

Slabe Jajko Transcript

[00:00:09] **Eyal:** (narrating) My grandmother, among many other things, is also a Holocaust survivor.

[00:00:15] **Eyal:** You said Savta [grandma] is forgetful. Could you explain that?

[00:00:19] **Sheila:** (laughs)

[00:00:20] **Eyal:** (narrating) After the war, in 1957, Savta volunteered to give testimony about all of her family that were murdered during the Shoah.

[00:00:28] **Savta Hana:** Ugh, Osnat, I forgot something.

[00:00:30] **Osnat:** What did you forget?

[00:00:31] **Savta:** Nevermind, it's pointless.

[00:00:32] **Eyal:** (narrating) Savta gave 26 testimonies. 26 testimonies about her 26 closest family members, including her mother and her brother.

[00:00:41] **Sheila:** [Savta] Hana would sometimes be looking for her purse. She wouldn't be able to find it and she would call us saying: "I can't find it, I can't find it! Maybe it was stolen" or maybe this happened or that happened... So, we would say why don't you look here or look there... And then she would look in her bag and inside she would find the salted fish she bought and, in her fridge, she would find her purse.

[00:01:03] **Eyal:** (narrating) In 1999, for one reason or another, Savta decided to give her testimony a second time. She filled the same 26 forms and in 25 of them she wrote exactly the same thing. But one testimony was different. That of her brother, Henik.

[00:01:21] **Eyal:** And then there are stories like she would find her keys in the fridge and the ham in her bag. And she would go out and her bag would stink. There's a lot of stories like that about Savta. Memory was never her strength.

[00:01:41] **Eyal:** (narrating) When she gave her testimony in 1957, and also years later, in 2015, when Savta wrote her autobiography, Savta said where, when, and how her brother was killed.

[00:01:54] **Osnat:** She was always like this. Now that she really has memory problems, I always joke with her that it's always been this way but it's really not the same.

[00:02:07] **Eyal:** (narrating) But in '99, when Savta gave her testimony for the second time, after her first testimony in '57 and before her autobiography in 2015, Savta said that she didn't know what had happened to her brother. What happened in '99? To where did this memory go?

[00:02:47] **Savta:** I am Hana Handelsman. I was born in Poland, 1929. When World War II broke out, I was 10.

[00:03:20] **Eyal:** Could you describe Savta? Who is Savta?

[00:03:24] **Sheila:** What a question. Savta Hana... She is the example of the woman I would have liked to be. An example of optimism and strength.

[00:03:41] **Or:** That's a complicated question. Savta is Savta. What do you mean, "who is Savta"? Savta is...

[00:03:49] **Osnat:** She's very funny. She's forgetful, always has been.

[00:03:53] **Healy:** She's been through a lot in her life and she is still someone who is optimistic and fun and amazing.

[00:04:00] **Alon:** We were never able to get a clear sense from our parents of what they went through. Here and there they would tell us things that we managed to squeeze out of them but it would be the sort of thing like: "You don't need to know this. There is nothing to tell."

[00:04:21] **Savta:** There are things... There are a million things I forget. But there are some things that I... that I remember, remember...

[00:04:31] **Eyal:** There's a book next to you. Could you tell me what book it is?

[00:04:39] **Sheila:** It's the greatest inheritance she has left to her grandkids... to her great-grandkids, and the grandkids of her great-grandkids.

[00:04:48] **Or:** (reading) "From the Memories of Hana Handelsman née Nusbaum."

[00:04:53] **Osnat:** My husband Ori said that we have to find some way to preserve these memories. And from that we got this book which is a wonderful memento.

[00:05:02] **Alon:** When we were younger there were subjects we wouldn't talk about at home so we wouldn't, as they say, so we wouldn't awaken the dead so we wouldn't bring the ghosts out. But with the years some of mom's memories started to surface.

[00:05:29] **Healy:** In a few years no one is going to remember them if we don't pass them on. No one is going to remember them. And it's important to remember what happened because it's the story of our family. And it's the story of an amazing woman who went through a lot and was still able to remain optimistic, smiling and charming.

[00:05:52] **Or:** I wanted and we all wanted her to make this book because it's true that with the years she has started to forget more and more. We felt that, even though these were stories we had heard and nearly knew by heart... I think we wanted a copy that was in her words and not us retelling what she had told us.

[00:06:17] **Eyal:** You said earlier that Savta's memory is not as good nowadays. How do you feel about it? About Savta's current condition?

[00:06:33] **Osnat:** Look...

[00:06:36] **Savta:** (sings)

[00:06:44] **Osnat:** It's very, very, very complicated, and hard, and sad. And I... I don't know what I hope to happen anymore.

[00:07:00] **Savta:** (sings)

[00:07:11] **Or:** It's hard. You see it fading.

[00:07:19] **Savta:** (sings, and continues singing through next statement)

[00:07:21] **Or:** You see that she recognizes but doesn't remember. She tells the same story over and over again. She repeats it again and again.

[00:07:33] **Savta:** (sings) The end.

[00:07:46] **Savta:** Do you remember how often I was sick at home?

[00:07:49] **Alon:** How was that?

[00:07:51] **Savta:** I don't know I can't understand it even today. I was never sick in the camps

[00:08:00] **Alon:** Or maybe you were and got better.

[00:08:01] **Savta:** What?

[00:08:02] **Alon:** Maybe you didn't have time to notice being sick.

[00:08:05] **Savta:** But if you have a fever, or a cough, or you have a runny nose you notice it. I didn't have a runny nose or a cough and I was barefoot in the snow. I never had a cold! I was never sick!

[00:08:21] **Sheila:** She was never able to understand how she survived while her brother did not.

[00:08:27] **Savta:** And then she said, "You?! You survived but your brother didn't?"

[00:08:33] **Eyal:** (reading) "If you survived then he will also return."

[00:08:36] **Alon, Sheila, Osnat, Or, Eyal, Healy, and Yoav:** (reading in turns) "Henik and I were together 3 months and were separated during the Aktion I didn't know where he was sent but after liberation, I was sure that if I survived as a little girl, I was sure that a young, strapping lad like him would surely return. This feeling grew stronger because no one expected me to survive. When I returned, I was told, "if you came back, he will come as well." One day, unfortunately, I met Bozhokovsky the baker's granddaughter who told me it was pointless to wait for Henik. She told me that during the war she worked in the kitchens at the Gröditz camp in Germany where Henik was until he tried to escape, a year before liberation. The local Poles didn't want to endanger themselves by helping him and he was caught, beaten nearly to death, and thrown into the room with those who were sick with Typhus. The guard who beat him also broke his glasses and that was what apparently broke his spirit. Until then he was tough and faced all the challenges but since he was unable to see, he became weak. Being with the sick, he caught Typhus and died. Now that I knew the details of how he died I was sorry she told me. What you don't know can't hurt you. Later, when dad was able to get more information from someone else who was at the camp, we realized there was no one to wait for. Even today I still can't understand how I survived and he didn't. Our non-Jewish nurse asked the same question: "You survived and your brother didn't, how?" Before the war, as a young girl I was always sick, suffering from angina and wearing a shawl around my neck. I was so sensitive I even had to have my tonsils removed, which was rare back then. I was so sensitive I even had to have my tonsils removed, which was rare back then. Because of this my mom nicknamed me "ślabe jajko," which means "soft egg" in Polish. But in the camps, where there were infectious diseases like scarlatina and typhus, I never had cold, I never had a cough, and I never got sick. I can't explain it."

[00:11:02] **Osnat:** I know for Savta, the person she misses the most in her life is her brother. She never got over the fact that he was murdered during the Shoah. That he never returned. She was sure he was going to return. I think all those years in the camps her hope was to be reunited with him. She never thought she would see her dad again; I don't know if she thought she would see her mom but I know she waited for him. She was looking for him when she returned.

[00:11:37] **Healy:** When she was young, she had very soft skin. Her brother liked to touch her cheeks because of it. She didn't like so she grew out her nails and whenever he tried to do it, she would scratch him so he stopped. And her mom would say: "Hana, he just loves you, don't do that." "Then he should love me less!"

[00:12:04] **Or:** I know that he saved her.

[00:12:07] **Healy:** They were at a work camp, I think. And they told them to stand in line. And they asked everyone their age. And Savta, because she always looked older for her age...

[00:12:22] **Alon:** After they lined them up her brother pushed her into a different line. She never saw him again.

[00:12:32] **Eyal:** And they asked them "who here is over the age of..." I don't remember exactly; I think maybe 15. He pushed her. And she told him, "But I'm not 15." And he told her, "Today you are." He pushed her. And they took her to the work camp. And she survived. And those children did not.

[00:12:59] **Eyal:** In the passage you just read from the book, Savta says her brother died in the Gröditz work camp. Which is the same thing she said when she provided testimony in 1957. But in 1999, when Savta gave her testimony a second time she said she didn't know what happened to him. Why do you think she said that?

[00:13:16] **Osnat:** I don't know. That's a good question. First of all, maybe she didn't remember at that moment. Which would be typical of her; she often forgets and get confused about things even before her age and dementia took their toll. I don't know. It's strange.

[00:13:40] **Or:** What you don't know doesn't hurt.

[00:13:44] **Eyal:** You can't forget on purpose. You can't erase a memory.

[00:13:50] **Healy:** Maybe she couldn't remember at that moment? Or during that time? Or maybe she didn't want people to know. Maybe so not everyone can know how he died. Only that he survived until a certain time and... and then not.

[00:14:09] **Or:** There's knowing and then there's remembering. She knows how but she prefers not to remember it. So, I think because of that, to write it... again and to get into the details... I think that maybe it was just too heavy for her.

[00:14:24] **Eyal:** I like to think that... she just... had a moment... when she didn't remember. There was one moment where her brother didn't die like that, a moment where he hadn't been killed like that. I hope that that's what happened because I would have liked for Savta to have had a little moment of peace. A little moment to rest from such a heavy and difficult memory.

[00:15:08] **Shir:** What message would you give to today's youth? To the Jewish people, today, about the Holocaust?

[00:15:14] **Savta:** Remember. Do not forget.

[00:15:32] **Savta:** (singing) It's burning, brothers, it's burning!
Oy, our poor shtetl is burning,
Raging winds are fanning the wild flames

And furiously tearing,
Destroying and scattering everything.
All around, all is burning
And you stand and look just so,
You with folded hands...
And you stand and look just so,
While our shtetl burns.
It's burning, brothers, it's burning!
Oy, our poor shtetl is burning.