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--with the-- Good afternoon and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. And I am the host of the museum's public program First Person. This is our third season of First Person. Today's "First Person" is Dr. Fritz Gluckstein, whom we shall meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust, who are sharing with us firsthand their own experiences associated with the Holocaust. Each First Person guest currently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. Each Wednesday, through August 28, we will have another First Person guest.

The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org-- that's www.ushmm.org-- O-R-G-- provides a preview of upcoming First Person guests. This 2002 series of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Helena Rubinstein Foundation, to whom we are grateful for making this year's program possible.

I would like to introduce several individuals who are important to the First Person series. I'd like you to meet Harold, of course, who's been so kind to give people a little bit of a history of the museum itself for those of you up front. You were greeted at the door by Dora, and a colleague, whom I don't know, unfortunately.

I point them out to you because they're part of our program. But also, if you have any comments or questions about the program after, we would welcome anything you have to say to any of us. So please, don't feel bashful about offering your thoughts about this program,

We will listen to Fritz Gluckstein as he shares his First Person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 40 minutes. We will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask Dr. Gluckstein some questions.

Before you are introduced to him, I have a couple of requests of you. First, if possible, please stay in your seats during the program so that we minimize any disruption while Dr. Gluckstein is speaking. And second, please make your questions during our question and answer period as brief as you can. I will repeat the question as best I can so that all, including Dr. Gluckstein, can hear it before he responds to your question.

I'd also like to let those of you who have passes for the permanent exhibition for either 1:30 or 1:45 today know that they are good for the rest of the afternoon. So no reason to think that, oh, my goodness, if I don't jump up out of my seat, I'm not going to be able to get into the permanent exhibition. No problem.

I had the pleasure of visiting with Fritz Gluckstein and learning about what he and his parents went through during World War II. Fritz survived the Holocaust by managing to stay in Berlin throughout the war. As you will hear today, despite several arrests and other close calls, Fritz remained a part of labor details until liberation by the Russians when they took Berlin.

Here we have a portrait of Fritz Gluckstein as a young boy living in Germany, where he was born. Here we have a map of Germany within the context of Europe and, of course, the world itself.

And next, we will see a larger map of Germany. And then, finally, the turquoise spot marks Berlin, where Dr. Gluckstein was born. And as you can see Berlin, was on the eastern side of the country.

This is a contemporary photograph of one of Dr. Gluckstein's homes that he lived in in Berlin. And here we have a photograph of Dr. Gluckstein's parents, Georg and Hedwig, as well as an aunt and uncle who are posing for a portrait. And as you might guess, Dr. Gluckstein is the little fellow who's standing there in front of the car.

This is a contemporary photograph of where Dr. Gluckstein played as a child in Berlin. And here we have a contemporary photograph of Dr. Gluckstein's school that he attended in his early years.

This is a photograph of many of Dr. Gluckstein's friends as children posing in their party clothes. On a much different note, we have here a photograph of the first German troops to return from their conquests of Poland and France, marching through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on July 18, 1940.

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This is Dr. Gluckstein's Christian aunt and uncle, Ernst and Elfride Dressler, who helped him to survive. And then, finally, here, in this last photograph, we have Dr. Gluckstein and his parents in the late spring of 1945 after liberation.

Today, Fritz Gluckstein lives in the Washington, DC, area with his wife Maran. Following his arrival in the United States after the war, he eventually became a doctor of veterinary medicine. After a stint in the United States Army, Fritz began a long and distinguished career with the federal government, where he became an expert on diseases that are transmitted from animals to humans, such as mad cow disease.

Fritz is a self-described opera buff and a football fan, a good combination. He volunteers each week here at the museum translating letters and other documents written in German. He has a daughter Ruth, and two granddaughters, one who is three and a half, and another who recently arrived and now is three months old. I'm pleased to say that both Ruth, his daughter, and his wife Maran, are in the audience with us today.

We're about to learn a great deal more from Fritz about his experience during the Holocaust. With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our "first person," Dr. Fritz Gluckstein. Fritz, would you please join us?

[APPLAUSE]

[BACKGROUND NOISES]

Fritz, thanks for joining us. It's a great pleasure to have you be our First Person guest, and be willing to share with us your account during the Holocaust. And perhaps a good place to start would be for you to tell us about your life as a boy, your family, your community, before war came, before the Nazis came to power.

Well, it was in good times. Everything was normal. My father was a judge. He actually was quite patriotic on public holidays, national holidays. He had a flag and he even taught me how to salute it.

But in fact, I would say it was utterly normal. As you could see in the first picture, we took trips. And at that time, at least I didn't-- had any hint of antisemitism.

Your father was actually a decorated veteran in the First World War.

Yes, my father was in the war, got the Iron Cross. But he still lost his job when Hitler came to power. And it was in January in '33, when he was in the office. He was told that he was no longer needed, and was asked to leave the court building.

And he said, well, outside there is a group of Nazis demonstrating. Better leave by the back door. And he said, no, I came in by the front door, and I'm going to leave by the front door. And he left by the front door, went right through the demonstrating SA people there.

And your father was a judge. He was a very prominent--

Yes, he was a judge.

You mentioned to me that the first real sense of antisemitism that you experienced was around the time of the 1936 Olympics.

Yes. Before '36, already signs and plaques indicated ein this spot only for Jews. Jews are not permitted to use certain benches. And we saw signs that Jews are not wanted in towns and in restaurants.

1936, suddenly it changed. You could go anywhere. You could sit anywhere. And everybody was very polite.

The Nazis were told, be careful. You never know. It might not be a Jew. It might be a foreign visitor. Therefore, better

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be careful.

But I would say one week after the end of the Olympics, the signs went up again. And they get from there.

So they cleaned up their act--

Absolutely.

--for the Olympics, when all the press was in town.

That is correct. Very careful. Nothing happened.

They had a public relations mentality too, didn't they?

Yes. Actually, I was lucky too. I saw the red school. That was the public school I went to. And the school was extraordinary. Most of these schools actually were held with Jewish students. They had to sit apart, and were harassed, and so on.

This school, it did not happen. There were six students in the class. And we were treated like any other student.

The homeroom teacher was a party member. He didn't treat us any different.

Meaning he's a member of the Nazi party?

Yes. Perhaps I might mention here, the fact that someone was a member of the Nazi party did not mean he was a dyed in the wool Nazi. Not at all. No, the people who did were not party members were very vicious. In fact, some of the most vicious Nazis were not even party members.

But this school was extraordinary. And eventually I had to leave it to go to a Jewish school. But until then, the principal really kept things down. This was extraordinary.

But you-- I think you mentioned to me that you remember actually seeing Hitler at one point.

Yes, I saw Hitler at the Olympics. Relatives had an apartment in one of the main thoroughfares of Berlin. And Hitler came on his way to the Olympic stadium to open the Olympic games, lo and behold upon the balcony, and there he passed by.

And the staff are hoping [CROSS TALK].

Staff are actually, yes. And this-- of course, people cheered him. [INAUDIBLE]

Your father was a judge. He lost his job. Things began to get really bad. Tell us about any efforts your father made to try to get the family out of Germany.

Yes, we tried. Oh, we tried to come to the United States. But at that time, you needed affidavits. First you had to find someone who would give an affidavit, meaning he had to sign documents stating-- obligating himself to take care of us. If anything would happen, he had to take care of the person. Affidavit give a-- had to take care of the immigrant.

And of course, not many people wanted to do that. That was one difficulty.

And then the quota. At that time, there was a distinct quota. Only so and so many in Germany were permitted to enter the United States. And so it made it quite difficult.

And of course, even getting-- my father lost his job. He had a very small pension. And who would pay the passage to

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the United States? All difficulties. We tried, but-- in fact, we had a number, a waiting number. And when our quota came up, it was too late. It started. And he couldn't go.

Because the issue of having an affidavit, an affidavit from somebody. You need to fall within the quota. And then the bottom line, you need to have the resources to be--

Exactly.

As I recall, Fritz, you were 11 on the Night of Broken Glass, or Kristallnacht.

Yes.

Tell us what you recall about that very dreadful, dreadful night.

Well, morning I went to school. And suddenly it was-- I saw glass on the street. I didn't know what happened here. And another. And I realized-- another store. And I realized that the windows of all Jewish stores--

You're on your way to school noticing all this broken glass.

Yes, well, and then, of course, we saw some smoke, and saw a synagogue on fire. Nobody knew about it. It was a surprise.

But later on, I wondered, how did they know Jewish stores? And that is something you will find. I have never-- nobody apparently knows about it. You can look at encyclopedia and books. It's not mentioned. How did they know it was a Jewish store.

And about two months before the Crystal Night, the Jewish proprietors had to have their names written in long letters on the window. And at the night of the 9th of November, all they had to do, is go down the street and look, ah, here. There are the big letters. And they just broke the windows.

And of course, the German authorities claim that that was just a spontaneous outburst that happened to take place in every city all over Germany, and with these names put in large letters months in advance.

Right.

So much for spontaneity.

Absolutely.

You had mentioned to me that at one point during that time you did not get your report cards because of quote, "special circumstances."

Yes.

What was that?

After the Crystal Night, they imprisoned quite a number of Jewish men, at random, I would say, put them in concentration camps. And our teachers were in prison too, of course. You were without substitute teachers. And of course, was interrupting the regular-- regular daily activities in school. And the teachers came back and said, well, we need more time to get the report card. And we got a little note. Because of special circumstances, report cards will be delayed this year.

Of course, Crystal Night was November 1938.

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Right.

It was in fall of 1939 when Germany invaded Poland in September. You said, that's when things just really, really changed.

Yes.

And tell us about what changed for you--

First--

--the beginning of the war.

--was the ration cards. For Jews, ration cards. I would say at the beginning we were almost equal with the non-Jews. But then, I would say every six months or so they cut the white bread. They cut meat. No cigarettes. And so on and so on.

Then came their identification cards first, each one-- you had to have an identification card, a special one, and had to change the name-- get the name with the name of Israel or Sara. And if you went to a place, or to any government office, you have to take out the card, show it to them, hold it up, and say, I am Jew. Or if you had a signature, suppose you had to sign a document, wrote-- and since I had to sign Fritz Israel Gluckstein, Jewish identification number so-and-so and so-and-so.

Every Jewish male had to adopt the name Israel.

Unless he had a Jewish name.

Unless they--

If your name happened to be Moses or something, no.

But if you didn't, you had to have that.

All-- and women Sara. Yes, absolutely.

And that was the beginning. And then, of course, the first deportation started bit by bit, the beginning, let's say, two month. And really, it snowballed.

And then, of course, came the star that the Jews had to wear. And there too, my mother, was not Jewish. But they still had to wear the star. My father had to wear the star because I was raised Jewish. Had not been raised Jewish, I wouldn't have to wear the star, would not have to wear-- work at the labor gangs, and my father wouldn't have to wear the star either.

I was a so-called-- we call it Geltungsjude, meaning counted as Jew, considered a Jew.

Explain that again so we understand that.

Geltungsjuden, counted as a Jew.

Counted-- exactly.

Explain that for us.

They were subject to all the law, decrees, regulations. We had to wear the star. And usually, with all the time, escaped deportation.

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And even I think you mentioned to me when we talked earlier that if there were a number of children, and one child was raised Jewish--

That is correct. And I have a friend. There were two-- the older boy was raised Jewish. The younger boy was not raised Jewish. He was Christian. Didn't matter. He was still a Geltungsjude, because his older brother was raised Jewish.

That counted as a Jew.

Counted as a Jew.

When you started wearing the stars, you told me that the police had a technique of--

Yes.

Yes.

Well, the star had to be put right here. It had to be attached firmly. The police came with a pencil and tried to get the pencil behind the star. And so help you if they got behind the star.

Meaning that if it wasn't tight, not only was--

Completely tight.

If it wasn't, it wasn't just a violation of regulation. Maybe it might suggest you might more easily take it off.

Yes.

You also told me that, and I found this astonishing, that not only were Jews force to give up radios, furs, jewelry, that you weren't even allowed to have pets.

Yes, that is correct. No pets. We had to give up our dog, [PERSONAL NAME].

And you chose to then become a doctor of veterinary medicine.

Yes, but--

A little irony in that.

Yes.

Now tell us about your dog. There's a story here.

Well, the dog was trained. If you give him a piece of meat, and said, from the Nazi, he didn't, didn't take it. But if you give him a piece of meat from Jew, then he ate it.

[LAUGHTER]

And wagged his tail. [LAUGHS] Well, I think it is fitting that you became a doctor of veterinary medicine after all of that.

The deportations began. Describe a little bit what that meant for those that were deported. What happened? How did you know that was going on, other than they just weren't there one day?

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Actually, at school, for instance, your neighbor wasn't there. May be sick. But you knew no, he was deported.

At the beginning, the deportation was quite organized. Even got notification. You were asked to make a list of the possessions. And then, there's a certain date. Police, usually Gestapo, came and looked at the lists, mhm. And then they left the apartment. The apartment was sealed.

And the people, actually, sometimes in the beginning, we had to go along to a deportation collection place. Sometimes we are escorted there.

A collection place.

Yes, a collection. Which sometimes was a social hall, a synagogue, or whatever.

A main collection place, meaning humans go to this collection--

Correct. There we were-- stayed. And if they had, let's say, through the day, they arrived there, and at night, I think we had some hundreds or so. And then they were deported. They were transported to the railroad station and deported to the east.

During that whole time, of course, as you said earlier, your father had lost his occupation. He had a very tiny pension from his military service.

Thank goodness that he was a veteran. It was helpful.

How did the family-- I mean, how did you manage to exist?

My good aunt with her husband came in. My aunt paid for everything, from shoes, birthday parties, anything.

The aunt that we saw in the photographs?

Yeah, exactly. You can imagine. A growing boy needed shoes. And I still remember if he took me out buying shoes or clothing. And we went out. And afterwards, we went into a place, maybe a cafe. And I could select some pastry there. It was always a highlight. I remember that distinctly.

Sometime during that period for you, the British began bombing, or the Allies began bombing Berlin.

Yes.

What did that mean for you?

Well, it's a beginning, actually. It was almost a circus, by a few houses were bombed. And people went there, and really, oh, wonderful, look, oh, and be lucky that we escaped. And people enjoyed looking at the slightly damaged houses.

But that changed pretty soon. It was no longer a circus. And even we were bombed out twice.

And could you go into bomb shelters?

Yes. But bomb shelters, each house had a bomb shelter. But Jews were not permitted. We had to go to special bomb shelters. And each neighborhood, it was one bomb shelter for Jews, meaning the alarm sounded, you had to go downstairs, and let's say walk two or three blocks to a special bomb shelter.

And of course, something else. The air raid lasted longer than 1:30, school in that time, a Jewish school started two hours late, and classes only in 35 minutes. And sometimes we're sitting there. Well, it's 12:00. It's 1:00. 1:15. 15 minutes more. Like, let's hope the all clear won't come in the next 15 minutes. Well, sometimes it worked, and sometimes, well,

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we had to go early anyway.

So hope that the all-clear signal is not till after 1:30 in the morning so you don't have to go to school the next day.

Yeah, [INAUDIBLE].

Kids are kids, aren't they?

Oh, yes.

Speaking of being a kid, and going to school, you were able to continue in school until 1942. And then the schools closed.

Yes, in '42, and Jewish schools, which were actually German schools. And still, people were deported, and people expected to be deported.

But still, the teachers taught, and we learned. And actually, the school was an oasis. Once we were in the school, we forgot most of what's going on outside.

And the younger one of you might be surprised. School discipline, that was quite strict. For instance, in recess, we had to walk around the yard counterclockwise. No running. If you were caught running, you had to stand in the middle.

Or for instance, if you were caught sneezing without a handkerchief, you were very bad. You were not allowed laugh-- ha! ha! ha! No, we were told do that, laugh silently.

And you know, I still can't do this, put my hands in my pocket. If they saw you with both of your hands in your pockets, you were asked, are you going on a trip? Why go on a trip? Well, you packed your hands already.

But we didn't feel oppressed. That's the way it was. Even, well, pranks, what-- that's the way it was.

So school is closed in June--

Early '42.

What do you do then? You go to work, right?

Yes. Went to work the next day. And I worked first on the Jewish cemetery, and then, later on, the factory. And were gangs cleaning above the area.

The first was working in the Jewish cemetery.

In the Jewish cemetery.

But then you're forced by the Germans to-- by the Nazis to start working on cleanup crews?

First in a factory.

First in the factory.

Actually, that-- we worked in the factory. And what happened to, what, a very notorious so-called factory Aktion. This was in February '43. Why? It was suddenly the SS-- wasn't the Gestapo. This was an SS undertaking. They came with trucks, threw people right onto the trucks, and ready for deportation.

And another promise were made. And I was put in the truck too. And they brought us to a social [INAUDIBLE] or

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[INAUDIBLE]. And there we were.

And I was always lucky. The name Gluckstein means "lucky stone." And I was lucky. I was interrogated and told, well, your mother is Jewish. OK. Get out of here.

The guy was nasty. He let me and my friend go. Had he been nasty, who would have known? I would have been deported. Nobody would have known.

And after that, we didn't work-- the Jews didn't work in the factories anymore. We were in groups. We had to work cleaning up after air raids.

And, well, we got the very best education you can imagine. 15 years, 16 years old. And of course, we were very well protected. And now suddenly we worked with those gangs of foremen, nice guy, a former, actually a petty criminal, but pretty rough. And we learned certain words that we hadn't known before-- which, by the way, came in very handy. I will get to it later on.

And something else happened too. Well, there we were, young people, young boys. Well, we didn't learn anything. Well, we started a kind of school over there.

On the workforce.

On the workforce. Look, we had lawyers, chemists, and businessmen all among the work group. Well, they had to do something to keep the young fellows on their toes.

What happened, we were in with the wheelbarrow. It was being filled. And you were given a problem. By the time you came back with the empty wheelbarrow, you had to have the answer.

I still remember what I was asked. I had, when you come back, give the names of all the Great Lakes in the United States. Well, they kept us growing. And education was very important.

Can you imagine cleaning up, your life is threatened, you're cleaning up all the debris of bombing raids, and you're being quizzed on name the Great Lakes? I mean, that's remarkable.

And there too lucky. And days were very windy. We're cleaning up after an air raid. And the wall came down, and I was under it.

Well, I was hurt. Actually, they took me to a nearby hospital, Catholic hospital. They weren't supposed to treat Jews, but they sewed me up and treated me. Very decent.

In fact, up here, a big scar. And here covered it up. Now my hair is thinning, you can see it still.

Fritz, you had some other close calls. In fact, at one point, wasn't your mother ordered to bring you and your father in for a collection?

That is correct. My mother helped people escort people, accompanied people to the collection points. And someone was there, what are you doing here? Oh, you have a Jewish husband and a Jewish son. Tomorrow, we have to go to report at the-- the main deport, Grosse Hamburger Strasse. This was a old people's home. This was used as one of the collection points.

And we report there. At that time, they had-- we stop. And this S officer, he was brought down from Vienna. And he started to interview us, and interviewed me too, try to trick me.

But, well, apparently I satisfied him, and he let me and my father go. And I remember distinctly that it was my 16th birthday.

But you were interrogated on your 16th birthday.

Exactly. I still remember it. It's noteworthy too. I come in there, interrogation room, and there the [INAUDIBLE], the-- and his assistant, Austrian, were sitting behind the table. Lined up in chairs alongside were the German ones, to learn how to do it with the Austrians. I must say, usually the Austrian SS were the worst one.

You had an experience as part of a work detail involving Adolf Eichmann.

Yes. When we were bombed out, and stayed at the-- the second time bombed out. And there we found new quarters. We stayed at the Jewish hospital. And I went to work every morning in the hospital.

And one morning, I was getting up. You're hereby attached to a special so-called catastrophe mission, catastrophe mission. Well, put us into van, moving vans. It was moving vans. And we drove. And I tell you, now I know why so many things get bombed, like, moving.

There we have half an hour ride, the doors open, and there we are, the Devil's Den, they call it. Eichmann, the fellow who was responsible, or the driving force behind the deportation, his headquarters. That was the-- had been bombed, and they needed people to clean up.

And they took-- I was lucky. I was assigned to a Lieutenant Hardenberg. In fact, later on, looked in a book here, at the Holocaust Museum. He's real name was Von Hardenberg. I'm quite sure he's descendant of a Hardenberg, a Count Hardenberg, who in 1812 really was a staunch supporter of civil rights for the Jews.

The man didn't belong there. He never raised his voice. Was absolutely liked. And I still know what the young fellow got into the SS. But there were other nasty people. Above all, Eichmann's deputy was GÃ¼nther. He was running around with a big Shepherd, and he was really cursing people. And very unpleasant.

Is this the fellow that's still on the loose?

He is still on the loose. I wonder what happened to him. A very nasty man.

And again, I had to help to move one of the officers who lived in the headquarters. He was very civil, but at least he didn't live up with his reputation. One of the most vicious and aggressive officers.

And the head devil I saw only once. I was working. Suddenly, Eichmann is coming. Oh, I said, I never seen him.

Then he came. Nondescript. We wouldn't have noticed him in a crowd. Comes up, and is right next to me. Looks at some of the-- with some demolition expert, discussing whether certain things ought to be done or not. And then he disappeared.

And then again, [INAUDIBLE] was interesting. We had to walk in front of the building. And there were two enlisted SS guards. One was very nasty, harassing us all the time. The other, a very short man, they'll see him, reddish complexion. We didn't do.

Anyway, he took a rest. Took a rest. We had to observe something across the street. I wonder, the man made a point of not harassing us. Why? What did he do? The SS and even in Eichmann's headquarter.

You see, even in Eichmann's headquarters, the devil's den, found two, apparently, these men, Lieutenant Hardenberg and this enlisted man. I still wonder what happened to them.

There is a postscript, isn't there, to this part of your story? And I'm going to fast forward, if I could, a minute.

Yes.

After liberation, our OSS, which was the forerunner of the CIA, didn't they want to talk to you?

Yes, actually you've mentioned prior to immigration at the consulate. And I asked some question, well, how do you-- [INAUDIBLE] and so on and so on. And I mentioned by chance that I worked then for a short time-- actually, it was a week, in Eichmann's headquarter.

Whoa! Wait a minute. Would you please go out, then come back. And in half an hour they called me back in. And the two mostly were asking. And they wanted to know, where were the entrance, and where were this room, and whom did you see, and give the names, and so on. Apparently, they wanted to-- well, I remembered the names.

And that's an interesting little postscript, I think, to that incident that you went through.

You've talked to me also that during all of that ordeal, people had to maintain some semblance of a sense of humor. And you told me about one joke that was making the rounds about Mr. Goebbels.

Oh, yes.

Yeah. So would you share that with us?

Well, Goebbels had the misfortune to fall into the River Spree. It was a river. A young men come, pulls him out. Oh, thank you. Thank you for saving me. Now, you have [INAUDIBLE]. What would you like?

Well, he said, I'd like a state funeral. Why a state funeral? When my father finds out that I pulled you out of the river, he's going to kill me.

[LAUGHTER]

When you were working on all these work details, and doing this kind of work, was your father doing the same thing?

Yes, he was. And actually, the beginning we were separate, but at the end, for sometimes there were two groups. We were in the same group.

you actually were able to work together--

Yes.

--in that sense.

We all worked together.

You've described to me that because of the bombing, as it became more and more intense, that Berlin became more and more rubble-like, and life became exceptionally hard, for everybody of course. But what was it like at that point for you? Food is scarce. Water is scarce. What were conditions like?

Very scarce. As I mentioned, the ration cards for Jews were cut again and again. And without my aunt, I don't know what would have happened.

And of course, light, no electricity. Actually, there are two-- even the rations for the general population was very low. And there was another joke. When will the war be over? Well, the war will be over if the British, well, the British eat rats. And the Germans eat rat ersatz or rat substitute.

That would be the clue when the war was over. In fact, that basically happens, you said.

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Well, of course, I had another clue at one time that the war was close to the end. You worked close to SS barracks. Lo and behold, what did I see? There SS man pushing a truck. He didn't even have gasoline for the SS. Well, I knew that now we are pretty close.

During that time, though, you were actually caught without your star on a couple of times, weren't you?

Yes. I was lucky. Well, sometimes after air raids you want to go to work. It wasn't wise to wear the star. Or you would have been harassed too much. But after air raid, everybody tried to get into the trains with a star.

But one time, what happened to me, we had, after bombing, we had to move out of our first apartment. And I had stored some items in the attic of a building. And I went there to pick it up, some eating utensil, what I-- went down with a deep meditation, and suddenly stop.

There was a man in front of me. I knew immediately he was an Gestapo. You could tell by the way-- not by the clothes, but the way they acted. And he showed me his copper badge, and wanted to have my identification.

They know what they wanted. What is a young guy doing out of uniform? Are you a deserter? And I showed him my exclusion certificates, one from the labor service and one from the army. And of course, one stated that I was a Geltungsjude.

And he looked at me. And I wonder what would happen. Just a week ago, one of my fellow workers was stopped without a scar-- star-- and he wound up in one of the deportation collection points. Well, there I was standing. Except a couple of-- experience. Standing beside myself and saying, now what is going to happen here?

Well, he looked. He looked here, and he left.

I think what he was doing, he was considering, well, it's a German with Jewish blood dominant. He look and looked, and then he turned around and walked away. Lucky.

But you said to me that you survived really because of several things. One of them, of course you said was luck. And you've mentioned that Dr. Lucky Stone. You've mentioned that a number of times.

But you also said because of your mother, and also because of Marshal Konev.

That's correct.

Can you explain that.

Actually, because of my mother, I mentioned it once. After once I was picked up too at another occasion, and put into another former administrative building of the Jewish community. Recall what-- Rosen Street. All the husbands and children of mixed marriages were confined there for deportation. There was demonstration of the non-Jewish, of the wives outside.

At first, the police dispersed them. Then the SS dispersed them. But they came back, and finally, I guess, Goebbels realized, but they let him go. It's really, I suppose, some soldier comes back from the front and finds that his sister has been deported, not too good. Well, it saved us. Lucky again.

Did you protest for non-Jewish--

Well, we only protest outside. Yes, now a memorial, Jew. The non-Jewish women, Christian women, demonstration, give us back our husband and children. But he didn't go where it is. Threatened to shoot, and he came back. And, well, here I am. Yes.

And Marshal Konev. Well, another story. Listen, what is free, the American and the British approaching the Rhine. The

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Russians were on German soil. And we were detached. You are hereby detached from your ordinary work.

They got us to a place where we had to help laying foundations for a new Berlin. It would be completed after the war. Five minutes to 12. Still--

They were still building the foundations.

Was building. We liked it. For once, you could build something, not to tear down.

But then they detached again, and they sent us to the southern part of the city to build tank traps, tanks [INAUDIBLE]. We get there, and there was a big sign saying [GERMAN]. I would translate it perhaps like, go to work. No shirking. Yes, Soviet Panzers lurking.

Well, get to work. We dug ditches. And we put steel beams into the ground in 40-degree angles. And at midnight they put us onto a moving van, again moving van, to a social hall for some soup.

And there was an air raid. And at that time, they only bombed the northern port. And the morning, about 8 or 9 o'clock, that they came. Did it and done.

Well, before we left, we looked at our handiwork. The man said, now how did it hold up, the Russian tanks? Well, we decided, 31 minutes. Why 31 minutes? Well, Russian tanks come to the traps, to the obstacles. The crews laugh for 30 minutes, and it'll take them one minute to get through.

This probably what happened, because Marshal Konev came into Berlin so fast that no effective resistance could be mounted, and the fanatic Nazis couldn't get to the remaining Jews. And I feel my fellow workers and I had a tiny part in the--

Fritz, I've read several accounts of what Berlin was like after the war. And of course, you're there still with your family. Tell us a little bit, as we start to wrap up, what Berlin was like for you and your family post-war? In fact, I think you said the winter of '45, '46 was an extraordinarily harsh winter.

Yes, it was very cold. Of course, Berlin was devastated. Was absolutely-- I forget. Actually, the Russian bombarded Berlin. And there too, as I mentioned, I was lucky. We had no water. Had to go out, get water from a pump. Berlin still had pumps at the time. And I was waiting to get out. And it was neighbor, another fellow next to me. Suddenly, bang. He falls down dead, hit by shrapnel.

Well, it could have been me. [INAUDIBLE] Well, lucky stone.

And Berlin was absolutely devastated. And you have dead people, corpses, horses on the street.

And, well, there's something else. After the liberation at that time, of course, we-- one time we thought, just wait. The time comes we're going to get even with those people who harassed us and so on. Of course, we didn't do it. We wouldn't, we wasn't on the same level as them.

And actually, then, the Americans and Russians took turns in supplying Berlin. The Russians supplied us was usually turnips and dark bread. The Americans, who came later, then white bread. I still remember it.

And of course, at that time, the currency was cigarettes. We have care packages. And open up.

At that time, I think it was K rations, which had supplies, food for six or ten soldiers one day, and the cigarettes. And you always opened up and wondered, now what will be in? Because the cigarettes, Camels, highest on the black market. Followed by Lucky Strike, Chesterfield, and so on. And the lowest were rollies. But you still were glad to get rollies.

But you see, of course, you had to be very careful. My father, again, was a judge. We couldn't tell him that it was

cigarettes on the black market. He probably suspected it, but they never knew.

I wanted to ask just a couple more questions, Fritz, before we give the audience a chance. When the Russians took Berlin, when they came pouring in-- there's been a lot written about that-- how did you manage to survive them? And were they being discriminating--

Yes, it was.

--identified on the streets?

Well, of course, they came in. I still remember. I tried to get some bread. And they wanted to come back. And some people behind me something stop me. But some Russians already were at home, and they signal to the others, well, we are here. Let them come to us.

This was difficult. They asked you, what about-- you're Jewish? You can't be Jewish. All Jews.

Well, we had to persuade him. Actually, these troops that came in, the shock troops, were very decent. Late on, of course, the people, like the Kommissars and other people came, they had nothing to do. And that was always very pleasant.

But the troops that actually-- hundreds troops came, they were lucky too.

So you just, once you persuaded them that you were--

Yes, you are absolutely right. It was quite tricky. What are you doing here?

Young male?

Well, we had to show-- well, of course, we had some identification cards that helped--

[CROSS TALK].

--came in handy, with the star. [? We hoped ?] maybe we are posing as Jews. Could it be the Gestapo? Who knows? Well, this was difficult. Absolutely.

And of course, at that time, [INAUDIBLE] electricity and sanitation, well, it didn't work. You can imagine what that meant, actually. And I went back to school, in special courses to make up for lost time. And I had to study in the subway, like. There was light and it was reasonably warm.

Then, of course, you're sitting at a party or at home, suddenly the light went on. Of course, a silly story. People's party, and somebody had to make the cake. It was enough where we got a package from in the States. It was one piece left, and of course nobody takes the last piece. Lights went out. And you-- the horror, the scream.

Now there are two versions. Everybody grabbed with the hand and one with a fork, or everybody grab with a fork and one with the hand.

[LAUGHS]

But this actually happened.

Fritz, with that, in 1948, of course, you came to the United States and began a new life. And there's obviously just so much to talk about there too. But I'd like to ask our audience if they have a few questions they would like to ask of you, if we could do that. So, yes, ma'am.

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[INAUDIBLE]

The question is, you were pulled in and interrogated several times that you've mentioned. What was that about, you ask. Why were you let go when you were pulled in?

Well, I had to persuade them that my mother wasn't Jewish. But of course, sometimes they try to trick me. Oh, that was the reason why.

This was the Geltungsjuden notion.

It was the Geltungsjude. And there two, if they didn't like some things, they could have arrested me and kept me. And some people were kept. Most of the time, Geltungsjude escape deportation, but not always.

And again, to your point, a lot of luck.

A lot of luck.

Yes, sir.

[INAUDIBLE]

The question is, from your perspective, were the majority or great numbers of Germans aware of what was happening to the Jews, and part of it, or was it a small number that were actually aware or involved? Is that a fair citation?

Yes, relatively small number knew what was happening. If you want to generalize the population, you knew that something was going on. And we didn't know about what actually happened in Auschwitz, although reports came back from the front.

But you see, my father used to say the Germans are very good on the battlefield, but they have no civil courage. They knew something was going on, but, well, they didn't do it. They always say, at one time you needed just two words to be perfect in German. Two words. One was "achtung," attention, and the other was "jawohl," yes, sir. And if you knew that, that's all you needed.

I would say, most people didn't know the full extent, but they certainly knew that things were going on that were quite bad.

That their Jewish neighbors and Jewish communities were disappearing and going somewhere.

That is correct. And, well, what can we do? We are little people. We can do it. Will be too bad. Some were glad that they could take over the apartments and the jobs. Others. But I must say, the harassment on the street, no, people even came up to me and gave me some food, and milk, and so on.

You had we all know it-- what say, they didn't have the courage to do anything about it.

OK, we have another question? Yes, ma'am.

[INAUDIBLE]

The question is, what happened to your father?

My father was reinstated. And he said, if I were 10 years younger, I would go with you. But what can I do? I'm a judge. The law here is based on old Roman law, and the United States on English law.

And he also told me, Fritz, he said, I wish you would take a profession that is not limited to one country like law. Look

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what happened here. Well, I didn't.

Interesting. And if I could just follow up, your father and mother lived for a number of years, didn't they?

Yes, they stayed.

In Germany.

In Germany, yeah. I left. I didn't consider it my duty to rebuild Germany.

We have another question? Yes, ma'am.

[INAUDIBLE]

Yes, my mother's-- my mother's sister. Yes, she helped. And actually, sometimes even met at night, and the food packages. Yes.

If anybody didn't hear that in the back, the question was, how was your aunt able to help. You had a hand up just-- yes, sir.

[INAUDIBLE]

The questions is, what happens if your father was Christian and your mother was Jewish?

The same. If the children were raised Jewish, then the Jewish part had to wear the star. If there were no children, the Jewish part had to wear the star. If the children were not raised not Jewish, then the mixed marriage was called a privileged mixed marriage, and nobody had to wear the star.

Yes, sir.

[INAUDIBLE]

Question was, since your father served in the German army in World War I, was that also factored in for the reasons that you were able to escape so many close calls?

No, I don't think so. My father got a slightly higher pension. In 1935, with Hitler already in power, he got another decoration for serving in the war. First he got the Iron Cross after the war. And then, in 1935, he got another declaration signed by one of Hitler's deputies.

[INAUDIBLE]

The question is, was there much lingering resentment by the Jewish people after the war towards the Germans, or were they just so glad to survive and move on?

Actually, were not too many left. Most people left. And everything was blackened by it, I assure you, after the war. We went back with special courses to make up for lost time. And those courses were for Jewish students and German students who had-- would make the final-- like, a final examination board. And they were standing on one side, Jewish students. On the other side, the Germans. Well, the German students found out that the Jews are actually very normal people. And the Jews realized not all Germans are Gestapo or other fields.

Fritz, in the slideshow that we saw at the beginning of the program, there was a picture of you with all of your classmates and friends in party dress. Do you have any idea how many others survived in that photograph?

Yes. I am standing about five years old, especially the Jewish festival. I think it was Purim.

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I would say those people, 80% didn't survive. And that is very conservative. Very few survived.

I'm just, on a maybe slightly lighter note, Fritz mentioned earlier the currency were cigarettes, and the pecking order of the cigarette. When you came to United States and stepped on the ship, I remember you saying the captain had something to say to everybody.

Yes. "Ladies and gentlemen, let me inform you, the moment now you entered the ship, and put-- set foot on the ship, the cigarette is just a cigarette. Nothing else. This, don't forget that."

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, you've done, just in a short time, Fritz, you've done a remarkable job of giving us a glimpse into what you went through over many years, from your early childhood, the rise of Nazism, and then surviving through the war in Berlin. And then, of course, what we didn't get to is your life becoming really a very accomplished man and raising a wonderful family here in the United States.

Before I turn back to Fritz to really conclude today's program, I do want to thank everybody for joining us. I'd like to remind you that we have a First Person program every Wednesday at 1 o'clock until August 28.

Next Wednesday, March 27, we will have another First Person conversation, and we will speak next week with Mr. Leon Merrick, who is from Poland. At age 14, Mr. Merrick was forced by the Nazis into the LÃ³dz ghetto. From there, he was sent into slave labor. In 1945, he escaped from a transport to Germany and survived the war. And so we encourage you, if you're in town, to please come back next week, or any Wednesday, between now and the end of August.

It's our tradition that the "first person" has the last word. And with that, I'd like to turn the program back to Fritz, and ask him to share a final thought with us, and including, you might just mention something about why it is that after all you went through, you are volunteering here in the museum.

Well, I felt the old age for once is to my advantage. And why? I still can read letters that were written in the German cursive SÃ¼tterlin script. There are very few people left who can do it. They don't teach this anymore. Even if you make a PhD in German, it's not taught, the script. Unless you're a historian you don't learn it. And I'm glad I can help there.

And if I leave you with one thought, do it now. Don't put things off. Don't keep things for good. Make that call. Write that letter. Make that visit. When you go home, go and have your best bottle of wine. Don't need it for a special occasion.

But now, comes a special occasion, we buy another one. Now is the time.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you very much, Fritz.

[APPLAUSE]

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