

[theme music playing]

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LAUREN: Hi there, I'm Lauren and I'm your host for episode 3 of the Talks at Google podcast, where great minds meet. Talks at Google brings the world's most influential thinkers, creators, makers, and doers all to one place. Every episode is taken from a video that can be seen at youtube.com/talksatgoogle. Today we hear from Irene Zisblatt, who tells her story, a story that moves from her childhood and hungry, through her terrifying coming of age as a prisoner in Nazi death camps, continuing on to her life in America. Irene found that believing strongly that the horrors of the camps were temporary, helped her cling to the hope she could survive and be human again. It took her 50 years to unleash the terror of her experiments, and find the courage to relive the pain in order to share her story without hate or bitterness. Now here is Irene Zisblatt, "The Fifth Diamond" the story of Irene Weisberg Zisblatt.

[theme music playing]

[applause]

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IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Thank you. Thank you very much. I got to take my Bible out. This is my Bible. Thank you so much for having me here today. First, I want to thank Gilly and her husband for making this day happen for me. Her husband Adam and Gilly are my friends for a long time. I also would like to thank-- extend my very special thanks to Google for helping me reach the present and future readers of "The Fifth Diamond." The pages of my book tell my personal experience. You will learn about the darkest part in history and humanity at its worst. While many people want to forget, it would certainly be wiser to understand.

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Through my account as a witness to these crimes, it is my hope to demonstrate the strength of my hope in human spirit, the meaning of having faith in God, and the memory of a loving friendship. I am a Holocaust survivor of man's hatred. I am the only survivor of my family. That places on me a double duty to bear witness. I remember when Hitler gave the order that all Jewish people must be exterminated. We had no place to hide. We were thrown out of every country and our suffering did not end. My mother was so sad when she did not see us children play or smile anymore.

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She tried to give us away, not because she didn't love us, but because she tried to save us, but there was no one there to help her. The SS took her, my father, and all my siblings, but they wouldn't let me go with them. I saw my family go into the chamber of death. My mother gave me her diamonds and that is the only connection to her that I have. I couldn't pray on that day, but for some reason they let me live. It is now 71 years after the Holocaust, and still things like a railroad track or a train brings my yesterdays into today. I like to share some of my yesterdays with you, not to make you hate them, but to tell you what hatred does. I am a Hungarian Jew.

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The devastation of Hungarian Jews were the worst murdered of men, women, and children in the last days of the war. When Hitler was facing defeat, he brought the Holocaust to Hungary. I was living there in a beautiful little resort town in the mountains. We were only 263 families and a third was only Jewish. As far back as I can remember, I had a great relationship with my non-Jewish friends. We didn't have any telephones, or iPods, or computers, but we had each other. We children were always together, in the parks, in the homes, and in schools. The mountains we lived in had the most natural resources in all of Europe. Mineral water was one of them and still is today.

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My father had a spa, and he used this water for people with muscular problems. He devoted his life to help everyone. My siblings, my friends, and I loved living in these beautiful mountains, but not far from us in Germany, Hitler was ending democracy and was lining up his henchmen. The SS, which were the Stormtroopers, the SS, the Security Police, and the Gestapo, the Special State Police. Our government was an ally to Germany and chose not to report the Jewish people yet, but ordered strict restrictions. From 1939 until 1944, Hungarian Jews were stripped of their rights and entitlements as they had never existed.

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In addition, the men were forced into labor units where they were poorly clothed, ill-fed, and ultimately murdered. At the age of nine, I was thrown out of the one thing that I loved most, my school, because I was a Jew. And from that day on, my life changed, and so did the world. My non-Jewish friends ignored me. My education and freedom was taken away from me. And my hopes were destroyed by Nazi hatred. We didn't see any SS in our towns yet, but the evil was carried out by the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian SS. They were feared by all people. Our food was running out and they wouldn't let us buy in any store. A curfew was enforced and we had to wear the yellow star. I will never forget the sadness in my parents' faces when we children were hungry and they had no food to give us.

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Once, a cow wandered into our backyard, and my mother risked her life during curfew, climbed out the back window, and milked the cow. And that was the only time that we had milk. I was the oldest of six children. I had four brothers and one sister. Every day, the Nazis ordered new restrictions for us. After they stripped us from our dignity, they demanded our valuables. I heard my mother say to my father, first they made our star to a badge of shame, and now they want to rob us of our feelings of being worthy enough of owning something of value. I think that my mother sewed her diamonds into my skirt to save our pride, and then she gave them to me with a purpose, to buy bread if I am hungry.

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In 1939, when Poland was invaded, a few men were able to escape to us over the mountains. My father with his friends helped them to safety. Their destination, Palestine. I don't know if they ever made it to Palestine, but one night a man had to spend the night in my home because it wasn't safe to go on. And I heard him beg my father to take his family and go with him because when the SS come to us, they will kill our children just that-- like they do in Poland. I couldn't sleep the rest of the night. In the morning, the man was gone. And I asked my father, why-- who are these SS and why are they killing the children? What have those children done? And my father said the man wasn't himself. He didn't know what he was saying. People don't do such things.

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See, the most civilized country in all of Europe, nobody believed that they did such things. So we didn't go with the man. We also didn't believe that the Nazis were going to come to us because the war was almost over. And besides, we were in this little town surrounded by mountains. We didn't think that they were going to come and bother to look for so few of us. And just then, my country was trying to extricate itself from the alliance with Germany. And Hitler got so enraged. He ordered the army to invade Hungary and deal with the Jewish problem. The next day, each person had to pack a suitcase not exceeding 25 kilo and go to a ghetto. I didn't even know what a ghetto was, but they made me feel that I had to be punished for something.

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They made me leave my home for no reason at all. The ghetto was a brickyard, but there were no bricks being manufactured. There were just people everywhere suffering. When we got there, there

was no shelter left, so my parents built a hut from the tablecloths and sheets that my mother packed in her suitcase. And they built a tent and that was our new home. Once a day, they allowed us to go to the river that surrounded the ghetto just to drink a little water. They wouldn't let us wash our face or clothes. We couldn't even take back water to the little children or the sick people. We children were always afraid to be taken away from our parents or being beaten for no reason at all. Every day, they took men and boys to work. Many of them never came back.

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And then the cattle trains came and they told us that we need to be relocated to the vineyard in our own country until after the war. Well, everybody was so happy to leave this hellish place and go to the vineyard. So everybody, my mother still packed up our suitcases. And she reminded me that if we work in the vineyard in separate places and I get hungry to use the diamonds to buy bread. When I saw the cattle trains, I asked my father, why are we going to work in cattle trains? My father said the vineyard isn't that far away. It wouldn't be so bad. But when they forced 100 people in each boxcar with a small pair-- pail with no water in it, I knew that something was very wrong.

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When they locked the doors from the outside, we were in complete darkness. A crack in the wall was the only light we had. My father was standing by the crack to see how far away we are from the vineyard. And the boxcar was so bad. There was no room to sit or stand or move. We children-- all the children were sitting on the floor against the wall and holding our little siblings in our laps so the adults should have a little more room to move around. And then, my father saw through the crack that we are not going to the vineyard and he said they lied to us. We just left our country and we crossed the border to Poland.

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I was holding my two little-- my two-year-old little brother in my arms and he never stopped crying. When my father said we are going to Poland, I remember the man that was spending a night in our home and he told us to go with him because when they come to us they'll kill our little children. My little brother was crying in my arms all the time, not for food, not for water. He just wanted to go home. And I promised him that we will be home soon. But when my father said we are going to Poland, and I remembered what the man said about the little children, I held my little brother so tight, and I promised myself that I will never let the SS take him from me. My little brother never saw his home again.

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We were in the boxcar for about five days and the entire time I was wishing that the train would stop so we can go to a real bathroom like normal people. But most, I was wishing that they would give the children some food and some water and maybe they will stop crying. And the boxcar was so bad that when the train stopped I thought that we have survived the worst, but I was wrong. When the doors opened, the SS with their vicious dogs and clubs in their hands yelling at us, "Get out you dirty Jews and make it quick." They immediately separated the men from the women. They made us leave our belongings at the train and they told us that the men will bring it to us later. We never saw our men or our belongings ever again.

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As we were passing the cattle train, I saw chimneys in the distance and I pointed them out to my mother and I said, "The factories we are going to work in." But my mother paid no mind to me. In this chaos, she was trying to hold us together. She took my little brother from my arms and she told me to hold my four-year-old little sister's hand really tight so she doesn't get lost. A man in a striped jacket came over and he offered to carry my little brother, but my mother didn't let him. But she asked him, "Where are we?" And he said, "Auschwitz." But we didn't know what Auschwitz was or why we were there. There were three long cattle trains packed with people waiting to get off. And I

again looked at the chimneys and I couldn't believe that the Nazis had so many factories, that they needed so many of us to come to work for them.

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Little did I know that we were the daily ration for the gas chamber. When Hitler declared the assault on Hungarian Jews, it was during the "Final Solution." The Final Solution then, that not one Jew will survive to bear witness. And on-- in 54 days on a hundred and forty-seven cattle trains, 437,402 Hungarian Jews were in Auschwitz. And that was only from the little towns. The big cities were long gone. When we passed the cattle trains, a handsome SS man wearing white gloves and a baton-like stick in his hand, he appeared in front of us, and he pointed that stick at my mother. And he yelled at her, "Put the child down and go to the right."

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But my mother being so desperate to keep us together, she yelled back at him, "My children will go with me." He got so angry at her that she did not obey him, he took that baton-like stick and he hit my hand between my little sister. He separated us. We were bleeding. We were crying and begging him to let me go with my mother. But he just took my little sister away and kicked me away from them. And then, I heard my mother call out to me, "Don't cry. I will come for you later." That was the last time I heard my mother's voice. A few minutes later, I was in a huge hall with thousands of people, but I was alone. The SS men and women with their vicious dogs again yelling at us, "Take your clothes and shoes off and hold them in one hand."

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"And take your valuables and put them in the bin." And I remembered my mother's diamonds that she sewed them in at the head-- in the hem of my skirt. So I quickly took them out. I don't know how many they were, but I found four of them. And they took our belongings right away. I didn't know, so I was holding them in my hand really tight. And when they moved us to the next section, I saw that they shaved their hair, they tattooed-- they took our name away, tattooed a number in my arm. And then I saw that they were pulling gold teeth from people's mouth. I put my mother's diamonds in my mouth when they were shaving my head so I can hide them.

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But when I saw they were looking in people's mouths I knew that they will find the diamonds. They will take them away. And they will shoot me for not putting them in the bin. So for fear, I swallowed the diamonds. So then I was safe. I didn't have to worry about going to the gas chamber because I owned diamonds. They after pushed us into another room, and there was a pile of clothes. They ordered us to take one piece. I got a pajama top that barely covered my body. And at the door was a huge mirror, and they ordered us to look at ourselves. I didn't recognize me when I-- myself when I saw myself. I was reduced to a number that represented a nothing. I was stripped of my identity and my dignity. But you see, that was their first process of dehumanizing us.

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And then they lined us up in rows of five and marched us into a place called Birkenau, a planet of evil. The SS locked the electric barbed-wire fences against us-- behind us, never to let us out. It was spring, but flowers and grass didn't grow there. The sky was as gray as the mud under my feet. The wooden barracks with three-story bunks were our luxury housing. One thousand of us in each barrack and ten of us in each bunk didn't give us much hope ever to get out. Our food for the day was a cup of brown liquid they called soup. It was seasoned with a chemical that was destroying our reproductive organs. The twice-a-day roll call wasn't just to take count, but Doctor Josef Mengele's haven for human guinea pigs for his brutal experiments.

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We were completely cut off from the outside world. At the end of the day, when my mother didn't come for me, I decided to go look for her because with my hair shave, with this piece of rag on my body, she will not be able to find me. But when I got to the door, the kapo slapped my face and yelled at me, "Where are you going?" And when I told her, she pointed to the chimney, and she said, "Your mother is just about now coming out of one of those chimneys. And if you don't go back to the bunk, all of you will go there." I was so scared. I didn't understand why she was saying that about my mother. My mother was only 32 years old, and she was beautiful. Why would anyone do this to my mother? But I had no answers to my questions.

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So I climbed up to my bunk, and I tried to go to sleep, hoping that when I wake up this madness will be gone. But I couldn't fall asleep because the cries of little children were so sad. We didn't have any windows in our barracks, but we had a three-inch opening between the ceiling and the wall. So I was on the top bunk, and I looked at the three-inch ceiling between the wall and the ceiling. And I looked out, and I saw trucks coming down the road. And two little children-- they were this little-- they fell out of the truck. The SS men picked them up by their little feet, and then he just threw them against a truck. The blood was everywhere. He threw them back on the truck like they were no children, like they were two pieces of firewood. Those little children that committed no sin will never, never cry again.

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I was so hopeless I didn't know what to do, so I started to scream, but the girl next to me put her hand over my mouth and she begged me not to scream or even talk because the punishment was death. So in my silence, I called to God, but God wasn't there. I was thinking, where is he, and why isn't he taking care of those little children? I was so angry with him. I had the biggest fight with him. But then, I said to myself, why am I fighting with God? God didn't create the Holocaust. Men did. So in my silence, I figured it out, that he must be in a place where he is taking care of other children. And when he is done, he will surely come and take care of us. The next day, I was selected by Dr. Josef Mengele for his brutal experiments. I was no longer a 13-year-old child.

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My childhood couldn't continue in the death camps. But in a desperate effort, I had to try and save my mother's diamonds that carried her love. Once a day, we were allowed to go to the latrine. If you saw "Schindler's List," you know what the latrine looked like. I never had the pleasure of sitting on one of those holes because I had to find a safe place to save my mother's diamonds. It would have been safer to throw the diamonds away when I realized that I cannot buy bread, not even for diamonds. But the love and the pride that they carried was stronger than Nazi hatred. I saw hatred so strong that when Mengele was experimenting on us without anesthetics and the pain was so unbearable, I saw joys in his eyes watching us suffer.

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That kind of a hatred existed in the 20th century in Nazi Germany. When the SS packed the gas chambers with mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers and grandparents, I was there. I saw them, and I heard them cry out for their last time. Do not forget us or shall I Israel. At that moment, my will to live became stronger and more important. I promised to be their voice if I survived this evil. Those children's voices were silenced in the most unspeakable terror of the Shoah, of the Holocaust, just because their eyes were not blue enough or their skin was not white enough or they were Jewish. Those million and a half children are depending on us to carry their message, never again.

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When Nazi doctors were torturing us and the pain was so unbearable, I knew that we must endure and live as long as we can for those children. During the experiments, I had a silent friend. Her

name was Sabka. Even in our pain, we could not cry because the punishment was death. And then they took Sabka away. And when she didn't come back at the end of the day, I just thought that they took her to the gas chamber. I was so lost without her. And then they called the selection, and they selected 1,500 women, including myself, to go to the gas chamber. When we got there and we started to go inside, we realized that the gas chamber wasn't big enough to hold 1,500 people.

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So everybody started to push outside, and I was pushed back to the door. So when I got to the door, I dug my nails into the side of the door and I just hung on-- didn't want to be pushed back inside. Not that I was looking for a miracle-- because nobody ever came out of there, but for that moment, I just wanted to look at the sky for as long as I can. And then the Zyklon B arrived, and the SS ordered the guard to close the door so they can throw the Zyklon B. But he was so nervous because I was in the doorway and he could not close the door, and he must obey at any cost. So he threw me out, and he closed the door. I ran up the ramp that I just came down looking for a place to hide, but there was no place to hide.

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But then, I saw that the gas chamber had a little space between the roof-- see, the gas chamber was underground, but the roof was on top of the ground. And between the roof and the ground, there was about this much space. And I only weighed about 50 pounds at that time, so I was able to crawl in that little spot and hide. And so under-- and while I was underneath, I said to myself, what's [inaudible] In about 20 minutes, another transport will come in. And they will find me. They will put me back in the gas chamber with the people that are coming in. But for that moment, I had hope. And then a Sonderkommando boy came to do his job, and he saw me first.

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Do you know what a Sonderkommando is? Anybody? Okay. A Sonderkommando is a group of people that Mengele and doctors selected when the trains came in from all parts of Europe. From every part of Europe, they would select the strongest between the age of 18 and 35. And their job was-- they were called the Sonderkommando. Their job was to appease the people when they were leading them into the gas chamber. And when they were dead, their job was to put them in the oven and cremate them. The only problem was that they were only given three to four months to live. And after that, they would take the Sonderkommando and kill them and select new ones that came in. The reason they selected a group from every country, so they can speak the language that the people that they were appeasing.

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Can you imagine? There were over 8,000 people in the Sonderkommando at all times. And every three, four months, they would kill these strong, beautiful, young people just because they did their job. And this one Sonderkommando boy found me first. He took his jacket off and covered my naked body and said, "I'll be right back." And I thought I was hallucinating because I never thought that anybody-- that these things were happening. It didn't take a few minutes. He came back. He took my hand, and he walked me around the gas chamber. And he says, "There is a train going to a labor camp. I will try and put you on that train." I says, "Who are you? I mean, what is your name and where are you from?" He spoke my language. He says, "That doesn't matter. I only have three more days to live.

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So if you make it, live a little for me, too." That is the time when I realized how much I want to stay alive for him and for all the others. So he says, "My name is not important. I'm not going to be here." Can you imagine? Killing all these people for doing their dirty work. So he did put me on a train. The train was moving only at night. I didn't know which way we were going, where we were going. But when the train stopped, we were in a labor camp. We were put in barracks and in bunks

just like in Auschwitz and Birkenau. In the morning, when I looked down at my lower bunk, another miracle happened. My silent friend Sabka was looking straight at me.

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You cannot imagine what this was like. We both thought that we were taken to the gas chamber and we were both dead, and here we are in the same camp alive. We were-- we didn't know whether we were able to talk there because how the punishment was there, but we didn't have to. We just looked at each other, and we just knew that from here on we were going to be together no matter where it takes us. We worked in this factory. It was a munition factory. We were 5,000 women there. And we worked in separate places, but we were together every night. We worked there until January of 1945. And in January of 1945, they took all 5,000 women. They gave us a pair of wooden shoes that didn't fit and a blanket, and they put us out on the death march.

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It was so cold. The snow was up to our knees. But the SS pushed us off the road and left us there. Whenever they wanted to, like, stop for themselves, they would push us off the road and let the dogs guard us. And I don't know what they were doing, but I guess they needed a rest. They were shooting people every few miles that they couldn't keep up and left them on the wayside. Sabka and I were so helpless. We couldn't let them-- we couldn't help them live, and we couldn't help them die. And then we were marching from January until April. By April, we were only 200 of us left alive from the 5,000.

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And we decided that we were going to give up. We were going to sit on the road. And if they tell us to march and we don't march, they are going to have to shoot us. But just then, planes appeared from behind the mountains, and they were bombing everything that was moving. But we were on this very narrow farm road with forests all around us, and the only thing that was moving on this road was the trucks that were carrying the supplies for the guards. So needless to say, they bombed those trucks to smithereens. And when they came back, they ordered us to march again. And I said to Sabka, "I don't want to march anymore, so I'm going to sit down on the road and I was going to wait for somebody to shoot me." But Sabka pulled me into the lineup, and she whispered to me, "Look away from what you see and think about the world that they took away from us.

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So you can, you've got to go." So I went. And a few miles later, I sat on the road again. I just didn't want to go. And I said, "Sabka, I don't know where we're going. And when we get there, they're going to shoot us anyway. So why waste all this time?" And she says, "I know where we're going. We're going to the library, and we're going to read a book. And then we're going to go home, and we're going to have dinner with our family. And then we're going to sleep in our own bed, and we won't have to share it with 10 people. So you can't die today." So these were words that Sabka and I would tell each other when one of us gave up, and it kept us going. And then finally, she realized that, yes, we are going to get killed, so let's do something about it.

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We were at such a dark night, we couldn't even see each other. I don't know how she found out that the guards had no flashlights and they had no ammunition because it was all bombed on the truck. So I-- she said she pushed me off the road, and she jumped after me, and she held my mouth. And she says, wait until everybody passes. And so when everybody passed, she says, God created this dark night so we can escape. So she-- I says, but I don't want to escape. I don't want to go anywhere. They're going to catch us. They're going to kill us. She says, we must go. We must find some real food before we go to heaven. I says, okay. See, these were words that kept us going.

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So I kept going. And so we-- all night, we were running and walking as fast as we can. At daybreak, I noticed an abandoned farm. So I ran and I started digging in the ground. And she says, what are you doing? I says, I'm looking for the food that's going to take us to heaven. She says, in this mud? I says, this is no mud. This is an abandoned farm. And my grandfather had a farm, and I know that during harvest they left a lot of food in the ground, so I'm going to look for it. And I found a little potato. And I shared this little potato with her. I says, see, this is the food that's going to take us to heaven. And then we heard water running, so we found this little brook with the cleanest water that we have seen in a long time. So needless to say, we drank a lot of water. We were so rich. We had this little potato and this clean water.

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So we decided to stay by the brook and rest. We covered ourselves with this half a blanket that we had left because the other half we had to cut pieces and wrap up our feet when we lost the wooden shoes in the snow. But that's okay. We only weighed about 50 pounds each or less, so we wrapped ourselves up in this little blanket and we fell asleep. I don't know how long we slept, but someone was poking me with the back of a rifle. And Sabka says, I am not coming out of the blanket. I don't want to see who is going to shoot us. And I said Sabka-- see, Sabka was a little older than me, so she was a little wiser. But I had more dare, and I didn't care anymore. So I said, Sabka, let go of the blanket, and I'm going to see who's going to shoot us. When I put my head out, I saw two soldiers in strange uniforms and strange boots, and they spoke a strange language.

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I spoke seven languages at that time and I didn't understand them. And when I spoke to them, they didn't understand me either. They were looking at me with such a disbelief. God knows, I didn't look human. My eyes were bulging out of my head. My bones were sticking out of my skin. I was covered with lice and dirt. I weighed about 50 pounds. And one of the soldiers was bending to-- I don't know whether he wanted to help me up, but his dog tags fell out of his shirt. And on the dog tags, he had a little tiny 10 Commandments. And I said, Sabka, come out of the blanket. There is another Jew here. And she said, who is he? I says, I don't know. She goes, I'm not coming out of the blanket. So you see, at that point, Sabka and I thought we were the only two Jewish people in all of Europe that is alive.

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So the soldier helped me up. He put his 10 Commandments in my hand, and I kissed it. And I said-- so he, at that point, kind of guessed who I was, but he didn't know exactly who I was. And he motioned for me to stay, and he took off with his buddy. A few minutes later, a whole army was coming down that mountain towards me, and they had a German-speaking soldier, so I was able to communicate. And he looked at me, and he said, who are you hiding from, and why do you look like this? God knows I didn't look human. And I tried to explain to him about the death camps and the death march and that the Nazis are doing this. He says, what kind of people do this to children? And I again tried to explain.

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He didn't know what I was talking about, knew nothing about that. And I was angry. I didn't know who they were, and Sabka wouldn't come out of the blanket. And I was afraid that maybe they are not who I think they are. And I got angry with him. And I says, who are you? And he goes, don't be afraid. We are Americans. And I didn't believe him. I says, Americans? What are you doing here? Don't you know what's going on here? He says, yeah, we do, and that's why we're here-- to stop it. And he kind of-- tried to convince me to believe him who he is. He says, Germany is burning, and we're going to go to Berlin and kill Hitler. And this will-- never going to happen again. You will never have to be afraid of. I said, okay. So I started to believe him. So at that point, I looked up to heaven, and I said, thank you, God, for watching over us.

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I cannot find the words high enough to describe my liberators, but they helped us to believe that there are still people in this world that care. I saw so much love in their eyes. I wanted to hug them and thank them for finding us, but I was so dirty and covered with lice, I didn't want them to be like that. And then he said, would you like to have something to eat? God knows we looked hungry. And that's when Sabka came out of the blanket-- not because she wanted to eat first, but she asked them, can we just little-- have just a little scrambled eggs and a small loaf of bread? So our wish becomes a reality. Because that's what we were talking about on the death march and in the death camp-- of our favorite foods and the world they took away from us. And that's what kept us going all this time.

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Within minutes, there was little fires all over the mountains because we couldn't build a big fire because we were in danger. You know, the war was still on. But they built these little fires, and they were scrambling eggs in their helmets. They didn't have any bread, so they gave me these brown little boxes. And they opened them up, and there were lots of crackers in there and these brown chunks of things. I didn't know what they were. They turned out to be chocolate, but I never saw chocolate before. So I didn't care about that, but I was very happy with the crackers. And Sabka was very happy with her scrambled eggs. And then they gave us clean shirts, and we went back to the brook and washed ourselves and put on those clean shirts. And they put us in a Red Cross van. And again, they made our wish become a reality.

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There were two beds with pillows and blankets and white sheets. We weren't sure that that was for us, so we sat on the floor. But then, after a while, no one came in, so we just realized that they must be for us. You cannot imagine it. It was the greatest feeling to know that we will not have to share this bed with 10 people. We started to think about our families, and we knew that we will never see them again. So the feeling was different. We weren't so happy anymore. We just sat and we cried and cried, and we just cried ourselves to sleep. In the morning, when I woke up, Sabka was still sleeping. I was calling her name, and I yelled at her, Sabka, get up because today is the day we will start our new life in the free world, together.

00:45:25

But she didn't wake up. A soldier came in to tell us to get ready to leave because the enemy was closing in on that area, and we were in their way. So I asked him, please help her wake up. Because she is so tired, she can't wake up by herself. And when he saw her, he opened the door and he yelled, medic. And the medic came in. And I saw that he gave her an injection, but she didn't wake up. So I yelled at him, wake her up. Don't let her sleep so long. And he says, I can't wake her up. She is sleeping in a very beautiful place, and she is no longer sick or hungry. And she knows that you are free. I said, what are you saying? She was never sick. And he said, she was very sick. She died in her sleep of typhus, and I can't help her. Please, tell me, where do you want her body to be buried because we really must go.

00:46:28

But my heart was so full of grief, I questioned myself-- if I could have done something to help her stay alive. The loss was so unbearable. Again, I was losing my loved ones. She was going to be the friend and my family forever, and now I am again alone. I couldn't even spend time at her graveside because we were in harm's way and we had to go. We buried her in the blanket that we were liberated in, and we were-- we buried her also in the spot where we were liberated. And the soldiers told me that they will make arrangements for the soldiers that are coming after that to come back after the war and take her body to a real cemetery. And we did that, but we couldn't find her body because the mountain was so destroyed from fighting.

00:47:30

She is in my heart all the time. And they took me with them, and they left me in a army-- in a field hospital somewhere in the mountains near [inaudible] and they went on to fight the war. And when I got stronger, they put me in a displaced person camp where I joined 40 children to go to Sweden to an orphanage. And while I was waiting to go to Sweden, my name appeared on a list of survivors in New York. And my father had a brother in the Bronx that I never knew. And he saw the name on the survival list, my name, and he called the-- wrote a letter and asked the camp to find me and asked me if I want to come to a free country and a new family.

00:48:34

And I screamed so loud they must have heard me all the way to New York. So I gave up my spot to another child to go to Sweden, and I waited two years to go to America. I couldn't believe that I was going to the greatest free country in the whole world. And finally, in 1947, I saw what a free country looks like for the first time in my life. After many encounters with death, I survived Hitler's atrocity. And now, I must rebuild my life. But first, I must find a way to be the voice that I promised to be for those children. But I couldn't, because who was going to believe such a nightmare, a child? So that was one of the reasons that I did not share my past in the Holocaust for 50 years. I couldn't tell of my torturers that destroyed my temples, my Torahs, and humanity itself.

00:49:40

But then in 1994 when "Schindler's List" came out, and I knew that it is my duty to bear witness, it was difficult to describe so much sorrow and pain. Even in my free world, my nightmares were the same, except the ashes were grayer, the cries were louder, and the children and their-- and the children's pain was clearer. When I woke up, I had to force myself to think where I was. So how can I be the voice that I promised to be? I tried to think about my tomorrows because my yesterdays were all about Auschwitz and Birkenau. And then I thought of the camps. With my experience, maybe they could be lessons for humanity. So I must learn from my yesterdays and share them with the present and future generation.

00:50:41

Since I was only 13 years old when I endured so much pain, and I witnessed so much injustice against humanity, I knew that the children of tomorrow could learn from my pain. So, in 1994 when after "Schindler's List" came out, I realized that it is my duty to bear witness. So I went back to the death camps with 5,000 teenagers from 49 countries on the March of the Living. Fifty years after the Holocaust, I was back in Auschwitz-Birkenau on the planet of evil where I lost my entire family, and I was a human guinea pig for Dr. Josef Mengele. When I saw how much evidence the SS destroyed, I was so angry I wanted to kill someone. But most of all, I wanted to yell at Mengele because he always yelled at us.

00:51:43

I looked around because I didn't want to yell in front of the children, and what used to be the gypsy camp were still a couple of barracks that were not destroyed. So I went inside one of them, and I yelled as loud as I could at Mengele, look at me. I am alive. In spite of your experiments, you tortured Sabka and I and millions of people you sent to the flames, I am back with 5,000 healthy children, and you can't touch us. Since there is no room for hatred in my life, that was my revenge. And from there, I went to the number 2 gas chamber where my entire family was murdered. And again, I was angry. What used to be the gas chamber is now a pile of rubble. I found an opening in that rubble, and I crawled inside. 50 years on the anniversary of the Holocaust, I was again in the gas chamber.

00:52:49

The walls were still green and blue from the Zyklon B. The smell is still very strong, and the fear of death still embraced me. I sat down on the ground and lit all my candles that I had in my backpack, and I prayed for the victims that died such a cruel death. As I was leaving the gas chamber, I turned around one more time to look back, and I saw a table set for dinner. Actually, it was set for our first Seder, for our holiday. And my whole family was sitting around the table, and next to my little sister was an empty chair. And that was my chair. So I turned around, and I was going to go sit in my chair, but my mother put her hand in front of me and she says, you can't sit in your chair yet. Promise me that you will stop crying and you will do what you must. When I reached out to hug her, she wasn't there. So I sat down by my candles and I wrote her a letter, and I'd like to share the letter with you. I will not cry anymore, and I will never forget the children who died a cruel death because their eyes were not blue enough, or their skin not light enough, or they were Jewish. I will never forget the painful look in their eyes when they marched to their death. Dear mother, this letter I am writing to you is very special. I want to tell you how much I missed you. I missed you on my wedding day, and you did not share my happiness. But most, I missed you when I gave birth to your grandchildren and you could not hold them. It is difficult to live with the fact that you were cheated of enjoying them.

00:54:49

As for me, being a mother today, I can feel the pain you felt when your children died in your arms from the gas. For me, there is no medicine I can take to heal my pain. I am still learning to live with it. But I promise you to tell the world all that happened, and I hope that God will help me to stay strong. And I pray that he watches over our children of tomorrow so they can remember the past and never be silent when they see injustice against people. What happened to us should never happen again. And on this day, I am making a commitment to help heal the sickness of hatred. And when I can't help heal any more, I hope to sit in my chair and tell them that they are being learned from. When I came up from the gas chamber, I shared my past with all these teenagers from 49 countries for the first time in 50 years.

00:56:01.

I was grateful for the courage and also the liberation of this road of murder where SS trained me to step over death and not to cry for them. Today, I want to tell them, I survived your atrocities and I cry for the death, and I walk among people that value human lives. And I have not stopped ever since. After that day, I have spoken to many, many people from almost all the free world, including our government. I still can't believe that I am alive today and I shared my painful past with the most powerful government in the world. But sharing my past with you is most important because you are going to be that government in the future, and it's going to be up to you to make sure that everyone is free to practice their beliefs. So if you remember the Holocaust, you will not let it happen again.

00:57:07

The Holocaust is not just a part in history, but it lingers in the present, in Rwanda, in Bosnia, in Africa, in our own country, 9/11. Perhaps when we were forgetting how powerful hatred can be, 9/11 reminded us. And we tasted violence and mass death. So we must absolutely be aware of hatred and change people's minds of hating others. Otherwise, it will cause another unexplainable event like the Holocaust. We must learn the lessons of the Holocaust to bring awareness of this unfairness to humanity and never forget what hatred leads to. If we stand up against prejudice and promote tolerance, it will change lives and behaviors. We must work together to protect the future of human existence for generations to come, and it has to start with our future generation.

00:58:13

They are at a distance-- of they are first generation at a distance of the Holocaust and the last generations to know survivors firsthand. None of their children will be able to meet a survivor, so they have a very important mission. To teach their children what they learn from a survivor. I need them to help me to bring a good understanding about this painful event. When I am no longer here,

I hope that they will carry my message to the future so those fires of hell become a light of hope. All the technological devices my generation had created in our lifetime, we failed to create a tool to stop hatred. But we will help you to find that tool as long as we're here, and you will change that.

00:59:14

You will change the world. So my mission is to help you find that. It was very easy for Hitler to take our lives, but it is difficult for us to get Hitler out of our lives. So please, join my children and grandchildren, who will tell and retell of our losses and grief in hope to stop genocide. I will not be silent, and I will not forget the victims. As long as I am able, I will speak worldwide to improve human conditions. My goal is to make a difference in one person every time I share my past. I cannot explain that dark time in my childhood, but we must remember it. It is important to recall the past so our lives and generations to come have more meaning. The memory and the lessons of the Holocaust are not negotiable and not a subject to be forgotten.

01:00:19

I relive my pain again and again so present and future generations can learn from it. I hope that they will learn and remember and never let it happen again. I came forward to share my degrading experience and hopes that my personal story will influence generations to come to work together and work for tolerance and understanding. I don't want the world to forget what happened to us because I don't want it to happen again. For too long, hatred, fear, and intolerance have torn apart families, communities, and nations around the world. If our world is to achieve lasting peace, all people must learn that even if we come from different backgrounds, races, and culture, we all have the same dreams for our children.

01:01:26

The world has not learned yet from past histories-- not just the Holocaust, but histories before the Holocaust. I cannot explain the Auschwitz and Birkenau and the genocide of Jews and others, but this painful event teaches us what is important in life. So no matter how small you think you are, you can make the biggest difference. So embrace the past and learn from it. In spite the chemicals in my soup and Mengele's experiments, I have a six-foot-tall gorgeous son and a beautiful, beautiful daughter and five grandchildren that light up my life every single day. My mother's diamonds and I survived Hitler's atrocities, and they are to be handed down to each firstborn girl in every generation to preserve my mother's memory.

01:02:32

They are not to be sold or traded. Except, god forbid, if they're hungry, they can buy bread. So thank you so, so much for having me here today. I want to-- before I end, I want to thank two very special people again, Gilly and Adam and Google, the company, whoever.

[laughter]

Whoever you are and as many as you are. And if you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer if I can. So where is my helper?

PERSON: [inaudible]

[applause]

PERSON: So--

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Before I let him go and before he goes anywhere, I'd like to pin him with a pin that we have to earn it.

01:03:35

We get it on the March of the Living. And it's a pin. It's a Hebrew word, and it says Zakar. Zakar means remember. So I want to pin him with this pin because he remembered to get me all these things to say today. So thank you so much.

PERSON: Thank you.

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Oh, maybe I have it on the wrong side.

PERSON: Perfect. It's perfect.

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: But that's okay.

[laughter]

PERSON: Thank you again. I think that we are-- if you have to leave, we understand that time is over. However, I would love the opportunity for folks to ask questions, and we have a few minutes. Go ahead.

PERSON: I just want to say thank you so much for sharing your story. I can't imagine the strength and the courage it takes to-- and it's like so selfless of you to share it with everyone. So thank you so much. I'm Shanah Tovah.

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Shanah Tovah to you.

01:04:36

PERSON: I was just wondering, you were 13 years old when you went through this experience. How did you-- and like, throughout the talk, you were describing your relationship with God. How did you rationalize all of the hatred that you went through, and able-- how are you able to hold on to your relationship with God and have hope?

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: I held on to words, very important words. Don't give up. Fight. Stay alive as long as you can. And [inaudible] and I, we were each other's strength. If I gave up I would-- she would find words for, you know, say to me. Like, for an example, one day I said I want to go through the electric barb, you know, barb wires. I want to die. And she says, "No, no, you can't do that." Just imagine, she says, "This hell cannot be last forever." And when it's over, the world will be so beautiful.

01:05:38

Don't you want to stay alive for just one minute to see that beautiful world?" Those are the things, those are the kind of things that helped us push each hour to stay alive. I could never imagine being alive tomorrow, but I was hoping and pushing for today. So, yeah, I think and there was no man or woman anywhere that can help me to be here today except God, and I never lost faith in God.

PERSON: Thank you.

PERSON: Thank you. Nick.

PERSON: Thank you so much for speaking with us today. I had a question. Just sort of, I've noticed over many years of discussing politics and current events with people, a sort of constant refrain that people immediately jump to when they tend to dislike a politician or a government or are

upset. They frequently, immediately compare them to the Nazis because they know everyone agrees that they're, you know, personification of evil in many ways.

01:06:45

But I always wondered, from your perspective, you know, do you think-- does that upset you? Do you think that sort of does a disservice to sort of discussion? I mean, do you think it's disrespectful for people to sort of paint with brush strokes when they don't like something, immediately to jump to that as a characterization?

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Does it upset me?

PERSON: Yes.

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: It makes me sick and afraid, and it takes me back to my childhood where I wasn't allowed or I wasn't giving or I wasn't able to do anything. Of course it does, but-- and I wish I can do something about it.

PERSON: Thank you.

PERSON: All right, last question in the back there.

PERSON: Thank you so much for this gift and for being here. I have two questions. How did you, after experiencing these atrocities, find joy in your life?

01:07:49

And do-- you mentioned prayer. Do you pray? Do you have a prayer practice?

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Yes. I pray all the time, and I talk to God every Friday night when I light candles. I tell him my problems. I ask him for to fix it, and he does. I really believe that he does. As far as my joy, I did not have joy for a long time. The first time I had joy is when I gave birth to my family, my son, my daughter, and then my grandchildren. Those are my joys. That is the most important thing in my life because I lost my family at a young age of forty nine people in five minutes. And I was alone ever since then. And so this family is the most important thing in my life. And I have a lot of joy from them.

01:08:53

PERSON: All right. Well, again, on behalf of Google, thank you so much, Irene, for coming and sharing your story today.

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Oh, okay. Thank you for having me.

PERSON: I'd recommend to anyone, she goes into more detail in "The Fifth Diamond." It's a book [inaudible]

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Yeah. I have books back there. Whoever wants a book, you're welcome.

PERSON: But thank you for sharing your experience, you're doing a great job on your mission.

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Thank you, sir. I hope so. I hope so.

[applause]

IRENE WEISBERG ZISBLATT: Thank you so much. I love you.

PERSON: If you have any feedback about this or any other episode. We'd love to hear from you. You can visit g.co/talksatgoogle/postcastfeedback to leave your comments. To discover more insightful content you can always find us via YouTube.com/talksatgoogle. Or via our Twitter handle [@googletalks](https://twitter.com/googletalks). Thanks for listening. Talk soon.