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UC SAN DIEGO

After Auschwitz

Choosing Life - with Edith Eger

January 21, 2015

1 hour, 8 minutes, 50 seconds

Speaker: Edith Eger

Transcribed: Carla Altomare

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Time	Transcription
0:00	[The Library / UC San Diego]
0:05	[After Auschwitz: Choosing Life / <i>with Edith Eger</i> / January 21, 2015]
0:12	Susanne Hillman: Good afternoon. It is a great pleasure to meet every one of you or to see so many of you here. I'm delighted to see visitors from as far away as Boston, who are some of our most dedicated supporters. I'm also very pleased to see, not only current students, but former students, and I'm thinking: we must be doing something right, that these people are coming back to UCSD to our events. It gives me great pleasure to introduce - well, I'm not going to introduce our speaker today - Edie - Edith Eger, but I'm very pleased to acknowledge her support for our program, which has been very strong from the beginning.
0:57	Susanne Hillman: This is of course, as you may guess, not the first time that Dr. Eger is here to share her terrific experiences. If after this event, you would like to learn more about her experience in Auschwitz and beyond, you can go to The Visual History Archive website. As some of you know, this is the website that has access to thousands of testimonies, videotape testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses, and Edith Eger's full-length testimony is available. So, you can contact me and come to UCSD to watch that entire testimony. Recently, I checked out her sister's testimony, which is also in the archives. This archive is a treasure trove of testimonies.
1:47	Susanne Hillman: Before I will introduce our student volunteer, Anna Parkhurst, who will tell you more about Edith, it is my pleasure to thank our supporters: Judaic Studies Program and the UCSD Library. I would also like to draw your attention to some upcoming events. On the 18th of February, Nathan Englander will talk about the <i>Twenty-Seventh Man</i> - he's an author and a playwright, he's the author of the <i>Twenty-Seventh Man</i> - and he will be in conversation with Barry Edelstein, of The Old Globe - The Old Globe Artistic Director. This is an event sponsored by Judaic Studies. On the 25th of February, we have the pleasure and honor to host Christopher Browning - one of the foremost Holocaust historians, and I put up a - or a put out a flyer for a lunch seminar. It's open to the public, so if you are interested please sign up and the date and time is on the sheet. What else? That's

it. So now, it is my pleasure to welcome Anna Parkhurst, an undergraduate student in Literature, who will say more things about Edith Eger. Thank you, Anna.

3:13 Anna Parkhurst: Hello everyone. Thank you all for coming, and I also want to thank Susanne Hillman for making this all possible. I have the pleasure of introducing Edith Eger, and I'm just going to give you a brief overview, timeline of her life. She was born September 29th, 1927, in Kosice, Hungary, and her mother was Llona. Her father Lajos, and she has two sisters: Klara and Magdlena. She was very active in dance and performing arts and she and her family lived in the Kosice Ghetto in 1944, after the Nazi occupation of Hungary. And depicted is a picture of her family. And here we also have two pictures. One of Edith, the dancer, and another with her two sisters.

Early Life

Born Sept. 29, 1927 in Kosice, Hungary

Llona Klein (mother), Lajos Elefant (father), Klara and Magdlena (2 sisters).

Active in dance and performing arts.

After April 1944 Nazi occupation of Hungary, lived in Kosice Ghetto

4:10 Anna Parkhurst: In 1944, when Edith was 17, she and her family were deported from the Kosice Ghetto to Auschwitz. In 1945, she was transferred to the Gunskirchen concentration camp, and then soon transferred to the Mauthausen concentration camp, where she was liberated May 4th, 1945, when the camp was liberated by US forces. And, I have a map for all of you.

Deportation

1944 - Deported from Kosice ghetto to Auschwitz II - Birkenau

1945 - Transferred to Gunskirchen concentration camp; transferred again to Mauthausen concentration camp

May 4, 1945 - Mauthausen liberated by US forces

4:41 Anna Parkhurst: So, Auschwitz is in Poland. Kosice, as I mentioned, is in - it's kind of on the border of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and the two concentration camps I mentioned are in Austria. After the war, Edith moved to Czechoslovakia, where she met her husband. The two of them moved to the US in 1949, and in 1969, she received her degree in Psychology from the University of Texas, El Paso. And, she has her own private practice in La Jolla, where she practices psychology.

After the War

Moved to Czechoslovakia, married 1949 - Moved to the US

1969 - Received degree in psychology from University of Texas, El Paso

Runs her own clinical private practice in La Jolla

5:19 Anna Parkhurst: And I think really the point of us all coming here today is when we look at Rudyard Kipling's quote, "if history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten." And I think that's why we're all here today: to hear the story of an amazing woman, an amazing survivor, an amazing person, and so that

The Visual History Archive

USC Shoah Foundation

Includes 52,000 video interviews with Holocaust survivors

we can make sure that things like this do not happen again and so that we can best remember our history. And as Susanne mentioned, you can find more stories, and you can find Edith's testimony on The Visual History Archive, partnered with the USC Shoah Foundation and we can, by promoting this archive, and by viewing these stories, listening to these stories, and listening to Edith's story, hopefully, we can make sure that nothing like this ever happens again. Thank you. And now, Edith Eger.

Accessible on the UCSD campus
and through remote access

- 6:10 Edith Eger: Hello. I'm gonna try to be here, it's easier because I don't think you see me when I sit down, right? And I've gotten littler and littler because I've lost about six inches of my height. I have a pretty bad case of scoliosis. I thank you so much for coming and hoping this will turn into a dialogue because we all have a story to tell. And, the question is how you look at everything in life as an opportunity, for an opportunity. To discover many things you may have never thought was possible.
- 6:58 Edith Eger: When you mention my mother and my father, immediately I'm crying. By the way, we do not really grieve over what happened. I think we grieve over what didn't happen. Because, I remember when my granddaughter was born - I think she's 37 years old now - right here in San Diego, the pediatrician examined her and said, you know what, Grandma? This little girl is really flexible, she might become a ballerina, and I thought to myself, my God, now I can die, because now I have three generations, and here she is, I am able to now just recognize that I'm going to live in her and my spirit. Well, it just so happened that Lindsay did become a student of ballet, and I saw the Nutcracker Suite, oh my God, many, many, many, many times. First, she was a flower part, and then she grew into under the skirt, and then whatever. She went to Bishop's School, and I was very fortunate to be honored just a few days ago and I'm just still on cloud nine. She asked me to go and buy her a dress, so she can go to the dance, and of course, I'm a big sucker and buying the best of the best and I came home and all of a sudden, I was crying. You see, I didn't understand what was going on, I just bought Lindsay a beautiful dress. See, the word 'understand' is very academic. You know, if you wanna understand something, go to the classroom because it's all up here, and many people do that. They go from one school to another school to another school, to avoid the real world. So I can just teach, but of course, you cannot really heal what you don't feel. And this is really what I'd like to concentrate today, on healing that is really different from curing.

- 9:23 Edith Eger: I do a lot of work with cancer patients and of course, there is - there is grieving, there is feeling, and then there is healing. And this is the cycle hopefully I will get into. So then I realized that I will never understand what is my tears all about, but I remember thinking, I'm not crying that I bought Lindsay a dress so if she can go to a dance, I was crying because I never went to a dance. So maybe tonight, I will trigger some feelings in you. Remember, I'm not that powerful, I don't put any feelings inside you, I just bring out something that was there already. And let's hope that tonight is gonna be a healing experience for you, recognizing that we're here together, and that's all really counts because we together are much stronger than me alone and you alone.
- 10:39 Edith Eger: I have a wonderful, precious relative here and his name is Dickie Eger - and I call him Dickie-boy, and I think I'm the only one who calls Dickie-boy - and Dickie-boy - Dickie-boy took me last week to a Rotary meeting. The last Rotary meeting I gave, it was on human sexuality, and it was only - there were no seating available. But he took me to a Rotary meeting and it was amazing. I saw at least a couple of hundred people, and what was so wonderful about that, that all these people are committing themselves to someone, or something, other than themselves. This afternoon I was speaking to students who are in the Cross Cultural Center that they are opening up here, and from the Healer Foundation, and I think this is why I'm so grateful that you're here because I know that your presence really matters to me because you are committed to do something, whatever limited capacity that we have, to make the world a better place. And how we can possibly hold hand in hand and form a human family so we can empower each other with our differences. That I can be I and you can be you, but of course, we are much stronger together than me alone, or you alone.
- 12:23 Edith Eger: I've been speaking all day today, so I'll do the best I can. And I dearly love Martin Buber because I had a philosophy professor who was telling me about Martin Buber - who was trying to promote his book. And a young man approached him and wanted to speak to him, and he brushed him aside and said, Can't you see I'm very busy, I'm promoting my book, and that young man went home and took out a revolver and took his life. And then Buber found that out, he could not forgive himself, that he could've saved a life, and the book is just an it. And that's when he developed his theory on the *I and Thou*. So, I'm gonna call you thou, that you are I are here together, hoping to get into a wonderful dialogue.

- 13:38 Edith Eger: The other story that my professor told me, he said that Buber was walking with a friend and someone came by and he said, Do you know that person? and Buber said, Not enough to spend silence with him. Maybe that would be very meaningful today if we would just hold hands and share silence. Sometimes we talk too much, sometimes we talk too little, but I think it's very, very important - I know that when I work with young couples, you know they can't - where are you going and what time are you coming home and they sleep in this little bed, you know, and because they have to be together all the time. But later on, you have a king-sized bed, and you sit on one corner of the room and the other one - and you don't have to say, Do you love me? Carl Sandberg said that, Do you love me? The young woman says, Yes, I do. What did you say, I'm hard of hearing. Yes, yes, yes, you don't have to really ask do you love me, I already know that you do. So I don't think love is a feeling, I think love is what we do. What we do that we commit ourselves to someone else's welfare. That we can marvel, actually celebrate someone else's growth.
- 15:15 Edith Eger: My late husband, I remember when I told him that I wanna go get a doctorate. He said I don't wanna be introduced as Mr. and Doctor. Well, if there is a doctor in you, go back to school. Because, when I was 40 years old, my supervisor told me, Edie, you gotta go get the doctorate. And I said you know, By the time I get a doctorate, I'll be 50. And you know what he told me? Edie, you will be 50 anyway.
- 15:48 Speaker 1: You'll be 50 anyway.
- 15:53 Edith Eger: And so, I'm hoping that tonight maybe, I can be your midwife, and you can give birth to the you that was meant to be. To be free. To be free from what other people are going to think about you. To be free to really give up the need to please everyone, because some people are not gonna like you, and that's okay. And with that, you give up some of the perfectionism too. Then so, I am here to tell you a story, and so, would you like me to take you on a ride? You saw my picture. My parents had two very beautiful daughters. Magda played the piano. Klara was a child prodigy in violin. She played the Mendelssohn violin concerto when she was 5 years old. It was a very hard act to follow. I never introduced myself by my name, I would say, I'm Klara's sister. Well, Klara was a child prodigy who was the only Jewish girl accepted at the music conservatory in Budapest. She was already

in a camp, when her Christian professor, Mr. [unclear] - I was looking for him when I was in Budapest last June - he smuggled her out and hid her until the end of the war.

- 17:31 Edith Eger: I was fortunate enough to be invited, in 1985, by the Prime Minister of New Zealand, to celebrate the righteous gentiles, the people who risked their lives to save others. Like Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*, I lectured with her at the Baptist University oh many, many, many, many years ago. So I am just very grateful to be alive and well, but I know when I was a little girl I was - they called me 'the ugly sister,' because I was cross-eyed. And being different really meant inferior. My sisters took me for a walk and they blindfolded me because they didn't want anybody to see what an ugly sister I am. People tell me, you must have really grown up with a lot of love and everything, well, let me tell you, I think God put me in the family so I could spend more time alone. Because if you're not happy alone, I don't think you'll be happy with anyone else. Dependency can really breed depression, but we can get into that a little later.
- 18:51 Edith Eger: I'm gonna try to tell you my story, what happened in there and then you maybe apply that into the here and now. I was painfully shy. My mom told me, she looked at me very seriously - I was about ten years old, she said, I'm so glad that you have brains because you have no looks. And today when I talk to the students, I let them know, don't allow anybody to define who you are. You're beautiful because there'll never be another you. And you. And you. So I really came to celebrate your uniqueness, your one-of-a-kindness, because maybe everybody can do what you can do, but not the way you can do that. And by the way, you are the future. You are the future ambassadors, and I'm counting on you because I'm 87 years old and I'm one of the youngest survivors. So the question comes up, how do I want to be remembered? Well, I hope that I will be remembered as someone who did everything in her power to see to it that your children and grandchildren will never ever experience what I did. And I know I'm gonna be very satisfied when I'm on my deathbed because I'm gonna feel that I used every moment, I didn't take anything for granted when I go to a restaurant I eat up your leftovers because it still pains me to throw out a piece of bread. My precious daughter always tells me, 'It's okay, Mom, it's okay to leave food on a plate.'

- 20:56 Edith Eger: So, let me take you back again, being very very shy, spending a lot of time alone. So my mother took me to a ballet school - I was just interviewed by someone from Czechoslovakia and I remembered the name of my ballet teacher: Mr. [unclear], and I was a very talented gymnast as well, he picked me up and he said to me, You know, God built you in such a magnificent way, that all your ecstasy has to come from inside out. I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about, until later on. And yes, even today I look at life from inside out, not from outside in. I was a very good student. I was a very, very good, good, good girl as the runt in my family. And then, there was a knock on my door. As you study history, you'll know that Hungary joined Hitler March 1944. We were taken into a brick factory. And, I did have a boyfriend, his name was Imre, I think it translates as Eric. And he and I had our own book club, and we were going to build a future. He was a very ardent Zionist. He was a member of the Betar - anybody, I don't know, knows that - a kind of a militant and was going to go to Palestine - he was going to go to Palestine and when I was picked up and taken to the - to the box car, somehow he found me, and he said to me, I don't know what's going to happen, but I will never forget your eyes and your hands. And in Auschwitz, I kept coming to everybody, Tell me about my eyes. Tell me about my hands. Because I said to myself, if I survive today, then tomorrow - tomorrow I'm gonna see Imre. That kept me going: if I survive today, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow - even though I was told every day I'm never gonna get out of here alive, I said to myself, when I get out of here when I get out of here.
- 23:54 Edith Eger: I did not allow them to really get to me. I was able to somehow look at myself, and observe myself going through an experience. So here we were, this is May 1944, when I met Elie Wiesel many, many, many years ago, he also said that he arrived in Auschwitz May 1944, that we may have been on the same transport. My sister, Klara was not with us - thank God - my mother went there to get her and she was not able to bring her home. And when we arrived in Auschwitz, there was a lot of chaos. And in the cattle car, my mom - and this is what I tell when I speak at the schools - my mom held me, and this is what she said - if you listen to one of my TED Talks, they gave me a word called impact, and I don't use impact too well. I didn't know what to say, but I used the impact, what impacts was really that what really, really, really help you in life. And this is what my mom told me, and that was the biggest impact in my life, she said, We don't know where we're going. We don't

know what's going to happen. Just remember, no one can take away from you what you put here in your own mind.

25:44 Edith Eger: You know, I worked with Vietnam veterans, and as such, I also was on the advisory committee for the VA - Veterans Administration, and when we arrived in Washington, we were picked up every morning and taken to the VA headquarters, and we passed the Holocaust Museum. And I kept saying to myself, I've been there, done that, I'm not going there. But on the sixth year, I came in Sunday, and I had the courage and I went to the Holocaust Museum. And I went upstairs on the fourth floor - I don't know if you've been there - and was looking for the GIs who came to liberate us in Gunskirchen, May 4th, 1945, and I was looking at the pictures of the GIs and - and I saw other countries - you know, Italy and France and so on - there's a big picture on the right: new arrivals in Auschwitz, May 1944 - don't go and look for me, but for a moment I thought I was in that picture. But then I didn't see my sister. But I also remembered that the following day I'm going to the headquarters at the VA and there is a big card with Dr. Edith Eva Eger and I said, How did that girl become this woman here today? You know children don't do what we say, they do what they see. And I'm hoping to be a good role model to children who are about to give up school because American children want everything easy. Not only I want it easy, I want it now. They don't know how to postpone gratification. If it's not easy, I don't want it. Very low frustration tolerance level, as we call it in psychology.

28:06 Edith Eger: That's why I tell people, don't call me shrink, call me stretch. You know, and I'm hoping to stretch today your comfort zone and how you accept, really, something that you cannot change. Namely, how other people are going to think and feel about you. So when we arrived, I have something from the Red Cross - and I think it was May 20th, when we arrived in Auschwitz, it's documented. So, allow me to take you there and we were separated. I begged my father to shave, but he didn't. Everybody over 40, everybody under 14, every young mother with their child, immediately were separated. I never saw my father again. And my mom, and my sister Magda, and I approached that line and at the end of the line was a man, we called him the Angel of Death. He was no angel, and his name was Doctor Mengele. He pointed my mom to go to the left, and I followed my mom - now here comes, here comes absurdity - the very man who annihilated my family - I'm picturing him now and those eyes, and I spoke German

fluently those days, he said to me, You're gonna see your mother soon, she's just gonna take a shower, and promptly threw me on the other side, which meant life. Question: was my life in Dr. Mengele's hand? I don't think so. I think it was meant for me to be here tonight.

- 30:32 Edith Eger: As a mother of three, as a grandmother of five, and a great-grandma of three little boys, isn't that the best revenge to Hitler? I think so. Hey, wow, and they call me chichi, and the little one calls me chichi-baby. Oh my God, the best feeling ever, wow. It was such chaos, we didn't know what's happening. And pretty soon, we found ourselves in Birkenau, because the women were taken to Birkenau, the men stayed in Auschwitz. I did revisit that place, I will tell you about that, too. I was faced with one of the inmates who pulled my earrings out, and I was bleeding, and I told her, I would've given it to you, and she says While you were going to the tea, I was rotting here, you see I'm part of the final solution of Eichmann. She was there much earlier, she was from Poland.
- 32:05 Edith Eger: I say, When will I see my mother? She pointed at a chimney, fire was coming out of the chimney, and she said, Your mother is burning there. I never forget those words. You better talk about her in past tense. And Magda and I hugged and she said, The spirit never dies. So, I bring you that spirit, because that's why I am - I'm lecturing and letting people know what can happen. What can happen when - Kushner is writing a book - *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* - and I'm gonna tell you why it's happening. What I have learned, and I can only speak for myself. But I never forget, Magda and I hugged each other, and she said, The spirit never dies. And I owe it to my parents, so they didn't die in vain. Because one of the most beautiful gift of God is the gift of memory. I'm hoping that I will have that memory and I will be able to speak out wherever I go.
- 33:51 Edith Eger: So, my sister Magda, was the pretty one in my family. I don't know whether you were the pretty one, but my sister was the pretty one and the sexy one. Right? She had beautiful hair, so when she left the house, she turned around in such a way that, God forbid, she won't move any of her locks. Just to give you an idea. I don't know if you're old enough to know Zsa Zsa Gabor, my sister calls me, she says, I'm gorgeous, and she is gorgeous. Magda is gorgeous, she's alive and well. Her birthday is Friday. She's gonna be 93 years old. Sometimes she plays bridge with Omar Sharif. She's a life master in bridge, she teaches piano:

quite a girl. My sister was the child prodigy, and I was the runt. But I think God put me in that family so I would really be the one that rose to the occasion.

35:08 Edith Eger: Magda will tell you that she took care of me, and I'm gonna tell you that I took care of her, so go figure. But, we were completely shaven, completely shaven, terribly embarrassed, and Magda came to me and she had her beautiful locks in her palm and she said, How do I look? Good Hungarian question, how do I look? My sister is the one, when in 1945 February when we were slave laborers, they came around and they gave us coats, and I got a warm coat and she got a warm coat. And in no time at all, I saw my sister exchanging her warm coat for another coat. I said, What's the matter, Magda? She said this is more stylish. That's my sister, Magda.

36:14 Edith Eger: So you see, I had a choice then as you have a choice now. I love choices because the more choices you have, the less you feel like a victim. You have a choice whether you're going to point out what's wrong about the world. You're gonna have to point out what is good about the world as well. And I knew, I had a choice to point out Magda, the way she really looked in her nakedness, cause I became her mirror, and instead of telling her the way she really looked, I said to her, Magda, you have beautiful eyes. You know what, and I didn't see it when you had your hair all over the place. Thank God I didn't study psychology those days and I was relying on my common sense. And that's how I remember we entered. We entered the barracks. Dr. Mengele came to the barracks and wanted to be entertained, and my schoolmates, my friends, volunteered me because I was the one from the Jewish community that was entertaining everyone, and I was the one who welcomed the President with the Hungarian csardas. With the little red boots and the little red skirt. And next thing I knew, I was dancing for Dr. Mengele. I was so very scared because he was pointing who to take to the gas chamber, and I closed my eyes, and I checked out. I dissociated. I pretended that the music was Tchaikovsky and I was dancing the *Romeo and Juliet* at the Budapest Opera House.

38:30 Edith Eger: So when you are in school, don't check out. Check-in, check-in, check-in. And also sometimes, you know, your mommy will tell you that, you know, you're such a beautiful girl, but you're a little fat, honey and you're a little pimply in there, so when you say but I say give me me a but and I give you an and. Yes, you're

beautiful just the way you are. So Magda and I were there together, holding on to each other. Today when I work with post-traumatic stress, if someone comes alone, I have a very different person than someone who is there with someone else, and I hope you have such a friend who's really showing up for you at all times. Dr. Mengele gave me a piece of bread, and I was on the third on the top, and yes we had rules. We had one foot, one head, one foot, one head, and if somebody wanted to turn around: 1, 2, 3 pfft. We all six of us had to - cooperation was the name of the game, not competition, not domination, because all we had was each other then, and guess what? All we have is each other now.

40:03 Edith Eger: I shared the bread with the girls. Auschwitz was very difficult because there is a difference between stress and distress. Hans Selye told us that when anything comes to us that is stress-producing, we have two automatic responses, we either fight or flee. Now, I couldn't fight in Auschwitz, because if I would've attacked the guards, I would've been shot, and many people were. I know my sister Klara would've been the one. She was, you know, such a very temperamental artist. I couldn't flee because if I touched the barbed wire, I would've been electrocuted. So I had to learn, I had to learn how to stay with the discomfort. There is a difference between stress and distress, stress is very good. It is the salt of life, Hans Selye said. But distress is when you don't know what's gonna happen next. And we never knew when we took a shower whether water is gonna come out or gas.

41:25 Edith Eger: Now what did I learn in Auschwitz? I learned I learned humor. We were talking about food all the time, and we were just salivating and - and humoring, and how much paprika you put in a chicken paprikash and so on. But then they started to take our blood. And when they took my blood, I asked Why are you taking my blood? I couldn't yank my arm away or I wouldn't be here telling you about it. He said to me, I'm taking your blood to aid the German soldiers so we can win the war and take over the world, especially America. And I said to myself - I was a pessimist - with my blood you're never gonna win the war, and maybe that's why they didn't win the war, but again, I - you know, he could beat me, he could throw me in the gas chamber, but he could never murder my spirit. And that's what I bring you today. Things were much worse because we never knew what - one day we stood in line to get the tattoo and I didn't get it, I said, Why? How come? She said to me, Because you're going to the gas chamber, they don't want to

waste the ink on you. I'm getting emotional now because I'm there and here, so please allow me to - just kind of bear with me.

43:17 Edith Eger: So, we were going towards the gas chamber. I thought what I realized that Magda was yanked away and she was in that part and I was in the other part. I think survivors have to be very quick decision-makers. I didn't have time to ask Why me? I had to say, What now? What do I do now? I had to entertain the guards, so I started to do the cartwheels, so Madga could and we were together. We became slave laborers in December 1944. I was out of Auschwitz. Striped uniform, thinking that the British won't bomb, but they bombed anyway. About seven girls dies around me, the train stopped. I am a gymnast, I jump and I run into the forest. I don't see my sister. In the middle of the bombing, I ran back where she jumped, but she fell. Remember, she was the pretty one, and I saw some political prisoners eating, and I'm ashamed to tell you that I chewed up my sister because she had this bleeding - she was bleeding, I said now that you have to be pretty and ask for some food that you're looking like that. How terrible it is, you know, we give them a name, you play the game, it didn't occur to me that I could go and ask too. But I was the ugly one you know, and she was the pretty one.

45:02 Edith Eger: Things were pretty bad because the Americans came from one end, the Russians came from the other end. So, we were evacuated from one place to another. We were put in a German village in a second floor, we were told if you leave the premises, you're gonna be shot right away. But abnormal behavior, of course, had become absolutely normal because Magda asked me for some food and I didn't have any, any, any, any - respect for other people's property. But I went outside and I saw some carrots in the next garden and I jumped and I stole the carrots and I came up and I met the guard with a gun. Remember, he had to follow the rules, and I was faced with that gun - I never held a gun in my life - and I heard the clicking about three times and then all of a sudden he turned the gun around and he looked at me like a father who was gonna teach me a lesson, and he turned the gun around and he pushed me inside. But I had the carrots. I gave it to Magda, this is April 1945, the following morning he comes and wants to know who dared to break the rules and I crawled to him. He gave me a little loaf of bread and said, You must have been hungry to do what you did. I found the diamond, even in that garbage pile. Wouldn't it be nice if I could meet that man today?

- 47:00 Edith Eger: Things got worse after that. I ended up in Mauthausen. In Mauthausen, we were going up the steps and I saw nothing but skulls and blood and I knew I'm gonna die here. And we were standing in front of the crematoria - I guess I'll share it with you. I said to myself, Before I die, I have to know how a man looks like. Because I had two sisters and I've never seen my father. And I snuck out at night and I looked at the dead bodies. I don't know why I'm sharing it with you, but I thought, well, I was so curious. The article you have, Auschwitz at Sixteen and Sixty-One, I'm quoting Primo Levi, "I was so curious." I wanted to know what's gonna happen next. That curiosity is the childlike part, not the childish part, but we don't need the childish part. I want, I need, I gotta have, that's the childish part. The childlike part. But you see that changed their minds. And from Mauthausen to Gunskirchen, what is referred today as the death march. And I revisited that place, but as we were walking, if you stopped, you were shot right away. Left and right, left and right. And I became - I'm sorry, I'm getting, I'm getting lightheaded now can I have some water, please? Wow.
- 49:11 Susanne Hillman: Do you want to sit on a chair? Are you sure?
- 49:12 Edith Eger: No, it's okay.
- 49:26 Edith Eger: I began to slow down and I became very weak. And the girls that I shared the bread with formed a chair with their arms and they carried me so I wouldn't die. Isn't that amazing? That the worst can bring out the best in us. And if you were only for the me, me, me, you didn't make it. And that was then. And when we arrived in Gunskirchen, I hope you get to see *The Sound of Music*, because cannibalism broke out, and I said, I'm not going to be able to touch human flesh. And all of a sudden I looked down and I had grass to eat. And I chose one blade of grass over and against the other. I just spoke to a wonderful school a couple days ago, to little children, from 6th graders to 8th graders. And I put on the board, I can't. And then I took the apostrophe and the t and I erased the apostrophe and the t. I can. Why? Because I think I can. The whole cognitive psychology is based on Epictetus who said, it's not the things that happen to us that make us feel the way we feel, the way we view it. So, it's not what's happening to you, it's the way you think about it. So, think about your thinking. And pay attention what you're paying attention to, any behavior you pay attention to, you reinforce that very behavior.

- 51:41 Edith Eger: So, you see how I keep running away from there. I go from here to there and here to there. So, I had grass to eat, I had a choice. And then, the 71st, the saints came marching in. The GIs came May 4th, 1945, and I got M&M's. The good news about this is that now I'm known as Dr. Edith Eva Eger who lectures on Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, and then I got a call from a general from Fort Carson, Colorado City to come and lecture to the guys and the girls who are coming back from Afghanistan, on PTSD. And, I show up, and guess what? All I see is 71 everywhere and it's the home of the 71st Infantry. You see how things come around? You see how there is hope in hopelessness? And of course, when I told them that - that that uniform means a lot to me because you're not there fighting the war, you're here to preserve the peace.
- 53:21 Edith Eger: So, May 4th, 1945, I was very ill, and I noticed that people would go through the gate and then pretty soon they would come back. Dr. [Martin] Seligman writes about the learned helplessness. I do work with battered wives and even today I also help to build transitional living centers, they keep going back. Going back because they are so brainwashed that they cannot make it without a man. So you see freedom is very scary because when you're free, you can't pass the buck. So when I work with families I write the constitution that there is no freedom without responsibility. Freedom without responsibility is anarchy. So I was very fortunate to be liberated by the Americans because many of the girls who were liberated by the Russians didn't make it home because they were getting peas and beans and they got stomach typhus and died. I was very fortunate enough to be taken to a hospital. When I came home and the way I found out that my sister was alive, that when I was in Prague and they were taking us from the railroad station, I saw pictures of my sister with the violin: that she's giving a concert. And she became my mother. She had tremendous guilt. She - she thought that if she would've been there, our mother would've been alive. So Klara took care of me, Klara took me to the hospital. And when I was in hospital, and I realized that my parents are not coming home - see, when you're depressed you get up and you don't say What?, you say What for? I had nothing to get up for and I became very suicidal. After all that, and I'm so glad that I didn't.
- 55:53 Edith Eger: It's easier to die than to live. And I wanted to be for something, I wanted to build something. I am so grateful to be in the healing arts profession so I can talk to you about what can happen and in what way the resilience and the

perseverance and the lessons that I have learned. I don't know what time it is because time goes by but I am talking and you're not talking so let us turn this into some kind of a dialogue. And if you wanna share your story and if you can really turn this evening into a wonderful, wonderful memory, I would be so grateful. Thank you so much. So, anybody, thank you, thank you, thank you. So -

- 56:56 Susanne Hillman: So, we'll take questions. Please wait until we're there with the microphone. Mark is over there with one and I'm over here. So, who has questions for Dr. Eger?
- 57:10 Speaker 2: Doctor, when did you leave Europe and come to the United States?
- 57:13 Edith Eger: In 1949. The story is that I married up. If you know what that means. I thought he had a grocery store and he brought me salami and Swiss cheese and that was enough for me to get married. But I didn't realize that his family was one of the wealthiest in Czechoslovakia. So I was living in a place with servants and so - then the communists took over and they confiscated the business and they dragged him to jail, cause he didn't join, they called him a capitalist. So, I told you before, I'm a survivor. I don't say why me? I say what now? What do I do now? And I packed up, I went to the jail, I took off my big diamond ring, I put this in my little girl's diaper, precious Mary Ann, I was told when I got pregnant that I am not allowed to have a child because I'm too big and I told the doctor, Sir, I wanna give life! And my husband apologized to the doctor, that his young wife doesn't know how to talk to the doctor, that's the kind of world I was in.
- 57:47 Speaker 2: And then you came to the United States?
- 58:43 Edith Eger: Mary Ann was a ten-pounder, I could've had a horse doctor, so get a second opinion. Please get a second opinion. So, and that's how we came to America penniless. We fled overnight and we were in Vienna and in a Rothschild hospital that was supported by [unclear] and the American Jewish people who actually took care of us. And I stood in line so my precious little girl would get some clothing and we went to the American Consulate and we were able to come to America. And I didn't speak a word of English and I became a factory worker in 1949, and that was in November 1949 and Mary Ann went to a daycare center and she came home and she told me I have to buy a turkey because Thanksgiving is coming up. Okay. So I didn't know whether you drink it or eat it but I knew that I

couldn't afford a turkey. But you see, I'm a survivor. In the factory, on Pratt Street in Baltimore, Maryland, there was a grocery store called Schreiber's. I remember going to Schreiber's and I bought the smallest little chicken and I didn't know much about money so the guy took 25 cents and then 4 pennies. You see, I didn't have time to complain, I had to put everything into some form of creativity, and it took me an hour and a half on the bus to go home and I was totally fired up - that's what I tell teachers: you have to be fired up to share the light. And I was totally fired up and I did the high kick and I said, guess what Mary Ann? We're gonna have a baby turkey. So when you come to my house for Thanksgiving, I'll have the turkey, and then I have a baby turkey. That's my first Thanksgiving in America, in 1949.

- 1:00:57 Edith Eger: My late husband ended up ill in the TB hospital and I sent him to school and he became a CPA [Certified Public Accountant]. So that's the story with the immigrants and today I live in La Jolla and I'm very fortunate to be able to truly make a good living.
- 1:01:16 Speaker 2: So you went to school though and became a doctor at 50, so you were in camp when you were 17...
- 1:01:25 Edith Eger: I was 17 on my birthday in Auschwitz. September 29th in 1944. I had my 17th birthday.
- 1:01:37 Susanne Hillman: Okay we have a question over here.
- 1:01:40 Speaker 3: Dr. Eger, would you describe the scene and what was happening when the GIs came into the camp and got you away from the Nazis?
- 1:01:55 Edith Eger: The plan was - they showed it to us - the plan was that they -
- 1:02:02 Speaker 3: Who's they?
- 1:02:05 Edith Eger: The Nazis. They put a bomb in every barrack and they were going to pull that lever and we would've been blown to pieces. And Gunskirchen, I went back, there is a monument there if you ever go that way. No, I didn't see any Nazis but they assured us that the men that were supposed to execute the order fled and that's how we were alive and liberated. Okay.

- 1:02:45 Susanne Hillman: Other questions?
- 1:02:49 Edith Eger: Yes.
- 1:02:50 Speaker 4: The antisemitism that's now, unfortunately, going on, not only in Hungary and France and other places, what advice do you have to bring the world together, to stop this? It's not just a question of remembering, but why and what?
- 1:03:11 Edith Eger: That's a beautiful question because genocide is happening as we speak. But never in the history of mankind such a systematic and scientific annihilation of a group of people existed. So it's not comparable, because 12 highly educated people were celebrating at the end of the day that finally, they can put 10,000 Jews in the oven in one day. Yes, so, I'm in school work, letting the students know whether they are really learning how to think, not what to think. And to question authority. Not blindly ever follow, because that's what can happen. Thank you so much, that's a very wonderful - I mean because we could spend hours on that. Children are very impressionable. When I was in Auschwitz I realized that there is no difference between me and the Nazi because I could've been born in Germany, I could've been born in Vienna and I would've been a very happy little Nazi with a uniform when I was told Heute Deutschland - Today Germany and tomorrow the whole world. I think it's very important for us to really teach parents. Yes, and how you can be a good parent to you, I think that's the best thing parents can do: teach children how to be parents to themselves, and how they can make it in the world without you. I think that's the best thing parents can do.
- 1:05:09 Speaker 5: Hi, just to tag on to that, I've become concerned sort of that we're having a backdoor antisemitism by just changing or shifting feelings toward Israel and I always see Israel as the one good thing that developed after the Holocaust, I wondered if you had any thoughts on that?
- 1:05:33 Edith Eger: That's right.
- 1:05:36 Edith Eger: That's right, that's right. Truman was a wonderful man who - who fortunately made that happen and Israel needs all the support we can give. I was in Israel myself doing research with a wonderful man, Hillel Kreim was his name, wondering about the positive effects of suffering. And I found people and the test I

used by Abraham Maslow of a self-actualized person. When the survivors who are not only survived and not only function on an average but on an above-average level. You know in research, you always find what you look for. That's really very very good and hopeful that Israel is the only friend that we have.

- 1:06:40 Susanne Hillman: Okay, one final question.
- 1:06:43 Speaker 6: You said that you speak with the hopes that what you went through and - would never happen again, do you have concerns today for what you see in our country, not just antisemitism, or some of the race things that we have, or the separation of the rich and poor, but some strategic something that is afoot that we should somehow try to oppose?
- 1:07:09 Edith Eger: I do get very scared, but I refuse to live in fear. Because fear begets more fear. When ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] said that they're going to wave the flag on the White House, I think we'd better watch out, because they really mean it. I think whatever we can do preventively, I think the best thing is to open up communications because it's very hard to beat someone into an object who you really know and really break bread with. And I know Israeli kids get together with the Palestinian kids and they are opening up the communication. They are better than we are at ours. So how we can get rid of the us and them mentality. Because them is me. Find what you don't like in someone else and look at that inside you. There's a Hitler in every one of us. And there is beauty and kindness and I wanna thank publicly Susanne, this little girl, who I remembered, I encourage her to really go on with her doctorate and I'm so happy that you're here. She works day and night, really to keep this wonderful library alive and I thank you so much for having me. I'm a good mommy to you.
- 1:08:35 Susanne Hillman: Thank you so much.
- 1:08:37 Susanne Hillman: Yes you are.
- 1:08:40 Susanne Hillman: Well on this wonderful note, please - Thank you, Edith. Thank you so much.
- 1:08:45 Edith Eger: Thank you so much. Thank you.

1:08:48 Susanne Hillman: Thank you all for coming and have a good night.