It's recording so.

So this is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Alfred Munzer on August 25, 2020 in Washington, DC, your location. We are conducting this interview remotely during the time of the 2020 pandemic. And I'll start the way we start almost all of our interviews, from the very beginning. And then we'll go on. So Mr. Munzer, could you tell me-- could you tell me the date of your birth?

I was born in November 23, 1941.

Can you tell me where you were born?

I was born in The Hague, The Netherlands.

All right. And what was your name at birth?

Alfred Munzer.

The same as today.

Well, actually, there were some differences in spelling. So my father's name at one point got misspelled to Minzer, M-I-N-Z-E-R. My parents were actually cousins and had the same last name. So when I was born, it was really Alfred Minzer. Interestingly, you know, I did some checking recently. And I could not find a registration of my birth that was done at the time.

So I don't know whether that was done because people were not registering children or babies, Jewish babies. So it's a question that I still-- I'm trying to resolve.

OK. Remind me again, excuse me, the date of your birth was when?

November 23, 1941.

OK. November 23rd, by that point, I take it that the Germans had marched into the Netherlands.

Yes.

It was already an occupied country.

Yes. The Netherlands were occupied between May 10th and May 14th, 1940. Holland basically capitulated on May 14th, 1940. But the invasion began May 10th.

OK. So did your mother give birth in a hospital?

No, I was born at home. And the reason for that was that, first of all, my mother did not like hospitals. She had given birth to two other children in a hospital. And she told me she did not particularly enjoy the experience of being in a hospital. So that was one reason. The other was that the obstetrician she had consulted had advised her to have an abortion.

He told her that it would be immoral to bring another Jewish life into the world. And it was in reading the biblical story of Hannah, who was desperate to have a child, that my mother decided not to have the abortion. And her obstetrician basically fired her as a patient. And so I was born at home with the help of a nurse.

Oh my. When you heard that later, when your mother told you, what kind of reaction did you have to that particular episode?

She may not have, you know, it probably took a while for me to understand what it meant. She may not have used the term abortion. But what I do remember is that, during childhood, she would retell Hannah's pledge, which was, if the Almighty will give me a child, I will give that child to the service of God all the days of his life.

And whenever I was bad or sort of needed a little bit of pushing, my mother would remind me of that particular pledge. She said, you know, I made the same pledge when you were born.

Did you ever feel that as a burden? Or did you feel that as something more or less mapping out the path you have to go?

More of a responsibility, you know. And it's-- whether that was part of it or just the responsibility that comes with being a survivor, you know, that's-- yeah, the two together, probably.

OK. OK. And the circumstances, which is the first thing that came to my mind once we established the dates, is that, nevertheless, there is a danger in giving birth to a Jewish child by a Jewish mother in a Jewish family during Nazi occupation. Did she ever talk about that kind of factor?

Yes. And very specifically, this came up immediately after I was born. My-- and that was a decision that had to be made, as to whether I should be circumcised, whether I should have a bris. And my parents' friends, apparently, said very-- advised very strongly against having me circumcised. They said it would identify me always as being Jewish.

And in this case, what happened was the pediatrician who had just examined me sort of had a worried look on his face. And my father asked him, is there something wrong with the baby? And then the pediatrician smiled and said, no, your son needs a minor operation we call a circumcision. And so my father told him of our Jewish tradition. And indeed, you know, eight days later, there was a bris, perhaps the last such observance in the Netherlands, a formal observance with, you know, the friends of the family gathered in our living room.

And you know--

Wow.

I have-- you know, there are two small photographs that were taken of that bris. And those photographs were very small. And my mother carried those somehow on her body through her subsequent stay in 12 concentration camps. And I actually did count those with her. And fortunately, she survived. The photos survived. And I survived. She had this superstition that if she ever lost the photographs, it might mean that I had been killed.

Oh, what a beginning, what a beginning.

Yet my parents tried to go on with normal lives after I was born. You know, they continued to have family observances, celebrations, my mother's birthday, a lot of family photographs that were taken in spite of the occupation.

When did they decide that, at some point, that they cannot go long-- can no longer live life normally? When did it become too dangerous to do that?

I think this was probably mid-1942, when I was about nine months or eight months, nine months old, something like that. That's when the-- my father received very specifically his first notice to report for so-called labor duty, which, of course, meant going to a concentration camp in Holland. And he first avoided that apparently by having a hernia operation.

At that time, you know, those operations were not as minor as they are now. And so they involved a hospital stay for several days. And that sort of kept him away from that immediate appeal. But then, he got a second notice apparently. And this time, the decision had to be-- was made that we would have to go into hiding. And my parents made the very painful, very difficult decision that we ought to split up, not go into hiding as a family unit.

That it was safer for us to be split up so that if, according to my mother, one person was discovered, the others might have a chance to survive. We had to-- my father, at that point, pretended to commit an act of suicide, supposedly. That's what my mother told me. And that gained him admission to the Remarkkliniek, R-E-M-A-R K-L-I-N-I-K, Remarkkliniek, in The Hague, which was a psychiatric hospital, Jewish psychiatric hospital as I understand it, part of a whole complex called Old Rosenberg.

And he went into hiding in there pretending to be a patient. My two-- my parents had two neighbors, the van Leeuwen sisters, who were very devout Catholic women. And they had already begun to instruct my sisters in Catholicism, to some extent, as I understand it. And that's one of the parts that's becoming clearer now actually. And so--

Can you stop there for a minute? Excuse me to interrupt. But I didn't establish when we first started talking who is the whole family unit--

Sure.

--who are your sisters, what were their names, your parents' first names, and so on. So let's do that now before we get further in. OK.

Sure. So my mother's first name is Gisele or Gitla, G-I-T-L-A, or Gita. Most of the spell-- most of the time it's Gitla in official documents. And my father is Simcha and sometimes Siegfried. And so, as I said, both of them originally had the same last-- same family name. And M-U, with an umlaut, N-Z-E-R, that was the family name.

Were they originally from the Netherlands?

No, they were not. They were born in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And in fact, if you asked my mother, where were you born? Like many other people from that area, she would say Austria. In actual fact, after the First World War, that part became Galicia really, it was part of Poland. And my mother was born in a town called Rymanow and my father in a nearby town, probably about 40 miles away or less, called Kanczuga.

And they both--

And today, are they-- would that still be Poland today or Ukraine?

No. No, they're still-- both of those towns are still in Poland.

OK.

In fact, I visited Rymanow. I've not visited Kanczuga. But they both left home when they were about 18 years old. My mother told me that she had to have her age on her passport changed. And she had to be made two years older, so that she could leave the country. I don't know whether that meant becoming 21 or I think-- I have to look more closely at that.

Her official date of birth was May 20th, 1905. But in actual fact, she said it was 1907, or 1909 actually. But, you know-- it's--

And your father?

It's a little bit of a mystery.

And your father--

I don't have-- I don't have an exact birth date handy. But he was about two years older.

Did they both come from large families?

Yes, very large families. I think there probably were altogether 10 siblings perhaps in my mother's family. I don't know, I don't even know all the names, frankly. It's one of those things I still haven't been able to find out. And the-- thank you. And the-- my father also came from a very large family. A little bit more complex, because his father had lost his first wife.

So he was remarried. And my father was one of the younger children from his second marriage. His father apparently was quite old when my father was born. One of my father's brothers did join us in Holland. And his name is Emil, Emil Munzer.

Did you know him?

No.

He didn't survive?

I heard a lot of stories about him. But I never, you know, he actually, and we'll get to that. One of the things that I found out was that he was deported in the exact same transport as my two sisters.

[GASP] I see.

Some of the researchers at the Holocaust Museum felt that he may have found out that they had been betrayed. And he joined them and may have just opted to stay with them. Because there was absolutely no record of him being registered in Auschwitz. And he was apparently killed on arrival, just like my sisters.

I see. I see. So-- so do the Auschwitz records have, I'm jumping ahead, but just because we've finished on that sentence, Auschwitz records have-- are your sisters listed there?

Yes. Well, they are actually, not the Auschwitz records, it's the last record-- yes, two things. So they are. The records that I that have both their names is a long list, page 137, of deportees through from Wester--

Oh, Westerbork, Westerbork, I see.

And there, it clearly shows my uncle's name is right next to my younger sister actually on that list.

So he's listed there.

He is listed there. But nothing, no registration evidence, no evidence that he ever, quote, arrived officially in Auschwitz. And the records that I have in Auschwitz for my sisters are just records that we received through the International Tracing Service very, very early on. They were actually through the inter-- they were labeled International Red Cross.

Right.

The records, my mother was able to get those shortly after the war.

But so there are records from the International Tracing Service that your sisters actually were in Auschwitz. But there are no records that say that your uncle was in Auschwitz, though clearly he would have had to have been.

That's right.

So there's the difference there. And he's the only one of your father's siblings who came then to the Netherlands--

That's right.

--that figured in the family in the Netherlands.

Right, as far as I know.

OK. So the rest of, I mean, if we look at it geographically, then it was that your family comes from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But the part of Poland-- Poland was made up of Prussia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then Russia, when it reconstituted. And so they were from that part that had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Poland.

That's right. Yes.

OK. OK. And how did it end up that they came to the Netherlands rather than someplace else?

Sure. Well, my mother initially actually went to Berlin. She had older siblings who lived there. She had a brother and a sister who lived there. And she spent several years with them and worked in the factory and really enjoyed the life in Berlin, my mother told me. That was a tremendous change, of course, coming from the small town of Rymanow.

And I did try to-- well, my family, my mother's brother, was Adolf Minzer. Her sister was Feige Minzer or Fanny Minzer, or who became-- her married name was Zehngut. And the Zehnguts had one young son, Jossi. And Adolf and his wife Helen had one son, Norbert. Adolf's wife was actually Catholic and converted to Judaism, which was pretty amazing at the time when you consider this was in the '30s.

She must have loved Adolf.

Exactly. Well, most of the time I think. After that, he called himself Abraham, went back to his original Jewish name. So they managed, Adolf and his Helen and Norbert, managed to leave Germany for Bolivia. And to this day, I still have relatives living in Bolivia. In fact, we just had a WhatsApp exchange this morning.

Oh, nice. And so these were from the Berlin relatives.

Through the Berlin relatives. The other side, the Zehnguts were deported. And I don't have-- well, I have some records but very, very little about what happened to them. My mother was very-- the two sons were very, very close friends. They were close in age, very close friends, and a lot of lovely photographs of the two of them together.

But you never knew these people?

Norbert, I met many, many years later in Bolivia. We traveled to Bolivia. And you know, my mother stayed in touch with the Bolivian family. She tried to persuade them to come to the United States. Her message immediately after the wars was, do not invest, come to America. You know, this was before she was in the States. She really did not like the idea of them staying in Bolivia. But they felt that that was the country that had saved them. And so they made a commitment to stay.

And they are there to this day?

Well, they have-- my uncle and my aunt are deceased.

Sure.

Norbert passed away a few years ago. He eventually moved to Chile. He had two children. And one of them, the son, moved to Chile. And the daughter remained in Bolivia and is still in Bolivia. And she, in turn, had one son. And he is now-- and he and his-- he's married. And he's living also in Bolivia still.

OK. So these are two siblings from your mother's side of the family, one of whom survived because they left. And the other was deported. Zehnguts were deported. Did she have more brothers and sisters, as far as you know?

Yes, several, many of them. And all the others I think remained in Rymanow and were deported from Rymanow. And of course, I have no-- I have not as yet found any kind of records about them. It's still not a mystery, but I ready-- I get on periodically. I will see a name. But it's very, very hard to connect to-- the name Munzer is not that unusual apparently.

And the spelling really did change several times. You know, I've seen some documents where it's spelled M-I-N-C-E-R.

Of course.

Sort of Polish or Yiddish, you know, Mincer. So it's-- it's hard to figure out.

Do-- when you were in your mother's town, Rymanow, was the-- did you visit the municipal authorities? Because sometimes they have birth records.

And that time, that wasn't just so readily available. This is probably about, I would say, about 15 years ago or so that we were there, maybe a bit less.

2005, yeah.

Something like that, I can't remember exactly. And this was really a surprise visit. There was-- I received a telegram inviting us to a commemoration for the Jews who were deported. I think it was August 22nd, 1942. And so we decided to attend that commemoration.

And was this the authorities, the municipal--

No, this was a young man, Adam, I'll have to-- I have to look that up.

Yeah, it's OK. It's OK.

But there was a specific young man who really had made it his-- his father had a Jewish business partner. They were very close. They were in the brewery business, which is very common in Rymanow apparently. And because-- so he had, through his father, he had a very close connection to the Jewish community. And so to this day, every year they have a commemoration.

I think that may have been the very first that we attended. And since then, it has continued. In fact, I just got an email from him or a Facebook post a few days ago. And he periodically also posts photographs of the deportation of the Jews. Virtually all of them were deported in that one day, taken to a-- on a forced march to a nearby town where they boarded the train to Belzec.

I see. But how did he know to find you, since your connection to Rymanow is so tenuous? I mean, it was-- it is-- how would a paper trail have led him to you? And I focus on this because so much of our story, you know, we're not going to repeat that much of the details of the war. It is really discovery post-war, you know.

Sure.

How do you go back and try to find out things, and how do people make these connections?

This was, actually, it wasn't a-- it was an email that I received. And he-- I think he found my address at the hospital. Or he found out from the Holocaust Museum that I worked at a particular hospital and so sent this email to the hospital. And then they passed it on to me. I have the exact text actually. I just wrote something about it for our Echoes of Memory class.

And so that's what-- and I also wrote a long piece about the visit to Ebensee that we made. And so that's-- that was very,

very special. So he found me. You know, my partner and I were very reluctant to go to Poland. We had mixed feelings about it. On the hand, my mother had always spoken very lovingly about Rymanow, you know. And sometimes in fun, she would call it "Grimanisch," sort of gave it a funny name and told us, you know, all sorts of stories at all, what sort of in my mind created a whole lore of Rymanow, you know.

The one policeman they have called "Bamboulla," you know, at least that's the name they gave him. The fact that it had a town well in the center, and there was never any water because it was built on the hill. So, you know, all these crazy little stories that made me want to go. And then at the same time, telling me that the surroundings were actually beautiful, you know, the foothills of the Carpathians.

And it really-- so it's--

Did any of those things she tell you bear out?

Absolutely. Well, the well is gone. That's now a beautiful center now, a little kiosk selling newspapers and, you know, Coca-Cola and things like that. But it's a beautiful, really beautiful town. And the synagogue is standing. It was in terrible shape. It's gradually being restored. We visited a cemetery. But I could not identify any of my family's names. They were still in very, very poor condition.

This is Adam Lawrence. And I forgot his brother's name. But they are the ones who have been taking high school children on weekends to clean the gravestones in Jewish cemeteries, not just in Rymanow. But they've now expanded it to the whole surrounding area.

Is this a Polish teacher or something or--

He's actually an advertising man. So, you know, he's not a teacher. But he has taken-- he and his brother have taken a tremendous interest in this and really made it their life's work.

Let's go back to the Netherlands. So we know a little bit more now of your family's background, where they came from. And you started to say that your mother, at first, spent many years in Berlin--

Correct.

--working. And your father, did he go straight from the village you mentioned, I forget the name now, Kanczuga was it or something like that.

Kanczuga, K-A-N-C-U-G-A, Kanczuga.

How was-- how did he get to The Hague from Kanczuga?

As far as I know, he went directly to The Hague. You know, the reason I have this very slight hesitation is that a few-- some years back, when we were back in Holland, we went back to the house where I was born. And my father's business was on the ground floor. And the sign of his business was still there. And it still is there today, as far as I know.

Wow.

And it says, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] So--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yes. So, you know, it's a little bit of a white lie probably, you know, Siegfried Munzer. You know, it's really, I think it's probably a little bit of a white lie. Whether he ever really went to Vienna to study tailoring, I'm not sure of. But the origin was Vienna, let's put it that way.

OK. Well, listen, Vienna has a lot more cachet for tailoring than Kanczuga would.

The whole family actually, our whole family on both sides were tailors for generations back. So and all of the family and anybody I have talked to who were friends of my father, whom I discovered later living in Australia, for example, some distant relatives, all tailors, all of the same business.

But their name is Munzer, not Schneider, you know.

That's correct.

So how do your parents meet? Or they must have known each other than from before, if they're related.

They were really childhood sweethearts, if you will. They knew each other from childhood. And then my father-- my mother, in 1932, she joined my father in Holland. And they were married. And originally, when I recorded this, I said they were married in December. In actual fact now, I found a marriage certificate. So their civil marriage at least was in November 1932.

Whether the religious ceremony may have been December, that's still possible. But the civil ceremony was in November. And I found the actual record in Holland in, oh, miracle of Google.

Yeah.

So that's--

That's amazing.

So they were married. And as I've told many, but I usually, when I give my talks, you know, at the museum, it's just about the same time, a month before Adolf Hitler, of course, comes to power in Germany. So it's these coincidences. And then my-- their first child, my sister Eva, was born in July 1936, again, coinciding with the Olympics. And my sister Leah, the second child, was born November 12, 1938, just after Kristallnacht. So all these co-- these historical coincidences.

Yeah. I saw some photos of your sisters. They looked darling, absolutely lovely, you know. It just-- you want to take those little girls and hug them. And those are in the archives of the Holocaust Museum.

They are in the museum. I still have many of them here. And they actually all will make their way to the museum. We do it gradually. You know, Suzy Snyder and I have an arrangement. And periodically, I will go over there and bring, you know, another-- I'm really fortunate to have all the photographs. You know, it's through those photographs and sitting with my mother and going through the photographs that I really learned the story of our family, you know, some very amazing, heartwarming stories, you know, that really showed that life continued on even during the occupation, even after I was born for a short while at least.

One of the things that my mother, little incidents that my mother described, for example, is that I was in a playpen while they were eating breakfast or lunch, whatever it was. And I had a big cookie in my hand. And the entire family, all four of them, were watching me eat that cookie and eating all around it. And then typically sort of being puzzled as a little--

Now what?

--eight-month-old then throw it down. And then they saw me very gently picking it up with my fingers and continuing to eat the cookie. And they all applauded. Now my mother telling me that story really brings-- recreates the family for me.

And the photographs did that. That is, they were kind of like were the triggers or the--

Yeah, this particular photo-- there's no photograph of this, especially. But my mother would tell me, part of that photograph where you saw me sitting between my two sisters, that's sort of that same time frame.

Let me think. So your sisters were also very little girls during the time of the occupation. And you mentioned that the family split up. Your father is in a psychiatric ward.

Right. And my sisters at that point were placed, now this is what I had always been told with a, quote, a very observant, very devout Catholic woman who had a vision or a dream in which the Virgin told her to take Jewish children into hiding. And I never knew the identity of that woman. That was a mystery.

I thought they were neighbors. You said that these were neighbors.

But now-- now it's become clear over the past six months or so that I found out that in actual fact, my sisters, I am 99% sure, were left with those two women, initially, for probably for about the first year, probably beginning in October 1942 to October 1943. And it's at that point, in October 1943, that, for some reason, they had gotten scared.

They felt it was no longer safe for them to be there, that the priest, Father Lodders tried to find, and found, another place for them. And that place turned out with a woman called Roza Mazurowski.] And she was-- she was in her second marriage to a man called Schermer was his last name, S-C-H-E-R-M-E-R.

Schermer, OK, yeah.

And so she-- she had owned a boarding house basically from her first marriage, or a guesthouse, let's put it that way. And so Father Lodders approached her, whether she would be willing-- he interviewed both of them apparently, husband and wife, whether they would be willing to hide my sisters. He told them, supposedly, of the risks that they were taking.

And so my two sisters were placed in that family. And whether that's the woman who had the dream that my mother told me about, I did meet that woman one time, didn't know exact, didn't associate it. But my mother after the war, after I was reunited with my mother, insist-- took me on a visit to the woman who had hidden my sisters. And that must have been Roza Mazurowski

And you know, I remember-- I very vaguely remember the visit. But the purpose was to thank the woman for at least trying to save my sisters and giving her some of the credit, see there's at least one of them, one of the three did survive. And we, there was only a one time visit. So but now, you know, after all these years, I finally found out that woman's identity.

And I've continued to work on trying to find more about her. And what happened, the way I did this was really amazing. I decided to Google the name Pater or Lodders, Father Lodders.

Would be L-U-D-D-E-R-S?

L-O-D-D-E-R-S, he was a Ductchman. And lo and behold, I found a church bulletin from the church that was associated, that was in our neighborhood, Elandstraat Church. And in the church bulletin, old church bulletin, there was an article about Father Lodders being involved in saving Jews. I contacted the author, first the church itself, and then they referred me to the author of that article. And she and I have been corresponding almost daily ever since then.

And when was this that you found that, that you first contacted--

I think this was probably about three months ago, three, four months ago.

Wow. Wow.

And so she found, for example, baptismal certificates for my sisters. Now, just backing up for a second, my mother join-

- after my sisters were placed, I was placed first with a neighbor called Annie Madna who lived across the street from us. My father then joined my father in that same psychiatric hospital, in her case pretending to be a nurse or a nursing assistant, something like that.

And the reason that I'm mentioning it now is my mother told me that my sisters had been taken for a visit to that psychiatric hospital on Christmas Day 1942. And it was sort of a mini reunion, she told me, of the family. That was the last time my parent saw my sisters.

Oh my.

And two-- the following day, actually, is when my parents were deported. And two weeks later, it may actually have been a few days, but about a week later is when they were deported. And two weeks after that, on December 14, 1942, my-- '43, sorry, '43, no, no, '42. Sorry--

But you had said--

January, January, January, January 14, 1943. January 1943, my sisters were baptized in the Elandstraat Kerk. And I found their baptismal certificate. Whether that was discussed when my sisters were taken to my parents for a visit, I don't know. It's one of the mysteries that remains. There was only another part of trying to hide their Jewish identity.

So that's just a backup, I think, to complete the story of my sisters. And then my sisters in early in January, Feburary, in fact, February 1944, they were denounced. The husband of the woman where they were in hiding denounced and to the Nazis.

This was Mr. Schermer.

That's right. And I found, actually, this woman in Holland from the church, sorry, the reference--

The reference to Father Lodders-- she told me that he had been imprisoned in Scheveningen, near The Hague, in a prison that was sort of was given the nickname Oranjehotel, or Hotel of Orange. And the Holocaust Museum happened to have a book about the Oranjehotel that details all the names of the prisoners, including Father Lodders. And the two van Leeuwen sisters are both mentioned in there.

And they were both imprisoned at the time when my sisters were denounced. They were imprisoned, the sisters, for about two weeks, and Father Lodders for about a month. And the offense is hiding Jewish children. Actually, in his case, the offense is baptizing Jewish children. And for them, it was providing help to Jewish children.

Roza Mazurowski's husband denounced her not only as hiding Jewish children but he called her a Jewish Pole. And I think because of that, she was actually sent to Vught and then to, I think, RavensbrÃ¼ck. I'll have to look that up. I wrote it down. But I think to RavensbrÃ¼ck, where she develop typhus but eventually did survive.

And many of these last details really come out of testimony that both she, Rosalia Mazurowski, and my mother gave at a trial of the man who had arrested my sisters. His name is Dirk Vas, a Dutchman who joined the SS immediately after Holland was invaded, was sent to fight on the Eastern Front-- volunteered, basically-- was injured, and then sent back to Holland, to The Hague, where he was given the job of being a policeman. And he specialized, apparently, in rounding up children.

Oh my goodness.

And he was described as being very, very cruel in the testimony. And apparently, one of the reasons he betrayed-- and the reason we think we know that he betrayed his wife is that when the Nazi police came to the house they had a key. And this woman's husband just stood by basically. And then he pointed her out as the Polish Jew.

And so she was deported. And that gained him a private property. The guesthouse that she owned, it now became his.

So this whole thing was a ruse apparently for him to gain ownership of that guesthouse.

Oh my goodness. So let me see if I can reconstruct and understand this properly. Your parents have very devout Catholic neighbors-- the van Leeuwen sisters.

Whom I met after the war. They became Tante Jo and Tante Ko.

So you knew them?

Very well.

You knew that after the war. And for the first year they take in your two sisters. And after one year-- and that would be around October 1943-- they're getting frightened. They see that it's a bit dangerous. They approach their parish priest, Father Lodders, who goes and finds another family, or another place for the sisters to be. And that's with Roza Mazurowski and her second husband, Mr. Schermel.

Right.

And do you know the dates at which point your sisters were arrested or Father Lodders was imprisoned-- I mean, around the time all of this happens?

This is all February 4, 1944. And then my sisters were taken first to a prison, the same prison actually-- the Oranjehotel. Although, it was given a different name in the official testimony.

Of course.

But apparently, Jews were not registered there. So I don't have any records of them being in that prison. Neither is Roza Mazurowski. She also was sent there first. And then from there to Westerbork. And then almost immediately from Westerbork on the transport, which left, I think, February 9. Quite sure of that. February 7 or February 9, 1944. And my sisters were killed February 11, 1944 in Auschwitz.

Oh wow. Oh wow. So it is a good four or five months after they leave the van Leeuwen sisters that they're murdered.

Correct.

And that is the sequence is being in the home with Roza Mazurowski, and then her husband betraying all of them, and one can then maybe assume that in his betrayal he talks about Father Lodders and he talks about the van Leeuwen sisters as well as his wife and the two little girls. And that's why they end up in Oranjehotel.

Right.

And one of the questions I had when I first listened to your testimony, the interview you had with my colleague Gail Schwartz so many years ago, is did Mr. Schermel, was he ever prosecuted for anything?

The answer is yes. And he was found not guilty.

Not guilty?

Not guilty, insufficient evidence. And this is a report that I received through the Holocaust Museum. They put me in touch with a researcher-- well, two ways that I got to it-- a researcher in the Netherlands who actually viewed the testimony and viewed the prosecution record of both Mr. Schermel and Dirk Vas. And Dirk Vas was convicted and sent to prison for 20 years and apparently died in prison.

And Dirk Vas was--

The policeman.

When did the trial take place?

This was in, I think, still 1945. Well, the testimony from my mother was taken in 1945. But that was where there was just taking evidence at the time. Sadly, unfortunately, there are very strict privacy laws in the Netherlands. So those records can only be viewed in person. And you have to have a special interest. And you can't copy them at all. Not for another five years or so. So all I have to rely on is what this researcher copied, was able to transcribe.

There was another person who prior to then actually had contacted me, because in listening to my story, he found out that his two nieces were on the same transport as my sisters. And he is writing a book about them. Ron van Hasselt, a Dutch writer from Groningen. And he volunteered to go to The Hague and look at the record. And so that was the first report I received.

And then I received a second report more recently by the researcher contacted by the Holocaust Museum. So now I have a fairly good picture. It also included something I mentioned where we talked briefly on the phone-- the name of the town where my mother was liberated.

It remains somewhat of a mystery. It's not RavensbrÃ¼ck, which is listed in the museum by the museum. It's another camp, but I've also looked at the records, the write-ups about the white buses, the buses that took people from Danish border to Sweden and then to ship to Sweden.

So this is post-war though.

This is post-war. This is all post-war.

But what I'm trying to establish right now.

Yeah, let's stick with--

Yeah, no, what I'm trying to establish right now is the betrayal story and how much detail you get and when do you get that detail? So it gives somebody who will listen to this in the future, what I'm hoping, is a sense of the events happen in 1944-- February 1944 is the betrayal. And it takes you how many decades? Half a century, 60 years, something like-- I don't want to put words in your mouth. But it takes a certain amount of time for you to get the details. And what are these details? And where are they?

It's 75 years that it took.

That's amazing.

Yeah. And the fact that these discoveries are still being made. It's not unique. And I've encouraged my fellow survivor volunteers to also research. We've talked a lot about remaining questions, even though I learned a lot from my mother. But obviously, there may have been some things that were just too painful for her, even though she was very open. But I think there were some doors she just wants to keep closed.

As I said, I remember the van Leeuwen sisters. They showed me the notebooks that my sister Eva had written in. It was this beautiful handwriting. And they showed me the catechism books that they had used. But again, in my mind, I never associated the two. I do have a photograph too of my sisters actually attending a procession in the Catholic school. I think that's also at the museum's collection. If not, I still have it.

So there were all these little pieces-- the baptism-- whether my mother did not know about it, which I suspect that it was discussed with her. But that's something that she really I think did not want to discuss, did not want to bring up after the war.

Well, I'm a mother, and I have a girl who's 25. And I can imagine when she was young, if something had happened to her at that age, I don't know what I would do. I'd be beside myself. It is your job as a parent just to protect your children. And when you can't-- your mother must have been an extraordinarily strong woman to be able to live through that and go on.

Yes, that's really amazing, because I've been working on a memoir-- through my Echoes of Memory class actually. And what I called it is a carefree childhood, because that's the amazing thing. This is really what I remember, what my mother was able to provide me with after I was reunited with her, was a carefree childhood. And there wasn't a weekend that we didn't go to a movie, a museum, a play. She really took care of me.

Yeah, that is incredible.

This is immediately after the war, some of the things that I was exposed to and that she made sure. Yeah, still, to this day, it's a mystery how she managed. I did remember after the war, and we'll get to that maybe in sequence, but I might as well mention it now.

I remember during the night, I would be asleep in my bedroom, and she was in the adjoining bedroom. And I would hear her sob and say my father's name-- Sigi, Sigi-- basically asking, why did it have to be you? Why couldn't it have been me? Something like that in German. And it's really-- so those are little instances where I understood the pain that she was suffering.

And at the same time giving you a normal childhood which is an amazing thing.

Amazing thing. I want to go back to this trial record. So you have not been able to actually read the full trial record of either man.

Correct.

It was just what these researchers have been able to tell you. And now to put the date on it. How recent is it that you have found this out?

This is probably also within the last three, four months-- maybe a little bit longer, something. Again, very, very recent. It's all happening at the same time. I think it probably was last year, because I remember writing an essay about it and saying something about the clock turning back 75 years suddenly. It's just amazing.

And was the impetus that you just started to do some research and then you Google Father Lodders and you find this and so it sort of snowballs?

It really started probably as I think now with Ron van Hasselt, when he wrote to me that his two nieces were on the same transport as my sisters. And he's now writing another book which is going to include my sisters actually. And that is probably when I started really looking.

And to get with him, also I've been corresponding not quite as frequently. But also he inquired of me whether I knew the name of a woman-- and I can't remember it right now-- the young woman my parents had hired as a childcare person, nurse. And I said, well, my mother may have mentioned someone, but I have no idea.

So he gave me a name. And he found a record that said that she was a young Jewish woman from Austria who was hired by my parents apparently as a care for helping with my sisters. And he asked me whether I had any photograph of her. I said, I never heard of her name.

But then I looked closely at the photograph, those small photographs of my bris. And lo and behold, between my sisters is the face of a young woman. My father standing behind the three of them. So it is very, very logical, it is very likely that that's the woman that he was referring to and that he's also doing research on. She apparently perished. She was arrested, did not survive. All these little pieces coming out.

When you mention something that is current reality, and that is the privacy laws that exist in the Netherlands. These privacy laws actually exist throughout Europe now, particularly the countries of the European Union, and very strongly in Germany. And from what my understanding is, historically, one of the reasons there are those privacy laws is because the Gestapo could get a hold of so much information on people that there is nervousness about state authorities being able to do this and that people are endangered.

So it's an irony. It's an irony that the impetus started that way. But it also now prevents people from finding out about their families. Tell me, would you have the right if you were to travel to the Netherlands to see the full transcripts? Would you be in that category?

Oh yeah, I would like to see them. Actually, I need to go back even more. At the same time as Ron van Hasselt-- I can't remember which came first. Yeah, that may happen even earlier. This was all about the same time. There was a young woman who was doing research at the museum as a research fellow from Germany-- Lilly Maier.

And Suzy Snyder said that Lilly Maier was interested, was writing her doctoral thesis on women who had tried to save Jews, and that she had come upon the story of my sisters. And so I went up and talked to her. And I said, I don't even know the woman's name. I have no idea who she is.

And she said, I had contacted the Dutch archives, and I had to provide proof that your sisters had been killed and were dead. And so I was given the name of a record that included the names of your sisters. And that record was Dirk Vas-- the criminal record of Dirk Vas. So this is really where Dirk Vas first was brought to my attention. That then, in turn, made me start googling Father Lodders and trying to find out the name of this person.

There was also an advertisement that I had been given many, many years ago. When I first started telling the story of my family-- actually it's over 30 years ago-- someone who worked at the Library of Congress came up with a sheet of paper. And he said, here, here's an advertisement that was placed in the summer of 1945 in a Jewish newspaper asking for the whereabouts of your sisters.

And I showed that to my mother at the time. She was still alive. And she did not recognize the advertisement. It was placed by a Mr. van Leeuwen. But van Leeuwen is a very common dual Dutch name-- both Jewish and non-Jewish. And a man who lived in Amsterdam, so I don't know who he is, who he was. And that they had been given a hidden name of Jansen, a very common Dutch last name-- Maria Jansen and Anny Jansen.

And were they baptized by those names?

No. Not Jansen. No. Not even the first names were changed. I have to recheck that. But I don't think so. And then it so happened that when I looked at the records of the Oranjehotel, just about the same time that Father Lodders was arrested, all in that same period, same few days, there was a Mrs. Jansen. And so my initial thought was it was Mrs. Jansen-- she was arrested also for hiding Jewish children. So I put the two and two together and thought she might have been the one.

Not Roza? Not Roza Mazurowski?

That's what I thought initially. I didn't know about Roza at the time as yet. And so Roza did not come up until we actually read the testimony. So Jansen is still somewhat of a mystery-- why this woman was arrested. I still wonder whether there may still be a connection. Yet another person who may have been involved.

Well, it's true. There are holes. And when you start exploring the holes and the gaps and the open questions, you find out that there could be more unanswered questions than you had originally thought of.

Absolutely.

One of those that I've got is just to clarify. You say somebody had the key. Was this Dirk Vas who had the key to the home that Roza had?

Right.

And when Roza survived all this, I can imagine she had a few words for Mr. Schermel. And do you know what happened? Did she get her boardinghouse back? Did she kick him out?

He sold the boarding house to his niece apparently. And it's only in the last few days that I found-- I could not find out. I did find out first. I asked the researcher in Holland whether there was a record of the address where Roza Mazurowski lived at a time. I wanted to see whether in my mind that would refresh my memory that might have been the place where I visited her. It didn't really work.

But then I wanted to find out whether she had any family members. I'm trying to get her, frankly, recognized at the Yad Vashem. Here's a woman who really tried, did not succeed, but paid a very, very heavy price, about being sent concentration camps. Or in some way, I want to make sure she's recognized.

So I finally found out, just two days ago actually, that the day that she died-- in 1972 at age 77. And she had moved from The Hague to another town. And so again, now I have identified the Catholic church near her home there. And so my next project is writing to that Catholic church and see what records they have of her last years and whether she had any friends, any relatives.

There was also the mystery because he called her Jewish. And so when I first mentioned honoring her at Yad Vashem, she can't be honored if she's Jewish. So that's why I went through that whole research again finding out when she was married in the church in Elandstraat-- both her weddings were there-- she had to present her baptismal certificate from her birth place, which was actually in Germany. So it was a German family living in Germany.

Well, it's interesting. They must have been from Poland originally, because Mazurowski's not a German name.

And that's why I thought might be Jewish. And I thought it was not-- yeah, I know several people Mazur. It's the shortened name in the United States. But she was born in Calbe, Germany. And she was baptized, apparently, 10 days after she was born.

So I don't have the baptismal certificate. But she presented it at the church, in fact, because it was her first husband who had to be given an exemption for marrying her. So she was really-- they really verified the fact that she was Catholic. So that establishes that she was in fact Catholic and that the whole business of calling her Jewish was just an added way of insulting her.

Or to really get rid of her.

Or to get rid of her. Right, exactly.

Really get rid of her. Yeah. Man oh man. So there may be more questions associated with exactly how that betrayal happened. But for right now, what we know is that Mr. Schermel gave somebody a key or somebody got a key. And they came. They arrested her. They arrested your sisters. They arrested a number of other people.

No. Arrested only two.

But they arrested the priest, Father Lodders, and the van Leeuwen sisters.

Right. Oh yes, yes. OK. But the other people that were living at that address apparently also testified, provided testimony. But apparently, none of them were Jewish. There were no other Jews, as far as I can tell. There were no other Jews hiding in that particular place. But there were other people living in that guesthouse.

And is there a reason why he was found not guilty or insufficient evidence?

That's basically said insufficient-- and they said actually through the trial record that he was a liar. And that he just lied his way through and denied having anything to do with anything.

The damage that such people can do.

Yeah.

Let's go forward a little bit.

So we left we were at my sisters being placed. And I just barely mentioned my being in hiding.

Yeah. Well, one of the reasons I didn't want to go into that as much is because you had mentioned earlier that it was your sisters for which you had new information.

Perhaps some new information about myself too.

Oh, wonderful. OK, good.

[LAUGHTER]

Good. So let's talk about that. Or excuse me, before we do that, let's wrap up what happened to your father. Both of your parents are deported. Your mother goes through 12 concentration camps. What happens to your father?

My father, just about the same thing. So my parents were both initially sent to Westerbork, then from Westerbork were sent on to Vught. They both worked for the Philips Electronics factory. But again, this is very recent, new discovery that I've made.

My mother-- I always assumed and the story that I've been told that they were both sent to Auschwitz. And I surmised that that's where they were separated. In actual fact, the records now show that my father was deported three months earlier. He was deported in March 1944. And my mother late in June 1944. Having her deported in June 1944 meant that she was part of a group called the Philips Kommando.

The Philips Kommando were a group of women that Mr. Philips had persuaded the Germans were essential for the workings of his factory and for making war material for the Germans. And so they were somewhat protected while they were working for the Philips factory. And so those women were not sent to Auschwitz until somewhat later in June when the factory apparently was closed and Mr. Philips himself was arrested, actually.

And so my mother, my father, my parents, in actual fact, arrived in Auschwitz at separate times. My father remained in Auschwitz for-- I would think I have records-- but it's at least six months. And he was employed-- and again, this is something recent discovery-- probably at the rubber factory of IG Farben. At the museum, I found a small piece of paper with his number as a prisoner and no name. But it says in German, [GERMAN]. He's entitled--

There was kind of payment.

That he warrants a higher salary.

Two pfennig, not one pfennig.

So I asked the researcher at the museum what this meant. And he said, well, the factories that employed the slave laborers had to pay wages to the SS, to the Germans, to the Nazis. And hiring your father warranted a higher price. It's like slavery. It really is. So that's what that little slip of paper. And then also I found reference to that slip of paper into longer payment documents also.

Can I ask just as a technical question, were you looking at a digital copy of that slip of paper?

Yes.

Or the actual slip of paper?

No. These are the digitized ITS records that the museum had. This was a few years ago that I came across that. So another little piece of my father. And for my father, there is a detailed registration form for Auschwitz, which is amazing because it lists, for example, the name of his wife. And it's misspelled. There's an O instead of an I, whatever it is. But put the funny, or the amazing, part is it asks current residence for my mother, that is. KZ Auschwitz.

[SILENT LAUGH]

This is a German bureaucracy, the Nazi bureaucracy at work. This detailed form. So that's for my father. Then he was sent on from there. He went to Mauthausen. And I don't know exactly, can't remember exactly, how long he was in Mauthausen. Then to Gusen, Steyr in Austria-- all in the same area-- and then finally in Ebensee.

And so he survived long enough in Ebensee to actually be liberated in May 1945. But he was so weak that he died two months later. And actually, he was taken care of for the last few months at a convent near the concentration camp. And I visited that convent actually. I talked to some of the sisters there. None of them were there at the actual time, but they gave me the story. And then my father was buried in the concentration camp itself, which is now a huge cemetery.

Marked grave or not a marked grave?

It's interesting. No, there is a huge mass grave of the people who were found dead in the camp. And then there are individual graves. There was a marking when my mother first visited the camp. It was a cross on it. And then there were also some straight-- there were hundreds of graves there. And there were also some non-specific markers.

And then my mother told me. Actually, she warned me. She said that the caretakers of the cemetery decided since the markers really made no sense-- they didn't know what anybody's religion was-- all of the markers were removed. And so there is-- you have to go to the office, and they show you by number where the grave is located.

So that's the system as it was when I visited there about 20 years ago or so. That's the last time. We were going to go this year, but COVID happened. So I was there 25 years ago was the last time I visited. And it's a very, very moving experience. So that's the story of my father. I can tell you my mother's story. Or you want to go to my hiding?

Well, I would like, as I say, because we're not going to repeat everything that was talked about with Gail. We have the news that your mother survives. We have the news. We know what did happen to your sisters. And we know now what happened to your father. One point though-- when you go and you're at the cemetery in Ebensee and they show you in the central office where the grave is, you can then actually go to that grave, that spot?

Yes, and I have some photographs. The only time I really cried for my father, the only time I shed tears is the first time, when I went with my mother actually. My mother went there twice. She went there once on her own as soon as she found out where he was buried. And then I went back with her just before we came to the United States in 1958. And that's the only time-- the first time-- when I shed tears for my father-- that the reality of the loss of my father really hit me is when I stood at that grave.

That there was a person. He had been yours.

There was a person. Exactly.

Let's turn now to what happened to you, and who hid you, and how did you survive, and then the new information you have about that.

Sure. So I was placed initially with Annie Madna. She was a neighbor of my parents. She was a woman who was divorced, had been married to an Indonesian man. That's something we've all known already. I was with her for a very short period of time.

And then I may have mentioned this before, but I was passed on first to her sister. And that sister's last name was Polak. Yorina Polak was the sister. Polak-- P-O-L-A-K. Yorina-- Y-O-R-I-N-A. And I remained and I was placed with Yorina Polak. That's something I found out just in the last few years actually.

There was a woman Dini Polak, who had mentioned to the Madna children actually-- she was a cousin of theirs. So she knew of me being there. But it was never much talked about. We always talked about the Madna family-- Annie Madna, TolÃ© Madna-- and never about the stay really with Yorina and her husband and her two children.

And so finally, I have been in touch over the last few years much more with Dini Polak. And I have visited her a few times, last year especially. And then she told me some details last year. She said I came to the house and slept in the bed with her parents, between her parents, and that I wasn't happy, that I really cried a lot, and that they had a neighbor who was a member of the Dutch Nazi party.

That part I sort of knew. And they really got scared. And it's at point after two months or so that I was then passed finally onto TolÃ© Madna. But that little chapter of my being there and the fact that this woman is still alive and can talk about my being between her parents. And she's seeing this new baby in the house, basically. She was probably 10 years old, something like 11 years old at the time.

Unfortunately, she has myasthenia gravis. A very, very bright woman. And we were very much in touch through Facebook and we talk on the phone. So that is really one new thing.

OK. So yeah, when you were first with your neighbor across the street, you wouldn't remember, but do you know how long you were with Ana?

Annie? I don't know. I would guess that it was a matter of weeks or maybe one month. It was a very short period of time. She had had some bad run-ins apparently with the occupiers and really was scared and felt it was safer for me to be with her sister. And then at that point, I ended up with TolÃ© Madna. And there were some new things also that I discovered.

Now, TolÃ© Madna, did he live in The Hague as well?

Yep, this was all in the same general neighborhood-- probably five blocks away, something like that, not very far. Maybe a little bit further. But no, it was all the same general neighborhood in The Hague. And they had joint custody of their three children. They had three children. And Dewie, Willie-- Willie the oldest, Dewie the middle, and Robby Madna were the three children.

So while I was with them to talk about the newer things, I spoke with length-- Robby Madna told in his testimony that he gave at the museum, as well--

With Gail.

I think he may have even mentioned this. But Dewie Madna, when I visited her in Holland, a couple of things came out. Some of them may already be-- I don't think they're in that history. First of all, I thought I was called Bobby-- my name while I was hidden-- after the little dog in the family. It's in the family photograph, famous photograph that's in the museum's collection.

And the theory that I was told was people heard Bobby being called, they think, well, they're just calling a dog. And then I found out that she told me the dog's name was Teddy. And I actually then remembered that. She reminded me that the name was Teddy. I had totally forgotten. And then I figured I was probably called Bobby after Robbie so the two names being very close-- same theory.

And then both of them mentioned-- but especially Dewie talked about the fact that TolÃ© Madna would put me in a stroller and take me out of the house and people would ask, who is this baby? And he would simply say, it's my son. And then he would sort of have fun looking at people's puzzled faces. And he said, they're probably telling to themselves, poor Indonesian man, doesn't know his wife has been sleeping around.

[LAUGHTER]

It's the sense of humor that really explains TolÃ© Madna. And so that story sort of lingered. I heard that story. But by the same token, I was always led to believe that I was always inside the house. I wasn't allowed out of the house.

That's right.

[INAUDIBLE] of your window. So where did this story come from? So a few years ago, I was interviewed by a Dutch journalist Arthur Keppy And he finally wrote-- he gave a lot of talks about me. He interviewed me in detail, wrote several articles, and then wrote a book about the Indonesian resistance. And my story is in his book. Herman Keppy. Sorry. Herman Keppy.

And then he gave an interview to a Dutch newspaper about the book. And it included a photograph of me with the nanny, with Mima. A man still living in The Hague saw the photograph, contacted the newspaper, and he said, that's the little Jewish boy I used to play with. The little Jewish boy in hiding I used to play with.

[LAUGHTER]

Now, I had a photograph of me on a three-wheeler and a little boy and a little girl standing to either side of me. And there are several photographs. And one of them in the back, is said the Friederizi children. I never knew their first names, didn't know anything about them. I had been told that their parents were German but were communists and therefore totally trusted to play with a child who was in hiding.

Well, now I know that little boy is Arthur Friederizi. Again, after 75 years, he contacted me. He is 83. And so he was slightly-- he was older, much older than I was at the time. [LAUGHS] He was a six-year-old, and I was a three-year-old. Six-year-olds had much better memories, much more things engraved in their memory. So he remembered the little Jewish boy called Bobby that he used to play with.

And his sister Helga, who stands on the other side, she's older than he is, which was very clear even in the picture. And then I started corresponding with him. And he sent me a lot of photographs of the Madna family. His parents had been friends with the Madnas for many, many years.

They were indeed Germans but very staunch-- not necessarily communist as far as we know, but certainly strongly antifascist, anti-Nazi, and had been living in Holland for a long time. And they had two children-- Helga and Arthur.

First of all, I showed him the photograph the two of them-- so identified that. And then I had several other photographs of me with his sister sort of taken in the backyard. I always assumed it was the Madna's backyard. But then he showed me photographs of him at the same age as a three-year-old on the same swing that I was sitting in. But he told me it was at their house.

So that means that you got to go outside.

It meant yes, that certainly that at some times Papa Madna felt safe enough to take me out of the house. Probably not very late. I don't know when exactly. But there were times when he did take me out of the house and took me to their house.

And I asked him. I said, well, how did I get there? I looked at a map. I thought they were next door neighbors. They were not. They lived in the same general neighborhood. But it was really quite a distance. It was probably about three miles. So walking with--

Three miles?

I think maybe a little bit less. It was not close. It was possibly walking, it would be a very long walk. So he said they probably took the tram. And he gave me a map of the tram that they may have taken. So this probably puts the two stories together of the truth of the fact that he had this baby with him outside periodically.

When you uncovered this, what significance does it have for you? It's another piece of the puzzle in your life. But what does that mean?

This is another piece of the puzzle. It sort of completes the story. It makes it more complex. I wasn't just all in hiding. I had been hiding in open view at times-- really on the street. In the house, I was in hiding. When the house was being searched or there was a danger of being searched, I had to go into a closet to hide. That I remember. And I thought it was a game. I was just a little kid. So that I knew.

But the other thing that really struck me, because all this all came at the same time-- Arthur sent me a whole bunch of other photographs, the ones that clearly showed that I was in their backyard by showing him and his sister on that same swing actually many years earlier and the same background.

But then the amazing thing he sent me was a picture of me with my mother. And that was the first picture taken of me with my mother. Actually, it's the first ever picture I have of me with my mother. I don't have any before the war. There wasn't a single picture that shows me with my mother. This is the very first picture. And it must have been taken in July, August 1945, shortly, probably within a day or two of when I was first reunited with her.

I told the story what my first memory of being reunited with her of having been asleep, carried into the living room where the whole family was sitting in a circle, pushing this one woman away. It was my mother. And this picture was taken probably a day or two later.

And it shows my mother very obviously, very slim, with a very faint smile on her face. And she's standing behind us, and she's not touching me. And I think that is probably because I wouldn't let her. The one who is touching me, is holding me is Helga, the little girl. The little girl has her hand on my shoulder.

And I'm smiling. And I'm sitting on the same tricycle that I sat with them. My hair is a little bit shorter. I had had a haircut in between. A little bit shorter, but otherwise, the same outfit. And it's an amazing photograph, which obviously will also make its way to the museum's collection.

But that photograph, there are many reasons why that photograph really touched me, because another detail that I found out when Arthur started telling me about their family's story is that Arthur's mother actually died during the hunger of the winter of 1944, '45 in Holland.

It was pretty bad. It was pretty bad then.

Yes. And she died of dysentery, apparently, and leaving his father alone with two children. And he and I have talked about the fact there is this amazing scene of his father taking a photograph of me with my mother who has just lost her two daughters and her husband. And this question-- did they ever talk to each other? What was their conversation? That is one of those mysteries we'll never resolve, unless Helga has something to say about it.

I don't think she's really totally with it. So I've sent her a very nice letter and got a response from her husband. But she and Arthur, unfortunately, are not speaking to each other. But it's very-- and maybe it should remain that way as a mystery.

But you only come to this part as the result of a Dutch journalist having an interview with you and then writing about the Indonesian resistance and a photograph appears in the newspaper and Arthur recognizes it. And that's when this all snowballs. And this is very recent. So sometimes you don't even know that there is a gap-- because would you have questioned it?

By the way, Herman Keppy-- this is just a coincidence-- Herman Keppy is best friends with Louise Israels' son-in-law. [LAUGHS]

Louise Israels, for people who are going to see this in the future, is another volunteer survivor at the Holocaust Museum. [LAUGHS]

It all comes together too.

Yeah. Well, also the Netherlands is a small country. People know each other.

Sure.

Or more likely to.

Sure.

I'd like then to turn in the last part of our interview to the museum. You've referenced it a lot during our conversation. And I'd like to ask you a factual question and then go on from there. And the first one is people might not know what is the Echoes of Memory. But you have talked about it. So explain what it is, and then we'll talk about more things.

So there is a writing group at the museum, which I think has been around for about 20 years, where survivor volunteers are encouraged to write essays-- part of a memoir, if you will-- parts of a memoir-- then the museum publishes once a year. Not all of them get published-- whatever we submit and we select. And it really gives a picture of what the survivors are like, and about their lives, and their concerns.

So I've submitted several pieces. I've been part of the writing group relatively recently, probably for about four years perhaps. Maybe not even that long. And it's really an amazing group. It's really the place where I think the survivor volunteers who participate get to know each other. We listen to each other's stories and really form very, very close bonds. It's a wonderful experience. Listening to the stories, I think it's an absolutely fabulous program organized by the museum.

And so does this mean that you attend weekly classes?

It's actually monthly. But when the museum is functioning, it's a monthly class. A professor from Johns Hopkins comes every month. Initially, she gives us a writing prompt. And we are encouraged to write for about 15 minutes or so about whatever strikes us in that particular writing prompt. And then we read those out loud, go around the table. Then we socialize a little bit, have lunch, come back quickly, and then read longer submissions that we have sent to her ahead of time.

And it's for altogether about four hours or so. And it's once a month. Now that we do it via Zoom, we do it every other week for two hours. And so again, it's continuing to be a really wonderful experience, except that periodically, some of the survivor volunteers are quite elderly and some of them are sickly. And so we do periodically lose some people.

Has it given you anything-- writing is an interesting activity. And sometimes you don't know what you think until you write it down. And then you explore it. You talked about how it provided a way, a vehicle of getting to know some of the other people. Has it been something that you have discovered about yourself as well through this process?

I think If it weren't for the Echoes class I might not have done all this research and not really been focused on finding out. It really is one of the motivations for finding out more about my story. Some of it was somewhat by accident-- Lilly Meier approaching me with the email from Ron von Hasselt, for example, those coincidences. But even with my whole involvement with the museum is somewhat-- is interesting. [LAUGHS]

How did it start?

How did it start? So I was a physician. I had a practice in the hospital.

Which hospital?

Washington Adventist Hospital. And one day, a patient came in-- a man who was head of one of the institutes at the NIH. And he came in with his wife.

National Institutes of Health.

And I went into the examining to examine her. And his wife remained in my office. And when we came back, we started to talk. And said, who did these paintings? And I said, they were done by my mother. Oh, she said, that's amazing. Tell me a little bit about your mother. I said, well, she was a Holocaust survivor.

And then she said, oh, tell me a little bit about your story. I work at the Holocaust museum. And then I told her I had been hidden as a child. I told her a little bit about my story being hidden with a Dutch-Indonesian family. And she said, well, there is a new exhibition being developed on hidden children. Would you be willing to participate and provide some of your photographs? And I said of course.

And that was my introduction really. I had known-- I had visited the Holocaust museum. I had actually been at the inauguration of the museum. But this is really how I was introduced as a volunteer, if you will. And I'm blocking on her name right now. She retired last year. She worked with Suzy Snyder.

Was it Teresa?

Teresa, right. Sure. Teresa Pollin. Her husband Pollin was the director of the National Institute of Mental Health-- or drug abuse, I think actually, at the NIH. And so he was the patient. But she was accompanying him. So she's the one who introduced me. And then, of course, I got together with Suzy Snyder. And then was asked-- but I was-- want to volunteer.

So initially, while I was practicing, what I first did was what many other volunteers have done is offering to do translations. And I did translations for the Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos and also, especially, for the multi-volume series Jewish Responses to Persecution. And several of my translations are in there actually. And that sort of really got me more and more involved. Then became a formal survivor volunteer. And then when I retired about five years ago is when I started doing the public speaking.

So when you first met Teresa and talked about that, what year was that? About.

I would say maybe 10 years ago. It's exactly timed with the Life in Shadows exhibit opened. So just before that-- probably about six months before that exhibition opened of Life in Shows. And somewhere on my desk, I probably have a book marker that has the exact time.

But it gives us a sense. So the museum opened formally in 1993. We are talking in 2020. So this would have been about 2010, something like that. And up until 2010, shall we say--

Maybe a little bit earlier. Yeah.

Yeah. Up until that time, you had been at the opening, but did you visit the museum at all?

Oh yes.

Did you go?

[INAUDIBLE] I visited the museum. The opening is kind of an interesting experience in itself, because my mother had some real doubts about a Holocaust museum. Well, she said, it's so many years after. Who's going to go? Who's going to come? And I'm sure many survivors probably at that time shared that feeling. And I may have taken some of that on.

Although, an interesting thing is I recently did find a letter to the editor that I wrote about the opening of the museum. I can't remember exactly what the reason for the letter is. But it's a definite letter about the opening of the museum and the importance I attached to it. I don't think that particular one got published. I've been very fortunate getting letters published, but not that one.

So anyway, at that time, I was either president of the American Lung Association or very involved in the American Lung Association and was supposed to present testimony on Capitol Hill for the museum about-- I think it was all about clean air or something.

For the museum? Or for the Lung Association?

Sorry. To Congress on Capitol Hill. I was giving testimony on Capitol Hill. And this was the only committee that actually had hearings on the day that the museum opened, because it was chaired by Congressman Traficant, who was a real antisemite supposedly, I'm told, and who also, fortunately, ended up in jail-- from Pennsylvania. But he's the one who conducted the hearing.

I spoke at the hearing, gave my testimony, then sat in a taxi which was going to take me back to Washington Adventist Hospital. And I made them turn around and take me to the Holocaust Museum opening. And at that time, there was no security to speak of. And I sat in the rain and listened to Elie Wiesel and President Clinton. I sat there at the opening. And that sort of probably sold me on the museum.

What has it meant for you in the subsequent years and particularly since you got more and more involved? What do you think the significance of it is? How would you answer your mother's reservations now?

The amazing thing is probably-- I wish, and maybe she had seen-- I don't know whether I took her back. I don't think I took her ever on a visit to the museum. I just don't think so. But I wish she had seen the long lines of kids, long lines of visitors lining up outside the museum waiting to get in, needing tickets to get in, and how crowded it really got, and how many people did show an interest, and the number of people who shed tears when they go to the Survivor Desk, where I also sit on Tuesdays now.

And the response that I have gotten when I've spoken to school groups has been-- school groups more than adult groups, frankly. I've spoken to law enforcement people, all sorts of groups. But probably the most meaningful are the school groups, especially the ones out of town where the survivor volunteers are invited. There, the responses have been amazing.

Last year, I was in a small town-- Morrilton, Arkansas. And I spoke at two events there. And one of them was in this huge basketball arena, filled on four sides with kids from all the schools from the entire area-- several school districts, thousands of kids.

My pictures were projected on four huge screens. An incredible experience. But I didn't really know how much those kids would get out of it. But it was well organized. Kids were able to ask questions. They had microphones. It was passed around.

And then when I got thank-you notes from the kids-- a whole stack of them-- they referenced very specific parts of my talk. One of them, especially, touched me. This was from a young girl who said, before you spoke, we had a bullying problem in our school. But since you spoke and since you warned us about the dangers of bullying as a form of hate and where that can lead, we've had normal bullying problems.

That was incredibly meaningful to me. And that's the kind of experiences I think that we all get when we speak of these places-- tremendous appreciation. And the fact that too many people still don't know about the details of the Holocaust. And the lessons are as important today as they have ever been.

I can't think of a better note for us to end on. There are many, many more questions. If there are things that I haven't asked you about, we can talk now. We can talk again. If there are things that you think that you'd like to add, we can do this again. This is not a one-time deal. One of the silver linings of a very dark cloud which is the coronavirus is that this technology has allowed us to be able to have such conversations in a safe way and an easy way.

Sure. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

I will. But first I'm going to turn off the camera.

OK.

[LAUGHTER]

I knew you were going to say that. That's fine.

Then what I'll do is I'll say my usual closing line, which is that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Alfred MÃ¼nzer on August 25, 2020 in Washington DC. Thank you again.

Thank you.

OK. So now I'm going to-- now you'll see my challenges. I have to end the recording but not end the interview. So here we go. Stop recording. Do I want to stop?