

## Survivor Transcripts

### **Astrid's Story:**

*Titles on screen:* Astrid/97. Astrid Aghajanian survived the Ottoman Empire's systematic destruction of its Armenian population.

*Astrid:* When I was a little girl, my father said they were going to take him as a soldier. My father came and kissed me and said to my mother, "I know that they are going to shoot me, and you will remember me by looking after Helen." My name was Helen. And they took him and they shot him. So my mother did everything to save me. She sold her rings, she sold her earrings, she sold everything so that she could get bread and feed me.

They came and told the mothers that they are going to look after the children. My mother said, "No, I am not going to give my child. I will look after her." She saw the children piled up on top of each other and they put fire around them, the children screaming, burning. It was horrible, she said. And she was glad that she didn't give me. The other mothers started crying, weeping, about how their children were burning like that. It was horrible.

When the Turks started slaughtering the Armenians, one after the other, the kill was reaching us. Mother look around. She saw that there is no other way to run away. We are going to be killed. But my mother took me, and she buried me and herself under the dead bodies. So the Turks said, "We finished them." They collected their horses and they went. My mother stayed with me under the dead bodies, fearing that they might be hidden and kill us. So, we stayed there til the morning.

In the morning, she picked me up and she started walking in the desert. We walked the Syrian desert. And the shoes got torn out, we started walking bare feet. Imagine.

I owe my life to my mother. She was a real mother.

When she was walking, she saw a Bedouin. He said, "Come with me." She said, "If you are going to kill me, I don't want to come with you." He said, "No, no. Come with me." So mother went with him. He saw a man with many camels, very rich. He spoke with the man and mother saw him taking money from the man. And then he came to my mother and said, "Now, go with him." He sold us. He sold us to the man. So, mother had to go with the other man. She told him, "If you are going to kill me, I don't want to come." He said, "No, no. Come with me." So she went with the other man.

Their aim was to kill her, to throw her into the river. A shepherd boy knew about it. He came in the morning, very early. He said, "Sister, sister. They are going to send you to fetch water from the river and throw you into the river and keep your child. Don't go." And in the morning, the man poured the water out from the tank and came and kicked mother and said, "Go and fetch water." She didn't go. But mother knew that he was after her, to kill her.

Soldier came, a Turkish officer, and he was looking at the Bedouins. He found my mother. He said, "Who are you? What are you?" And my mother told him. He said, "Look, I'll get permission from the governor to come and fetch you and take you away." We were taken to the governor's house, and they told her, "Now you can serve. You can work here as a housekeeper."

And while she was working there, I was a little child, playing in the garden. Opposite, there was a butler, and the butler called me. I ran to my mother and I told her, "That man is calling me." She went and saw him. The butler said, "Who are you?" She said, "I'm an Armenian refugee." He said, "Do you have relatives?" She said, "Yes," and she would like to get in contact with her uncle who is in Aleppo to say that we are alive. We are not dead." That's how we were saved.

## **Margaret's Story:**

[Margaret is a refugee from Nazi Germany.]

My name is Margaret. I'm ninety-four years old now. I was born in Germany. I had a very happy childhood, and then Hitler came to power. The school took part in a march, so I took part in this march. It was called "By torch light" and something awful, awful somehow started. They sang a *lied* [song]:

*"Wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt, dann geht's nochmal so gut."* (Once Jewish blood sprays from the knife, then you'll feel twice as good.) That meant, "When we kill Jews, everything will be much better." I was absolutely shattered when I got home to my mother and said, "You will never believe what has happened."

On the first on April 1933, when a person was an SA or SS had to stand in front of the Jewish shops to see that nobody would enter the shop and buy something.

And as it happened, our next door neighbor had a son and we were very [good] friends with him. And all of a sudden, he stood outside of our shop, in a uniform, and my mother said, "What?! How can you do this to us? You've known us [since] when you were a child." His answer was "Orders are orders." So that was that.

The *Kristallnacht* (The night of broken glass). There were heaps outside of our house, heaps of glass and porcelain, all broken. They had broken in through the shop windows and destroyed everything that they could. I was furious, absolutely furious. After that, it was clear that we had to leave. I went back to my mother and I thought, "I'm not leaving you here." My oldest brother had emigrated to Holland and took my mother to Amsterdam, but I had a letter from my boyfriend: don't wait in Amsterdam. Come to England. That actually saved my life.

I went to Sheffield and there was the wife of a rabbi, who had several young girls and found jobs for them to work. The ladies who were looking for maids to work in their houses looked us up and down, and I felt like... [the way] a slave must have felt. My brother tried to get out of Holland with his wife, but they got caught, and then they were taken to Auschwitz.

They were gassed straight away.

My second brother, Paul, was left in Berlin. He said, well, nothing will happen to me. He ended up in Minsk (Belarus). Luckily, my youngest brother's life was safe in Palestine. And as I said before, I took my mother to Amsterdam, thinking she would be safe there. I should have left my mother in Germany. It would have been the same end for her. Can you stop [recording] a moment?

After my mother was taken to Sobibór (extermination camp), it was straight away they got killed. When it actually sank in that I didn't have any letters anymore from the Red Cross and so on, I was absolutely... I was finished. It never leaves you. It is with me, what has happened to me, constantly. Every night, I ask for forgiveness and I thank my parents and my brothers for all the love they have given me. So it's with you all the time. That never leaves you. It never leaves you.

### **Var's Story:**

[The Khmer Rouge emptied towns and cities forcing men, women and children into the countryside to work as labourers on collective farms. Deaths from execution, disease, exhaustion and starvation have been estimated at over two million. Var Ashe Houston survived the Genocide in Cambodia.]

The Khmer Rouge won the four-year civil war on the 17th of April, 1975. On the 18th, they came into the capital and everybody cheered them up, only twenty-four hours later. It was announced on the radio, asking everybody to leave the city to the countryside for a few hours, so they can protect us from American bombing. My family was a bit stubborn, so we didn't leave until the Khmer Rouge came through the roof, four of them with a gun, and forced us out. After the Khmer Rouge left, we started packing. I packed water, rice, salt, and dry fish. We started the journey by pushing the car. Anybody who drives a car they stopped and let [made get] out, because that indicated capitalism, and that's what they tried to get rid of. They took all the mud from the outside and, you know, put us all on the car, make it look so so dirty, [pulled the] spark plug out of course, and they put everything out, even on top of the jeep. At that point, I threw away all of my suitcases.

Thinking about it now, I must have been crazy at that moment; I kept one Oxford dictionary.

I still can see it vividly in my eyes, and some jewelry. That jewelry saved our lives later. Because they abolished the money. So one ounce of gold, you can buy ten tins (5.5 lbs) of rice. The room was packed [full] of people. They were behind us, with children and older people, and exhaustion, and even ill people from the hospital, so it was slow [moving]. The Khmer Rouge were firing over our heads, "Go, go, go, go, go, go," and they shot a few people who didn't obey them.

So if you have a dictionary—especially in English—it means you are attached to the capitalist world, and that's what the Khmer Rouge tried to get rid of—capitalism. Had I known that the dictionary could get the Khmer Rouge to kill me, I wouldn't have kept it. I kept it during the four years under the Khmer Rouge's hiding it and with me when I was escaping to the Thai border.

It's a comfort as well, 'cause you know, it's something that ties you to your life before.

## **Sokphal's Story:**

[Sokphal Din was born in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. After the city fell to the Khmer Rouge, he and his family were among those driven into the killing fields...]

In 1975, just after [the Cambodian] New Year [in] April, my family was having breakfast in the morning [when] somebody knocked [on] the front door. It was a Pol Pot soldier with a black uniform and a gun. [He] pointed the gun at us and said, "You've got to get out of your house right now, or we'll shoot you." So myself, because I was about thirteen or fourteen, they forced me to work hard labor in the cornfields. They told us, if anyone [who is a] soldier or teacher tells them that you are what you are, then they send you back to [the capital] Phnom Penh to study.

After three months they come back or you join your family. So my father talked a bit [with my mom], thinking, what shall we should do?

I remember the night before he left the family to join training, father gave me his necklace. He gave it to me and he said, "Please look after this, and look after your brother and sister. Look after your mom. I don't know when I'll come back. It's your duty now to look after the family." At the time, I didn't have any emotion, because... "Well, okay, you go now, and in three months you'll come back and take me with you," kind of thing. I will see you again.

We waited and waited with no news back at home. Then one day they told us, "You're going to join your family now." I was so excited, my mom [was] excited. Then somebody, the farmer, told us it was not true. They're not taking you back to Phnom Penh. They'll take you to the jungle. We knew that we'd never go back. We knew it was a lie, they just wanted to kill us. We knew that we'd never see our father again. We kept hoping, but we knew that it was impossible. They took us through the jungle, until we got to the place—a complete jungle, nothing there at all. They just left you there to die, basically.

So my grandmother [was] really hungry, so I fed her this egg to eat, a boiled egg. She couldn't swallow it; she couldn't chew because she's too ill to eat anything. And I held her head in my arms. So that night, we slept in the same mosquito net. [It was] nearly morning, when I touched her, she felt cold. So we all woke up and looked at her; she had already passed away. I felt so sad to see her burn, burning, cremated underneath a pile of wood in the jungle. After my grandmother died, they separate[d] me, took me away to work in hard labor. I came to see them, but I could not stay there more than one day. I had to go back the next day. And I found out my brother was really ill, who was six years old. His name was Kosal. I remember, that morning when I left, I heard my brother not shouting but crying. He swore to the communist Khmer Rouge, "You took my brother away. I'll never see him again. You took my brother away. You are terrible. You burn to hell. I condemn you. Please stay brother. I want you to stay with me. Please don't go", begging me. I can hear his voice now crying and begging me not to go back. I walked out in tears. I could not stop. Then, two days later, I got news from my mother who said that my brother had died.

Some people who have got the radio heard about the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia. So they forced me to join the army. I thought to myself, I [could] never ever kill anybody... But I had to take the order. One day, we heard the sound of the tank, the ground shaking and everything, and we knew the Khmer Rouge soldiers disappeared, the Vietnamese were in the village already. That day, they put me in the brick oven. So we had to sit against the wall, in a circle, in the oven. I thought to myself that day, that's

it. That's it. They are going to burn us alive in here. I can say nothing. I thought, I'm going to die.  
They moved me to Siem Reap prison. After many months in the prison, I was released. So I spent time in the refugee camp, until they found my cousin in England. She sponsored me, and through the Red Cross I came to England in August, 1987.

All the memories from the killing fields stay with me everyday. I have nightmares all the time. Even [just] the night before yesterday, I had a nightmare. I dreamt that I was there and I tried to escape from the water. I've seen so many things. I've seen dead bodies next to me. I've seen a lot of things. I can't describe it, but it still upsets me. It's a real nightmare.

### **Besima's Story:**

Those who didn't live through the war know nothing.

I came by bus to Prijedor to see if there was anything left, if there was a place that we could return to. No one was visiting until then. I couldn't recognize the place. It was all grown with brambles and hawthorns. I was numb when I saw there was nothing left. Only chars and new grown trees. Someone had even planted corn on my land and were harvesting it. Serbs planted it! And they were harvesting the corn, and laughing, oh dear god! They had a tractor trailer. Tied up cows were grazing, a horse, a man was carrying corn over his shoulder and into the trailer. I said to him, "What right do you have occupying our land as you wish?" He said, "Well, we know that the land here is good, so we used it." The women who were working in the field fell silent. They didn't make a sound. I said to him, "I know you, but I don't know your name!" He said, "I am from Vrhovac. I am from near the railway line." I said, "You thought that none of us would survive. Well some of us did survive. Somebody will always survive. And I want to know who you are. You people killed my child and I don't know why!"

When I was in Germany, my daughter rang me from Zagreb. They asked 'do you know mama that Dzevad was killed? Dear Lord, I didn't eat, I didn't drink. I don't know how I survived. But you can't force yourself to die. You have to live for as long as it's written. I said Dear Lord, why didn't they kill me and let my children live. They didn't choose. They were killing indiscriminately. God forbid, God forbid. Some people survived all of it. You can't choose your fate.

When I was in Palanka they asked me and Jasmin to go and identify Dzevad's clothing. When I got there, in one room clothing was lined up like bodies. I just looked at them and walked away. I couldn't face entering the room with the bodies.

## **Simon's Story**

In 1941 when Germany attacked Russia, and the Russians fled because they weren't expecting it. We soon realized that the Germans didn't like Jews.

The Jews were ordered to go into the market square—all seven thousand of us—and when we got there, a group of about twenty Gestapo machine-gunners came, and they pointed their machine guns at us. We thought they were going to kill us. People were screaming and crying and fainting and praying. Then, a car pulled up outside of the square, and a very high ranking officer came out of the car and waved his arm. The machine gunners put their machine guns away, and they left. When we got back to our houses we discovered that they were empty; the Germans had stolen all of our possessions, because about six months later, the Germans created a new home for us—a ghetto, a prison.

My father was very pragmatic. Even before the ghetto was built, he prepared himself. He sold most of his valuables and he converted the money into gold bars, eight ounce gold bars—today worth about ten thousand [British] pounds or more—and he would hide these gold bars in various clothing, bottoms of shoes, false bottoms on brushes, etc. Probably the first gold bar that we used was to bribe one of the guards to let us escape, and that was a miracle. So we escaped from the ghetto.

I remember walking down a river. The river that separated our town Radyvyliv from Brody, a nearby town where my mother and brother were born. We couldn't cross the bridge because we were advised by somebody that the bridge was being guarded by Ukrainian Nazis. So we went downstream. And this is where I start remembering things:

I remember walking down the river, and my father suddenly walking into the river. I thought, "What is he doing? He's crazy!" He walked across the river, and as he walked across, the water got higher and higher, until it came up to his neck. When he got to the middle of the river, the water came up to his neck. But it didn't drown him, so was able to come back and collect each one of us—me, my brother, and my mother—carry us piggyback style to the other side of the river, and we were free! But soaking wet.

And a second miracle: a woman came out of a house and saw us, could have easily handed us in because she must have recognized we were escaped Jews from the ghetto and could have probably been rewarded for it—but no! She invited us into the house, allowed us to dry ourselves, warm ourselves, even gave us some fresh clothing and then allowed us to sleep [there] overnight.

But in the morning, she said, "Please please don't ask us to hide you any longer, because the Germans have threatened us that if they find any Jews here our family will all be killed." So we were on our way, looking for our first hiding place, or our next hiding place. It was a very cramped bunker under a pigsty. Even less space than in the ghetto, and less food, because all the farmers in Poland were regularly raided by Nazi soldiers and having their food stolen. So the farmer not only didn't have much food to give us, but also, we weren't allowed to surface in the daytime. We were always frightened or the farmer was frightened of the Germans coming and finding us on the farm. So we had to only surface at dusk. At dusk, we had to slop out, get some fresh water, take a breath of fresh air, and then back into the bunker to sleep.

Then, in the in third bunker, my father was able to invite some other relatives and friends to join us, because there was more room. And he invited my mother's brother's wife. She was pregnant, and she gave birth actually in the cellar. The baby screamed. When the farmer heard about this, he told us to get out. He was frightened for his own life and his family's life.

We had to make a terrible, terrible decision: life or death. Life for one child, or the death for all of us, including that child. Had I been a grown up, I think I'd like to have made a different decision, but I don't know. It's a very, very difficult situation, a very, very traumatic and impossible decision to make. Shortly after that, I remember the farmer opening the cellar trap door, and the sun was shining, and he said, "You're free." I didn't know what that meant. I thought I was going to live like this for the rest of my life or get killed. Sure enough, the Germans were in retreat. They'd been kicked out of Poland by the Russians, and the Russians were back. The farmer even said, "You can go back to your houses." We tried to go back to our houses, but our houses were occupied by Russians and Ukrainians, and they weren't prepared to give them back to us. So we became refugees.

**Sero's Story:**

My house was destroyed by our neighbors who still live all around us in their original homes. One day they decided that we were getting in their way and that we were no longer welcome. They would be better off without us.

That pile of rubble and stones, you can see over there, that was my house. My wife and I were tending to the potatoes when a man came to the house. I can name him, but that is not important. He came with a driver wearing a camouflage uniform and carrying an AK-47. When I became a prisoner, that same soldier who had provided security for his superior stopped me in the camp one day and said, "You never offered us coffee or brandy." It was a matter of life and death and he said, "You never offered us coffee or brandy. Was it that you didn't want to, you were afraid, or you didn't have any brandy?" And then he said, "If you had offered us coffee or brandy, it would be much better for you now."

Less than two days later they took me out at two in the morning and tortured me for the next three hours. They tortured me for three hours. I screamed for three hours. Suddenly I had an idea. I thought, why don't I pretend to blackout. So I fell down, and the guard shouted, "The [expletive] is lying! Look how he is protecting his head." They kicked me again saying "get up!" I then blacked out while standing up.

If I hate, then the hatred sits here on my neck. I have been through all the emotions, and if I hate, then it will consume me. I won't know what to do with myself. Whenever I wake up, I'll hate! And it will drive me crazy. If I take revenge, who do I target? Crime is crime! End of story! That's it! That's it!

### **Appolinaire's Story:**

[Genocide in Rwanda 1994. Following years of persecution approximately one million Tutsis and many Hutus were murdered in Rwanda in just 100 days. Extremist Hutu leaders used radio and word of mouth to encourage killing squads to carry out the genocide by hand. Appolinaire Kageruka survived the Genocide in Rwanda.]

Yeah, my name is Appolinaire Kageruka. It was morning, very early morning, and my uncle, he came and knocked on our door, telling my dad in my language that you know that turashize. The meaning of turashize is "we are finished." Our president... died. He has been shot... The death of the president is going to cause a lot of death[s] of Tutsis.

After two days or three days, the people started to kill other people. The national radio was telling all the Hutu to, "Attack Tutsi. All Tutsi in the country must die." So, I have to leave my house. Where am I going? Maybe in five minutes I will die. You can't say, ok me, I have to go with my dad or my uncle, because hiding is hiding. You can't take a group to go to hide.

I didn't take anything. Only a radio to try to get some information. The radio was saying "Kill this! Kill this! Close this road! Go there! The enemy is there! The cockroach is there!" Even that time you can't think about if you're hungry or not. No. No, you think about your life.

For the first day, I went to see my friend. I chose Bascar because first of all, Bascar was a Hutu. Nobody was looking for him to kill him. He would be killed if they knew that I was hiding in his house. So many people be killed and they are Hutu because they are trying to hide some of Tutsi. I knew that. But, I don't have choices, I don't have another choice. And he, he took that sacrifice for me. Before I left Bascar's house, we spoke. He told me, "Appolinaire, you are not safe anymore here, because the people start to think that you may be hiding somewhere."

You can't think about any other things. You just think how to stop the militias and killers. And I didn't take anything because I had nothing. I just left the house and go to find somewhere. And then Bascar says, "Stay here." He comes back I think after twenty-eight or thirty hours. I was waiting for him, but he came. He give me some water. Dirty water, but I have to drink it, and food. I was trying to ask Bascar if he knows at least where is my family. He said no. Later, I found out that they had been killed already, died. So, I left my house like four days after the seventh, and from that time until the end of May I think when the RPF comes to my area. It was like one month and a half, which is long generally for me at that time. Long generally, and bad generally. At the end, you say, but it's happened. I don't have mom. I don't have dad. I don't have brother. I don't have sister. You cry. You think. You spend a lot of time without sleeping. You, sometimes you see them, sometimes you feel they are still alive, but they are not.

So I say, ok, I lost my mother, I lost my father, I lost my brother and my sister and my family and friends, but my life continue. I have to find a job, work hard, get married, and get children, and get another family. But not to forget, but to rebuild your life again.

## **Hawa's Story:**

*Titles on Screen:* Hawa is a survivor of ethnic cleansing in Darfur, Sudan.

[In] 2003/2004, I had some attacks near to my village. During that time, day after that day, we heard that some killed in the same village. And sometimes we see some plane[s]. We hear[d] some noises from the Antonov and gun[s] like that. We hear[d] it. And all the time [it] is scaring [scary] from that.

My cousins heard some shooting. When they got out...what happened in their village, some people is shooting them, and they... die at that time. They didn't know who... kill them. Until now.

Once the people arrive from that village attack and come to my village, they left all our things in the village, and the *Janjaweed* took it. The people that arrive are tired and scaring and crying. A difficult situation. I can't tell you.

And I run out in a hurry with my family to camp near to Al Fashir. I want to live, and I want to save myself. And for certainly, I lost everything, but I want save myself. And when I went to camp, it was quite better than when I was in my village. Also, in the camp, sometimes we hear shooting. And sometimes, we [are] afraid to go out, because... somebody can kill me or can kill my friend... It's very difficult. We need to cook. We need everything. We need to eat, and we try everything.

When we arrived at the camp, I had some idea about nutrition, and I work with some organization. I worked with them like a social worker. Like a health visitor. I sit with some mothers. That mother have their children in nutrition center. And everyone was talking about the *Janjaweed* or about her life during the attack. All the problem that she had in the past. Everyone, once she told, she crying, she remember everything, is very difficult. And I remember one mother when she done talking she told us about running out from the shooting and she had her baby in her back. And she went to bring her child from her back. She find the child was died. All this time she was talking about her babies.

There are a lot of them, but if you want to talk about that, you feel afraid. You know, the government has control of all of the people. If there any problems, you can't talk about it because you afraid to feel. Until now, I here, but I feel there. And I feel with them in Darfur, because my family, all my family, is there. And I don't want a lot of problem[s] in my village or in Darfur.

I don't want war, and I don't want shooting, and I don't want [people to] hurt everything like that. But I feel now is worried about my family, because until now, there are a lot of problem in Darfur.