

Name: Hana Kovanic

Age: 79

Birthdate: May 17, 1936

Birthplace: Velka nad Velickou, Czechoslovakia

Religious Identity: Reform Judaism

Holocaust Story:

I was born Hana Deutelbaum, that was changed after the war because everything was so anti-German and that was German meaning for "date tree", so we translated that into the Czech version which was Dubovy and then of course when I got married I became Kovanic, and that used to be Kovanitz. I was born on May 17 1936 in Czechoslovakia, Velka-Nad-Velickou was the town and what it means is there was small River, but in Czech Velka means big river, so it means big river over the little river. I was born in 1936 and by that time Hitler and anti-Semitism existed in Germany and my father's sisters were in the U.S and wanted him to come over and he finally had a girl because I have two older brothers so he was delighted and didn't want to leave. To us it was temporary we thought it would go away, in 1939 Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, more or less immediately various regulations were passed we were no longer able to travel, my oldest brother was traveling to a different town for his religious training for his bar mitzvah. They started taking my father to German headquarters and he would come back being beaten, you name it. What saved our lives was that my mother was Czech and my father was Slovak, the nationality goes by where you were born, we lived in the Czech portion but because of my father we were ordered and given 24 hours to leave the Czech portion and go to Slovakia. We didn't really know where we were going. There were times when we had to walk to get to the next train station because they were bombed. When we got to my uncle told us that the situation in Slovakia is bad too, and they started gathering Jews and sending them into camps already and they were building two labor camps in Slovakia. My father was an apprentice in Slovakia, a carpenter. His brother told him that he should apply and try to get into one of these camps and because my father was needed to build new barracks they let us into one of the labor camps this was in late 1942. The labor camp was livable let's put it this way, I was a child, secretly educated by some of the mothers. My mother was working in laundry. In 1944 there was a Slovak uprising, the Slovaks were actually up to that point (not German) but they were supervising and guarding the camp. During the uprising because the Slovaks were under oppression as well they opened the camps. The question was where to go; my father decided that if he goes back to where he came from, it was a very small village where his parents had a very good reputation. He was convinced they would hide us if we could get there. We didn't have any money because of the camp, in order to be able to get someplace this happened in the beginning of September. The idea was that farmers would need my parents to work on the farm gather the crops and my parents were able to get a job with a farmer to help out, and he even fed us. There was disarray in Slovakia so nothing was happening, as the Germans were taking over they started again gathering Jews, and the farmer realized he would be arrested if they found out they were hiding us. He told us that we have to leave, he was very decent about it that there was a shepherd's cabin in the forest and that they were leaving for the winter and that we could hide in those

cabins, and my mother who didn't look Jewish if she would come into the village, He said he could try to help get us food. Of course these cabins were built with a lot of air, and no heat. As we approached the winter, a decision had to be made; it was more difficult to be in the town the Germans were looking all over. We would either freeze or die from hunger. My father decided he could get back to his village to where he came from that most likely people thought they would hide us. The farmer with the help of the village gave us id papers. Religion was not listed as Jewish. Father decided we would try to get back to where his family came from, and take a train because we had some money from working on the farm. He was very friendly with part of a family from the labor camp and they were with us too. The family was at this point kind of already broken, they were hiding some jewelry and money in their town, the wife decided she would go back to her home and get the jewelry and money and she went back. The father and daughter came with us, and worked for the farmer and in hiding. This becomes important, his daughter was wearing a winter coat this was already December, which was given to her in the labor camp and that same material was used for making clothing. While on the train if one family gets caught maybe the other one could get away. We were separated on the train so we wouldn't all get caught, my mother was on one side with one child and me and my father on the other. As we were on the train the SS were going over all the trains getting all ids as they knew a lot of Jews were hiding, and they came first to the friend of ours with his daughter and her coat that came from the labor camp gave her away and they were immediately arrested for being Jewish. Now when they came to our train we had the id papers that were issued in the same village as our friends, and they put the two and two together and immediately arrested my father. My mother at that point decided she didn't want to split up the family, so she got up and the SS told her "What do you want with a Jew?" and she told them "he's my husband." We were all taken off the train, we were put on a truck full of people who were caught, back into the labor camp where we were initially, it was no longer a labor camp, they were just using it as a holding place to separate them to who was going to concentration camps. My father and my oldest brother who was 15 were treated as adults and they were decided they would be needed and were sent within a week to Saachsenhausen, my mother, myself I was 8 in 1944 and my middle brother 11 and within a week we were loaded on a cattle car and taken away. We didn't know where we were going we were squeezed on top of each other about 100 or more people taken away. My mother spoke German and when we were standing as it turned out we were in Poland in Auschwitz. End of December beginning of January, she understood what was going on outside, orders and all of a sudden she heard the order to leave. What was happening at that point, the gas chambers were destroyed and they didn't know what to do with us, maybe a day staying there. They sent us to Theresienstadt, we ended there in December 44 this was my mother, brother and I. When we got there my mother was fairly happy because again, the Germans needed all the men they could get for the battlefield, so the Czech police were guarding us, my mother spoke fluently Czech, when we got off she noticed there was a little stool and it had her nephews name on it, she thought that meant her brother was there and could help us, as it turned out he was not. Being Czech my mother was assigned to work in the kitchen in the political part of the camp. The political prisoners were treated better; she was able to sneak food. The Czech police would make jokes about her gaining weight but she was actually sneaking out food for me. I was able to stay with her, we were 8 people assigned to one room, my brother was sent to one of the children's homes. That becomes important to some extent; a lot of the children were secretly educated. My mother she was eventually able to get my brother out, she was able to cook some things for us. She had the news she said that the war was coming to an end, she didn't want us to be killed at the end, but kids don't listen. We found some red material and we made a Russian flag, I had my birthday just before liberation, my brother made me a cake out of barley. The Soviets liberated us. The Czechs

provided trains, depending where people were from, since we were separated my mother thought that if my father and my brother survived, they'd go back to where we were separated in Slovakia. We went to Slovakia, my father's brother was there and his brother was in the same camp that my father was, he had no idea if anyone survived his wife and daughter, he got separated from his son. He told us that the last time he saw his brother and his son,(my father and brother) was on the death march. My uncle couldn't walk, he rolled down a hill and a German farmer took him in and saved him. He told my mother that he didn't think my father made it because he was weak and his was carrying Otto, my brother who was 15. My Uncle didn't give us much hope that my father and brother survived, we didn't hear anything from them all summer long. My mother and uncle decided that they will try to make the best out of it and we started school in September. One day my mother came to school and I didn't know why, I didn't think I did anything wrong, and she was big smiling and she found out that my father and my brother actually survived, they thinking since we came from the Czech portion went back to the Czech portion. My mother was operating a general store; she had an apprentice who took over for her. He was assigned to the United Nation restitution office and he used the truck my father sent him, told him to go to Slovakia, to see if any of my family survived. This fellow came and he found us, so that how we found out that my father and brother did survive. So she came and took us out, and we were going to go back to the Czech portion with this fellow. Unlikely, I haven't come across anyone else who the whole immediate family survived, even though we were separated. My father was very sick; He was in an American army hospital. We were reunited, however there was still anti-Semitism. When my father tried to get back his house and business he was told don't you see now we got rid of all the Jews that were going to help you, we were the only Jews that survived from that town. He had three sisters in the U.S one of them wrote to everyone to find out who was alive, she had tried to get us out in 1936 and we didn't think anything of it because we thought it was all just temporary. I was a baby so we didn't leave. In 1939 she again sent papers but it was too late at that point for us to get out. In 1945 she wrote again and offered to bring us to the United States, finding out there was hardship in Europe and the cities and we were being welcomed, and in addition the communists were taking over, not seeing any future for us. We decided to get to the United States, it took 3 years and in 1948 we arrived in New York that's where my father's family was, we faced another problem because in New York City you couldn't get an apartment. I stayed with my cousin whose daughter was my same age, we didn't speak the languages, but kids tend to communicate. By the end of the summer I was fine, my parents not being able to get an apartment, worked as superintendents at an apartment, no one wanted a family with children, so they told them that they only had two boys I was denied. I finally joined them when the owner of the building realized they could do good work. Father started working again, mother took care of the house and all that, I went to school. Thank god for America, we worked our way up, our first apartment it was a fifth floor walkup but we were happy with that, we saved some money we bought a two family house in the Bronx the one was rented and the other we lived in. I started in 7th grade going to school my mother was good at math and I was too, except the division sign was different in Czech than in the U.S and I had no idea what it meant so I got 60 something in math and hardly passed. And we discovered what the problem was the next semester I got a 98 the next semester. By the time I got to high school, I guess I spoke fairly good English I was the high school newspaper editor. I was able to get into city university of New York, later got my masters from there too. We lived in this two family house and then from there the neighborhood kind of changed and we made it into a three family house to get more money. I was working during the summer as a waitress and councilor. I met a boy who was also working there; his father owned a building in west Bronx. We worked hard in the U.S so we eventually ended up in Riverdale section of the Bronx, my husband and I

headed the apartment when my parents retired to Florida. My husband escaped on a medical convention in London from there he went to Rodina, and was going to come to the U.S. he came here for a fellowship at the Cleveland clinic, he got a position at New York university a research job, we met through a mutual friend and in 1969 we were married. We had one child, Paula.

What was your first job here, what occupation do you identify with?

Initially I went to school I was twelve when we got here, spent the first week with my cousin, in Atlantic beach. When I was 14 my brother the older one was always working, the middle one got a job in the Catskill Mountains and when I was 14 I started working there, except for school. Ba in Business and accounting, masters in accounting and finance, certified public account in New York City and New Jersey. First worked in public accounting when Paula was 18 months old, I kind of got bored we had a house in New Jersey which my husband liked, I had my CPA and masters but I wanted to spend some time with her. There was the feminist movement, so even though I didn't have any experience in teaching. Needing women I got a full time job teaching accounting at William Patterson College, it was very fortunate. I had a two day schedule even though it was full time, so it worked very well. I was able to be home and teaching, that's how I got into teaching. I taught accounting until I retired.

How many/if any children do you have? Do you have any grandchildren?

One child and three grandchildren.

What is your favorite thing to do now and why?

Well when my husband was alive, we traveled a lot, we were everywhere. I'm having leg problems, so I enjoy my grandkids mostly. Having a pool in Florida, I swim.

Do you think your experiences during the war held you back or motivated you?

It's well, being a child, it didn't do, the motivation I think came from my parents they wanted a better future for us, and my middle brother wanted to be a doctor always; the older one was too old by the time he got here. My other brother motivated me to work hard, I followed in his footsteps, he was three years older, I went to City College because of him. The opportunity in the U.S. motivated the whole family because we realized that if you work hard you can accomplish a lot. My father got a job on a skyscraper in New York, he would work overtime, and he made as much money as he could. His sister paid for our tickets and we had to repay the tickets. He always said I didn't die in a concentration camp, but I might fall off one of these things. My mother passed away first, my father unlike my mother had tremendous need to talk about it and get it out of his system. He would always talk to me about it, and my older brother would fill in certain things for my dad. Friend who was my brother's age was in the same labor camp and he lived in New York and he would fill in a lot of information after my brother and father passed away. He always told us what happened. I do a lot of talking about the Holocaust. Florida it is law that Holocaust is taught.