Hear My Story Helen Kaltman transcript

**Lisa MacVittie** 00:00

I'm the last survivor of the Holocaust in our family.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:04

Behind the words pictures and artifacts in the museum are people whose stories of survival and hope come alive to inspire new generations of upstanders. One by one these stories stir the soul

**Al Miller** 00:18

Can there really be hope for us?

**Bella Ouziel** 00:21

Mine was 40018. My sister was 40017

**Jackie Congedo** 00:28

Holocaust survivors, their descendants, liberators, champions of justice and courageous upstanders ask only this, hear my story, so that the lessons they teach will echo for generations

**Elisha Wiesel** 00:41

I will never meet someone else like my father. But there are many of us who if we come together, can keep his voice alive.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:48

These stories will change you, they will move you to action, inspiring the best of humanity every day.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:00

I'm Jackie Congedo. And in this episode, you'll hear from three generations of women who share their reflection on lives upended by the Holocaust. Helen Kaltman was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1937. When the war began, she and her parents fled to the Soviet Union and were then deported to Siberia. Throughout the war, Helen's family suffered lengthy separations, hunger, illness, and the loss of many extended family members. Miraculously, Helen and her parents survived and looked to the future of rebuilding their lives. In Israel is where Helen says her life began. It's where she met her future future husband, Simon. Helen and Simon ultimately settled in Cincinnati where they raised their family. Their daughter, Elana, and granddaughter Ariel, join Helen to bear witness to this remarkable family story, and the strength and love Helen has shown throughout her life.

**Trinity Johnson** 01:52

Good afternoon, ladies, thank you so much for being with me today to do this very special segment of Hear My Story. So excited to dive in to your family's history, but then also how together we will keep this story alive. So again, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for being with me. And Helen, my first question goes to you. You are a Holocaust survivor who survived with your parents. But before we really get into your story, I'm curious. Just and I know you were very young as well. Can you share anything you know about pre-war life and Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland, what your family was like, and, and growing up.

**Helen Kaltman** 02:37

I don't have a lot to share them. I was two years old when the Germans came into Warsaw. And somehow now that I'm 87 years old, I can hear how the Germans walked with it, you know, it came back. Now, when I go to sleep, it can come back to me. And I see my parents and I see myself is a baby. And that's how it started.

**Trinity Johnson** 03:12

And I know today faith is very important to you. Where were your family very observant?

**Helen Kaltman** 03:18

Yes they were. I know that my grandfather from my mother's side was very, very frum. And he came to New York with his only son. And he stayed here a year. And he said that the Jews here are not observant enough. And he went back to Poland and he got killed like everyone else. I don't remember any of my family. But I remember the names. Thank God Elana and her sister were good enough, and Ariel, to name the kids after my whole family that went. I knew the names because my mother and father were alive. But I don't remember anybody from my family.

**Trinity Johnson** 04:18

I'm so sorry to hear that. But thank you for sharing. I know a lot of what we'll talk about today is is hard. And I'm just so thankful that you're willing to share this with us so that hopefully we can learn from from your experience in this history. I know you mentioned the Germans coming in into Poland. And eventually you you and your family ended up in Uzbekistan. And you, you and your mother really survived the war together. You're separated from your father who's conscripted into the Soviet Army. Can you tell me how how did your mother keep things together keep you and her together safe? And how did you survive the war together with your mother?

**Helen Kaltman** 05:08

Well first I was in a few places in Russia until I came to Uzbekistan. And when the Russians came, they sent us to Siberia. And in Siberia, my father was not together with my mother. They were in a different camp and my mother was in a different camp and I was in a different camp. And then one day, it was before the war as soon as we came to Siberia, my mother got a letter that somehow my Aunt can smuggle me back to Poland. She was a doctor and she worked for the Russians. The men used to smuggle back to the women's camp. And he decided they have to run away from there and we went on a train. My parents had some jewelry, and we went all around Russia. For three months we went on the train. We didn't know where we were going. And it was a lot of survivors like us from Poland, that run away. And then I got to Uzbekistan. As soon as we got to Uzbekistan, they took my father away. And he was in the army. And my mother and myself were in Uzbekistan. And she worked from morning to night for a piece of bread until the end of the war, and then my father came, and I didn't recognize him. And I was screaming. (Some words in Russian) please go away, I'm not your daughter. And one time, I heard a man crying and I went up to him and I said, "Why are you crying?" And he said, "I had a little girl that I loved so very, very much. And now she doesn't want me anymore. She doesn't love me. She doesn't want me." I told him, "She's a very mean little girl, but I will love you." And I loved my father, I loved him with my whole heart until he passed away. He was a very good man.

**Trinity Johnson** 07:42

And so patient and understanding because you were so young. So being through what you and your mother went through and then reuniting with your father, which is incredible that you all were able to survive and reunite after the war. It is heartbreaking to hear that you didn't recognize him, but how beautiful, that rebuilt relationship with your father.

**Helen Kaltman** 08:04

We went away. We ran away from there. We went to Poland. A lot of survivors, Polish people, survivors, Jews, probably, we went back to Poland. And when we came back there, they wanted to kill us. And my mother had a nervous breakdown. And she cried all the time, "I can hear the blood" and my father used to tell her, "You don't hear the blood, you look at the blood." And she really was sick. She had a very hard time. And they were people worked from Israel. And they smuggled over to Germany. And from Germany, we can go to Israel.

**Trinity Johnson** 08:57

One thing you mentioned that that I did want to ask you about is you you know through a lot of our tours, we see thousands, especially students, that come through our museum. And one of the misconceptions is that the war was over. Everything went back to normal, you know, antisemitism miraculously disappeared. And what I hear from you...

**Helen Kaltman** 09:21

They let us live in the same area. And the parents went every day to a place. That was a big list of the survivors. Every survivor told their name and it went in every place the Jews were. My parents used to go every day, and they didn't find anything. Nobody was survived, because my mother was from a little town and my father was near Warsaw. A lot of Jews in Warsaw were dead.

**Trinity Johnson** 09:21

Yeah, that's what I'm hearing from that is one, the the ongoing danger for survivors going back to their homes... I know. And another time you and I spoke, you talked about being met with sticks and stones and people really intimidating and making your family feel unwelcome in the very place you were from

**Helen Kaltman** 10:26

Scared to live.

**Trinity Johnson** 10:28

But then another thing you touch on is that that ongoing trauma, and how hard it was for survivors, to rebuild and to try to go on and live normal lives. And before we really talk about the next part of your story and DP camps, and then eventually even going to Israel. I wanted to ask, Ariel, when you hear your grandmother's story and the trauma and the pain and everything that she describes, on the flip side of that, it also took immense strength, right, but not only of her mother, but also of her and her father as well. And I'm just wondering, what do you hear it in your grandmother's story? Or what do you admire most about the character strengths that that she's sharing through her story?

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 11:19

What really sticks out is her love for family and her parents. And like she said, you know, it really does stick out to me, that my grandmother and grandfather said every day, they would go and look at this list to just hope that somebody was alive. And just never giving up on the idea of if there was even a speckle of a chance that somebody could be alive. They had to find them and reconnect and make sure they were okay. And I think that I was really always touched. When my grandmother told me about her mom, having a nervous breakdown, circling back to you know what, how her mother survived during this with her, I have no idea. I mean, she just kept going on, when she probably had nothing left to give, you know, having a nervous breakdown. And I'm sure she was fairly young had a baby. And just how people always say, I don't know how they did it. I don't know how they survived. But they didn't have any choice. They just kept going. So it's just inspiring that even when you're at rock bottom, somehow you kind of gravel up and continue for your children and your family.

**Trinity Johnson** 12:43

Yeah, I hear love and definitely hope, right? That hope that that they would survive, be reunited with Kissel, right, your father, you know, a hope that that this will pass and we will once again be together as a family. So I think that is so beautiful to pull out of this story that really is just so dark and so tragic. And Elana, I'm curious, when when do you recall first realizing that your parents were Holocaust survivors, and you really started kind of understanding this, this piece of your family's history.

**Elana Grubbs** 13:23

I was pretty young, because I remember my cousin Sandy said to me, "You know that the grandmother we have in Israel is not our real grandmother. She's a step grandmother." And I said, "Well, what happened to our grandmother?" And she said "She was killed." And that was all she said about it. But I knew there were a lot of secrets that I wasn't allowed to know. And I distinctly remember, my grandparents, my mother's parents, we were in Israel with them. And we were visiting their friends. And their friends came in and started to talk about, "We need to tell them what happened to us. They need to know." And my grandmother got so mad. And she said, "You can't tell them you can't, they can't ever know. Don't talk about it." And then also I remember my dad would drift off, like in the ozone, like just sit there and stare into space. And I knew instinctively as a kid, don't ask him what he's thinking about. It was just little things like that. So I think I always knew that there was a terrible dark secret that I'm not allowed to ask about.

**Trinity Johnson** 14:36

And as you you know, through the years learn more and more. I'm wondering when did you then share with your children and then Ariel, if you could follow up what have you shared with your children now or have you yet?

**Elana Grubbs** 14:52

When my father started to get sick, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's when he was 65. And I think that it kind of drew in that he does have a mortality here. And then he started to tell me more and more about what happened to him. And he would say, "Write it down." So I would get out a piece of paper, and he would dictate to me and I would write it down. And I think he started to share stories with me and my sister, and I know with the grandchildren. So that's when we really started talking about it. My mom really never did talk about it too much. I think that my mom had a lot of trauma. And as an adult, I can see, she absorbed the anxiety and the brokenness of her parents, on top of her own brokenness, and then being married to someone who had been through the horrors of concentration camps. I think it made I think it made you very anxious in general, and we kind of, Yaffa and I were always felt like we had to protect our parents.

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 16:00

I would imagine that it probably was lightly talked about always. My youngest now is six years old, or my oldest, I'm sorry, my oldest is six. And he asked me about what I was talking to bubbie about. And so I told him that I was talking about the Holocaust. And he said to me, "What's a Holocaust?" And it was so weird, I'm like, wow. This is a kid who obviously doesn't know what the Holocaust is. And I said, it was a very bad time in the world. And it's when very evil man named Hitler was trying to hurt the Jews... and the Nazis... And I told him a little background, you know, but gently, like, you know, but bubbie's family survived. And this is why we have to be proud Jews now, and, you know, stuff, very gentle, but just a general gist of it. And so, I would think that probably my mom always said stuff like that, like, you know, there was a time where people were trying to hurt my parents. And so I don't ever remember this big, like, sit down conversation. It was just, yeah, I was just always something that I knew about. And so I feel like with my children, you know, I think that it'll always just be something they know about, and then it'll kind of grow as far as to like, really what that means. So now, you know, my son knows what the Holocaust is. But does he know the extent of it, no, but will always continue to build on it.

**Trinity Johnson** 17:40

We already touched on this a little bit that you were with your mother during the war and separated from your father. And the trauma, the immense trauma that that your mother had through a nervous breakdown after the war, and I know you were very close with your father, and rebuilt that relationship with him. Did he speak very much about his experience with you - in the army and his experience?

**Helen Kaltman** 18:07

No, he talked about the family, the names and who they were, what they did, and nothing what he went through. But wanted me to know the family.

**Trinity Johnson** 18:25

When you think of your parents and everything, I asked Ariel, to to what we call strength spot, right? What does she hear in your story about the personal strengths? What do you what strengths do you see in your parents?

**Helen Kaltman** 18:41

My mother was a very strong woman. And before they took my father and sent him away, they had to work, plant trees. If they didn't plant the amount they were supposed, they wouldn't get anything to eat. So she used to take a bunch of it and put it all together and close it up. My father said, "If they catch you, they will kill you." And she said this life. I remember this all the time. She used to say, "I am hungry, I will do everything to bring my child a piece of bread." And I had a very hard time when we were in Uzbekistan. I was very sick. And then we came to Poland. It was kids like from five until I was I think at that time I was eight, something like this. We were talking to understand what our parents, why are they crying all the time? We understood. Our parents tried to send us to a regular school and they used to say “żydzić” - "dirty Jews" and I used to come home and I used to wash myself. My mother said, "Why are you washing?" I said, "They tell me that I'm dirty. Maybe I smell." And my mother used to say, "You smell good, you are okay." And start crying. She was crying a lot. And then when we were in in Germany all the time, I didn't have a life, I didn't have a life like a child. We were in a camp. And we did not have normal parents. My father used to say, "Forget them. Be good to them, just be good to them." And my mother said, "She has to know, she has to know." And then she changed her mind. And she said, "Nothing happened, nothing happened." So I didn't know what exactly happened. But I knew that something really, really something awful happened.

**Trinity Johnson** 21:09

And I hear this from survivors a lot. It's an unspoken understanding. Right? So it's, it's one thing for you also to be a survivor of Holocaust survivor parents. Maybe there was a level of not needing to talk about that. But you were so young, I'm sure you were curious. And then being in a school system with other survivor children. Is that something that you felt you could ask your parents about? Or, or you learned through others experiences as well, the shared understanding?

**Helen Kaltman** 21:47

Other kids were talking. And then can I go farther? We went to Israel from there, and

**Trinity Johnson** 21:56

I have lots of Israel questions. So but go ahead.

**Helen Kaltman** 22:00

My mother couldn't have any more children. Because of the war, she worked very hard, and whenever she went to a doctor, they used to tell her... And I used to tell my parents, please have a baby, please have a baby, I want to have a family. I want to belong with a family. And she couldn't have. My friends used to have siblings. So when my mother gave me some money to buy lunch, I used to give it to them to let go with it with the buggy. As I used to tell myself, "These children are mine."

**Helen Kaltman** 22:47

And when I was crying and would tell my parents, especially my father, "How come I don't have anybody? I only have you and mother, nobody else." And my father used to say, "When you grow up, you will get married. And you will have a big family, a bigger family than anybody else." And thank God I have nice kids. And they are very nice, very gentle especially (points to Ariel). And I have 20 great grandchildren.

**Trinity Johnson** 23:24

Wow.

**Helen Kaltman** 23:24

And each one is named after somebody of the family. So my mother when they were alive, they told me "If you name this person, they were this. She was a blonde, she has blue.... She had blue eyes, you know some things like this." So when I see the kids, the grandchildren, I just I feel like I did something. And now the situation. What's happening now, I don't sleep nice nights. I just am scared that my grandchildren will have the same thing like I did.

**Trinity Johnson** 24:09

And before, because I know we would definitely will get into Israel and talk about your life there, and, of course, the rise in antisemitism today, I kind of want to close out the part of your life in Poland and then we'll get there a little bit chronologically. So you touched on something I've never heard you speak about. And that was going back to school and being in with other survivors. And I'm just wondering, do you remember some of the things that were being taught because my understanding of the history is the whole school systems changed in what was being taught to children and I'm just curious if you remember anything about being back in school with with both Jewish children and non Jewish children.

**Helen Kaltman** 24:55

Non Jewish children I don't want to remember. I don't want to talk about. But when I was in Germany four years, with survivors, only survivors, and we were talking... children were talking, "Did your mother tell you this?" And I learned a lot about other survivors, other families, and we were very close. All kids were close. And the teachers never taught us about what happened with Germans. They taught us about Israel, that we will come back to Israel, and we will have teachers over there, and it will be all Jewish.

**Trinity Johnson** 25:47

So, so what ultimately led your family to go to the displaced persons camp in Germany? You said you spent four years there? How did your family make that decision, especially to go to Germany, the birthplace of Nazism that that invaded Poland?

**Helen Kaltman** 26:06

This is the only way that we can go. All the survivors of concentration camps went to Germany, because only from Germany, you could go to Israel.

**Trinity Johnson** 26:18

So when you left Poland and went to Germany, your family already knew the end goal was to get to Israel? Yes. Okay. What besides the other kids and because really displaced persons camps, we don't hear a lot about kind of the every day or what life was like and, and that's a major aspect of rebuilding for survivor families. That's when many survivors met in displaced persons camp, had children, then emigrated to other countries. What do you remember about that four years?

**Helen Kaltman** 26:54

I remember that. We could go to other countries, but not to Israel. So every time it was a list, these, this country wanted that many people. And I used to say, "Let's go to this country." I remember it was I was crying, "I don't want to be with survivors. I want to go to a place that nobody will know that we are Jewish. We will be Christians, Catholics anything. But I don't want to be Jewish." And I remember my father got very mad at me. And he said, The only place that the Jews should go is to Israel. My father never wanted to go to another place. Only to Israel. And the survivors used to get together Friday or something. They used to dream about what's going to be in Israel and at the time, they didn't want to talk about what happened.

**Trinity Johnson** 28:08

And I've heard you say that Israel is really where your life began. And so can you share what life was like in the early years when you and your family arrived to Israel?

**Helen Kaltman** 28:19

When we went to Israel, I was 12 years old. We're living in huts. There was not enough buildings that go on live there, so we were living in huts. We were running around, and we were looking for oranges. Israel has oranges. Israelis used to come to the camp and taught us Hebrew songs. And all of a sudden, I felt loved. I knew the people that come they bring us... It was teachers. They retired. They used to teach us Hebrew. And the parents used to run around Israel to find a place where to live. So my parents had very good friends. And they came near Tel Aviv. And it was an Arab place before that. We were living in a building where the Arabs use to keep the horses. And we were happy. The only thing that I remember is that I am loved. And I wasn't scared to go anyplace. I used to go out with the other kids. And to me, it's I felt like everybody in Israel loves you. And I started to live again. I knew what... it's a life. It's a different life. Nobody hates me. Nobody hates my parents. And I met my husband, and he was a survivor. He had a terrible time during the war.

**Trinity Johnson** 30:16

It's beautiful to hear that that's when your life began. That's where you met Simon. And actually, I was hoping Alana, you could share a little bit about Simon's experience what you know, because I know you've shared the story before. Can you share a little bit about Simon, who he and his family were and then what happened to him during the war and what took him to Israel?

**Elana Grubbs** 30:40

He was from Lodz, which is a big city there. And he had a very large family, and they were religious, Jewish people. But they were also kind of secular. It was kind of that time. So he had an uncle that had gone to Germany, he had an uncle that went to Argentina, or, yeah, somewhere in? Yeah, I think so. And his parents, his father was a plumber and a locksmith. And he always said that life was good before the war in Lodz - that they had a lot of family, that they would go to their grandparents' summer home, and all the cousins would get together. And he was a happy child. And then he remembered when his parents were sitting around the table, they were saying that the Nazis were going to invade Poland, and his father said, "They won't, they won't defeat the Polish army, the Polish army is strong." And then of course, they came in and just kind of took over. Poland didn't... was not able to defend themselves. And they were moved to a ghetto, the Lodz ghetto, him and - my father in his family, and they were there almost until the end of the war, I think till they were like one of the last people that were still in the ghetto.

**Elana Grubbs** 31:59

His stories in the ghetto were very brutal. He worked with his father as a plumber and a locksmith and his brothers and his uncle. They all worked together. And then when they finally emptied out the, the ghetto, they were transported to Auschwitz. And at that point, his father was really kind of too old for them to keep him. And my dad was too young. But they asked my grandfather what he does, and he said he was a plumber and a locksmith. And so they needed him. And they could see he had really strong, healthy hands. So they, they kept them. And my grandfather said, "And I need them to help me." So my grandfather, and my grandfather's brother, and the three sons, all stayed together. And then his mother, and one of the sisters had to go to the other side. And my nephew asked my father, "What was the last thing you said to my mother... to your mother?" And that was the only time I ever saw my father cry, and we had to stop the tape. But he said in Yiddish, he said to his sister, "Take care of our mother." And that was the last time they ever saw them. So they were they were murdered in Auschwitz. His younger sister was only five and the ghetto, as you well know. Rumkowski had to give up so many people. So there was a time when he gave up the children. And they forcibly took my aunt, she was five years old, and she was killed. But my father and his brothers and his uncles and his father all stayed together. They were not in Auschwitz that long, which is why he never had a tattoo. He was sent to Dachau. And from there, he was sent to the different sub camps.

**Elana Grubbs** 33:58

And he was liberated at he was on the death march, and liberated in (Turil?). That was a very quick summary of his experience. And then he went to the The Displaced Persons Camp in Bamberg in Germany. And he, his father was able to go to Israel under an assumed person, it was a doctor that was supposed to go and he decided in the end, he wasn't going to go so my grandfather went in his place. And then my father left his brothers and secretly went and joined a youth group in the displaced persons camp. And they went to Italy, trained there and they went on a - illegally on a boat. (Hebrew name?) was the name of the boat, and they almost made it to Palestine but the British got them and broke the boat. And then He was sent to Cyprus. And he spent time there in Cyprus until his father who was now in Israel, sent a letter that his son was very young, and he needed him. And so he was able to go to Israel and rebuilt rebuilding started in Israel. And he was in the army there. And then he met my mother. He was 28 when they got married.

**Helen Kaltman** 35:24

I was 18, I was not quite 18.

**Trinity Johnson** 35:31

And I remember a story about you saying you were about the age where you were supposed to go into the military. And you did not, right?

**Helen Kaltman** 35:40

My parents were very religious. And they didn't want me to go to be a soldier. They held such stuff about woman that got the army, you know, and I was the only family that they had. So my father went there. And he said, "This is the only family that my wife has, and me and his wife they survived the Holocaust." And they said, "No, the only way that she's staying home is you have to swear that she's very religious. She doesn't go anyplace on Saturday. She doesn't drive. She doesn't eat anything that's not kosher, all that stuff." So my father said, "I think that getting married would be better."

**Helen Kaltman** 36:36

The other survivors were talking to my parents, "Don't let her marry a survivor. They are all a little (so matched?) They lived through so much at a very young age." And the funny thing about it, his father made him five years younger, because they would not let him go to Israel from Cyprus. So all my life until I came to America, and he was here, he was always only five years older than me. So one day we were sitting, I said something I said, "Simon is this and this age." And his brother said, "Oh, my God, this is not my brother. All this time they are together, my brother was this and this age." And then I knew that he is older. But he was a very nice, man.

**Trinity Johnson** 37:48

How did you actually meet him? Where did you meet him?

**Helen Kaltman** 37:53

I met him. I was with other boys and girls, and I didn't think it's time to get married. So but he used to see me. Everybody knew each other. So he said to me, "I don't want you to go..." We were someplace. "I want you to go back with me. And I want to talk to you." I said, "Okay." And he told me, he said, "I have papers to go to America. But my parents have an apartment for me. And if you don't marry me, I'm going to America." I said, "I don't want to get married." I came home and I told it to my parents and my mother really made him a hiskemet. I'm married. I'm going to live with him. And that's how I got married. I was so gentle to my parents. I didn't want to tell them something that they didn't want. I never told my father or mother, "I don't want to listen to you. I'm not going to do it." It was different. Now I see my children, my grandchildren, they have a normal life. Until today my life is not normal.

**Trinity Johnson** 39:22

It sounds like they knew it was a good match, though.

**Helen Kaltman** 39:25

Yeah, it was a good match. He was a very nice person. And he came to America because he was in the Army. It was the Sinai War. In Israel every war has a name. And we didn't hear from him about three weeks. Because he didn't have a book to write. He was in Egypt. And his father got a heart attack. When I came to visit him and he said, "I want my son to go to America, you are young. If he gets killed, you'll marry somebody else. But this is... my whole life is my son. And let him go to America, about five years. We will have one country with the Arabs. We won't fight. We'll see that life is to live." We came to America for five years with his brother. And then when we wanted to go back about seven years, yeah, my oldest daughter already met her husband.

**Trinity Johnson** 40:43

This is Yaffa?

**Helen Kaltman** 40:44

Yes, very young. And she met her husband very young, she was sixteen. And they said, they're not going anyplace. They don't know people. They don't want to go... they are...they have their friends. And that's why we stayed.

**Trinity Johnson** 41:01

I want to go back. Elana, you shared your father's story you said very concisely, in a short version, but I'm curious how were you able to put that story together, either yourself? Or did he share his story with you?

**Elana Grubbs** 41:19

He shared his story with me. And he shared his story with his grandchildren too. Like I said, he wanted to pass it on. And he also had like a lot of documents that you can fact check every single thing he says, and it's all in black and white, you know, they kept very good records.

**Trinity Johnson** 41:37

Wow. And do you remember also hearing the story then?

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 41:43

Yes, I always grew up knowing my grandfather's story pretty well. And it's interesting, because I never really knew my grandma's story as well. He was very, very gentle and quiet and just happy. So it was always hard to conceptualize, oh, my god, he went through all these things. And my grandmother always told his story. So we would come over, like everyday to my grandma's house. And she would tell me, this story of my grandpa, and this one and this one, because as my mom mentioned, he got Parkinson's. And so speaking became harder. As I got older, when I was 18, 19, and could really have these conversations with him. My grandma was always telling his story. And as I get older, I realize that, you know, I think one, she didn't want to tell her story. And two, she always thought his was worse. And so she always thought, well, I won't tell my story. It's not as... I wasn't in Auschwitz, I... you know, his was worse. And so she didn't call herself a survivor for most of my life. It wasn't until the last few years that she realized no, actually, I'm a survivor, too. So I knew his story very well. And as my mom said, it's really well documented because he was on a lot of these transports. And so, you know, I've seen the documents and it definitely helps it come full circle, to be able to hear it from my mom and my grandmother. And to finally hear her story has been really just important for me.

**Elana Grubbs** 43:31

I wanted to mention that when I was 16, I was really curious about my dad's family. So my parents sent me as a birthday gift to New York, where my father's extended family, the survivors lived. And so I got a lot of information also from my great uncle, my great...two of my great uncles, my great aunt, they got, and they also were very reluctant to tell me anything. But my one great uncle that had left Germany and was in South America, and I think it was Argentina, maybe Brazil, I don't remember. He had more artifacts. He had pictures that his family had sent him. So I have photos from before the war and letters going back and forth that he was corresponding with his parents, which were my great grandparents, before the war. So that kind of put it together for me too. And I wrote down, I took notes at the time from them.

**Trinity Johnson** 44:30

And you mentioned that one of the things that that really helped your your father's family persevere, especially within the camp system was they were together, right? The grandfather, their father, said, "Oh, I need them." And they were able to remain together throughout the war. But then after the war, with your grandfather going to Israel and then your father going to Cyprus... were his brothers with him or had they taken a different path at that time?

**Elana Grubbs** 45:01

They all took a different path. They were in the displaced camp in Germany. My grandfather, only thing he could think of was Israel. Because before the war in like 1925, he took his family to Israel to Palestine. And they tried to make it but the conditions in Palestine in 1925 were horrible. So he went back to Poland. And so when they were in concentration camp, his kids would say to him, if you would have stayed in Palestine, our mom would be alive. And you know, yeah. So all he wanted to do was go to Israel. So that was the grandfather. And then my uncle, Sam, had met his wife in the displaced camp, they reunited there, I should say. And he went to Cincinnati, my great uncle, who was also with them, went to New York, and he just wanted to be there with his extended family there. So they all kind of did their own thing. I think.

**Trinity Johnson** 46:03

Well and so, details that I've heard from both of you, you said, you know, him being in the war was another reason why you wanted to come to America. And then also, it sounds like there was family here in Cincinnati. So I'm curious, because I've heard you say that, that Israel will always be your home. But as a couple, you did make the decision to come to America. Was Cincinnati definitely the place to go because there was family here? How did you get here?

**Helen Kaltman** 46:35

His brother. And we got here. The thing is, he had the family, they went before the war, from Poland to other countries, and they survived. And from my side, nobody survived. Not an uncle. Not Nobody. I never knew anybody of my family. But I have a grandchild or a great grandchildren, I look at them. I don't know who could they look like? And Ariel's son is named after my father. And in school, he goes to Hebrew school, He is how old?

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 47:23

Six.

**Helen Kaltman** 47:23

Six. He says, "My name is Kissel." And I thought that nobody will give a name like Kissel. It's an old Yiddish name. And he's happy about it. And there is another Kissel... So the two of them. I'm a Kissel and you are a Kissel.

**Trinity Johnson** 47:51

I think that that is beautiful, though that that name lives on and so does his memory.

**Helen Kaltman** 47:57

I have so many kids names...they were killed. I wanted them to survive through the name.

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 48:09

Circling back to the question about how you came here. Grandma, if I'm right, I remember you saying always growing up that you really you didn't want to come here and you always longed to be in Israel. And I remember being... in my whole adulthood you would always dream of living back there and and they were going to move back there and then my grandfather got sick they were going to vacation, have a home there and a home here, and they never got to do that. But you always longed to be in Israel and you never... you talked about how hard it was when you moved here and you never felt there was almost like a status of like when you came to America of like, of the survivors. It wasn't easy asa young woman. Everybody treated you know, they're kinda like high school, they could be snobby. And it was very hard for you.

**Helen Kaltman** 48:56

It was three thousand survivors in Cincinnati. And we were so close together. But they didn't live long. Most of them died young, the survivors.

**Trinity Johnson** 49:15

And you came straight to Cincinnati because family was here?

**Helen Kaltman** 49:18

I came to New York. Simon had cousins in New York. And we said New York a week. And we went to CIncinnati. And I told everybody who ever wanted to listen. I'm here for five years. In five years I'm going back to Israel. We went back to Israel. We didn't have any money. Only the money that we saved up for the trip. And we went with Elana and with Yaffa, my other daughter. And to me, Israel was all my life. It was a miracle. Wherever I went, I used to know the story from the Bible, that this town was this, this, because when we were in school, every year, we used to go to another city and the teachers knew that they were all Sabras in the school where I went, it was only two girls that we were survivors. So they used to tell us, to all of us, what this town was from the Bible. And we belonged here, because 2000 years ago. People lived here and they told us who lived in time that till today. Then Elana came in she said that she's going to Israel to help out. I said, Elana, if I would be younger, I would go too. I'm very happy that you are going. And all the kids went to Israel for a year.

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 51:15

I wanted to add in one thing, if that's okay, too, when we were talking about when you came here and how hard it was, I think something that people don't remember is two things. One, these were children from France, from Poland, from, you know, Germany, they weren't. First of all, they didn't all speak the same language. My grandparents spoke Yiddish, but they didn't all speak Yiddish. Some of them spoke only Polish, or, you know, they didn't know Hebrew when they first went to Israel. And so they came to America. And they were the survivors that were grouped together. And they had so much in common, but they were also so different. Some of them had very different traditions for the holidays. And I think that growing up, I heard how hard it really was for my grandma here, she had no money, you know, they would take whatever they had, they would walk to the bank and save everything they had. They just poured everything they had into their children's education. My grandpa went to finish high school when he got to Cincinnati, because he didn't even have a high school education. He spoke no English, he could really only do things with his hands, you know, work at here, because he didn't speak the language. He had no education, she had limited education and English. And, you know, they had this group of people that sometimes they felt really connected to, and sometimes they didn't, and their family was back home. And I don't think that people understand how hard it was, I think they see Jews now as a oh, they assimilated so well. They've got good jobs, but they you know, it's really because of all the pouring they did into their children of, "Use your education. I didn't even get to go to high school." And so I think that that's really instilled in my generation and in American Jews now is the importance of education because of how hard it was for them. And also, I don't think that people understand how hard it was in Israel. You mentioned that. We'll also you mentioned in 1925, you know, when they went to is to Palestine and left, I don't think people realize when these survivors got to Israel, they didn't just like walk into these beautiful hospitals, and it was horrible for them. And Israel, it was hard for them here.

**Trinity Johnson** 53:29

Yeah, I've heard her refer to living in tents early in, in Israel, and then to your point coming here, and and maybe never finishing school. So it's amazing that your grandfather, you know, finished school, right. And I believe, did he become a plumber? In Cincinnati, right?

**Elana Grubbs** 53:49

Well, he had been a plumber all his life, in the concentration camps and in Israel, but

**Helen Kaltman** 53:54

He was helping his father

**Elana Grubbs** 53:56

He had to go to school here to do that. You had to learn the codes. You had to pass tests. He was a master plumber here. He studied hard.

**Trinity Johnson** 54:05

And getting right to work to your point, because you're providing for a young family. Right? And so thank you for bringing up those challenges. You know that we don't always think about what is the immigrant experience. How that isn't just hitting the ground running that really is a rebuilding process. But to your point that we did have a pretty vibrant survivor community, we still do I know survivors still get together.

**Helen Kaltman** 54:33

We used to get together when a baby was born. And bat mitzvahs and weddings. We used to go together. Everybody used to invite somebody else. It was a hard life. I wanted to go to Israel very badly. I've been back so many times and And, but what she was talking the people that survived was my husband's family. He had the big family.

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 55:12

Grandma, I think too, part of the trauma that my mom told me about too, we talked about as I got older is, you know, I never fully understood. But that must have been so traumatizing for you to leave your parents knowing your mother had a nervous breakdown when you were younger, and she couldn't have more children and you were like her world and your father's and then you were here in America and probably the guilt of being here and not sharing your grandchildren with them every day. And I think you carried a lot of guilt being here, even though you knew that they wanted you here to be with Simon, you didn't feel you always had a big guilt of being away from your parents.

**Helen Kaltman** 55:55

And there was a song about parents that you leave them and you went away and I used to cry about it. But I still think that my husband had been through a lot more. Because I had my parents. And when I asked my father by something happened, he used to answer with what was but in the Bible, everything was because of it. I said my mother felt very bad that she couldn't have any more children. And my father said, "Well, I told her the story about a woman from the Bible. They couldn't have children." He told me the whole story. "And I used to tell your mother, that she is more important than 10 kids."

**Trinity Johnson** 57:02

and what happened to your parents, they stayed in Israel?

**Helen Kaltman** 57:06

My father passed away. He was 72. And my mother came here after he passed away. She stayed with us for eight months. And something bit her. She came to Israel but and she went to have surgery, like a plastic. She stayed in the hsopital. And they liked her. So the told her stay here. She was living on the fourth floor. And being in the hospital and my nephew came to visit Simon's brother's son. And she said "Look at the beautiful soldier. He's all mine and she went like this, and she died. She had a heart attack. My father had a heart attack. They had a very hard life.

**Trinity Johnson** 58:10

But thank you for sharing that. And I think even though as well as you had a hard life, the strength I hear from that story and the love and strength and family. I obviously see in the generations that you have also brought and shared this history with...

**Helen Kaltman** 58:31

You should tell her, I had the Bible and I used to tell her every day. A story, one... one story. She used to say, "What is it is that a game method with Jews?" I said, "Yeah, in a way it was okay, good night." And she fell asleep.

**Trinity Johnson** 58:56

Well, in the last couple of minutes that we have together. This question is both for Elana and Ariel, how has the legacy of being the child and grandchild of survivors impacted your lives?

**Elana Grubbs** 59:10

Well, my parents - I will say that my father was somebody of hope. He had a lot of hope. And he tried to always see the good in people. And I do too, and he would focus on that. But he also had a very big mistrust of anyone that wasn't family, anyone that wasn't part of his circle, you know, a lot of mistrust. And I think that he also taught us to be very careful. Because you don't really know people you just you know, really stay with your family. My mother also family and hope but also some mistrust.

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 59:58

I actually really agree with that. I think that people see Jews and say they're so insular and they stay with their community. And it's probably a true stereotype because I think that after the war people were very distrustful, because it was their neighbors who gave them away, or their best friends. And so I do think that there is a sense of keeping to yourself and you know, not being like showy or flashy, you always just kind of keep to yourself, because you don't really know other people. And so I do agree that that trauma has passed on. But also I agree, the hope and I just see the strength in my mother and my grandmother. And I think, you know, it really shows that the matriarch of the family has really passed down our closeness and importance to Judaism and family. And I'm really appreciative to my grandma and mom for everything they've given. And thank you for giving us the opportunity to share this story.

**Trinity Johnson** 1:01:11

Well, thank you all for being part of that. I do have one last question. Because as much as your family has has done to share this story, through our museum through this series, Ariel, you're also part of the Guttman family. And recently, we launched our center - our Cynthia & Harold Gottman Family Center for Storytelling, and really the focus of that is sharing incredible stories like this right here in our community. And I'm wondering, what do you hope people will, will get or be able to glean from this series and all of the different ways we plan on telling stories, just like your family's.

**Ariel Grubbs-Guttman** 1:01:55

I hope that it captures reality, because, you know, we look on the internet, and we read stories, and you know, who writes it? Or whether it's reality, I have no idea, you know, you don't know. And so it's scary to me to think what, you know, information our children will get, and the accuracy and so (EDIT HERE) to have something that is true, and accurate is so important that I can pass to my children like telling these stories, because, you know, like I had mentioned, I don't think that it's going to be understood in my kids' generation that no, Jews didn't just go from Auschwitz to Israel, and it was amazing. And then they came to America. It was horrible. And it was hard. And I hope that these stories capture that and our children, can they be able to really understand what happened, and not just the big picture of it, but like the small details, because they're so important, and especially in the context of today and antisemitism. So, I'm so thankful to you, grandma, for sharing your story. And I know Lev will watch it one day with his kids and Noah and Ava. And so I'm, I'm really thankful.

**Trinity Johnson** 1:03:15

Yes. And thank you for reminding us of that hope and the resilience that that is so very relevant today, right, that, that we are blessed. And I'm so fortunate to have shared this time, with all three of you, and especially Helen, thank you for sharing a very difficult story that we really can keep alive for generations to come and learn these valuable lessons. So thank you all.

**Elana Grubbs** 1:03:42

Thank you.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:03:43

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**Jackie Congedo** 1:03:59

Hear My story is a production of the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. The Center's mission is to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust inspire action today. This series is part of the Cynthia & Harold Guttman Family Center for Storytelling and is generously supported by Margaret and Michael Valentine. Visit us in person at historic union terminal in Cincinnati, Ohio or online at Holocaustandhhumanity.org.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:04:23

Executive Producers are David Wise and Jackie Congedo. Managing producer is Anne Thompson. Consulting producer is Joyce Kamen. Technical producer is Robert Mills. Technical director is Josh Emerson. Select music by Kick Lee. This is recorded at the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.