family was forced into a ghetto. Tell us what that meant for you and for your family, including your grandfather, Aizik.

>> Julie Keefer: My grandfather had a house that was in the ghetto. He and some male relatives, my father included, built a secret compartment in his barn which they called a bunker. That's where my father, my mother, my baby sister -- well, my baby sister was born there -- and I lived there. And we were there from` 41 until `43.

My grandfather, who had escaped from Janowska labor camp, found out from the man who had helped him that the Nazis were going to burn the ghetto in 1943.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to that, just a couple of questions. As you just mentioned, your grandfather escaped from Janowska. Tell us how he got to Janowska, which was an infamous camp.

>> Julie Keefer: It was. Not only was it infamous, according to the records from the Soviets, the Nuremberg trials, 200,000 Jews were killed at Janowska. It was a huge, huge -- it was a labor camp. It was a concentration camp. And it was an extermination camp.

My grandfather was very strong. They put people in lines and they decided, for example his wife Clara was taken to Belzec and gassed but he was a strong man so they took him and other relatives I do not know to work in the forced labor. His job was to do something with rocks. And he worked in the cutting and carrying rocks.

When he lost 100 pounds, because the food was almost non-existent, the conditions were horrible, grandpa once said to one of the Commandants, "You can't have 16 people on these bunks. They don't fit. You could have eight at most." Because he said that, he got beaten 100 strokes on his bare body. It was only other prisoners putting wet rags on him at night. And when it was time for the morning lineup, yes, roll call kind of thing, he kind of stumbled out and was there. The Commandant said, "You pig. You're alive. I thought I killed you."

The food was 1/16 of a kilos of bread per day, a weak soup made of some cabbage. And the labor was intense. Then, one of the two Commandants -- I have a picture of the house that the Commandants lived in. And by the way, it's still standing. Rokita would stand at one of the balconies of the house. If he didn't like the way your Jewish star was sewn on your jacket or pants, he would shoot you in the head. He had a habit of just shooting Jews in the head.

One of the things that grandpa described was one of the favorite ways of punishing or whatever was to hang Jews upside down by their feet and letting them expire. He talks about a friend of his who was killed this way.

When he had lost 100 pounds and knew that he was going to be shot because he could not work at the hard labor that he had, he decided to escape. As the centuries were letting in new prisoners -- remember that the camp was surrounded by electric wire -- but where the centuries let in new prisoners he ran out. And we have a picture of the hill where he probably ran down. He ran down, crossed the street, Janowska Street, and jumped down a tall ravine. When he jumped down, he had his hands up. And the century managed to shoot his right thumb. He was wearing a thin concentration

camp uniform, no shoes because his feet were so big. He ripped off the Jewish star off his chest and his legs and went running along with the train to be hidden so that he did not get shot anymore.

This was late November in Poland, snowing, and very, very cold. He ran into one woods nearby. His hand was throbbing. He was feverish and cold and hot. After a while he stumbles to a Polish, small farmer's house. He, of course -- you could tell he was a Jew. He was wearing the concentration camp uniform. And, of course, the Polish farmer saw this. Aizik said -- my grandfather's name is Aizik. He said, "I don't want to endanger you." Because Pols who helped Jews were the most threatened of all in that their families were taken and hung before their eyes. And then the Jew was killed and the Polish person was shot. So it's one thing to lose your life alone but it's quite another when it comes to watching your family die. So it was a very difficult decision for Pols.

Anyway, this Pol was an unusual man. He said: Look, Aizik, of course, what the Nazis are doing is horrible. He put mercurochrome on his thumb, bandaged it, gave him a change of clothes, warm jacket, rags, and these kind of slippers with rags to wrap around his feet. He said, you know, he could sleep in his barn. Aizik said, “I don't want to make you and your family be threatened.” And Mr. Bereczki said, you know, “I'll just leave the barn door open and then if the Nazis come, I'll say, "I don't know who sleeps in my barn. The door is open. Anybody could come." So that's what he did.

The following day, Mr. Bereczki gave him three breads and some salt and some fruit and a shovel and led him to the Borszczowice Forest, which was a very, very large forest about five or so kilometers away from his house. That's where my grandfather began to dig a ditch with a shovel to hide himself from the elements and also from the Nazis.

In two weeks, he says in his diary, that he had made a tunnel about four feet by two feet. As he was waiting and just trying to live, he heard some men approaching. Lo and behold, they were speaking Yiddish. So he got out of this kind of lean-to and stood up and they almost shot him. He said, "Look, I'm a fellow Jew." So they all rejoiced. One of the men had a gun. My grandfather had been a soldier and a kind of a small-time officer, very unusual for a Jew in the First World War. And then he was in the Polish cavalry afterwards because he looked good on a horse.

>> [Laughter]

>> Julie Keefer: So he had military experience. So he was the leader of this group. And the men expanded the tunnel, expanded the tunnel. More and more Jews were coming into these woods from various small towns around because the Nazis were gathering up Jews to take them to the gas chambers.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, over time it ended up with more than 30 in your grandfather's group in this bunker in the forest. They began to engage in acts of resistance against the Nazis. Tell us a little about that and then how you and your family also ended up in the bunker with them.

>> Julie Keefer: Ok. The people in the tunnel would attack Nazi munitions trucks, shoot the tires and kill the drivers who would not run away, and steal grenades, guns, ammunition, clothing, anything they could get their hands on. Then they would store it. They would bring it back at night and store it in this bunker.

Then the second question you asked me?

>> Bill Benson: How you and your parents ended up in the bunker.

>> Julie Keefer: Mr. Bereczki had been taken as a political prisoner to Janowska. And then the political prisoners were let go. He was taken because his son was killed as a member of the Polish underground. He told my grandfather that the political prisoners were let out to make room for more Jews because the Nazis were going to burn the ghetto soon. The victims would be taken to the Kleparow station to be gassed at Belzec or to Janowska.

Anyway, when grandpa found this out -- we were hiding in the ghetto, remember, in that barn. So he made arrangements with Mr. Beretzki to hide my mother, my baby sister, and me in part of his barn to save our lives. Then he made those arrangements and he asked for volunteers of the men. All the men volunteered. He picked five. They took a commandeered Nazi truck and drove near the ghetto. My grandfather said, “Stay in the woods and I'll go into the ghetto alone.” He went into the ghetto and got my mother, my father, my baby sister, and me out.

The interesting thing is my baby sister had been born. She was born September of 1943. And that was first time my grandfather saw her. He had lost so much weight and his hair was from brown turned to white. His daughter, my mother, didn't recognize him. But the story I was told was that I did and I ran up to him and grabbed his legs and said, "Dziadzia," which means Grandpi. We were very, very close he and I. Then my father took the baby, my grandfather took me and got us into the command truck, out of the ghetto, and then drove us to Mr. Bereczki's.

What I remember about that is very, very little. All I remember is the smell. And the smell was like ammonia. What I was told was they were trying to dye my mother's hair blond. So I don't know whether this was from bleach or peroxide or cow urine because there were cows right here. But nevertheless, my mother said, “I won't stay here. I've already lost my mother. I don't want to lose my husband and my father. And I'm not going to be separated.”

You couldn't argue with my mother. Apparently she was quite stubborn. So we all -- the command truck went back. My grandfather, my father, my mother and I trudged in the woods to the bunker. Snow was falling. I remember sticking out my tongue and tasting snow. And it was so special.

So we got to the bunker. The bunker -- it's interesting because I remember the bunker but no one in it except my grandfather. The bunker was this huge tunnel. And I remember a ladder that seemed very, very high to me but was probably only six feet. You went down this ladder. Dziadzia says there was straw at the bottom. I don't remember the straw. What I remember is touching the walls. They were muddy and damp and cold. The room was probably about 12-by-8 or something like that. I don't know. But I remember walking along and feeling the walls and walking. At the very end of this so-called room was a splintery, wooden roundtable. On top of it sat a fat candle. This was the only source of light. Then as you went around, there was an opening. I kept feeling my way. And then there was another room, smaller, completely dark. What I remember is that I was about to touch something cold and smooth and Dziadzia screamed at me, "Stop." He was about to smack my hand. I mean, my grandfather never raised his voice to me much less his hand. Later I found out those were rifles, guns, and grenades.

So what I hear about this bunker is that in the Borszczowice Forest were a very big and well-armed band of Ukrainian resistance fighters. And they were the followers of Bandera. And they were called Banderivtsi. The Nazis didn't like coming into that woods because the Banderivtsi would go on tops of tree and throw all kinds of grenades, whatever at Nazi who kept losing people. So they didn't -- and there were 200 of them. They were well-armed and well trained.

My grandfather asked if they could join them. And the Banderivtsi said no. They didn't much like Jews either. But they said, ok, you leave us alone, we'll leave you alone, which was a big deal. And the only Jews they wanted and they kind of conscripted, were Jewish doctors.

So the Nazis thought that all of these raiding activities were being done by the Banderivtsi. They didn't realize that this small band of Jews was doing the same thing and going to various outposts of Ukrainian collaborators and getting food and clothing and so forth.

>> Bill Benson: Julie, your grandfather made the decision to take you and your baby sister, Tola, out of the bunker and back into hiding in Lwow. Tell us what prompted that decision and then after he did that, he returned to the bunker and tell us what happened.

>> Julie Keefer: He -- I was about 2 1/2. My sister was 5 months old. It was cold and damp. Food was scarce. There was canned milk. All of us had lice, terrible, terrible lice. We cried and made noise. And thaw was coming. People began to be very, very frightened that the Nazis would pick up the smell, the Nazi police dogs, or hear the sounds of us crying. There were four children amongst 37 people. Two of the children were in their teens and then there was my baby sister, a 5 months, and me. When I started crying, my father would tell me to be quiet and I guess I would listen but when -- how do you stop a 5-month-old baby from crying? My mother would put her hand over her mouth. And my grandfather was afraid that she would smother the baby. So he said that being in charge he was responsible for everybody's life not just his family and he couldn't allow us to jeopardize the lives of all of these other people. After all, everyone has a right to live.

So he dressed -- he got Mr. Bereczki help him, dressed as a Polish peasant with the typical kind of coat, jacket that they wore. He got a cart that Mr. Bereczki would use to bring things to the central market in Lwow and set out with us. He was looking for Dr. Gror, who was at a children's orphanage in Lwow. He looked and no Dr. Gror. He describes in his diary how he got desperate and he was about to leave us because he thought we were cute, we were little, somebody would find us and take care of us and he would come back if he lived after the war and get us.

Just as he was about to do that, he ran into a Polish Catholic woman, Lucia, who used to be a neighbor of his. He helped her and her husband, who ran kind of a taxi cab business with horses. They were very close friends. Meanwhile, Lucia's husband had been taken away or killed in one of the mass reprisals. But he said -- she said, "Eisen, I'm so happy to see you. Mr. Eisen, these must be Sala's babies." And grandpa said, "Lucia, can you take them and take care of them?" And she said, "I no longer own my own house. I work as a live-in housekeeper to a retired Polish Catholic couple. I would have to ask."

So they made up a story. The story was that my grandfather was Lucia's husband. He took -- fortunately they were the same height, same hair color, same eye color. So he took her husband's identity papers and a copy of the marriage license and pretended to be her husband.

How to explain us. We, my baby sister and I, were supposedly her sister's children. Her sister lived in a small town not far and supposedly had died and that Lucia had to take care of her little nieces because her sister had died. So we were the nieces and we went to live in that house where the Swierczyskis lived. Grandpa was working as a laborer anywhere he could find to bring in some food or whatever. The Swierczyskis did not know that we were Jewish.

Now, there's an interesting thing. The Swierczyskis had a house whose huge garden abutted the garden of the Nazi governor of Lwow. So there I was hiding in plain sight. There were Nazi soldiers all over the place.

Now, as Bill mentioned, the Gestapo took Lucia away for questioning because a woman down the street had said that Lucia Nowicka, housekeeper for the Swierczyskis, was hiding Jewish children. So the Gestapo took her for questioning. No one, the Swierczyskis, no one knew why they were taking her. But Dziadzia came back to the house --

>> Bill Benson: Your grandfather came back to the house.

>> Julie Keefer: To the house. And found that Lucia was gone and found out that the Gestapo had taken her. So he talked to Mrs. Swierczyski and asked her would she talk to the wife of the Commandant, they were friends, and see what she could do to get Lucia out. He was terribly worried that the Nazis would torture her, Lucia, and hurt her and that Lucia would crack under the pressure and say that she, in fact, was hiding Jewish children and, in fact, Aizik was a Jew and other fact that 30-some-other Jews were hiding in a hidden bunker in the Borszczowice Forest.

Well, she asked. Mrs. Swierczyski talked to the Commandant's wife. The Commandant got in his car and went to Gestapo headquarters and said, “Free Lucia Now.” That's when everybody found out why she was there. The Gestapo said "Clean up and don't tell a soul what happened here." And she was then taken by that car back to the Swierczyski's. She had not cracked. She had not mentioned anything.

While she was gone, Mrs. Swierczyski had to take care of me, my baby sister, all the cooking, the cleaning, and a very large house, the cow, the pig, the horse and couldn't cope. So she said, “I can't have a baby.” So my grandfather changed Tola’s name from Tola Weinstock to Antonina Novicka and took her to the Catholic orphanage run by Dr. Gror, who was a very famous professor of pediatrics, a pediatrician who ran a children's home. So grandpa thought, well, at least one of us would live through this war. And if he did live, he would come back after the war and get her.

>> Bill Benson: So when Lucia was released from the Gestapo and came back, by that time Tola was now in the orphanage and you are there with Mrs. Swierczyski. At that point I think your grandfather decided, ok, things are ok for the kids and he decided to return to the bunker at that point. Didn't he?

>> Julie Keefer: There was one thing that happened in between, if I may.

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely.

>> Julie Keefer: One day Lucia was taking a walk through the woods, looking for any spare potato, anything she could find for food. I was going with her. At this point I was 3. She was teaching me how to pick Dandelions with long stems so she could make me a wreath. I picked the Dandelions, more or less with long stems, and she made me a wreath. She kept on walking. I got tired. And apparently -- this is what I was told. I do not remember this. She kept walking and I just was tired so I fell down and fell asleep.

Pretty soon something picks me up, somebody picks me up, and carries me to the home of the Swierczyskis. Lucia was sure that I had gone home before her. She sees this Nazi soldier carrying what she thought was my dead body and she's about to scream. And Mrs. Swierczyski, who spoke German and Lucia did not, said, "Lucia, be calm" and put her hand over her mouth. Then, whatever, I woke up. And at that point I woke up and the soldier said, "You know, she reminds me of my children at home and I miss them so. May I take her picture?" And said yeah. So he took my picture. And that's the photo you saw of me, age 3, with a wreath over my head, the shoes that were too big. That was the only picture I have of me pre to the war, during the war.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about your grandfather returning to the bunker.

>> Julie Keefer: Then my grandfather came back and thought, wow, ok, everybody's going to be safe. You know, my two granddaughters are safe. I have to check on my daughter and her husband and the other people in the bunker. It was night. He met another man who had also left the bunker to join the resistance. He and this other man went to stay with Mr. Bereczki, or his barn, until morning so they could find the bunker and see what was going on. In the morning they got to the bunker and they saw everything was all asunder. There were dead bodies. And Dziadzia was sure that it was the grenades that they had that had exploded. And then he and the other man saw the bullet wounds in each of the bodies.

>> Bill Benson: Including your mother and father.

>> Julie Keefer: Including my mother and father. He and the other man buried everyone back at this huge bunker and said Kaddish, which is the Jewish prayer for the dead and then returned. This was in April 1944. In June or July of 1944, the Russians came and the war was over for us.

>> Bill Benson: The war is over. You're liberated. Tell us, one, how did the Russians treat you, treat your grandfather, now that they were in control. And I want you to tell us about Tola.

>> Julie Keefer: The Russians at that time were very, very kind to concentration camp survivors, which meant that grandpop could get an apartment, for example. He could get to the front of the line or whatever for food. They were very kind at that point. And we saw them as our liberators, at that point. Because things changed but not yet.

You wanted to hear about Tola. Tola was placed in this orphanage. The orphanage was on Polinow Street [phonetic]. We tried to find the building. What had happened was the orphanage, a part of the roof was bombed. So the children and the nuns were moved to another place, Korycin, which was kind of like a spa, a vacation spot. Then my grandfather went there to look for her and saw the caretaker who said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Eisen. You're about four months too late. The children were moved." And he said, "Where?" One story, one half of them supposedly were taken to Hungary. And the other half were taken to Switzerland or Germany or France. So he went to all of those places and nothing. You could not get into Hungary at that time at all. The Russians had it absolutely locked down. So we never found my sister. We looked for her for years and years.

When I was in the children's home where I was --

>> Bill Benson: In Cleveland.

>> Julie Keefer: In Cleveland, Ohio. My social worker came to me and brought me a black and white picture of a girl who was about two years younger than me, with a big, white bow on her hair, and kind of the dreamy, light eyes of my father, and said "The Red Cross thinks this is your sister." So I was ecstatic because I thought, wow, my sister. I really wanted her. So I took that picture and that went everywhere with me. And then two weeks later -- no. Then the social worker took me to the hospital to have blood tests. Two weeks later she called me into her office and said, "Julia, I'm sorry. This child is not your sister. The blood does not match." And we never found her.

>> Bill Benson: And Julie to this day, you still hold out hope that she's alive somewhere.

Julie, in the time we have left, tell us, first, about your grandfather and Lucia. Because your grandfather wanted to --

>> Julie Keefer: My grandmother?

>> Bill Benson: Your grandfather wanted to help Lucia out for all that she had done, as well as Mr. Bereczki. But their relationship changed. Tell us about that and then about them sending you to the United States. And then lastly I want to make sure that you have a little time to talk about yours and Larry's return to Lwow.

>> Julie Keefer: My grandfather had -- I don't know what he had done but he had quite a bit of money. He offered to pay Lucia all of it for saving our lives. She said, “Look, we've been a family. I want to stay a family with you and Jula.” At one of the DP camps we went to, Lucia was told that she had to convert. And in order to convert, she had to go in the ritual Bat Mitzvah and she had to shave her head. So Lucia went up to Aizik and said, "Aizik, I have so little hair to begin with. I don't want to do this." So Aizik, who could be very imposing, went up to this little tiny rabbi and said, "Rabbi, this woman is more precious than diamonds. That she wants to be a Jew is an honor to all Jews. I don't want anything to stand in her way." Ok, Aizik, she won't shave her head, all right, all right. So they got married. And she didn't shave her head.

>> [Laughter]

>> Julie Keefer: Then, Mr. Bereczki, grandpa went and he got every kind of food and clothing he could possibly get, 10 suitcases worth. He drove it down, all of it, to Mr. Bereczki. All of the peasants all around couldn't believe it. Where is this -- grandpa said, "You did us more honor than we can ever repay you but this is something to show you our deepest, deepest gratitude." So he said, "I want very much to honor you the only way I can right now."

>> Bill Benson: Julie, you have so much more that you could tell us. I wish we could spend several hours with you but we can't. You've had to skip over many, many details. In the little time we have left, tell us a little bit about the trip that you and Larry took back to the Lwow. It was a very profound trip for you. Share just a little of that with us, if you could.

>> Julie Keefer: Well, first I have to tell you that for many, many years I was not willing to share my experiences. It was too painful. And people really didn't want to hear it for most of my youth. And then I got caught up in life and living and marriage and work and children and life went on. But when I got older and I retired, I decided I wanted to go back to Lwow to see what was left of where I was born, where I was hidden, where my sister was, above all, anything about my sister.

So my husband Larry, who was unbelievably supportive and planned the whole thing, got us a guide and an archivist who was fabulous, Alex. We took grandpa's diary, selected sites we wanted to see; for example, where his house was in the ghetto. Now there is a gas station there. But the rest of the ghetto is standing. Where the Janowska was. It is still standing but as a Ukrainian prison. The Russians made it a prison. Wanted to see Jaktorow, the first labor camp he was in. It is now appropriately called an insane asylum.

>> [Laughter]

>> Julie Keefer: And then we went to see the memorial to the ghetto. We went to try to find the house where my sister was first hidden as a Catholic child.

By the way, Alex got us a newspaper reporter who wrote a long story, in Ukrainian, which I can't read, about my trying to find my sister and did anyone know.

It was a very interesting trip. There were signs of anti-Semitism still. But there were human touches that were unbelievable. For example, we went to visit Janowska. You could not go in because it's a working prison. You couldn't even take pictures inside. But on the side of the road, there is a sign commemorating Janowska and a huge rock, eight tons because Dr. Schwartz, who made that memorial and who had been one of the survivors of Janowska, decided eight tons, no one could take it away so easily. So there it was.

As we were standing in this little abutment with a bright blue bench, there was an old, old man wearing fingerless gloves and a cap and hunched into a coat, sweeping leaves with one of these twig

brooms that's made out of twigs, and sweeping it. And there was an open can of blue paint on the side of the bench. And there was a woman also, a middle-aged woman with several layers of love handles and a purple kind of shirt and bright crimson hair who was standing there. Alex explained that my grandfather had been at Janowska, that we were here, that we were coming from the United States to visit for first time that I was born here.

So the woman said, "He" pointing to the man, "Comes here all the time. He comes and he sweeps and he paints." So Alex said, "Who pays you?" And the man said, "Nobody. I just come." And the woman said, "Yes, he comes in snow and rain. He's always there." And the other part was the woman didn't speak any -- well, nobody spoke English and I speak no Ukrainian so we had Alex as a translator. And Alex translated. The woman pointed to the sign and said, "They are in heaven. They are in heaven. They are good. And they are in heaven." And then she said, "I live in that house." The house was the house of the Commandant, which is now an apartment building. She said, "And I can't sleep because I hear these terrible sounds at night and it is awful but I live here because my son is a prisoner here." I just remember, we just kind of grabbed each other and we just hugged. And I remember saying I'm so sorry for your pain. And she said the same thing to me; I in English; She in Ukrainian. We did not speak the same language but we certainly understood each other's sorrow. And it was very, very moving.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Julie in just a couple of moments to close our program. It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. But before I do so, I want to thank all of you for joining us and hearing what Julie had to share with us. I'll let you know that we will resume *First Person* in the spring of 2016. The website will have information about that. If your travels bring you back to Washington, D.C., or if you live in the area, we hope you will join us for future *First Person* programs.

When Julie finishes her last word, she's going to remain on the stage. So if you have a question -- because we didn't have time for questions and answers with you as the audience, please feel free to come up on stage and ask her whatever you want to ask her or shake her hand, give her a hug, take a photograph. All of that is permissible. Please do that when we finish.

And also, when Julie finishes, our photographer, Joel, is going to come up on the stage and he'll take a picture of Julie with you as the backdrop. It just really makes her a really wonderful picture of Julie to commemorate her being here as our First Person today. And I'll ask you to stand at that time as part of that photograph.

I want to also just acknowledge the numbers of staff, interns, and volunteers here at this museum who make *First Person* possible and made us have an incredibly profound year this year with 44 different *First Person* programs. So I thank everybody associated with the *First Person* program. Without them we could not do this program and, of course, we couldn't do it without our survivors.

So on that note I turn Julie to close today's program and this year's program.

>> Julie Keefer: What have I learned from my early life experiences? One precept I learned is all religions share the same credo. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” Christian wisdom. “Hurt not others with that which pains yourself,” Buddhist wisdom. "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you," Jewish wisdom. "Do unto all men as you would wish to have done unto you," and "Reject for others what you would reject for yourself," Islamic wisdom. And finally, "This is the sum of all true righteousness. Treat others as thou would thyself be treated. Do nothing to thy neighbor which here after thou would not have thy neighbor do to the," Hindu wisdom.

Why do we all not practice this? Some people have practiced this in my life. I know of two humble Pols who did fight against injustice and bigotry by saving the lives of my grandfather and me. One is Lucia Nowicka, now Eisen, whose name is on the wall of the righteous amongst nations. You can see her name there. The other is Stanislaus Bereczki. Unfortunately his name is not currently listed amongst the righteous.

We're all one family, the family of human kind. What hurts one of us harms all of us. But it's not enough to share this belief. We must also fight against injustice and bigotry individually and collectively. We must never stand by as silent onlookers, as acts of cruelty occur before our eyes. We

cannot be silent bystanders. But don't just jump into the fray. Call the police. Turn -- for you who are students, turn to an adult whom you trust but do not resort to violence. Violence begets more violence.

I'd like to quote a Lutheran minister who had the courage to defy the Nazis. I know most of you know this. "First they came for the socialist and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionist and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me," Reverend Martin Niemoller, 1892- wait. I said that wrong. Sorry. 1892-1984.

Thank you.

[Applause]