

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. This evening our guest is Fred Friedman from Salzburg, Austria. Fred, would you tell us about your early life and your family in Salzburg, please?

Yes, I was born in 1926, in Salzburg, Austria. And I just remember a few incidents of the early years in Salzburg. One clear memory is the summer of 1934. That was the year that the Austrian chancellor was assassinated. And I remember we were on vacation in a small village. And I remember all the candles burning in the windows of the farmhouses.

Oh, people were very, very upset?

Yes.

I think before we go any further, I should ask you about your parents. We have a picture of your father serving in World War I?

One, yes.

Oh, here it is. Do you want to tell us about that?

Yes, going from the extreme left, that was my father, and then my Aunt Greta, and my grandmother, and Aunt Ida. And the officer on the right, that was my uncle, Alfred. He died in battle in World War I. And I was named after him.

So your father was very proud to have been a soldier in the army?

Yes.

And you were very happy living in Austria? You have good memories? I think we have--

In the early 1930s, yes.

We have some pictures of you from 1927. What a cute baby you are. And we have another picture of you in 1933. Do you want to tell us where this is?

Yeah, this is in the Mirabell Park in the city of Salzburg. It's one of the nicest sites. I've been back there several times.

We'll talk about that soon.

And my youngest sister.

What is her name?

Margaret.

So there were two of you?

Right.

Mother and father and the two of you. And that's a typical dress for-- I think we don't want to see this picture quite yet. And those lederhosen were what the little boys wore typically?

Yes, yes.

Right. Maybe you'll tell us a little bit about going to school and life in Salzburg?

Yes, well, first I went to the elementary school, which was called the Volksschule, from 1933 to '37, and then to the Gymnasium or Realschule.

Were there many Jewish children in your school?

Very few.

Very few. Did you feel any experiences of antisemitism?

I didn't have any problems until after the Anschluss, March of 1938, when the Nazis took over.

Maybe you'll describe that, how they came in and what actually happened?

Yeah, on March 11, 1938, the German Army moved into Austria. There was a heavy air cover. I remember many planes, a lot of military vehicles. And our house was about two blocks from the main highway leading from Germany to Austria. In fact, Salzburg is very close to the German border.

What's the closest German city?

The nearest place was Berchtesgaden, where Hitler had his hideaway, yeah. So Salzburg was the first city to see the Germans move in. There was very little resistance. There was a home guard. Some of them put up some resistance, but they were quickly put down by the Nazi forces.

Were they killed?

Yes. Very few put up any resistance at all.

You were little, but what did you sense? And what kind of talk did you hear from your parents?

Fear.

Fear?

Yes.

Lots of fear?

Fear of the unknown-- also fear of how Jews would be treated because they heard what happened to Jews in Germany.

There was talk about that? There was information?

Yes. In fact, many people from Austria had been to Germany on business visits or social visits. I remember I had been to Germany.

And what did you hear there?

Well, you felt the oppression of the Nazi regime.

Did you see the writing on the store windows?

No.

Nothing?

Not before '38, no.

And were the Jews already wearing their identifications?

No, that didn't happen until later.

So the Germans came in?

Yes.

Did that disrupt your schooling?

Yes, this was in March. And in June, the Germans announced that Jews were not allowed to go to public schools, were not allowed to use the public beaches or swimming pool.

Just Jews? Or anybody else?

No, just Jews.

Just Jews. Just Jews.

And I remember at the time that the Catholic nuns ran a parochial school near our house for girls. And my younger sister was taken in by the nuns for that parochial school.

Were the Catholics persecuted in any way?

Yes, also.

Right, so that was difficult?

Yes.

How many Jews were there in Salzburg?

About 120.

Do you know anything about the Jewish community at that time? Maybe you could tell us something about--

Only what I found out since then from my return visits, that I heard that the majority got away. Very few died in concentration camps because they had a chance to get out early. And most got out in 1938.

Is that what happened to your family? Maybe you could tell us about your exit.

Yes, my father was the first one to get out. And he had to get a permit to leave Austria. So he said he had to complete business transactions. So they let him--

What did your father do?

He was a lumber wholesaler.

So this sounded legitimate?

Yes. So he got out in the summer of 1938. And then my sister and I were smuggled out of Germany in late November

1938.

What does that mean, smuggled? What is that activity?

Oh, OK. My father made a contact with somebody in Switzerland who would come to Germany and take my younger sister and I across the border.

This was a non-Jew, I presume?

Yes, a Swiss woman.

Were you frightened? What do you remember about that?

Yeah, of course, crossing a river at night was kind of scary for a 11-year-old kid.

It was just the two of you and the woman?

Yes.

Do you still remember her name?

No, I don't.

No. I think we have a picture of that. You can tell us about--

Yeah, she's the lady with the scarf. The other woman is my mother.

Oh, your mother accompany-- and who's the little girl? Who's the girl with the glasses?

She's the daughter of the Swiss woman. And the smaller girl is my sister.

So your mother accompanied you to meet the woman who was taking you?

Yes, and then eventually my mother was smuggled into Switzerland by a Swiss policeman.

So wait. You went from Salzburg to Freiburg?

In Germany.

In Germany-- and how long did you stay there?

Just a few hours.

And from there?

And in Freiburg, we met the Swiss woman. She took us across the Rhine to France, and from France into Switzerland.

Could you carry on a conversation? Did you speak the same language?

Oh, yeah. This woman was from Basel, Switzerland. And the language there is German. So we didn't have any problem.

And did you have to hide your identity in any way?

Yes, because she told the German guards that she was a Swiss, and she's just bringing her children home. And we were

told not to say anything. Keep our mouth shut.

Which you did, I presume?

Yes, but--

How long did that take, that trip?

You mean from Freiburg to Basel?

Yes.

A few hours.

Were there any problems at all?

Well, subsequently, I read in my father's diary that a soldier stopped us, a German soldier. And he told her he doesn't believe the story but to go ahead anyhow.

That was lucky.

Yes.

That was lucky. So in Switzerland, in Basel, she took you to your father, I presume?

Yes. Yeah, she ran a pension there. And that's where my father stayed.

And how long did you stay with your father without your mother?

I believe it was about two months. And then she managed to get to Switzerland.

And how did your mother manage to get to Switzerland?

There was a policeman in Switzerland who saved many people from Germany and Austria by getting them across the border.

Was he ever picked up? Do you know anything about that policeman?

Yes, he was eventually caught by the Swiss authorities. And he was punished by the Swiss, not the Germans.

By the Swiss?

Yes.

You did see the movie *The Boat is Full*?

Yes, and I think it's fair presentation.

It's a fair presentation despite the fact that the Swiss sent quite a few people back?

Yes.

So your mother arrived two months later?

Yes.

And in the meantime, you and your sister haven't gone to school for quite a while.

Well, in Switzerland, we started going to school. First, school in Basel, and from there, we went to a small village because we couldn't stay in Basel. The village was in eastern Switzerland.

And how long did you stay there?

Again for a few months, until we were finally able to leave for France.

What did your father do for income at this time?

At that time, he didn't have any income.

Were you helped by the Jewish community? Or did you have savings?

Oh, I think he took some stamps along, and he sold the stamps.

Oh, he was a stamp collector?

Right.

And that's how he--

His hobby, yeah.

Oh, that was very fortunate then, very fortunate. So tell us about your life in France.

OK, the first place we went to was Mulhouse, which is--

Oh, I think way before we get to Mulhouse, we have another picture in Switzerland there.

Oh, yeah.

Do you want to tell us about that?

Yeah, this was a little town of Unterwasser in eastern Switzerland. That's where I went to school. And I remember we stayed on top of a mountain. And the school was in the village, and I skied down.

That must have been very exciting for a little boy.

Yeah, all the kids went to school by ski.

Did the children know that you were Jewish?

Yes.

And were there any negative feelings there?

No, no.

Nothing?

It's a small village.

So that's a good experience?

Yeah. It was the first time I ever went to one-room schoolhouse. Yeah.

So from there, you went to France. So tell us about your life in France.

OK, first we went to Mulhouse, which is very close to the Swiss border. And from there, we went to Besancon, in central France.

How long did you stay in each of these places?

We were only a few weeks in Mulhouse, Besancon over a year. And while we were in Besancon, the war broke out in Europe.

September 1, 1939?

Yeah. And shortly thereafter, the French government interned all Austrians and Germans.

Including you all?

No, I should say all males over 18. I was too young. So it was my father. And he was sent to a camp in the Pyrenees Mountains, on the Spanish border.

How long was he there?

Over a year.

Oh, my goodness. So how did your mother manage?

We just got by, I guess.

Did the Jewish community help you in France?

They helped some of the people, yes.

What do you remember about your life there? You were about 14, 13?

Well, I felt there was a certain amount of antagonism against me by some of the French kids in school. I remember one expression that they used. [SPEAKING FRENCH], the Germans are Boche. [SPEAKING FRENCH], and the Austrians, [SPEAKING FRENCH], are their dogs.

Dogs.

Yes.

So they weren't very fond of you?

Yes.

But you managed to learn?

Yes. Yeah, I had studied French in Austria before I came to France.

And what else do you remember about that period?

I remember there were air raid alerts because were German planes flying overhead. And then I remember the Vichy government took over.

Tell us about that.

And France was split in two regions. And I remember there was a food shortage. And I often took my bicycle and went out into the countryside to pick up eggs and vegetables from the farmers.

Were you hungry? Were you ever hungry?

I wouldn't say hungry, but we could always use some more food. And I remember once I was riding along a country road. This was in the southern part of France. A German staff car with the German officers stopped, and they wanted directions. And--

You must have been very scared.

And I wouldn't let on, of course, that I knew German. So I couldn't help them. I didn't understand them. I remember that incident.

That was clever.

Yeah.

And you brought that information back home, I guess?

Yeah.

What did your mother do at this time?

I know she wasn't working at the time.

Did she hear from your father?

Yes, they were able to correspond but not visit.

Was it hard for your father in that camp, with all those Germans?

It was very primitive. But he got some kind of-- he got access to a typewriter there, and he started writing his diary. And he gave it to me recently. And I remember he starts out, I want to write about my early life so my children will know. So--

What did he write about that period in the camp?

That it was very cold. It was high up in the mountains, in the Pyrenees. And the conditions were primitive.

Did he write anything about interaction with the Germans?

No. I don't think there were that many Germans who were non-Jews in the camp.

So they were mostly Jewish Germans and Jewish Austrians?



Right.

Right, but for the time being, they were safe there. Now, why was he released?

Well, I assume that, after a while, the French government realized that those people were no threat to their security.

Right. Do you remember his homecoming?

Yes.

Maybe you want to tell us about it?

Well, he just suddenly showed up at our apartment. At that time, we lived in Agen, which is in the southern part of France. If you can visualize the map, it's halfway between Marseilles and Bordeaux.

That's beautiful country.

Yes, wine country.

Wine country. What happened when he came home then?

Well, then we started working seriously about getting a visa to come to the US. And we went to see the American consulate in Marseilles.

Did you have any family in America who could write for you?

Yes, an uncle and a second uncle, sort of a remote uncle who worked at Grossinger's and who managed to get the affidavits for us,

How long did that all take?

I don't know when he started working, but I assume it took quite a while. And we got out just in time. We crossed August 1941.

I think we have a picture of you all in Marseilles.

In Marseilles, yeah.

This is your father?

Yes.

What do you remember about this?

This is one of the times, I guess, we went to Marseilles to see the American consulate. And I was very impressed when I walked in the consulate-- first time I saw so many Americans and all. And one of the things impressed me, they looked very relaxed, worked in shirtsleeves. It was in the summer.

Are you wearing a school uniform here?

No, just a jacket and shorts.

And you're, what, about 14, 15?

Let's see. 1941-- 14, yeah.

So you're on your way to America here?

Yes. We traveled from France through Spain. We stayed overnight in Madrid for a few days.

That must have been fun.

Yeah. Oh, it was interesting. I remember looking at Madrid because that was right at the very end of the Spanish Civil War. So we saw the heavy damage of the civil war. And then from Madrid, we went to Lisbon. And there we stayed for a few weeks, just outside of Lisbon.

Waiting for a boat?

Yeah. And we couldn't get four passages on one ship. So we went separately, first my mother and my sister, and then my father and I.

And how long were you separated?

About a week.

So they arrived in New York a week before you did? Is that it?

I believe so, yeah.

And they were greeted by the relative from--

Yeah, we stayed in New York for a few days. And from there, we went to Liberty, New York, because that's where our relatives lived who worked at Grossinger's.

And how long did you stay in Liberty?

About three months. And I remember I started in high school, Liberty High School.

Did you know English already?

Just what I studied in France, in the lycee. And I remember my first impression of freshman high school class. I thought it was sort of a combination of a school and vacation--

[LAUGHS]

--because there was no homework. In France, they always gave me a lot of work to do. And I kept wondering when the school is going to start.

Oh, I see.

[LAUGHS]

I see. And what did the other children think of this strange new boy in their class?

They seemed to accept me all right. I didn't have any problems with anybody.

You don't seem to have had any adjustment problems. You did very well. I guess your parents were comfortable with the situation and you felt that?

Yes. And from Liberty, we went to Elmhurst, where my parents rented an apartment. That's in Queens County.

Why did you go to Elmhurst?

Probably for occupational reasons because my father intended to open a business as an importer of stamps.

Is that what he did--

Yes.

--all the time from then on?

From 1941.

And he was successful at that, I presume?

Yes.

And tell us about your acclimatization in--

OK, well, I enrolled--

You went to a lot of schools and went to a lot of places.

I enrolled in Newtown High School in Elmhurst. And one thing I remember about high school, I didn't have to study foreign languages.

Oh, yes. [LAUGHS]

Just took the Regents in French and German and passed it.

Oh, I bet you did.

English was a little difficult the first year. But after the first year, I found school easy. My favorite subject was American history, I remember. I came in top of the class to that. That's what I concentrated on, history.

Did anybody ever ask you about your experiences in Europe? You were a young man who had traveled so much and had seen--

At what time? In high school?

In high school.

No, there wasn't too much talk about that. See, by then, the United States was at war with Germany. And we wouldn't talk German on the streets.

Was your father drafted by any chance?

No. But when I was 17, I tried to enlist. But I couldn't get parental consent, so I had to wait until I was 18.

Oh, and you enlisted then?

And then I went into the army.

And where were you sent?

I was sent to Augusta, Georgia. I took my basic infantry training there. And then I was naturalized and became a citizen 1945-- April 12, 1945.

Did they send you to Europe? That would have been interesting.

No, I asked to be sent to Europe, and they said, we'll send you where we want you.

[LAUGHTER]

But a couple of times I asked to be sent to Europe. And then I applied for officer candidate school. I took the test, and I was accepted. But then they wanted me-- by then, the war was almost over. They wanted me to sign up for three more years. And I didn't.

Oh, so you got out. And I suppose you used the GI Bill of Rights and went to school?

Yes, I went to NYU, studied accounting and then the Brooklyn Law School. I studied law under the New York State War Scholarship Act.

And you have told me that you have returned to Salzburg five, six times?

Yes.

Maybe you want to talk about your first impression and subsequent visits?

Well, first impression was I walked around the streets. And I want to see everything, see how it was changed.

Did you remember--

Oh, yes.

--your home? Did you see your home?

Yes, I went to look at the home. And I found a lot of stores and other things very much the way they were before. In fact, Salzburg was hit quite a bit by Allied bombs. But when they rebuilt it, they rebuilt buildings in the original style. The apartment house that we lived in was hit too, but not severely.

Did your parents get reparations?

No.

Not from Austria?

No. Germany was very generous in that department, not Austria.

What about your uncles, your aunts, your cousins, your grandparents? Did they all make it?

No. I had two grandmothers, and they died under the Nazi regime.

Do you know where they died?

Yes, in Theresienstadt, which is Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovakia?

Yes.

Do you know anything about their last days?

No, nothing.

Must have been hard for you, for your parents, then, to realize their parents suffered so.

Right.

And what about uncles and aunts and cousins?

Well, my mother only had a cousin. And she also was taken to Theresienstadt concentration camp. My father had two sisters. And they both managed to get to the United States before us with their husbands and one daughter.

Now, when you went back to Salzburg, did the neighbors recognize you, any of them?

No.

So you had nobody to look up particularly?

No, I didn't see any people that I knew from before. I had one interesting experience. I received a letter from a Dr. Handel about a year and a half ago. And he said that he went to school with me and he remembers me.

How did he get your address?

Well, it's interesting the way he tracked me down. First, he went to the Israeli embassy in Vienna and asked about me. And they said, we don't know anything about him. Why don't you contact the Jewish congregation in Salzburg?

So he went to them. And they said Oh, yeah, we know him. He was here last summer. And so he got my address. And we finally got together this past summer.

Were you friendly?

Yes, very friendly.

No, I mean were you friendly as children, that he--

Frankly, I didn't remember him as well as he remembered me. [LAUGHS]

Well, why do you think he wanted to track you down?

He wanted to talk about what we did the last 49 years.

[LAUGHTER]

I see. Was he in the army?

Yeah, he told me that he served in the army. He was sent to Yugoslavia in the German Army. And then he decided that one way of avoiding getting killed would be to enroll in an officer's training school, which he did. And he was in a Wehrmacht officer school. He became severely sick with meningitis--

Oh, my.

--and was discharged.

So he was fortunate.

Yeah. And then he was very much interested in history. He became a history professor. So we were both interested in history. We talked a lot about the lessons of the Holocaust.

And I asked him, what reaction do you get from the high school students in Austria today? He said, they're very critical of their grandparents and parents for being taken in by such a regime and for going along with the Nazis. And a lot of their grandparents don't even want to talk about it, which he considers good. On the other hand, he sees some of the underlying things that brought about Nazism again in young people today-- the cliquishness, in-group feeling, following the leader.

Right-- super nationalism, I suppose.

Yes.

Does he teach the Holocaust period in his classes?

Yes. It's mandatory in Austria. It's not only for high school students.

But I saw something very interesting. I went to Mauthausen concentration camp outside of Linz. And I noticed a bus of cadets there from the national police of Austria. And they were taking them through the camps and explaining. And a woman who was a guide gave a very good explanation of what happened. She took the cadets into the gas chambers, closed the door, and then lectured them on the gas chambers.

Oh, that must have been--

So I think they're getting a good education in what happened.

It would be interesting for you sometime to be asked to come to your friend's class as a survivor.

Oh, he just retired. [LAUGHS]

Oh, so you won't have that opportunity.

No.

Have any of your children joined you? And your wife-- has she joined you in your trips to Salzburg?

Yeah, my wife and--

Your wife is American?

Yes, she was born in Brooklyn. She's been to Austria several times. And all of my children have been. And the youngest one and I visited the Dachau concentration camp four months ago.

Four months ago?

Yeah, in Germany.

And what were the impressions of your son?

Oh, he asked a lot of questions and became very interested in that time of history.

Had you talked about your experiences with your children prior to this?

Yes. Yeah, I think that sort of aroused their interest in world affairs and geography.

Well, it's a story that's so intrinsic to their family. Fortunately they did get to know their grandparents. Why do you keep going back to Salzburg?

Well, frankly, I think it's a beautiful country.

I see. So you go back for--

Vacations.

--the aesthetic aspect and the vacation.

And on my last two visits, I met the head of the Jewish congregation in Salzburg. And we have a lot of talks about what's happening in Austria today.

How many Jews are there in Salzburg now?

Less than 100.

Oh, so it's about the same number, a little bit less than before.

But none of them are natives of Salzburg.

Where are they from?

A few from Vienna, and most are from Poland and the Soviet Union.

Are there any young families?

Very few-- mostly older people.

So it's not a future community? It's not going to regenerate?

No, not likely.

There isn't a day school or a Jewish community?

No. The only place they have that would be in Vienna.

In Vienna is a bigger community. Well, what do you think the message of the Holocaust is? In summary, do you want to say anything to augment your testimonial?

Well, I asked a question of a German police officer once. Do you think there will be another Hitler in our century? And he said, not in my country. We have learned our lessons. He said, maybe in your country. And that was sort of a scary reply he gave me.

So the lesson that I have learned, or I think the world should have learned, is that we must be active. We must be active

participants in our government. There must be a moral basis for our government. There must be a legal foundation for our life.

Are you active in government affairs?

I have been in the fact that I ran for office a few times.

Then I guess you're active.

Belonged to political organization, yes.

Yes. So you feel it very strongly?

Yes.

And you've become active.

Yes.

So that's your message. It can happen again.

It could happen again. It could. I feel it's much less likely to happen in the United States because we have good constitutional safeguards.

Thank goodness.

Yes.

Is there anything else that you'd like to--

No.

--talk about?

Thank you.

We thank you very much for coming--

Thank you.

--to tell your story.

I enjoyed talking to you.

Thank you.