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 the First Person program. Today's first person is Rabbi Jacob Wiener, whom we shall meet shortly. First Person has a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who are sharing with us their firsthand accounts of their own experiences during the Holocaust and during World War II. All First Person guests presently serve as volunteers here in the museum.

Each Wednesday between now and August 28th, we will have another First Person guest. If you go to the museum's website at www.ushmm.org-- that's www.ushmm.org-- you can see the list of those who will be appearing on the First Person program each Wednesday between now and, as I said, August 28th. This 2002 series of First Person is made possible by a generous gift of the Helena Rubinstein Foundation, to whom we are very grateful for making this year's program possible.

I'd like to introduce you to several individuals who are important to making this program successful each week. And they are Martin Goldman, who is standing in the back, Martin back there, who is the director of survivor affairs here at the museum, Andrea Lewis, who's standing in the back door from the public programs education department, and then Harold and Dora, if you would wave, two individuals who help greet you as you come through the door.

I want you to know who they are, not just because they are important to the program, but we invite you to chat with any of us afterwards if you have thoughts, comments, or anything else you'd like to share with us about the First Person program. We will listen as Jacob Wiener shares his first-person account of his experience during the Holocaust for about 40 minutes. We will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask Mr. Wiener some questions.

Before you are introduced to him, I have several requests of you. First, if possible, please stay in your seats throughout the hour's program. That will minimize any disruptions while Jacob Wiener is speaking. And second, if you have any questions during our question and answer period, please, try to make them brief. And then I will repeat the question before Jacob Wiener responds to it. That way, we ensure everybody in the audience hears the question. I'd also like to let any of you who are holding passes this afternoon for 1:30, or 2 o'clock, or 1:45 for the permanent exhibition, please know they're good for the rest of the afternoon. So if you stay put with us through 2 o'clock, you won't miss anything.

And with that, I'd like to introduce Jacob Wiener, our guest on First Person today. I've had the privilege of spending some time with Jacob and hearing about his experiences during the Holocaust, as you will hear today. Jacob Wiener was a young man attending the Jewish Teachers' Seminary in WÃ¼rzburg, Germany when Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, occurred.

On that night in November 1938, in Bremen, his hometown, Nazis murdered Jacob's mother. After being in prison for more than a week, he returned to Bremen, where he became active in the Jewish community, serving as its liaison to the Gestapo. In 1939, Jacob, his father, and three siblings left Germany to find refuge in Canada. From there, Jacob came to the United States.

We've prepared a brief slide presentation to help with the introduction of Rabbi Jacob Wiener. In this photo, we have, on the far right, Benno and Gerd Zwienicki, now Jacob Wiener, posing with a group of non-Jewish children in their neighborhood. The photo here, of course, the circle is on our First Person guest. Here, we have a map of Europe with Germany highlighted. And here, we have a more detailed map of Germany, showing you where the city of Bremen is located, the birthplace of Jacob Wiener, who was born in Bremen in 1917.

As a child, Jacob experienced the hardships of the Depression and witnessed the violent street fights between the Nazis and their political opponents, the communists and socialists. This photograph shows a roundup of political opponents of the Nazi regime in 1933. After graduation from high school, Jacob began rabbinical studies in Frankfurt-am-Main, and later, at the Jewish Teachers' Seminary in WÃ¼rzburg.

This photo is a view of the WÃ¼rzburg Jewish Teachers' Seminary building. This is a group shot of the graduating class of the WÃ¼rzburg Jewish Teachers' Seminary shortly before it closed for good on Kristallnacht 1939. And here on the far right, the circle shows Jacob Wiener. This is a map of Germany showing cities in which synagogues were destroyed

on Kristallnacht.

Here, we have a picture of Germans passing a broken window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht November 10, 1938. On Kristallnacht, Jacob was arrested and held for eight days in the WÃ¼rzburg jail. This photograph shows Jews arrested after Kristallnacht awaiting deportation to the Dachau concentration camp.

And the next photo shows Jews arrested during Kristallnacht lining up for roll-call at the Buchenwald concentration camp. As I mentioned earlier, Jacob, his father, and several siblings ended up being able to go to Canada. And of course, the arrow points to Canada. And they began their journey May 31, 1939, almost to the day 63 years ago. Our final photo is of Jacob as he studied outside the WÃ¼rzburg Jewish Teachers' Seminary shortly before it closed down on Kristallnacht.

Upon arriving in Baltimore in the United States, Jacob attended rabbinical college and was ordained in 1944. He subsequently established a very accomplished career in the human services field, particularly in the emerging field of child welfare, where he contributed to the creation of child welfare laws. He also founded a home for children and earned his PhD from New York University.

Today, Jacob lives here in the Washington area. He's a founding volunteer here at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where you will find him each Tuesday. He's presently working on his memoirs. I'm very sorry to say that Jacob lost his lovely wife, Trudel this past January after nearly 54 years of marriage. Trudel, too, was a Holocaust survivor.

Jacob and Trudel have three children, who now among them have produced 17 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, with a fifth on the way. I'm pleased to say that Jacob's daughter, Judy, and her son, Jacob's grandson, Moshe, are with us right here in the front row. Why don't you do a little wave? And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mr. Jacob Wiener. Jacob, would you join us?

Jacob, thank you for joining us and for being willing to serve as our first person today. Jacob, you were old enough to be aware of Hitler's rise to power and to feel its effect upon your community, your family, and yourself. Perhaps we could start today, Jacob, with you telling us about your family, your community, and life in general for you prior to Kristallnacht in 1938.

Good afternoon. The time before Hitler came to power, it was a very turbulent time in Germany. I went to school. And at that time, there wasn't much difference between Jewish and non-Jewish people. They were together. They were living in peace. I had playmates, as you saw in the first picture here. In our street, we played together. We didn't know anything about antisemitism.

However, as time went on, slowly, the Nazi Party, the National Socialist Democratic Party came into power and got more and more because there were very bad times in Germany, especially when the inflation was very much up. And also, when the moratorium was-- they signed in Germany in 1929. But our neighbors and us were very good friends.

During the time when Hitler came to power, there were street fights going on between the Nazis and the communists. And I saw them and sometimes looked out of the window. And I saw them turning over cars, and streetcars, and other things like that. It was a very turbulent time. But in 1928, when I once went with my mother, at that time in the tramway, the Nazis came marching in into the tramway and started anti-Jewish slogans.

And my mother said, at that time, it's going to be very hard for us. And it was. It happened to be later on this way. There's more I could tell you about. But that's about the situation how it was in Germany until finally, Hitler came to power in 1933. And he came to power because the president at that time in Germany, Hindenburg, whom I saw personally at one time, had no choice. And he elected-- he appointed Hitler as the chancellor. And that was the end of it for us.

Jacob, your family was considered stateless at one point. Can you tell us a little bit what that meant to be stateless?

Every country has different laws. In Germany, the law was not like in America. In the United States, if you are born here, you're an American citizen. You're absolute. I mean, just like that, but just by being born with it. In Europe, it's different. In Europe, you are citizen according to what your father is. And my father came from Russia just before the First World War and settled in Germany.

At that time, Russia, soon after the First World War, became the Soviet Union in 1922. And what happened is they made a law that anyone who doesn't return, any Russian citizen who doesn't return immediately, will lose their citizenship. My father didn't want to return. So he lost his citizenship and became what we call stateless, without a state, a person without the state. And therefore, I was stateless.

You had said to me at one point that that wasn't necessarily a bad thing under certain circumstances. And why was that? I think that you-- there was a time when it may have saved you and your father from being rounded up by being considered stateless.

The Nazis afterwards, when they came to power, they considered most Jews who were living in Germany like German Jews. However, some of them had their own ideas. And they didn't go along with that. And they said, a stateless person is to be treated differently. And therefore, when they arrested the Jews in 1938, '39, I was not-- I was arrested. But I was not sent to the concentration camp because I was stateless. My brother, on the other hand, who was also stateless, he was sent to Sachsenhausen, to a concentration camp. Everyone did what they want.

Depending on what town or city they were in.

Yeah, and what their mood was.

Jacob, a little bit more about that time before Kristallnacht. Your father and his business began to be harassed. Tell us a little bit about the ways in which the Nazis started harassing your father.

This actually started before. But it started and continued in a much greater measure afterwards because my father had a bicycle business. We sold bicycles, and motorcycles, and repair shop. And one day in the year Nazis came to power, they wanted to find some fault with the Jews, that they either did not keep the law, the German law, or something, or they wanted to make them feel bad and evil in the eyes of the population.

Our neighbors always thought-- and this is something which we must remember that they thought and they told us, even 1928, what I told you before-- they said, even if the Nazis came to power, they said, it wouldn't be for long because Germany is such a great country with such great poets, and such great scientists, and so forth. They wouldn't do that. But it happened.

Because they thought that it would not happen here, it cannot happen here, but we cannot take this for granted anymore. In turn, it cannot happen here, we cannot take for granted. It might happen here, just like it happened here six months ago. But we cannot take anything for granted.

So what they did is they planted next to our business another man, who was not a good mechanic. My father was a mechanic and bicycle and motorcyclist. And they planted him there to have competition with us. Of course, he didn't know his business very well. He came over very many times to my father. And he taught him how to do it. In order to make it worse, they asked him to build a high wall between our house and the next house, so high that 3/4 of the kitchen window was covered up. Well, they did all kinds of things.

So Jacob, just so I understand-- your father had a bicycle and motorcycle repair business. So the Nazis set up in business a competitor.

A competitor.

And then this fellow they set up in business, because he didn't know what he was doing, would come over quietly and ask your father how to repair things? And that was one of the ways in which they tried to drive your father out?

In addition, they wanted to have customers come to us and buy things. And then afterwards, they accused us of having given them a different price, or something fake, or things of this sort.

So like accusing your father of fraud or something.

Yeah, to put something on us.

Didn't you tell me that he was either questioned by the authorities about that, and one of your neighbors spoke up for him?

Yeah. He was then taken to the court. And while he was going to the court, he looked around. And he saw one of our neighbors who was behind him. That was the one who actually wanted him to be punished and to be-- they wanted all the Jews to be punished in some way, one way or another. Was not a good time.

Jacob, you mentioned just a few moments ago that you saw Hindenburg once. You also saw Hitler.

Yeah, I saw Hitler.

You remember going to hit Goebbels, right?

He was already a very old man at that time. And they elected him, like they sometimes do also here, because he was a military man. And he had defeated the Russians in the First World War, the Battle of Tannenberg. One day, I went with my parents in Bremen in a park. And Hindenburg came. At that time, you see, you didn't need that much security as we need now because even the Franklin Roosevelt, he could go in sometimes without any reservation.

But Hindenburg was just walking there with his stick. And he came up to me. And I was only a few years old. And he took me into his arm. And he said to me, what is your name? I told him my name. And he asked me, what do you want to be when you grow up? I said to him-- and that was really some kind of a-- and how do you call it-- an idea. I said, yeah, I want to be a mensch. A mensch means a human being.

This is what you said to Hindenburg?

I said this in German. [GERMAN]. I want to be a human being. He tells me even later on that the people after him were not acting like human beings because they were very evil and they did not have any mercy on other people. And I saw Hitler one day. This was in 1934. I saw him in Hamburg. At that time, he wasn't so strong yet. But when he came to Hamburg-- in Hamburg is a special section, if you know the city-- which is called the [GERMAN] section, where many Jews lived.

Somehow, he changed his route. And instead of going through the main city, he went through the side with the German city, the Jewish part. And he came. And I was walking on that street, happened to be walking there. This was a street with an Allee. Allee means trees on the side. And he came there. Well, the question for me was what should I do? Hitler had his hand on the belt with a buckle. And he was making this salute. This was a German salute. This was a Hitler salute. Afterwards, we only had the Hitler salute.

And he had the German salute. And he was standing there. He wasn't very tall, maybe 5 feet 6, wasn't he? And what happens is he came by there. And he had his bodyguards around him. When I came, I just slowly raised my hand like this, not very much. And I said to myself-- and then I say, Heil Hitler, of course. Then I said to him, that's how high the trash lies in Germany. And you made it. He didn't hear this. But I heard it.

But you heard it, that's right.

I heard it. And he continued. And I continued.

Jacob, you used an expression in a conversation we had that you might share with all of us. And that is you referred to burned pancakes.

Burned pancakes-- burned pancakes is an expression, which means-- if you know what a burned pancake is, it's red from the inside and browned from the outside. Because in the very beginning, many communists-- communists is red-- and Nazism had Brownshirts. They were brown. So many people, communists, suddenly, were wearing Nazi uniform. We called them-- I called them, and many other people called them burned pancakes because they were brown from the outside. But inside, they were actually communists.

Red on the inside, brown on the outside.

And they were that from the Inside. But after some time, you see, of course, the Nazis discovered this. And they were all sent to prison.

Right. Jacob, in just a moment, I know, we're going to talk about an extraordinarily difficult subject for you. And that's what happened to your mother on Kristallnacht. Would you tell us a little bit, though, about your mother? She was a pretty extraordinary woman.

Yeah. You see, this happened in November. I was studying in the school at WÃ¼rzburg, as you saw. And we knew already, but we were so overwhelmed by the happenings and by the politics which were growing outside that we didn't care anymore and we didn't read very much anymore. It's sometimes not good to read too much.

What happened is on the night from the 9th to the 10th of November, we were supposed in school to have a test, a final test, a teacher's test. And that was on a Thursday morning, Wednesday through Thursday night. And I went home. I was sleeping in WÃ¼rzburg in a dormitory. This was about 10-15 minutes' walk from the institute, from the teachers' seminary.

And I went to bed early because I wanted to be fresh next morning for the test. I have to make a long story short-- it would be too much, that's a story by itself. Well, I should make a story short. In the middle of the night, they came and broke in. There was a noise. I heard a noise. The two colleagues and myself in this--

In the dormitory.

--the dormitory, I woke up and I heard the noise. It was maybe 2:00-3:30 in the morning. I said to my neighbors, wake up, something is coming our way. And whenever you hear danger, be prepared for it. It's better to confront it than to run away from it. I said, I want to confront it. So I got up. I got dressed. And they got dressed. And after a few minutes, people came in. And very strangely, these people came in in civilian uniforms. They were Nazis. But they wanted to believe the world that it was a group, the populous, the population. And it was not the Nazi Party.

So they weren't wearing their uniforms, they were--

Not in my place. Maybe in other places, they did.

Yeah, but civilian dress.

They went there as civilians. And they came to us and said, this time, we are not banning your hair. I don't know what that means because later on, they killed the whole person. Take had releases, which he unpacked and threw them against the window. To make a long story short, and afterwards, they took us out. And we went through the dormitory.

I know you want to make it short, but just say a little bit about that when they broke in. These were thugs in civilian clothes. They started trying to intimidate you by breaking everything in your room, is that right?

Yes. And then we saw them, they went on in this hallway. It was a hallway. And there was a window to a courtyard. They took typewriters and so threw them through the windows.

They threw your typewriters out the window?

Then on the other hand, we went downstairs-- this was the second floor. We went downstairs. And we passed by the ink. And they had cut our taps of the sink that the water just rushed out. And they were hanging lamps. They cut off the hanging lamps. And we went downstairs. When we came downstairs, there was a house couple taking care of us and the janitor-- was non-Jewish janitor. The non-Jewish janitor told us, pack up because they're coming back. They're not here, pack up.

The housewoman-- I mean, her husband, he was Jewish, he thought he could go to the police and report it. But he never came back because the Nazis had told the police, lay off, it's our night. But they came back after a while. And then they told us, stand all in a line. Make lines of five apart. And walk through the streets.

Now, the streets in WÃ¼rzburg were cobblestone streets. You see, they're very narrow. And we passed by the burning synagogue. And then they let us at a big barrack, big place. They had a king, the Bavarian king. And they led us through the new prison. And they took us what they called protective custody. Protective custody to protect us. But we didn't need protection. We did need protection, yes.

And the Germans were very meticulous. They took everything by the penny and so forth. They told us, empty your pockets. How much money do you have? Even one penny, they ripped only one penny. I even have the documents to that effect. Everything, they wrote down exactly. That's why we have some information on them, even though they wanted to keep it secret, and after the war, we didn't hear any more about it.

So they marched you to the jail.

Marched us through the city. And while we were marching through the city, the populace, they told them, stand at the side. Spit at them, call them names, and beat them, if possible, and so forth.

And all this was, they said, to protect you. They were arresting you.

They wanted to protect me, yeah.

And then what happened, Jacob? Then we came to the prison. And we were put in different cells. There were 15 boys within my cell. And they gave us some soup, a little bit of water with a few beans, and so forth. After eight days in the prison, they called over those people. And I told you before about what stateless means. They called over-- there were only seven people who were stateless. They called us to the side. They always read from a long sheet of paper all the names that everyone was there. They were very meticulous.

And they said to us, good. This was the eighth day. In the evening, they came again. And they said, we are emptying the prison. All the rest of you are being sent to concentration camps-- Dachau, Buchenwald, and so forth.

And these seven people stayed behind. I stayed behind. And they told us, go downstairs. You are released. However, you must report to your home city within 24 hours. You must report to the Gestapo in your city, which I did in the night. Of course, I had no money. I met someone. I had some money. I went on a train. And the whole night, I walked up and down the train because Nazis were in the train. And I don't want to be found out, you see.

So this is-- so you're going back to Bremen by train.

Because I went back to Bremen by train. And when I came to Bremen, I said, I wanted first thing to call my parents because we had had no contact with the outside world for the eight days, you see. Don't have contact there. You're just in there, any place where you don't know what's going on in the world.

Did you know that what had happened in WÃ¼rzburg was going on in Bremen?

I didn't know anything at that point. You don't know anything. You are just there, completely caught, completely by yourself afterwards.

So you got back to Bremen. And what did you find there?

Make it short, when I came to Bremen, I called up my parents. But there was no answer. Then I took a tramway, the streetcar that's called here. And I went there. And when I came to the house, I saw the window, our store window was barricaded with wood. And I ran to the other side. We had one entrance to the store, one entrance to our house. The entrance to the house, there was a sign, get the key from the police department.

While I was standing there about maybe 10 o'clock in the morning because we traveled during the night. I traveled during the night. I noticed that on the other side of our business, there was a furniture store. And one of the furniture store was standing out inside his store. And he was looking me over, looking me over. And I went over to him. He was afraid to go out and to be seen talking to a Jewish person.

So I leaned in, then he told me the whole story. So what he told me is this, really brief. He told me that during the last night, the Nazis came. And this is a very-- I don't understand why. Two people came, three people came. And they were all customers. They came the day before into our store. They came. And they called out into the house. Our bedroom was on the second or third floor and windows outside. So they called out and they said, Josef, my father's name, wake up.

And when they heard no answer, then they broke the door. And they went up. And they found my mother in there in the bedroom. And they asked her, where's your husband? And of course, she didn't know. Because in the meantime, my father had escaped, run over the roofs and escaped. And before he escaped, he told this neighbor, a good friend of ours, a non-Jewish person, he told them, I'm going to harbor. Bremen's a port. And a ship's going. And I will go to Sweden. Of course, he never went there. But he had in mind to go there.

So they-- when she did not answer, they point blank shot her. We afterwards found the bullet. But that's what happened. And then they left. There is a report which I recently saw when I returned to Germany in 1997. They showed me the report how they interviewed my brother, who was also in that building at that time. All right. So that's what happened.

Jacob, I know you want to move on, just the men who confronted and then killed your mother had been customers of your father. And when you learn what happened from the shopkeeper across the street, if you don't mind, I'm going to just say that Jacob told me about his mother, who was very educated, and she had been a prominent teacher of a method that's very similar today to the Montessori method, the Froebel method, right-- Froebel method, a remarkable lady.

What did you do then, Jacob, when you heard the story of what had happened? And this had all occurred on that same night of November 9 and 10. So while you were experiencing what you were experiencing with your colleagues at the WÃ¼rzburg Jewish Teachers' Seminary, that same night, this is what was happening in Bremen and with your family.

After that, I had one idea. I went to Hamburg because my sister, at that time, was in Hamburg like a house helper, giving help because that was the only kind of a job that Jewish girls could get at that time. And I went to Hamburg. And they were very much surprised to see when suddenly, I came in the evening, 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock, in November, it's already very dark early in Germany.

And from there, you got very quickly very involved in the Jewish community. You started to take on some major responsibilities at that point.

After I came back to Bremen, I took some time. Slowly, when more people came back from concentration camps and so forth, they were released, either because they had affidavits to go to other countries or because of certain other reasons. They came together and they formed a congregation again. And I joined them. And I helped them out. We started to get small synagogue services and other services. And I helped them also.

But then I saw that Jewish children could no longer go to any kind of school. The most difficult thing and the most

serious things for children is not to learn. Education is the most important. What happened is I wanted to make a school for Jewish children because they could not go to any other school anymore. And I went to the Gestapo.

The Gestapo man, of course, was sitting there with his legs on a chair. And when I came in, this was a Gestapo building, it was a building that had no sign outside. It had a little bell on top of it. You would push a bell. And silently, a door opens. And I came into the building. There was a big sign with a man like this, like this means silence-- in German, schweigen. Because they were schweigen, they were not talking anything. That's one of the things-- everything they did, you see, was deceit. They did not want them to know. Schweigen means to be silent.

So in the Gestapo building, there's a poster of a man with a fingers to his pursed lips--

More poster, yeah.

--saying, silence.

Right.

So you went to see this Gestapo.

And I had gotten in a discussion with him. Of course, he had his own agenda. And I had my agenda. His agenda was he wanted to know from the Jews as much as possible about the Jews. All little [INAUDIBLE] maps-- they had complete details of where a Jew was living, and what he was doing, what his intention was. They were spying all over.

My intention was different. My intention was when I went to the Gestapo, I wanted to get people out of concentration camps. And I sometimes did. And I wanted to build a Jewish school. So he always told me, you cannot have a Jewish school. I said, why not? And I was arguing with him. He said, you cannot have a Jewish school because during the time when non-Jewish schooling, Aryans, are being taught, Jewish children cannot be taught at the same time. That would be [GERMAN].

Now, what happened is I said, to him, OK. Then let us have a school in the afternoon. And he was always against it until one day, I said to him, why can't we have this building? Because it's not used. It's empty. So then he finally gave us permission. And I had about 42 children. I was not even finished, but I was able to teach and principal everything. But we had to have teachers. So I had to educate some merchants and other people to have--

To make teachers of professions.

And this happened till I left Germany. Afterwards, another one took over the school. It existed till 1941.

The school that you started remained until 1941.

And I even saw two of my students in Washington Heights in New York later on. They're still there.

They're still there. They were your students in this school.

Yeah. They were in there.

Now, what other activities were you trying to do with the Gestapo? You were trying to, as you said, trying to get some people released from concentration camps and get them to safety. And you had some success at that, you said.

Yes. For instance, as I said before, my brother was sent to a concentration camp. But somehow, we managed to get him out of the concentration camp and send him to the Jewish hospital in Hamburg. One night, in January, I think, he came in the middle of the night. And my brother and I were sleeping there because my brother-- I didn't tell you that-- younger brother, you see-- when my mother was killed, he wanted to go to a doctor. But the Nazis ran after him. And he ran away. I don't know how he came from Bremen to Hamburg because that's about 100-200 kilometers. But I found

him later on in Hamburg.

So one night, they came. And they knocked at the door. And I said to myself-- first, I didn't answer it. And I said to them, let me see who it is. And I saw them. And I let them in. And let them in. I asked them, what do you want? And they said, we are looking for your brother. OK, go ahead. Look wherever you can find him. And they looked. And they turned over the beds and looked in drawers, under the bed, over the bed, who knows? So then in the end, he came, and he said, thank you. You don't have to thank me. I thought you are such smart people. You have records of every person, every Jew in the country. Didn't you know that he was in a hospital in Hamburg? Didn't answer me.

That's the story. Jacob, how about your father? He had, on the night of November 9 through 10, that morning, he was gone. How did you reconnect with your father at that time?

It was a miracle. Because I went to Hamburg, as I said. And there, I found him. Of course, he was sitting shiva. Shiva is a Jewish custom, you see. After seven days, you sit there and you mourn. So he was sitting shiva in Hamburg in some family. And there, I met him.

Some family had taken him in?

My brother was so young, they put him into an orphan home-- not what they call them orphan, but really a kind of children's home. But I mean, he was there.

And then while you were starting the school and then helping to get people out of the camps, how did your father-- how did he manage? What was your father doing during that time?

He didn't do very much because the business was closed, everything like this. And you just had to prepare. We were just hoping because Kristallnacht was the day which, I think, that the whole world, even in America, even in the United States, felt for the first time that you cannot deal with them, that sometimes, some situation cannot deal with the person. Because they saw that Hitler really wanted to do what he had in mind and that he was honest, more honest than some people nowadays.

He was telling the world, I want to kill all the Jews. Now, we saw that this really was it. This night, I think, is the night when the whole world, for the first time, saw what he wanted to do really. Of course, we owe to our people, all our friends, and all other peoples, also non-friends in the world, we always got the answers, wait, it will change. It cannot stay this way.

This was-- you were writing to try to find a way to then leave Germany. And I think you personally wrote to, I think you told me, over 200 letters.

I wrote letters. Yeah. I wrote letters to others. And then finally, one of our relatives in Canada who was always writing us, and why we can't do anything, it will get better, and so forth. And he helped us.

Even your relatives in Canada would write back and say, it'll get better.

But then what happened is then he said, he will do something. He was living in Saskatchewan, which is in the middle of one of the provinces of Canada. And he was influential. I don't know, get us what we call landing cards or affidavits, you see. And he got us affidavits to come to Canada.

This was your father's brother?

My father's cousin.

Was in Saskatchewan. Before we talk a little bit about your leaving Germany to go to Canada, after your mother's death, Jacob, one of the things that you wanted to do before you left was to get a death certificate about your mother. And you had an immense ordeal in doing that.

Yeah, I have the certificate here.

Right.

Before I left, I wanted to get a death certificate. So I went to the attorney general in Bremen. I went to him. And I couldn't get in. However, there was one door that says, no entry. So I went in. I went into the door of no entry and I saw many people sitting their desk, and writing papers, and so I went to one of the person and said, I want a death certificate. They said, go to him. So I go to him. So I said to him, you see, I want a death certificate. What happened? When did she die?

Well, he wrote me a death certificate. And I have it in German. It says, this is to certify that my mother, name, and so forth, you see, was found dead on the morning of November 10th at 4 o'clock in the morning. Everyone knows, you see, that 4 o'clock in the morning, this is the night. And everyone knows that during that night was the Kristallnacht. She was killed. So indirectly, they acknowledged it.

But just said, she was found.

She was found dead, yeah. Because even afterwards, you see, to bury her, they ordered two women to bury her. I saw this in a different document.

There's been, I guess, a belief over the years that Jews were not killed on the night of Kristallnacht. And yet, you know for a fact that at least five were killed in Bremen alone, and including your mother. So your belief is that there were many more killed throughout Germany at that time than has ever been acknowledged.

I cannot definitely say that. If I can say one thing, that people were killed. And they say, for instance, in this book and some books which I have, one book written by a German teacher, don't quote me, it's in this book, that 91 synagogues, you see-- there were many more that were destroyed because we didn't know at that time how many there were. And many things will come out now, even now, 50-60 years afterwards, because I still get letters from Germany about things which we didn't know before.

In fact, Jacob shared with me a book published in German in Germany that is a pretty detailed accounting of the deaths on the night of Kristallnacht in Bremen, including the death of his mother. Jacob, you you were finally able to get an affidavit because of your father's cousin in Saskatchewan. You got to Canada. And you arrived in Canada in June, I think, of 1939. And from there, you made your way to Baltimore to go to rabbinical school. But it wasn't smooth sailing even when you got here, was it?

Now, mainly first, we went from Hamburg. Before we went, of course, there was difficulty. We were not allowed to go with a non-German ship. But the German shipping companies-- there were two, the Hansa Lloyd and the German-American Line. They did not have openings for two years. We didn't want to stay for two more years in Germany.

We finally found the [INAUDIBLE] line in Britain. My father found it. And we got-- with them, we got a ferry from Hamburg to England. Then we went Southampton to Canada. It took a long time because it took about 15 days for us. We left on May 31 and we came on June 15 because the has come too far north into the iceberg section.

Then you decided to try to come to Baltimore to go to rabbinical school. Did you have difficulty getting into the United States? And then trying to get permanent status here was not easy for you.

Well, it was not easy. At that time-- I don't know if you may or may not know the history. But during that time, the final authority to grant visas to the United States was not-- they did not have the naturalization department, immigration and naturalization department. But the general consul in Montreal, in Canada, he had to give the permission. And after I told him the story, he gave us a visa, a student visa. We came to the United States.

And you wanted to try and get permanent status once you were here.

Even when I was in the United States in the beginning, I was still considered a enemy alien.

You were an enemy alien because you were German by birth.

Yeah. Because when I applied to become an air raid warden in the '40s during the war, I was an air raid warden for a little while. And they said to me, you can't be it anymore because you're an enemy alien. But eventually, you see, I got citizenship.

It's just to reiterate that so we all understand that in Germany, you'd been considered stateless. You arrive here and you're considered an enemy alien because you're born in Germany. And you had become an air raid warden here in Baltimore, in the Baltimore area. And then they told you, you could no longer be that because you were an enemy alien.

Yeah.

Yeah. But eventually, you ended up with your citizenship and have had a long and distinguished career that we're not going to have time to really talk about today. But Jacob, I thought maybe we could turn to our audience and ask if there's some questions that you'd like to ask of Mr. Wiener. We have one right off right here sir. The question is since the Gestapo were communicating with you, was that unusual? Did the Gestapo often have conversations or do business, if you will, with Jews?

I don't think so. But whenever they wanted to know something about Jews, they might have come there and asked Jews about it. Because they wanted to hear from the Jews directly. That's what I think.

But pretty much, you were the liaison from the community. It wasn't like you were talking with lots of different folks. Right, OK. Right. Yes, ma'am?

[INAUDIBLE]

Thank you.

[INAUDIBLE] It's so important [INAUDIBLE], there are [INAUDIBLE] others to [INAUDIBLE]. And so how, as a Holocaust survivor, are you and others [INAUDIBLE]?

The question was preceded by complimentary remarks to you-- to Jacob, about his courage and willingness to testify to his own experience and what you saw. And the question is how you and other survivors are working to make sure the truth is known in the face of people who attempt to deny that the Holocaust actually happened.

I think it's most important that people tell the truth. Because I always tell the children or other people who come here that there are three things that the Nazis wanted to impress upon the world by doing certain things that you should not do. Number one is deceit. They were lying to us. They were telling the people go into this place here, you will get a shower, and out came gas.

They were deporting the people. You deport them from one place to another because they should know the environment. They should be strange in every way. They should know where they are. It's a certainty. You see deportation, here comes dehumanization, uncertainty, [INAUDIBLE], which means they treated them like animals because they gave them a number. And they were only allowed to answer by the numbers. They could not answer by the name anymore. The name was taken away. Any identity as a human being was taken away from them. And of course, they were just finally that they killed them in any kind of a way. So that's what it is.

But I think we should start with telling people the truth. You see, that's most important. Otherwise, we cannot live together. We cannot trust each other. We should trust each other. Once we say only one thing about what happened to me in class one day. One day, it happened in class that the teacher said-- he came in Nazi uniform. I was still in Nazi school in '35, '36.

And he said to them and said to me, I have to read Hitler's Mein Kampf, his book. And I will do this on Saturday. I didn't come to school anymore on Saturday. Before, I used to. But then they made it all Jews have to come all days or no days because I was Orthodox at that time. Well, then I said to them, very good. Thank you for doing this because I know that the Germans now, under Hitler, want to become more German. I want to become more Jewish.

You have to have your identity. And you have to know what you are. And you have to stand up for it, and not to deny it. Because denial is the worst thing. That's what you said about the denial of the Holocaust, they deny it. But they were not there, fortunately. And anyone who was there can tell you about how it happened. You hope it will never happen again.

Thank you. We have some other questions. Yes, sir.

[INAUDIBLE]

Well, you have to ask them because the answer is, you see, there were less than 1% Jews in Germany. But these Jews were very diligent, you see. They set up businesses. And they were jealous and many other things that happened, you see. And you see, if you counted Nobel Prize winners, you see, there are percentage-wise more Jews than others. You have to see, they were very intelligent.

The question had been-- the comment had been that with such a small population of Germany that was Jewish, less than 1%, why did the Gestapo and the Nazis spend so much energy and effort on first harassing and then, of course, killing so many Jews? And so thank you for the answer, Jacob. I'd like to just ask a question, Jacob, if I could. And that is you've mentioned earlier that you went back to Germany, I think, in 1997, several years ago. You had mentioned to me at another point that you had three reasons for going back to Germany. Would you tell us a little bit about that?

My wife never wanted to go back to Germany. Many people who came from Germany, had come from Poland, and all these places don't want to go back. Even I didn't want to go back. But then I decided, I go back. And I went back for three reasons. Number one was I wanted to see the grave of my mother, which they had made in Bremen.

Number two, I wanted to find out, since I'm working in the Holocaust museum here as a volunteer and I do process and other things like that, so I wanted to know what kind of historical-- history, I mean, the Germans gave to their children about the Holocaust. What do the children in Germany learn about the Holocaust? Number three, I wanted to know if there are still Jews, and how many, and why they live in Germany. Because some of them don't want to return to Germany.

The answers are very simple. The first one, I saw the grave. It's still there and has been kept. Second one, what they learned about children-- what the children learned about the Holocaust, I was invited to a few schools in Germany, children about 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 years, and with some other people in 1997, already five years ago. And I talked to the children in German. And I asked them, tell me, was any one of your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents, or whoever they are, were they in the Holocaust? And what did they tell you about it? I wanted to see how it affected them.

Many of these children, you see, do not want to talk about it. But some of the children said, yes, my grandfather, my grandmother belonged to the Hitler Youth or to the Bundes Deutscher Madel, which means the German Girls, had a special organization. And they were dressed in the Nazi uniform. But when they came home, the parents said to them, quickly, take off your uniform. I don't want to see it. They couldn't do anything about it.

So the children really felt more ashamed about it, you see, than actually the grandparents. The grandparents and the great-grandparents who were in the Holocaust, they didn't want to talk about it-- schweigen, as I said before, quiet. They don't want to talk about it because it's a very difficult condition. And it isn't for the glory [INAUDIBLE] in there. Well, that's what it is.

Third, about Jews living in Germany nowadays-- most of them are coming from Israel or coming from neighboring countries. And some of them returned, but not very many. I knew the number, but I don't know it anymore. And some of them just lived there a little while because Germany was then, and I think also now, when all of Europe turns against the

Jews, I think Germany is still the country, I know from one person, you see, which is still more or less antisemitic-- even very antisemitic before-- than many other European countries now. But that's what it is.

So I went there. And I still get letters and so forth from German non-Jewish people and others like me every year. And this man who wrote this book about-- Living Among Us, he's writing a different book. He still writes me. People are looking to return property which was taken away from them to return it to the Jews. In Germany, they have a special organization like that. They must return it. That's what it is.

We have some other questions? I mean, if not, I'm going to ask them. But if you have them, please don't hesitate. You had the opportunity-- your family, not you-- your family had the opportunity, Jacob, didn't they, to get an affidavit and to leave Germany as early as 1923, but chose not to go. Tell us just a little bit about that.

They had-- I saw this-- an affidavit in 1923, where my parents got an affidavit because they had saved a person from some kind of an event which happened in this family. And we could have gone too. But my mother didn't want to go because all the family was in Germany. People don't like to separate from their families.

So at that time, of course, the decision was to stay here with all the family. Your parents made the decision to stay put because that's where the family was.

And it wasn't so bad in Germany, after all, in the pre-Hitler years, was not so bad. Was more or less a democracy.

Right. OK. Yes, sir.

[INAUDIBLE]

All these things happened not overnight. In Austria, it happened overnight. But in Germany, it happened over six years, from 1933 to 1939. When the war started, it happened slowly. In the beginning, a lot of Jews emigrated. Then it stopped. Then it came again after Kristallnacht. See, it went slowly. And they made many laws. And they wanted the separation completely to come-- differentiation of all the places, they wanted. You see, in fact, one day, a teacher told us, the whole world, Hitler says, is divided into superior and inferior races. Every religion is a race. The Jews were consider a race, not a religion.

Well, I said to the teacher, at that time, I said, well, Mr. So-and-so, you are mistaken. The world is not divided into superior races and inferior races. The world is divided into different races and different people. We have different people. We have some people who are watchers, some people who are shoemakers, some people who are bakers. Everyone has a different kind of occupation in which he is superior to the other. And we are different. I mean, you cannot say he is superior, he's inferior. That you can't say.

The question that preceded that had been from the gentleman that Jacob had mentioned that he played with non-Jewish children, that the community was integrated in that sense. And at some point, it changed. And asked about when that change occurred. We're going to wrap up now. It's 2 o'clock. And I want to thank you, Jacob, for being with us and being our First Person guest.

I guess I'm struck by the fact that your Kristallnacht obviously interrupted your budding career at that time as a teacher, becoming-- you were in a teaching training role. You set up that school for Jewish kids. Even after that, you came here and have begun-- and had a remarkable career of commitment to children, including helping to write some of the nation's child welfare laws. And I think we're all probably struck by that and your commitment, also, to always questioning and challenging, as you clearly have done throughout your life.

And so this is just a real honor for us, as it is an honor to have a First Person guest each Wednesday, every Wednesday between now and August 28. And so I'd like to invite all of you to return on any Wednesday that you can, including next Wednesday, June the 5th, when we will have as our first person Mrs. Flora Singer. Mrs. Singer is from Belgium. And she survived the Holocaust by being hidden in Catholic convents with her two sisters during the war. And so again, please, return next week or any Wednesday that you can. It's our tradition at First Person that our first person has the last

word. And with that, I'd like to turn it back to Rabbi Jacob Wiener to say a few words to close this week's First Person.

First of all, I want to thank all of you for coming. And to listen about people who survived the Holocaust is very important, as people mention it, really. And as survivors, this witness that Hitler did not achieve his goal, albeit any people they could. But thank god, a few people survived. And they can tell you the story. And you should learn history. I sometimes think that history is not too much taught in the United States, I think. But I don't want to argue that.

We survived only with the help of God and with the miracles which happened. Every step in my life, I would consider a miracle. I think, leaving Germany was a miracle. Having lived in Germany but to be able to come to Canada, coming to the United States, living in the United States, and so forth, every day is a miracle despite all the hardships which we went through. You must remember that period of the history. And we must learn about it. And I don't think we say it cannot happen here. But unfortunately, not so much peace in this world right now.

But what can I say? Because we offer peace. Many times peace is rejected with a vengeance in history. But I want to thank you all for coming. I wish you all well. Have a good year. Have everything good. Be in good health. And God shall help you. Thank you.