

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 fourth season of First Person, and our "first person" today is Rabbi Jacob Wiener. We shall meet Rabbi Wiener shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us firsthand their own experiences during the Holocaust and during World War II. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here in the museum. Each Wednesday through August 27 we will have a new First Person guest each week at 1 o'clock. The museum's website, at [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)-- that's [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)-- provides a preview of the upcoming First Person guests.

This 2003 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Woldenberg Foundation, to whom we are enormously grateful for making this year's program possible.

Jacob Wiener will share with us 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 Jacob some questions.

Before you are introduced to him, I have several requests of you. First, it's our hope that you can stay in your seat throughout the hour program. That will minimize any disruptions to Jacob while he's speaking. Secondly, during our question and answer period, if you have a question-- and we sure hope you will-- please try to make your question as brief as possible. I will repeat the question as best I can so that all in the room hear it, including Jacob. And then Jacob will respond to your question.

I'd also like to let those of you who are holding passes for the permanent exhibition for either 1:30 or 1:45 know that they are good for the balance of the afternoon. So you can sit comfortably through the program and know that you will not miss the permanent exhibition.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. 6 million were murdered. Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

As we will learn today, Jacob Wiener was a young man attending the Jewish teachers seminary in W $\ddot{A}$ rzburg, Germany, when Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, occurred. On that night, in early November 1938, in Bremen, his hometown, Nazis murdered Jacob's mother.

After being imprisoned 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. Jacob then went on to the United States.

We have prepared a brief slideshow to help with the introduction of Jacob. In our first photo, we have Benno and Gerd Zwienicki standing on the far right, first and second standing, who are posing with a group of non-Jewish children from the neighborhood. And our circle is on Jacob.

This is a map of Europe with an arrow pointing to Germany. And our second map is a detailed map of Germany with the arrow pointing to Bremen, where Jacob was born 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 W $\ddot{A}$ rzburg. This photo is a view of the W $\ddot{A}$ rzburg Jewish Teachers Seminary building. And then our

next photo is a group photo of the graduating class of the WÃ¼rzburg Jewish Teachers Seminary shortly before it closed down on Kristallnacht in 1938. And the circle is on Jacob at the far right.

Our next map of Germany shows synagogues destroyed on Kristallnacht. The dots represent cities where many synagogues were destroyed. And in this photograph, we see Germans passing the broken window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht the night of November 10-- 9 through 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 Dachau concentration camp. And in this next photo, we see Jews arrested during Kristallnacht lining up for roll call at the Buchenwald concentration camp.

In this map showing North America, the arrow points to Canada, which, on May 19-- May 31, 1939, the Zwienicki family left Germany and settled in Canada, where Jacob's father had a relative. And our final photo is of Jacob as he studies outside the WÃ¼rzburg Jewish Teachers Seminary shortly before it closed on Kristallnacht.

Upon arriving in Baltimore, Jacob attended Rabbinical College, and was ordained in 1944. He subsequently established a very accomplished career in human services, particularly in the emerging field of child welfare, where he contributed to the creation of our nation's 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 is a founding volunteer here at the US-- the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. And you will find him here each Tuesday. He is presently working on his memoirs.

I'm very sorry to say that Jacob lost his lovely wife, Trudel, last year after nearly 54 years of marriage. Trudel too was a Holocaust survivor. Jacob and Trudel had three children who now among them have produced 17 grandchildren and, as of this year, seven great grandchildren, adding two more in this past year. And I might mention that Jacob's daughter Judy, right here in the front row, is with us. Judy, you might wave. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our "first person," Rabbi Jacob Wiener.

[APPLAUSE]

OK. I'm going to put that real close. [INAUDIBLE] OK.

Jacob, thank you for joining us and for your willingness to serve as today's "first person." You were old enough to be aware of Hitler's rise to power, and to feel its effects upon your community, your family, and yourself. Please tell us, Jacob, about those years in the 1930s that led up to Kristallnacht, and what it was like for you and your family.

As you heard, I was born in Bremen, Germany. And Hitler came to power March-- on January 30, 1933. From that day on, everything was different than before. Before, we had in Germany a democracy-- which did not really work very well. But people more or less could do what they wanted to do.

From that day on, every day, new decrees were made. New laws were made. The Jews were forbidden to go to-- to have the shechitas, that Jewish kind of slaughtering.

And they were slowly after slowly being expelled from the schools. People who were there from before the Nazi time were dismissed, and everyone had to join the Nazi party.

When I went to school at that time, I was in a non-Jewish school, because the city of Bremen only had about 1,400 Jews who lived in different parts of the city, and they did not have a school. I got my teaching from a rabbi.

However, every day, new things came up, and the classmates of mine, they had to join-- they must join-- the Hitler Youth. The girls had to join the Association of German Girls. And it was really a time where you did not know from one day to the next what would happen.

So it went on for six years. It went very slowly, until 1939, when the war started.

Jacob, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions, if I might. In the eyes of the German government, you were considered stateless. What did that mean? Why were you considered stateless?

There's a different law in Germany than in the United States. In the United States, if you are born here, you are a United States citizen. In Europe, especially in Germany, if you were born in Germany, it did not make you a German citizen, but it goes where your father was born. My father was born in Russia, so I had been originally a Russian citizen.

However, in 1922, Russia became the Soviet Union, and they decided that any Russian who lives outside the United-- outside Russia would have to come back immediately to claim his Russian citizenship. If not, if they would not come back within three months, in 1922, they would become stateless. That means they have no state. And so I was stateless.

Jacob, you were studying, a rabbinical student at the time. Tell us a little bit about your family. What was your father's occupation?

I had originally-- my father was a mechanic. He had a bicycle business, motorcycles, repairs in the shop. And my mother was a teacher originally, but afterwards she became a secretary, a bookkeeper, et cetera.

And she had a beautiful handwriting. And people came from far and wide to have letters written by her. In those days, typewriters were not very much known. But he was an expert in his field, and the business went well, good enough.

And people would actually pay your mother to write letters for them. And she also was a pioneer in education of sorts. I think you described the Froebel method, which is somewhat like Montessori today, that she was very involved in.

Many times she did not take money from other people. But she was teaching a certain method which may not be known here, which is called the Froebel method, to teach the child about the environment, and as a total personality. This was a kind of teaching, like the Montessori method, which some of you may know.

Jacob, your father was a mechanic. And as the Nazis came to power and consolidated their power in the years leading up to Kristallnacht, he began to experience severe harassment in his business. Can you tell us about that?

Since the Nazis came to power, they always tried to Jews to do something secretly, because this was really the trade of the Nazis, to do many things secretly. And that's why we didn't know so much about the Nazi period until after the war.

However, they came many times into our business, friends of ours, and neighbors, and other people. And since he was a very good mechanic, they wanted his-- everything repaired by him.

They came in, for instance. They told us they wanted to sell us merchandise which was stolen, which, of course, is against the law. And for this, you are being brought to prison. Other times--

So just so I understand, they would deliberately bring him stolen goods in the hopes that he would purchase it, because then they could charge him with a crime.

Yeah. We did not buy this, of course. But many things happened.

Then at another time, they set up a competitor right next to our store, a Nazi competitor, whom they also made, like, a bicycle mechanic. But he didn't know his job very much, and he many times came over to my father to do the job for him.

In addition, they did something else. We had a court between our house and the next house. They built a very high wall onto the second floor of our building so that the air did not come in anymore. So they did all kinds of things, harassment. And she kind of raising all kinds of things, you see, to make it difficult for the Jews to go on with their business.

Tell us about a phrase that you used with me when we were together one time. You referred to "burnt pancakes." What was a burnt pancake?

In the beginning, when Hitler came to power, he wanted to abolish all the parties. There were about 38 parties in Germany. And the reason was because after the democracy, every person made his own party.

And what happened is these parties were fighting with each other. The biggest party when Hitler came to power were the Democrats and the Communists. The Communists had the red flag.

And what happened is, many times after Hitler came to power, the Communists remained Communists. And we found a certain word for them, which we called red pancakes. A red pancake is red from the inside. It's not completely baked. And from the outside it's brown.

So that's what it meant. From the inside, they were Communists, and outside they were Nazis. The Nazi uniforms, brown uniform. And I saw many people there.

Jacob, Bremen, you describe Bremen to me as a Hansestadt. What was a-- what was a Hansestadt.

Hansestadt means a free city that had its own government. There were a number of Hansestadt in Germany, like, Bremen, Hamburg, Lubeck, and different other states. Like, in Poland they had Danzig was also free state. It was independent of the country as a whole. It was part of the country. Like, for instance, different states in the United States, it was different state by itself.

Because it was an autonomous city, a Hansestadt, did you experience the full force of the Nazis later than other cities in Germany?

No, it advanced throughout Germany. In fact, Bremen remained Democrat a little longer than the other places.

You actually remember seeing Hitler and Goebbels, as I recall. Is that so? Do I recall that correctly?

Yeah, in the beginning, Hitler was not so much afraid of going and seeing the people and going to the people, among the people. Sometime there were not very much bodyguards.

One day, he came to Hamburg. Hamburg in the city which is not very far from Bremen, where I lived. And it had a certain section where mostly Jews live at that time.

So at that time, he made the decision. I'm coming to Hamburg, which is the second largest city in Germany. The largest one is Berlin. And he said to his people, I want to go through the Jewish sector, because they certainly wouldn't do anything against me. And they wouldn't.

So he came to this city, through the street, which was a side street with trees at the side. And I was just walking in the street. And I did not know what to do, because at that time, everyone had to greet Hitler.

There were two kinds of greetings to Hitler. One was this [INAUDIBLE]. This was called the German salute. This is the salute which Hitler gave. And the Hitler salute, which was like this. So if I didn't give any salute, anyone who didn't give a salute was beaten up.

But I thought to myself, I'll stay behind a tree. And I do like this, and make believe. And it happened. I went by. What did I think in my mind? That's a different story. [LAUGHS]

During those years with your family before Kristallnacht, your family had actually made plans earlier, thought about going to the United States earlier. And you'd actually even had an affidavit much earlier to go to the United States. Tell us a little bit about that.

We tried already many years ago before that, because my father had helped someone to go to the United States. And it was very easy at that time to come to the United States. You didn't need an affidavit. That only came later. But I don't want to go into the history, because it's the whole history of-- and the legislation, everything, changed over time day by day.

At that time, it was easy. It was so easy at one time that people came to us and they said buy the German citizenship. Buy it for money, for 50 Mark, which was very cheap at that time.

But my father said, no, I don't want to buy the German citizen, because I don't know what's happened to us. Because usually, unfortunately, it usually happens to us, you see, that when things go wrong, we are being punished for it. And we are-- and even those people who bought the German citizenship, 10 years later, Hitler abolished the German citizenship to all those who were not Aryans by birth.

And so with an affidavit that you had in hand, your dad-- your father decided to not go to the United States, and he stayed.

Because my mother wanted to remain in Germany, we have a Stammbaum-- a family tree, it's called-- for more than 200 years, going back on my mother's side in Germany. And her family was living there all the time.

So for 200 years, your family's been there. And your mother said, let's not go to the United States.

No, she wanted to stay with her family, and that's understandable.

Absolutely.

So we stayed in Germany.

Jacob, of course, on November 9 through 10, 1938, the night of Kristallnacht, that terrible night, you were away attending the Jewish Teachers Seminary in Würzburg in Bavaria. On that night, your mother was murdered. Can you tell us what happened to you and your classmates, and when you learned what happened to your mother.

At that time, I was in the Würzburg Seminary, as you saw in the picture. It's a school in Würzburg, about 200 kilometers-- no, more. 400 kilometers away from Bremen. And I was there.

This school was not very far from a train track. But I saw every day, during that year, railroad cars covered with tarpaulin and war material. We didn't know it was war material, but we saw there were tanks in there and other things, going on. Hitler was preparing for war from the beginning when he became-- when he came to power. So that happened.

Now it was in 1939 that they invaded. They invaded before. They invaded Austria, and Czechoslovakia, and all kinds of countries they invaded. He wanted to conquer the world. And anyone who was not of the certain brainwash, so to say, that Hitler was, would be exterminated. His whole aim was to make Germans the superiors.

So I was in that school at that time, and I was supposed to have an exam the next day. It would be November 9, 1938. And we prepared for it. So I said to myself, today is November the 8th. I'm going to bed early to be prepared and refreshed for the next morning when we having tests.

It was about a 10 minute's walk from there in Würzburg. And we were living in a dormitory. That's a residence for students. In that residence, the boys were sleeping, a boys' residence. And I went in there.

And there was a big dormitory room, and some smaller ones at the side. I was in the smaller one with two other boys. And we went there to sleep.

And then what happened?

So we slept-- and we slept. Things would be going on like always.

But I can tell you, the things were so overwhelming in Germany, whatever happened to us, that we soon said to ourself, don't read about this anymore. It's too much. And it was too much, because they had all the news printed on a kiosk, which is round kind of a pole. And it's pasted on there.

And I didn't read something which had happened two days before, on November 7. On November 7, which was two days before November 9, there was a notice that a German boy by the name of Herschel Grynszpan had gone to Paris, who was living in Paris, had tried to kill the German consular-- [? Dutch ?] consular, a third consular, I think it was. And he had not died. But he died on November 9, two days later.

How did this happen? It happened because the Germans were negotiating with the Polish people regarding the city of Danzig. Danzig, as I said, is a free city. And they want a dancing because dancing is the only free city to the Baltic ocean.

And at that time, they were negotiating. They were putting all the Jews who were of Polish descent, who hadn't been in Poland for five years, they put them on a train. And the trains went into Poland. And when the negotiating was going like this, the train when they were negotiating well for Germany, it went back into Germany. When it was good for Poland, they were-- went in Poland.

Then came a moment when they came to an agreement. At that moment, when they came to agreement, the train stopped. Those people who were on the Polish side were let into Poland. Those who were on the German side were let into Germany. And those who were in the middle were not let in here, not in there. They were shot from both sides. And they were supported by an organization.

Among these people who were in the middle, in the no man's land, it's called, was-- were the parents of Herschel Grynszpan. And they wrote a postcard to their son who was in Paris. And when he heard, the son, when he heard from his parents that they were in such a situation, where they were not let in, not let out, they couldn't do anything. Then he got so angry that he went to the consulate and he killed him.

Now when he died, this was very ominous day for the Nazis, because in November the 9th was a very important day for the Nazis. Why? Because they celebrate on November 9 the Armistice of the First World War, which was in 1918. They celebrated this as a defeat, and they blamed the Jews, of course, for it.

Also November the 9th, 10 years before 1923, Hitler had made a putsch against the German democracy. And he had lost this war. What happened? The leniency of the democracy, in the leniency, they only sentenced him for six months in prison. During these six months, he wrote his famous or infamous book, *Der Kampf-- My Battle--* which became the philosophy of Hitler. And no one ever believed that it would happen. But it did happen.

Jacob, the-- so that date, of course, the 9th, was so important to the Nazis. And then when their person in the embassy in Paris was shot and then died, that became an excuse for them to unleash this terrible pogrom throughout Germany, which you experienced personally. Tell us tell us about your experience that night with your classmates.

OK. I was in the dormitory, as I said before. And we were sleeping. Then about 2:30, 3 o'clock in the morning, we had a big crash, bang crash. And it was like the house broke down.

We heard people coming up. They came up, and they came to different houses. And I said to my roommates, I said to them, in such situation, when you hear danger, there are two ways what you can do. You can either hide or you can meet it head on. I said to myself, it's better to meet it head on. Then we know what it is.

So we stayed up. We dressed ourself. And we waited for what would come.

There was a little door at the side of the dormitory, and we tried to close it. But a few minutes later, the people just

broke in and came in.

They were not in Nazi uniform. And that's what I must always emphasize, because it was not the Nazis. It was the whole German population.

So they came all in. One man came in, or two men came in. And they said to us, this time, we are not going to bend a hair of yours. But if it should ever happen before what, something like killing a German person, like this Herschel Grynszpan, and they killed him.

And they said to us, here you have pack your things. Pack them and throw the whole baggage against the windows. Now this had been a barrack before, and we threw it against the iron windows, and it got stuck there. That was the beginning.

Then they ran down on the hallway, and they went a little further. There was an office. So they took typewriter. They threw it. And it fell into the court. They also took other things. And then we said to ourself, let's get dressed and let's go downstairs, because my dormitory room was on the second floor.

So when we came downstairs, we passed by a place where they were hanging there. They had cut them off. There was a sink. They had cut off the sink. So the water came out.

We went downstairs. Downstairs in this dormitory building there were living non-Jewish janitor who told us they have gone now. But don't be surprised. They will come back. So be prepared.

And there was a non-Jewish couple, house couple. And they thought that if we sent a man, Mr. So-and-so, to the police, we would be safe. But he never came back, because they had made an agreement with the police in that night that they should send by them and not help them.

So they ransacked and destroyed the seminary. And then what did you do then?

So we waited. To make a long story short, they did come back, about 6 o'clock 6:30 or 7 o'clock in the morning. And they told us, get all together all your boys. Get them together. They were 15, 16, 17 years old. And go outside and form lines of five abreast, which we did. We went outside.

Luckily, some people took along some coats. It was winter. Because in Germany in November it's cold already-- very cold. So they took along some warm clothes. But others didn't.

But we ran out. And we were standing outside and [INAUDIBLE]. Then they said, no, start walking. So we walked.

During the time, we saw outside the [? barrack that chamber. ?] And there were people in-- not in uniform. It were civilian people, because they wanted to be believed. It is what we call the German the [GERMAN]. That means the anger of the people.

And we passed by there. And they were spitting at us, or shouting at us, and naming us, giving us different names and so forth. We passed by the synagogue, the burning synagogue, and we were led into the prison.

And we were-- and described there, we were written down there as being in protective custody. Protective custody means for our own protection. But it's not your own protection, because we didn't need protection, because who of us would ever do something, and Jews were forbidden only for a long time to have weapons and other things like it. But we [INAUDIBLE] in there.

So they marched you all down and put you into the local prison.

And the Germans were very pedantic, and very exact, and very correct. And they have very good records. And because they have such good records, and they kept such good records, that's why we know about it now. We didn't know about

it during the time of the Holocaust itself. Only afterwards.

And even now new things are coming out to light any day. I also got news any day.

So that's what it is. So write it down. They sent us into a prison. And we went in a cell for about 15 people at that time.

Once a day there was a prison walk. And they gave us a little bit of soup, water, and [INAUDIBLE].

Jacob, and you spent, I think, eight days in that prison. And when you were released, is that when you went back to Bremen and learned what happened to your mother?

After the seventh day came the eighth day. And on the eighth day, every day in the morning there was an Appell, and calling out the names of the people. They read it from a paper.

And one day, on the last day, on the seventh day, I think, they read out names of seven boys. My name they read out too.

Why did they read out my name? Because as I told you before, I was stateless. But that didn't matter, because my brother was also stateless in Bremen, and they sent him to concentration camp.

So they sent us out. So I thought they send us to Russia, Stalin, because my father came from Russia. But that didn't happen.

In the evening they came back, and they said to us, all those people who called out in the middle of the day, they called their names again, and they said to them, go downstairs to the prison office. We went to the prison office, and they they said, you are free. You are free.

And what does it mean, you are free? You are free means you must return immediately to your hometown and report to the Gestapo, which I did. Of course, there were many problems involved because, first of all, I had no money to go anywhere. Secondly--

And you're 400 kilometers away.

Yeah. And secondly, I had to get a train. And thirdly, I didn't know what was going on in school-- at home, because for eight days we had no connection with the world.

But you managed to get back to Bremen.

I managed, and got to go home. And while I was on the train, I was always afraid to sit down. In Germany, they have the trains which are called D-trains, where you have a pass on the side, you can go from train to train.

So what happened is, I never sat down, because I saw many Nazis in there in khaki uniform. And I was afraid they would recognize me, or things like that. But I returned home, and the next morning, it was a Friday morning, and it was raining outside, and I came to Bremen.

When I came to Bremen, the first thing I did was calling my parents. But there was no answer. So I took a streetcar, and I went home. And I came home.

When I came home, I came to our house. And we had, as I told you before, a bicycle house that had two doors, one door in the front, which went to the store, and one door in the back that went to our private quarters. I looked at the door to my quarters, and there was a note there, get the key from the police department. So I said to myself, I'll go there.

However, what happened is, while I was doing this, in the morning, about 9 o'clock it was already, old neighbor, our non-Jewish neighbor on the other side, who had a furniture store, he was standing inside.



From that day on, I mean, the Nazis had always tried to separate parents. They instigated that children went against parents and parents against children, all kinds of things. So therefore, no one wanted to be seen with someone else. They were always suspicious maybe that someone else is not a Nazi.

But this neighbor near us was a friendly person, and he was standing inside his door, and he beckoned me over, and he said, come in. He didn't say it. He showed it. So I went in to him. And he said, I want to tell you something, what happened last night.

Tell us please.

So he took me in the innermost room of his rooms, you see, where he had is safe. He called his wife. And he said to me, next-- last night, the Nazis came, and they called your father from the outside. And when there was no answer, they broke in through the doors. They came to the house.

Now your two brothers-- my sister was already in Hamburg-- my two brothers were there. And they told the older one of my two brothers, stay at the door and watch. Watch. But only watch that no one else comes in, not watch what we are doing.

So they came in, and they went upstairs. My brother then heard some noise, some screaming or so forth. But he didn't know what it was. So then, afterwards, they came downstairs. They opened the door. I don't want to go into all the details.

What happened is, when he went upstairs, he saw that my mother was about to die because they had shot her. Because she had-- they had asked her, where's your husband? Of course, she didn't know, because my father had fled over the roofs, and he had told my-- our non-Jewish neighbor that he would be going to a ship, a Swedish ship.

During the war, only three countries were neutral, starting with an S-- Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain.

And what happened is-- what happened is they asked her, where's your husband? And she didn't answer. So they shot her.

What was her sin? So the Nazis later on had a law court, and the court-- had brought it to court. And of course, they wanted to make someone guilty for this. They always wanted someone guilty.

The Justice Department just gave out the report. And I got the report a few months ago. And in this report it says the Nazis behaved completely disciplined and correctly. They did what they have to do.

What did they have to do? They have to shoot someone if you resist. And by not answering, this is a resistance. And I got a certificate even from the Department, because before I left, you tell me what happened during that night.

Jacob, after that, of course, you tried to find out more about what had happened to your mother. And I know that's a long story you don't want to go into right now. But you also then stayed in Bremen and became active in the Jewish community for a while, and served as the community's liaison to the Gestapo.

Yes.

Tell us about that, if you would.

Briefly, it's this. After this event, after this murder, I tried to go to Hamburg where my-- where my sister was. And I came there. And I met my father there again, and my brothers too, because they had gone to our relatives in Hamburg.

And then, after a while, the Nazis called off the pogrom, and more and more Jews came back to the communities. Only those who had the opportunity to emigrate and to go to other countries, who had affidavits for other countries.

So I came back also. And a few people who-- men and women and other people, they formed a new community. And then the Gestapo came, and they said to me, to us, on that day-- I mean, after the Crystal Nacht, which is called Kristallnacht, in Germany, they call it Pogromnacht, otherwise they called the Night of the Annihilation, the Gestapo wanted a contact man, a liaison with the Jewish community.

Why did they want that? Because they wanted to know everything, every little detail about the Jewish people, and they had special lists, and they knew exactly where everyone lived, what he did, where he was at this time, at that time, and so forth. They did have everything. So they wanted to have a liaison.

And they made me the liaison. So I had to go two or three times a week to the Gestapo, the secret service police, which was very threatened. Everyone was afraid of them. But I went there.

And I went there. It was a house. No signs outside. And there was a little button upstairs. You ring the bell, and the door opens automatically, and then someone says, come up to the second floor. Come up to this floor.

Inside the house, there was a big sign. There was a man with two fingers, like this, which means schweigen in German. Schweigen means silence, because they didn't want to talk about this.

There's a big poster in there with a picture of a man with his fingers on his mouth saying silence.

He doesn't say it. He shows it.

He just shows it, yes.

He shows it by putting two fingers in front of his mouth.

To let you know that there's no talking in there unless you're spoken to.

You're only talking when he talks, when he asked you questions.

So I went up there, and he was sitting there with his feet on his desk, and he was staying there. And he showed me certain things. And he said to me, here, these are the things which we found in your parents' apartment. It was not found. It was stolen. But whatever it is, I found a little passport picture of my mother.

Then, afterwards came the time, you see, when I saw that Jewish children no longer had school at all. And education's very important. And I think it's so important. It's one of the most important things in the world.

So what happened is I wanted to make a school for children, even though I was only 18 years old. But what happened is, he said, no, you cannot make a school. Why not? Because Jewish children cannot be taught at the same time when Aryan children are being taught. That would be mixture of the blood. The Aryan blood and the Jewish blood, they couldn't mix. They were not together.

Then he made another [INAUDIBLE] meeting. And I said, OK, so let us teach in the afternoon. The Aryan children are taught in the morning. He said, no, in the afternoon we have no place. I said, then we'll find a place.

Finally, we found a place. And then he was so upset about me that I always asked him, that he finally said, OK, you can go in the afternoon, but only two or three hours.

What we want to teach him? So I said to him, you want us out. So in this way, we be able to go out [INAUDIBLE] earlier, because we get some education. We get some knowledge about geography, and language, and things like this. And so I made a school.

And they gave you the permission for a while to actually build or open a school.

It wasn't really a school. It was in a kind of a building, a dilapidated building. But it was a school in that sense, that children learned there.

In the meantime, Jacob, your father had come back. Tell us where your father had been and how he was able to get back, and what he did once he returned to Bremen.

We returned afterwards, returned to Bremen in January 1939. And we were living there together, you see. And things went well, so to say. We tried to prepare for emigration. That's what everyone prepared for at that time, because they want to get out.

One day, in the middle of the night, there was an ominous knock outside. And this time it was also a man in civilian clothes was standing outside. And he knocked at the door, and he called my father's name, Josef, Josef.

By the way, Josef was not a Jewish name, because when they changed the name of the Jews, that a man should be called Israel and the woman should be called Sara, they did not include so Josef, because Goebbels, who was a propaganda secretary was Jewish-- but not Jewish.

So they knocked at the door. I said to myself, don't answer. But as I said before, you cannot just be there and neglect things which happen in the world. You have to take some stand on it. You have to confront it.

So I opened a window, and I saw this man standing there. And he called up. So I opened the door.

I opened the door, and he said, what can I do for you? So he said, we are looking for something. Didn't tell me what.

So he went into the house, everything upside down, upside down, here and there. And then he came back, and he said, did you find what you wanted? No. We were looking for your brother.

I say, what? You are so smart. Why don't you know about my brother was in the concentration camps, and I had worked with the Gestapo. That's what I had worked for, to get people out of concentration camps. And I got about 200 people out of concentration camps.

And he was sent to a hospital in Hamburg. He's in a hospital in Hamburg. Don't you know that? He said, excuse me. Goodbye.

So that was the story about this invasion in the night. They did everything at nighttime.

One of the things that you were doing while opening the school was, as the liaison to the Gestapo, you were able to bring, as you said, 200 people out of the concentration camps. And one of the people who was able to get out was your father. What was he doing at that time.

He got [INAUDIBLE] in concentration camp. What my father was doing?

Yes, when he came back to Bremen.

We were working all the time to leave Germany, and we wrote to the whole world. But as I mentioned before, I didn't mention that our non-Jewish neighbors, and even some Jews themselves thought that it could not happen in Germany that it would fall to such an abyss. It could not happen, because Germany was a country of poets, of scientists, of inventors, of all kinds of people of high intelligence and so forth. How should they, overnight, follow a person like Hitler, you see, whom I saw myself, and who was always screaming, and we had a high voice, and what he said was nonsense? How could such a person be the leader of the German people?

But they were just hypnotized by him, because I say, if eyes could kill, that Hitler, he could do.

Jacob, you and your family, your father and your siblings, it took until the end of May that you were able to finally leave Germany. Tell us how many times you tried to get out in those few months, and how many letters you wrote trying to find a country that you could go to or get the affidavits. And then tell us how you finally got out.

It was not easy at that time to leave Germany, for many reasons. Number one reason, the whole world was very reluctant to accept people from Germany, because they still thought that you can work with Hitler. Kristallnacht changed it. Kristallnacht was one of the 80 days of the change of world. And why? Because on that day the whole world saw-- even Roosevelt, who was president at the time-- that it would not change, that he would go with what he had written in Mein Kampf-- My Battle-- in the book, that he really wanted to destroy.

He was very honest in this. Nowadays they are not always honest. But there he was honest that he wanted to do what he said.

So we tried. And he wrote already, from 1933 and further on, we wrote to many countries, we wanted to get out. No country wanted to take us. And finally, after Crystal Nacht, a cousin of my father, who was living in Saskatchewan in Canada, send us a landing card, what they call it there, not affidavits kind of a thing, so that we could come. And he had made special arrangements with the member of parliament at that time. So then we got a [INAUDIBLE].

That was not enough, because we had to have it approved by the German government. The German government said, you must take it-- you must take a German boat to go to America. Airplanes didn't go at that time.

So the German boats, they have two companies in Germany, two shipping companies, Norddeutscher Lloyd and the Hansa-American Line. What happened to them, they said, we are only-- we are filled up for two years. You can't do anything.

So you have affidavits to go to Canada, but now the Germans are saying that you can only go [AUDIO DROP] out.

No, the thing is-- the thing is, finally he found someone in Hamburg from the British airline-- from the British Cunard-White Star Line, shipping line, and we got a ferry to Britain. And from Britain we got a boat to Canada. But it took a long time.

And you had-- you wrote over 200 letters in those efforts to get out of-- to get out of Germany yourself, I believe you said.

Yeah, we wrote many letters. But I even went to the consulates, to the consulates, Central America, South America, different other countries. But whatever they issued-- and we know this from different ships here that went out-- that many of these affidavits which they published were illegal.

Jacob, but through all that effort, you finally, you and your family were able to, without your mother, of course, were able to get to Canada. And then you went through some effort to get down to the States, and to come to the Baltimore area. And I'm going to ask you one more question. Then I'd like to turn to our audience and see if they have some questions of you.

But when you finally got from Canada to Baltimore, you tried then to play a role here in our efforts in the war, and become a warden. And you were not permitted to. Tell us why.

First, I came to Canada. From Canada, it was also a very difficult procedure to come to the United States. But I came to the United States, thank God. And I'm very glad for that, very thankful for that. I came to the United States. I came to Baltimore.

But even in Baltimore, where I went to school in Baltimore-- for six years I went to school in Baltimore-- I offered to be an air raid warden during the war. So they told me, no, you cannot be an air raid warden. You're an enemy alien. Even in the United States, anyone who wanted to come here was an enemy alien if you came from a different country. He was a refugee, unless he had a certificate number, and which was hard to get because these certificate numbers were already

given out for years in advance.

So I couldn't do very much. The only thing I could do is go to a night school and learn English. So I went to a night school, and I had very good teachers. But that's all. [LAUGHS]

All right. So the profound irony of that. I'm sure everybody feels that here too, to escape all that you experienced, get to the United States, and then be told you are considered an enemy alien, so therefore you can't serve as an air raid warden.

Jacob, let's turn to our audience and ask if they have some questions they'd like to ask of you before we close the program. Anybody have any questions?

Yes, sir.

Was it apparent prior to 1933 that they were able to carry out the things that he had professed that he wanted to do?

Jacob, the question is, was it apparent to you, prior to 1933, that Hitler was going to be able to carry out the things that he said he was going to do when he came to power?

We were not 100% sure. But we knew that the way he was going, he would continue to go, and to make it stricter for Jews and for other people-- not only Jews, also non-Jews who were not politically Nazis-- to get rid of them, like he got rid of all the parties in the very beginning in 1933, '34. He got rid of all the parties. And he was-- and even when the president died, when Hindenburg died, he took over all the forums. He gave himself a new name, the FÃ¼hrer. It was-- you could see it in advance that it would get worse. And we could not stop writing to the world that you're going to get out.

OK. Yes, sir.

Are there any trends or circumstances today that remind you of the early Nazi period, or that should give us cause for concern today.

Jacob, the question is, are there any trends or things you see today that reminds you of that period when the Nazis were coming to power that we should be concerned about.

The Nazis had a big influence on the world, it seems to me, even today. Because there's still great antisemitism in the world all over, even though people try to live together. And I think we should all live together. Because I want to tell you only a short anecdote which happened to me in school, if you want to hear it.

No, please. Absolutely.

One day the teacher came in in his Nazi uniform. And like always, when he comes in, we had to say, Heil Hitler, and things like this.

And he said, race science. It was a new subject which they instituted in the German schools.

Race science. Is that what you said? Race science.

The science of race. And there he said like this-- every person belongs to a race, and the Jews are no religion. The Jews are no ethnicity. They are a race, and we are race.

And the races are divided into superior and inferior races. The superior races are we. They follow the Darwin theories, the survival of the fittest. And we, the Aryans, are the most highest of the superior. And all the others-- the Poles, the Gypsies, the Jews, they are inferior.

So I said to the teacher-- I didn't know where I got the courage, but anyhow. I went to the teacher. I said, Mr. Teacher-- I

don't want to mention his name. I don't even know it anymore. [LAUGHS]

So, you are wrong Mr. Teacher. You cannot say that in the world we have superior and inferior races. We have different races. And thank god we have different races, because we all need each other. You cannot live as an individual in this world.

For instance, if you are a baker, you know a baker's job, and you are superior in that. If you are a shoemaker, you know a shoemakers are. They're superior in that, but you don't know the baker's job, and vice versa.

So we have to live in this world all together. And we have to support each other. And you see-- and everyone has to live, and we are here to live and not to die.

Thank you, Jacob. Ma'am?

Did you have any support from your previous non-Jewish friends who were your neighbors in Germany? [INAUDIBLE]?

Yeah, after Kristallnacht, Jacob, did you or your family have any support from your non-Jewish neighbors, and who had-- the folks who'd been here, neighbors, friends.

We had reports in the very beginning, where the people came to us. But the interesting thing is that during the night of the murder, and the day before, or during the night, some people who had been good customers of ours and friends, they were participating in this kind of thing. We were intimidated, which means we were afraid of-- they were more afraid of meeting us than we were afraid of meeting them, and talking together found out to be together with them.

And as I told you, this non-Jewish neighbor, he was always a friend. He even wrote us later on. And some people wrote us.

But publicly, they would not support a Jew at that time. It was against the law, because it was able to be found with a Jew, or to give him some support, they would be put in prison, maybe beaten up or so.

OK. Do we have some other questions here? And then we'll come back down here. OK. Yes, sir.

Yeah, we were just convening last year, and we learned the existence of a group of [INAUDIBLE] called the White Rose that was opposed to Hitler [INAUDIBLE].

The gentleman's comment that they were-- he was in Munich last year, and learned of a group called the White Rose that were opposed to the Nazis. And they were dealt with very harshly. And whether you knew of other groups, some that had been very opposed to the Nazis.

We have some pictures upstairs about the Rose group, on the second floor, I think. And these were some people, extraordinary people.

But most of them were really afraid to form groups and to go together. I don't know personally about any groups. Not at my time.

I know that there were people always who were hiding, who were resisting, and who tried to fight the Nazis. But in a large amount, I don't really know.

OK. All right.

Along the lines of the prior question [INAUDIBLE].

The question is, did the relationship between Jews and non-Jews deteriorate throughout the 1930s after 1933, or was it

sudden and abrupt? Is that--

No. that's a good question. But let me tell you. It went slowly. It went slowly. Because many Jews did not want to discontinue their relationship to the Jews in something, sat quietly. But as time went on, they became more and more afraid because Hitler made more and more laws. The Nazis made more and more laws, that to separate the Jews and non-Jews.

You will see in the museum pictures there, if a Jew was working with a non-Jewish person, and both of them were punished. You would see this. He made this his philosophy that you should not be seen with someone else, and you shouldn't even talk to them. Isolating them completely. That's what he wanted-- and then destroying them.

Jacob, thank you, and we're pretty close to wrapping up. I wanted to, first of all, say what is obvious to everybody here, that there's so much more that we haven't heard and wish there was time to do that. But there's not, unfortunately.

I might mention that the March 31, 2002 issue of-- a special edition of Time magazine featured what they call the 80 most important days in history. And one of those days is Kristallnacht that they selected. And in that piece, they interviewed extensively Jacob. And if you get a chance to go back and look at that, I recommend you do so.

And you can see the text on Time's website. I don't have the page number, actually, but anyway, it's November 9, 1938, "The Night Hope Shattered," by Jacob Wiener in the March 31 issue of this year's Time.

Jacob, thank you so much for spending this time with us. I look forward to when you're on First Person again. And there's so many more questions I wanted to ask, much less the audience.

We have First Person, every week, every Wednesday until August 27th. And next week, on the 21st of May, we will present another survivor as our "first person." And that person next Wednesday will be Livia Shacter.

Livia, who is from Czechoslovakia, lived under Hungarian occupation until 1944, when the Germans invaded, and life immediately became even worse-- far worse. The Nazis took Olivia and her family in a boxcar to Auschwitz. She survived, and did come to the United States in 1947. I hope you can come back next Wednesday, or on any other Wednesday until August 27.

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 Jacob to close out today's program.

Thank you very much, all of you, for coming here, listening to me, and for coming to the museum, which I think is a very important thing to do.

I just want to tell you that Kristallnacht was such an awful event in my life, which I will not and I cannot forget. I feel that every step in my life before and after was a miracle, for which I am thankful to God, that the rest of my family came out-- part of it; not all of it-- to establish ourselves and their families.

I only hope and pray that the world would learn what baseless hatred-- and we have a lot of it today-- baseless hatred and terror can lead to, and how important it is for all people to learn from the past, the importance in truthful talk, careful judgment, and peaceful-- really peaceful relationships. We must learn the history. Then we know more about it. The history didn't start with us.

And I want to close with a few lines of a poem which I made when I came to America.

Oh, this is a poem you wrote.

Yeah. How thankful we were when we came to the United States, the only country in the world where you can live free. Goes like this.

"Land, our future, our future, everything we bring to you. Seeking refuge, we are coming. That is all we have in view. To be treated in your country, duties, rights, like you the same. Not despised, disdained, detested. That's our true and only aim.

Continent of mankind's future, world of sun and hope. Far off words and scenes of fight on the Western semi-globe, God bless you.

From a terror country we were forced to flee. God bless you. America, you the land of the free."

And with this, I want to close. And I hope everyone will understand that we must live in peace together. But we must have peace. And we should not bow down to hatred which is going on in the world. But we should try to live together. And one thing we can all do, even if we don't embrace ourself, to respect ourselves. And I hope everyone will have learned something to this lesson. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]