

My name is Mala Tribich and I am a Holocaust survivor.

I was born in Piotrkow, Poland and lived a happy life with my parents Sara and Moishe, my brother Ben and my sister Lucia. When I was nearly 9 years old my life changed forever. The Nazis invaded Poland and over the next five and a half years I lost my parents, sister and most of my extended family. Our town was the first in Poland to have a ghetto. All the Jews of the town were incarcerated in these crowded and unhygienic conditions; deprived of the most basic human rights.

In order to avoid the deportations to labour and death camps, my parents arranged for me, along with my cousin Idzia, to travel to Czestochowa to stay with a Christian family, for which they paid. However, soon after this Idzia asked to return to the ghetto because she missed her family. I stayed and when I returned to the ghetto I found out that Idzia had never made it back to her parents. We never heard from her again and her parents never got over her disappearance. She was only a young girl.

In 1942, my mother and 8 year old sister Lucia were taken from the ghetto, to the nearby Rakov forest together with 560 others. There, they were brutally murdered. One of my uncles was also shot and my aunt was deported, so I had to look after their 5 year old daughter, my cousin Ann. At the age of 12 I became a slave labourer when the Piotrkow ghetto was finally liquidated. After 18 months Ann and I were deported to Ravensbruck concentration camp, whilst the men, including my brother Ben and my father, were sent to Buchenwald. After about ten weeks at Ravensbruck we were deported to Bergen Belsen in cattle cars.

During those long 5 and a half years we would say to each other that it can't get any worse than this, but when we arrived in Bergen-Belsen that was the ultimate, it was horrendous, beyond human endurance. The first thing that hit you was the smell and smog. There were skeletons shuffling along aimlessly in a daze and as they shuffled they would collapse and die. There were dead bodies everywhere and piles of naked twisted decaying corpses. I heard that there was a children's home somewhere in the camp and we quickly set out to find it. We were lucky to get in, but I still succumbed to typhus. I remember coming into consciousness on my bunk by the window and seeing people running. That was the 15th of April 1945 when we were liberated by the wonderful British forces. I cannot describe what it meant to be treated with kindness – as human beings – by these British soldiers.

My cousin Ann survived and so did her mother. I was sent to Sweden with some other children in order to recuperate. Whilst there, I learned that my brother Ben was the only other survivor of my family, we were reunited in England in 1947. It is here in the UK, that I have rebuilt my life, got married, had children and later, grandchildren.

For decades, I have shared my story with tens of thousands of people across this country. Year on year I tell my testimony in schools, universities, government departments and businesses. The vast majority of the people I speak to are students at school or those who are just about to enter university. I hope that my words and my story will reach them, that they will learn from the past, and work towards building a better world. I am proud to share my experiences and have done so for many years. In 2012 I received an MBE from Her Majesty the Queen to recognise my contribution in educating the next generation.

But, despite my talks and those of my brave fellow survivors who also speak in schools year in, year out, the lessons of the Holocaust are yet to be learnt. Prejudice and discrimination still live on. I really believe that a memorial next to Parliament, where vital decisions are made, will help us to learn the vital lessons from the past. What better symbol to remind our Parliamentarians and the wider public of where apathy as well as prejudice and hate can ultimately lead? What better legacy than to have a memorial and a learning centre in which thousands of students and teachers can learn more about the Holocaust? This is an issue of the utmost national importance. I would even say, it is an issue of international importance. Britain must lead the way in educating the next generation about the dangers of antisemitism, hatred and racial prejudice. A national memorial, in the shadow of Parliament, will enable not just hundreds of thousands of British students to learn more, but countless other members of the public to do so too.

I am 90 years old. I intend to share my testimony for as long as I am able to, but there will become a time when this is not possible. As the Holocaust moves further into history and we survivors become less able to share our testimonies this Memorial and Learning Centre will be a lasting legacy so that future generations will understand why it is important for people to remember the Holocaust, to learn from the past and stand up against injustice. The memory of the Holocaust cannot be left to fade when us eyewitnesses are no longer

able to share our memories. I implore the Planning Inspector to please support this vital Memorial and Learning centre.