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The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Genya Markon, and I'm one of the acquisition curators in the Department of Collections. The museum is pleased to present today a conversation with Simon Jeruchim about his experiences as a hidden child during the Holocaust. We will also have an opportunity at the end to ask him any questions you may be interested in.

This program is made possible by the William Goldring and the Woldenberg Foundation and is presented in conjunction with a special exhibition, Life in Shadows-- Hidden Children in the Holocaust. If you haven't visited it, I encourage you to do so. The exhibition is located in the Gonda Education Center here on the lower level, just around the stairs.

Before we proceed further, a few small announcements. If you have time passes for the permanent exhibition for 1:00 or 2:00, they will be valid all day. Therefore, it is not necessary, nor is it encouraged for you to leave this presentation, as it is rather distracting.

You should also have received a survey form to fill in on your way in. The surveys are for you to fill out after the program and submit them to our staff on your way out. We take your comments very seriously. For this, we will reward you with four complimentary passes to the permanent exhibition, which are valid for the rest of the year for you, your family, and friends. And finally, if you have any cell phones or pagers, please turn them off.

And now we're going to have a short video introduction which will introduce our guest speaker.

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.

Simon Jeruchim was 12 years old in July, 1942. His mother learned that the Germans planned to round up Jews in occupied France. Even the Jeruchim's home village of Montreuil was no longer safe. Simon's parents decided to send Simon, his sister Alice, and his brother Michel into hiding.

Simon was moved to a farm in a remote part of Western Normandy. He experienced great difficulties with the situation, and was moved again in April 1943 to another home in Normandy. He was given a sketch pad and watercolor set as a gift from the local schoolmaster and while in hiding, drew pictures of the surroundings and people among whom he lived.

One more move took him to a large house in the village of La Renouardiere. On August 6, 1944, he saw American soldiers marching through the fields where he worked, and knew that he and the other villagers had been liberated from the Nazis.

After liberation, Simon was reunited with his sister and brother, but not with his parents. Samuel and Sonia Jeruchim had been caught in the July 1942 roundup from which they had saved their children. They were sent first to the Drancy transit camp and then to Auschwitz-Birkenau where they perished.

Now our guest speaker.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you very much.

Simon, you were almost 10 years old when the war broke out. You and your family were vacationing outside of Paris in the Normandy countryside. Can you tell us what you remember when it was decided that you and your sister Alice would remain there?

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Well, this was the beginning of the war, and the thought was that the German may be bombing Paris or the neighborhoods of Paris where we lived. Actually, where we lived was not a village. Montreuil is really the suburb of Paris.

So there was a lot of feeling that maybe it would be very unsafe, and my parents thought, well, my sister and I could just stay there for a while, which was like about 50 or 60 miles outside of Paris, where my father had to go back to work. And my mother, of course-- my little brother was then two years old. She had to take care of him. So we remained there for about a couple of months until we returned back to Paris, where we lived.

Your father came to Normandy actually to take you back to Paris.

Yes.

Which was one day before your birthday. You were able to resume schooling until May 1940, when it was announced that all the children in the Paris area would be evacuated to the vicinity of Orleans. You and your sister actually left with your school classes until your father showed up. Is that correct?

It is. What happened is that no one had thought that the French army would collapse so quickly. And that by then they knew that the German Panzer division had crossed, actually invaded Belgium-- overrun Belgium, I should say-- and were already in France. And everybody in Paris became very panicky in the large cities around, because they remember in World War I, the German soldiers had killed people, killed civilians. So people were afraid for their lives.

And whoever, a transportation or a car, or who could take a train or with friends in Southern France, were fleeing Paris. But at that time, the school had already evacuated me, as Genya had mentioned. And I was with my sister in separate places, because at that time, school had separate classes for boys and girls. So we were housed in mansions and waiting out to see what would happen.

And my parents left Paris with my brother, and they took a little bit of-- just as little as they could. And they took the train, but things were very much of a panic everywhere. So they arrived in OrlÃ©ans, which is South of Paris, maybe 80 miles South of Paris. There's a river there called the Loire. And their connection in Southern France was where we thought we would be going.

And at that point, there was no transportation or anything, so my father came to pick me up in that home where I was. But then it turned out that there were no buses, no car. So he had to do the walking by himself with the suitcase, pick me up. And then we had to pick up my sister. And we did this by only walking on the roads, just walking miles and miles.

And eventually, my father bought some old bicycles that he could find in a store. And they were very rusty, very old, ugly. But they worked somehow-- put some oil in it, and we didn't have any brakes. So we just put our foot in the front tire. We became very expert.

And we left to get my sister. And then my sister didn't know what was going on, seeing us with the bikes. But anyway, we kept going, hoping to rejoin my mother, who was in OrlÃ©ans.

But then OrlÃ©ans. Had been bombed. And the French troops did not allow us to go to OrlÃ©ans. So we had to bypass that city and go to another point to cross bridges that would allow us to go to Southern France.

And then by then, the towns were being bombed by the German Air Force, the Luftwaffe. In fact, we saw the airplanes coming down and dropping bombs. So there was no safe place any place at that point.

But eventually, you made your way back to Paris, hoping to be reunited.

Yes. What happened is that we were on a French ward for about six weeks, either walking or rather riding our bikes until we were where we're supposed to go. And we stayed with that person for a few months until we were able to go back to Paris. Because by then, the Germans had occupied France and divided into zones-- occupied and not occupied

zone. And just to get on a train, you needed a lot of paperwork, bureaucracy like the French only know what to do, you know?

So anyway, we did go back to Paris. What happened is my mother never left Orleans, actually. And she obviously didn't die there. And she was picked up by military people who had trucks going back to Paris. And she simply went back to our apartment. And she stayed there, but they were not able to correspond. It took about, I would say, three or four months until we'd be able to know that they were alive. But then I went back to Paris, my sister and my father. And then we started life anew there.

And you started and remained there almost for a year and a half.

Yes.

And went to school normally until things became even worse. And you were then forced to report for ID cards and forced to wear the Jewish stars.

Right.

The thing was is that people probably-- it's difficult to understand, really. That in those days, we didn't have TV, number one. There were no instant report of any kind. Radios were a luxury to begin with. There was just the newspaper, which were actually under the control of the Nazis, the Germans. And so we really didn't know what was going on truly.

And there were persecution. I mean, slowly things were deteriorated for Jews who had curfews. You were not allowed to have any bicycle or radio. In other words, they were just whittling away everything.

And very soon enough, all the Civil Rights from the Jews were completely gone. That was actually legalized by the Vichy government, which was a government working under the Nazis.

But these things happened very slowly, and when you live in a small neighborhood, you don't think about all those things, especially as a kid. All I knew is that we couldn't go out at a certain time of the day. But you kind of get used to it in a way. You kind of live with it.

The thing that was the most daunting was wearing the Jewish star for me. Because first of all, we lived in a Gentile neighborhood, and my parents were not actually-- they were from Poland, but they never really followed religion. I really knew nothing about Jewish religion growing up as a kid. And I knew my parents were foreigners, the way they spoke with an accent, like I do today.

However, the feeling was is that things would get better. You always hope for the best. But wearing a Jewish start, going to school, being the only kid in my class wearing a Jewish star, that was so humiliating. You have no idea at all.

And I said I couldn't hide it, you know? I mean, I could hide it in the street. I would carry my books in front of me, you know? But certainly not in class. And you know, and let's face it. I mean, most kids in school were not particularly knowledgeable about anti-Semitism or not, but they practiced it like the parents did.

And seeing a kid with a Jewish star, well, he's a Jew. Some kids were very nice to me, but some other were not. They yelled at me. Nobody hit me really. But it was my first really taking consciousness of being a Jew and not knowing why it was happening.

And being totally different.

Yeah, totally, you know.

You attended school, actually, until the summer of '42, when you were able to finish sixth grade.

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That's correct.

That was the end of June probably.

July 16 of that year was a determining factor for all the Jews. Your mother had a dentist appointment that day. Tell us what happened at that appointment.

Well, as some people may know that July the 14th is like July-- it's a national holiday in France. And immediately after July the 14th, that's vacation day. So this is the greatest day when all the kids are free at last. So we were home.

Bastille Day.

Bastille Day, right, you know? So anyway, now we knew that we were not going to go on vacation, because things were pretty rough. My father couldn't go out. We knew there were arrests already, so there was not a mystery.

But meanwhile, you still lived your life, hoping that things would get better, that somehow we didn't see any German troops in our neighborhood. It was very quiet.

And my mother fortuitously had an appointment in Paris with a dentist, who happened to be Jewish, like most dentists. At least the better ones, they were in Paris. And while she was there, the doctor said, you know, I've heard a rumor that-- we always heard rumors-- that through one of his patients, was a cop, something was afoot, some really-- something big. And he had heard that from other cops, that there were probably thousands of cops on alert. He wasn't sure exactly what, but he thought it would be for a roundup. There had always been roundups, but small ones.

And this was a very general roundup, that actually the plan was to arrest every Jew in and out of Paris, completely. In one evening.

In one evening, one night. So anyway, my mother came home with a couple of friends of ours that lived in Paris, and she visited them. And she said, look, I heard of that. Won't you come with us Montreuil where we live? It's not bad in Paris. Maybe the suburbs will be in touch. We didn't know.

So they came back home with their son, and we thought it was like a vacation. Though, oh great. There were friends there, you know? And my mother was talking to my father, and they were our friends. And my mother said, look. I think this is a serious thing. We should not take a chance. Find a way of not staying home. Who knows, you know?

I remember my father saying in Yiddish, [SPEAKING YIDDISH], you know, like a sack of baloney, you know? My mother was a very strong woman, very adamant. And she always made her point or won her point. She was persuasive, to say the least.

So anyway, my mother went to a cleaning woman who did our cleaning once a week, who lived in a neighborhood not very far. And it was a very modest bungalow where she lived. She spoke to her. She said, can we spend the night with you? And she agreed.

So we went there. So it was my family my family, my sister, my brother, my parents, and this couple with a son. And we all went there, trip there. And we spent the night, just waiting in the little parlor for the morning to come. And later on, perhaps in the afternoon, I took out my Jewish star, and I went to the building where we lived.

And I saw the concierge, rang the doorbell. And when she saw me, she started to cry. And she said, oh, my poor boy. She said, I don't think you can even stay too long, because we never know. The cops may be coming back. But they come during the night, and there were two other Jewish couple in our building. We alerted them actually, but they did not believe that it will happen. And they were arrested. And there people were boarded in French buses, like the one in my drawing that you'll see later.

And so that was that. So we had no place to go at that point. But we had been saved from the roundup. And, of course,

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she had said to me, look. There's no way you could come back. The police put the seals on your door. And they said they would come back, and they will.

They were looking for you.

They're looking for you, and they're going to get you.

They knocked on her door as well.

Pardon me?

They knocked on her door to find out where you--

Yeah. Oh, actually, the concierge opened our apartment door. She had a passkey. So they didn't demolish anything, because the concierge was there. But they were very angry so that they say, oh, look at that.

So then your parents had to devise another scheme.

Right.

And the Bonneaus, they had friends by the name of Monsieur and Madame Bonneau.

No, actually they were not friends. Sorry to contradict you for the record.

That's all right.

What happened is that you just have to imagine for a moment that unless you had the wherewithal-- I mean, like with a lot of money. My parents did well, but they were not really wealthy. You know, my father was a watchmaker earning a nice living, but that's all.

And at that moment, they didn't have-- their pocket was in line with money or anything like that. And all the stuff that we had was at home, really, in the apartment. So there wasn't much where to go. We didn't have a car. Nobody had a car then, and where to go.

So there were some-- we had lived in a neighborhood for many years. And my mother was the most gregarious person in the world you can imagine. You came at the doorstep, you got a cup of tea with a cookie right away. So she knew people in the neighborhood. The stores owners were very friendly with her.

And my mother spoke to some of them. And they said, no, yes, we can hide you for a couple of days, which they did in the back room of their stores. But having two families in a back room, this is dangerous. And at that time, if you were actually helping Jews, number one, you would go to jail immediately or be shot or whatever, so not something you would do easily.

So for about, I would say, a week and a half, we can go in from one store to another in the back rooms. And one of the person my mother knew particularly well was a drug store owner. She was very friendly with that woman. And she was relating the story of this family with children who had been arrested to a client, the patron. And that person said-- that was this Mrs. Bonneau.

She said, you know, my heart feels for them, you know? I would like to help these people. They sound like such a wonderful people. Let me see if I can help them. And this is what happened.

So just about a few days later, we met this couple-- or maybe a little bit more than that-- who had thought about how to really help us out. And this was a Protestant couple. I use the word Protestant, because they were not just Gentile. The Protestants in France have a history, which is quite different than Catholics. They were persecuted. They were called the

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Huguenots. They were persecuted by the Catholic Church, and they suffered really greatly. Of course, not in modern times, but back in the 17th, 18th century. So as a result, they were different.

And I think maybe part of it was a feeling of compassion that other people may not have had. In fact, it was known after the war that there were many, many Protestant families who have Jews more than Catholics.

So in any event, we met this couple. To me, they were elderly couple, but I think they were in their 50s, younger than I am now. And they looked very dignified, very lovely people. We were in a small parlor. They didn't have living rooms then. It was a private house, very nicely furnished. You could see these people were a bit well off.

And there were-- we were talking in this little apartment, all of us standing around. And I remember my mother talking to that person, Monsieur Bonneau and saying-- and I heard the conversation, my mother. And she had tears in her eyes. I remember looking at her, and she was saying, you know, Monsieur Bonneau-- she said, if something happens, promise me you'll look after my children that they have an education.

And then I thought at that moment, we're talking then I was 12 years old, remembering that feeling almost embarrassed that my mother was crying, and she was saying those things. It's very strange when you're a kid or you can get embarrassed by your parents. And he reassured her, no, everything would be fine, that sort of thing.

And at that point, they were already prepared with some people to take me and my brother somewhere in Normandy. And my sister was another story. She was taken with somebody else. But we were-- at that moment, I don't remember really saying like a real goodbye to my parents. I'm sure we kissed, and I'm sure we hugged in some ways. But as I walked out, that's the last time I saw my father and my mother.

And you had no idea actually where they were going.

And that was the very last time I saw them. I remember still, and I write this in my book. I remember still to this day the particular house there were the Bonneau lived. And they opened the curtain to look at us as we were leaving, you know? And it was almost like they were framed in that window. And that's the last image I have in my head of them, you know?

And from there, the Bonneau's arranged for you and--

Yeah, it was all a bit complicated. And I don't want to go into too many details.

Right.

Because it would make your head spin. But first, I was located with my brother and this other boy who was with us to a place in actual northern Normandy, about, I would say, an hour and a half from Paris. And it turned out I have no idea what the connection was with Bonneau. But this man that took us was a man in his mid-thirties. He had two brothers and a widowed mother.

They lived in a place called Saint-Aubin-les-Elbeuf, which is not far from Rouen. For those who have any idea of the French thing, French geography, it's on the Seine River going north. And we were there with these people. And it turned out that this fellow was trafficking in the black market. And his brothers were kind of part time thieves, you know?

Yeah.

I mean, it was a very strange family. I mean, their heart was in the right place for taking us. But the point was is that there was an inherent danger really there because this fellow who took us in was dealing with black market. And that was illegal, not only for black marketing, but because all the food was supposed to go to the German army. So trafficking in meat-- that's what he was in mostly-- was really something dangerous.

And the boy who was with me was older than I was. He was about 15. His name was Joseph. He said to me, you know,

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we in danger here. If the Nazi have wind of it, we'll be arrested. He was a smart kid. And I wasn't smart, but I was not as aware as he was.

He convinced you to write the Bonneaus.

He convinced me to write to the Bonneau. And the Bonneau had said not to write. They said, do not write, because it's dangerous. But I did write. So they came to pick me up, and they never offered too many explanation about anything else, you know?

And you have to remember in these days, kids never really addressed adults. And the adults did not particularly have a whole dialogue with kids to explain their actions. It was quite different than today. Kids are in your face today. That was not the way it was then.

There was something called respect.

Yeah, I know. I know. We just thought that teachers were gods and parents were gods. We were always awed by the world.

So in any event-- so I got out of there, and the Bonneau-- and Bonneau placed us. A social worker took us to Normandy, but we're talking about really Western Normandy, which was about 200 miles away from Paris. And this actually, if people know the geography of France, is near Brittany, which is in a western part of France.

And it was in a small village hamlet, I mean very, very, very tiny.

Remote.

Very remote. And those farmers are-- OK, we were sent under the guise that-- my sister and I were placed in two different places, farms, under the guise we were refugees from Paris, which we were in some ways. And that either we're looking for foster homes somewhere. But at the age of 12 and 1/2, I was supposed to be an abled worker.

A farmhand.

Yeah, at that time kids who were 12 years old would work like an adult. So I wasn't there just as a vacation, you know.

But you didn't realize everything.

No, I didn't realize that. And my sister was placed in another farm. But the farm where I was, was with a woman, who her husband was imprisoned in Germany, even the woman, in her 30s, with a daughter was my age, about. And I was just a helper, a farmhand, and that was it-- small farms.

But from morning to night, I had to work very hard. And also, the problem was for me is that when we fled, we only fled with our clothing that went on our backs. So at that time it was a summer and, of course, these things may not seem so weighty in terms of life and death. But not having any socks anymore, and short pants, and no more than a thin sweater, that was all my possession.

So when winter arrived, I really suffered. Because by then, I didn't have my shoes. I had to throw them away. I had these wooden shoes, and I was barefoot. And I had no gloves, and I had no coat, and no scarf, and no hat. So that was very hard physically in that sense.

And, of course, I was to do all the chores around the farm, or a lot of the chores, not all of them. You know, look after the cows in the field. And we all got up early in the morning.

Chopped wood.

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And chopped wood, and feed the pigs, and feed this, and carry water. And that woman kept me busy from morning to night. And she was not probably mean, but she just was a very-- she had a very difficult life of her own. And she had no room for compassion in her own heart, because that's the way it was.

And so I was more of an object there, really, like a servant. And what really I suffered from was the fact that no longer anyone could say nice word to me or just a word of compassion or put a hand on my shoulder. There was none of that. I was totally there, almost invisible in some ways.

Or even praise you for the work you're doing.

Yes.

And she never considered getting you a coat or a pair of pants?

No, people had very little. I mean, it's very hard to imagine that then there was no running water, no electricity. Everything they had was from the farm. And these people were poor, basically poor. So for them, that was not a big issue as far as they were concerned. I was lucky to be there.

You were there for about how many months?

I was there for about six months. And by then, there was a social worker who placed me there who came back to see I was doing. And at that time, she told me that my parents had been arrested and were up to Drancy, which was this transit camp that would go to Auschwitz. Of course, at that time, none of us knew anything about it.

However, we just felt-- I really knew my parents were arrested and she said, well, sometimes some people are released. She tried to make me feel better about it, but she didn't want to hide that fact, though.

And anyway, she could tell that I was not very happy there, but I didn't say anything. But she said, look. I don't think you seem too happy where you are. And I'll look if I could find another place for you. And she did find another place. My sister was about three or four miles from where I was. So she found her a place within the same distance in a village.

And in those village, that new home, there were two other children there. Is that correct? Yes.

Who you suspected may be Jewish.

Exactly.

But you actually never talked about it.

No. I met that-- it was a widow in the 60s, who had a little shack, really, literally a shack, next to the church. And I'd gone to the church, every week, because with the widow of that farmer, she assumed I was Catholic. So we prayed every night on the dirt floor, on our knees.

And I learned all the prayers very quickly, was a smart kid. What I did, I borrowed a prayer book. And you have to remember that prayers were in Latin there. So that was a mouthful to learn, but not when we prayed in the evening where we prayed in French.

And so I did learn my prayers, and I was trying to be as Christian as they were. And I learned the ropes, so to speak. And so here we were next to the church that I was very familiar with. And there was hat little house, a one-room house, where I moved in with that widow.

And there were two other kids, and one girl was nine years old. Her name was Annette and the boy, called Maurice, was six years old. And somehow, I don't know why, I had this sense that they were Jewish, which we never spoke about

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anything like that. But I found out after the war that they were.

And Maurice was quite a handful. Is that correct?

Yeah, he was like an annoying kid, you know? And he was kind of slow witted, he looked to me, like big bulging eyes. And I thought for a while he was retarded. And that woman, her name was Madame Prim. She was a nice person enough, but, you know, she had her own problem physically. She had arthritis and three kids under the roof that were small, it was tight. It was a problem.

So that kid was annoying. And once in a while she took her cane, which she always walked with, and she hit him on the head. I thought it was so cruel. I mean, I felt she's going to kill him. She had a very short temper. But he did survive.

And one day, when she was asked to actually-- these children were attending school.

Yeah, they were.

But you were not. They were able to go to the local school.

Right.

And there was an appointment which Mrs. Prim was asked to go to discuss Maurice's conduct.

Yeah.

But she couldn't go. And instead, she sent Simon to meet Monsieur Crochet.

Yeah.

Which was a turning point at that-- for you.

Yes, it really was a turning point. Because we're talking about the school was only about 4 minutes from where I lived. It was down in the village. And this was a one-room schoolhouse. Actually, it was the house of the teacher, and the front parlor was the school.

I see.

So it was very small. They didn't have too many kids going there. So anyway, I went there. And when I met him, I was so-- I was like-- I was looking all the books they had. And that to me, I always loved to read books. And that's one thing I missed a lot, to read. And I was thinking oh, gee, if I just could borrow a book.

And we started to talk. It was a young guy. Believe it or not, he was 18 years old, I think. Actually, maybe he graduated high school. I'm not even sure. We had this kind of thing. The actual teacher was in Germany, a prisoner. So he was subbing for him.

And there was a calendar on the wall, which was from the post office, that every year you get a new calendar with a reproduction of a painting or something. So I was looking at it. And when I was a kid with my sister, our pastime was to look through the dictionary with all the paintings or the artwork. And we would play quiz to each other.

And we very knowledgeable about art, even very young. So I recognized that painting, which was by a French painter called Miele. And it was like farmers praying. It was called Angelus, like they were praying.

And I said to him, Mr. Crochet, oh, wow. That's a great painting by Miele. He looked at me like that little snotty kid knows something about that.

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So we started to talk, and he was impressed. I was articulate and certainly educated beyond the sixth grade. Because my parents always thought we should read a lot, and my parents were very much involved in our education.

So we started to talk, and I said, oh, no, I love to draw and everything else. That's why I like this, blah, blah, blah. And then he came back with a little package. And he said, well this was a piece of rope around newspapers. And he said my uncle, he had been a-- he liked to dabble in art, and always kept that watercolor set he gave me. Of course, I don't know how to draw myself a straight line. So he says, you can have it. So he gave it to me.

And we are now going to actually show you the drawings that he produced over the period of time while he was in hiding. And Simon will describe some of them and what they show. This is not--

OK, well we're starting with things which were not that original. Those were drawings which are-- the top one's something I'd copied, I'm sure, from one of the books that Mr. Crochet loaned me. But the bottom one, just a little fantasy thing that kids would do. You know, no particular focus on it, except to do some drawing and to having fun.

Next.

This one will be more significant, to the extent that it presents the-- it shows, rather, the lane in front of the house where I lived. And this little lane, which was no more than maybe a quarter of a mile, led to the village. And on the side, you could see the well. That's where we get the water every day for Madam Prim. And that was a big job to hoist all these pails of water. That was hard work.

And there on the left, you see this place where you put water. That's for the cows when they came back from the fields. I'd have to pour some water on it, and I helped out the farmer next door.

And this was beautiful country. It was what we call apple country, you know? And you have-- OK, we have the next one. OK.

This was something which inspired me from the chair next door. I was very impressed by the icons, the sculptures and everything else. And this says in French, La Vierge Des Fleurs, the Virgin Mary with flowers.

Next.

This was my first actually still life, watercolor. I took some flowers from the field, and just put them in a vase, and started to draw and paint. At the bottom of this paper, you see it says [SPEAKING FRENCH]. It means various tasks from the day, souvenir of year 1944. Savigny-le-Vieux was the place where I was.

And you can see that I'm doing these various chores, carrying water and cutting wood, and peeling potatoes, and sweeping, and so on. And the top is just something I'd copied from a book.

And this is the interior of Madame Prim's house where we were. The perspective is kind of-- throws you off a little bit. It was a small room, so it looks like gigantic. It wasn't. But what you see on the first one at the top of the picture, it's on the other side of the fireplace the beds. I had the bed at the right, which was pretty nice. And Mrs. Prim slept on the left.

So these were very poor conditions. This was the floor, was just dirt, hard dirt. And the beds were very tall off the ground so the moisture would not get to you. And there was a little chair, the only chair in the house. Because Mrs. Prim had to climb on the chair to go to bed. So every night it was a gymnastic. She had to really-- can imagine, to climb on that bed.

Anyway, and then everything was cooked in a fireplace. We very seldom used that stove. And the bottom view shows two other beds where the two other kids slept. The one, what you call, the one on the right is where Annette slept. The little one there, that was Maurice. And there was one armoire there that we put everything there.

And even though there was an electric box--

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Yeah, there was electric box that never worked. It was worked for electricity, but it never happened. So there was no electricity or running water.

Next. That's strictly fantasy drawings. I think the one at the bottom was inspired from a book I copied, because to me, America was an amazing thing. There was hope one day I would be there, and here I am. And the top one was strictly for my head, my future vocation as a burglar. No, I'm just kidding.

Next, please.

That was a sister with the typical habit of the village. And the sister played a very important role in my life there while I was in hiding. They're very wonderful people. They would do first aid. They were not doctors, but they would provide all the essential first aid.

And what you see on your right, the building was the-- or not the seminary-- was like a convent, basically. You could see the style of the windows, you know? But that was a typical-- there was no particular sister that I drew, just a sister.

Next, please.

That was the house where I stayed. And you could-- it says La Renouardiere. That was the name of the hamlet. Because in French, they're got a little word, the name for everything there. So that was La Renouardiere. I don't know where it came from.

But the roof you could see, it's sort of an orange color. It was meant to be actually tiles, which were red. And they're very untypical in Normandy. Most of the roofs were actually slate or thatched roofs. So why they tiled there, I have no idea at all. I never asked.

This was representing my neighbor, with whom I was very, very friendly. He was a very nice man. His name was Mr. Geslin, and he was doing the harvest by hand, which is really a job. And he had the son who helped him, too.

But it shows really very typically how he did it. I mean, that looked like him. And also the way he did it-- I mean, I observed it doing it. And, of course, I sketched it after. And then on the right, you could see the village in the distance.

And that's strictly fantasy drawing on my own. The top one was what I was always wondering when I'd be older, if I'd go in a fancy restaurant. And the one at the bottom was actually interesting. Because just as the war began in France, we had people who were very friendly with my parents. And they had visa to go to the US.

And they left a lot of stuff behind that they couldn't carry. So their youngest son was in the Boy Scouts. He gave me his Boy Scout hat and his shirt. That, to me, was such a prized possession. And that inspired me to do that particular drawing.

Next.

And that is interesting in itself. Because as the GI left after the fighting took place where I was-- the invasion, because I was close, I was very near the coast where the invasion took place. There were a lot of fights in the hedgerows. And the American soldiers left a lot of stuff behind, old cans and discarded stuff.

And there was one particular magazine, the Fortune magazine. I remember that became like my-- oh, wow. I kept it for years, actually.

Do you still have it?

No, I don't. And in it, I was so fascinated by all the ads in it, the refrigerators and all that stuff, and chewing gum advertising. And then there were pictures of war planes. So I copied that one.

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Next, please.

That was not our village. It was a village nearby who had been bombed by American airplanes trying to cut off bridges. But as I said, this is pretty near accurate representation of the bombing. Because what you see of the town, of what I remember and when I'd seen, was pretty much what it was. So I wouldn't say it's a photograph, but I think it should give you an accurate picture of a bombing really as it was.

Fine. What's next?

And that was a fantasy of mine to say, well, one day, I will go to New York. And New York to me was at the end of the world. And you have to really think hard that this was 1944. And I was thinking of the year 2000. That was kind of a nice round number, three zeros, like forever in the distance, like we would say 10,000 years away.

And this was the typical Parisian bus with an open platform in the back. And that's where you had to pay for it. The guy in uniform took your ticket. And I always loved to ride in the back. It was so nice to be in the open. I remember that.

And then I decided to do the drawing simply because it was kind of-- I always tried to amuse myself. Things were very dark where I was. There was nothing about being humorous about. And any time I had a chance to draw, I would draw things that would pick up my spirits.

And particularly, I always loved colors. To me, colors were so important, bright colors. And this is why always yellows and blues. I love primary colors. And I still do.

Thank you. I think that ends the slide show. And I'd like to make mention that all of these drawings have been donated by Simon to our museum and are part of our permanent collection, which we're absolutely delighted to have. They're also featured on this year's calendar, which is devoted to children's art.

The gentleman that you portray sewing, reaping the harvest, was Monsieur Geslin.

Geslin, yes.

And he also had shortwave radios.

Yes.

Which you discovered.

Yes.

Which was totally illegal.

Am I coming through? OK, good. OK. Again, you asked me if Mr. Geslin had a shortwave radio. Which at that time was pretty amazing, considering he was a farmer. And how he knew to operate it, that was even more amazing to me. But he did.

Of course, if you had a shortwave radio at that time, and somebody knew about it and didn't denounce, that would have meant jail or being shot. It was really very dangerous. So he would go in the barn and hid it. And that's where he listened to it.

And one time we listened to it. He heard that the landing had taken place. And that was so amazing, because nobody could believe it.

Now, the location of where I was in Normandy was only 35 miles away from Omaha Beach, so it was very close. But it

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took two months until the first American soldiers came through our village, because there was so much fighting there. There were so many German troops, about 100,000 men of the German army fighting back. I mean, they were not exactly collapsed. They were fighting. So I don't know. I'm just stopping here. You may have a certain impression.

No, that's fine. What I really want to go into to discuss how the liberation in this area.

Yes. Right. Well, the liberation-- again, we didn't know much what was happening. That's part of the whole thing. We knew that the American landed and the British, but more than that, we didn't know much of it, except that within weeks, we had refugees who came from the coastal area, asking refuge, actually, in the farms and everywhere. In fact, we had the couple stay with us.

And things were being bombed. It was difficult for soldiers and for civilians, because the Americans were bombing, actually, all the bridges and access routes to cut the German forces. So there was a lot of damage and were bombs actually falling around the village. And you had to be lucky if a bomb didn't fall on the farm or the house where you were. So these were very anxious time-- very anxious times.

But anyway, at one point we heard already the artillery. You could hear the artillery in the distance. I mean, we knew they we're coming closer, the Americans. We were not quite sure they were the Americans or the British yet. We knew there was fighting.

Were you able to visit your sister at that time?

Yeah, I would occasionally visit my sister, but not too often. Because it was three or four miles away, and three or four miles away on country lanes wearing wooden shoes was not that easy, you know? You walked through trails. And besides that, I was needed to do things at home. It wasn't like I just could willy-nilly take off and say, I'm going to visit my sister.

But this was one incident which I recall in my book. I actually did not see much of the war, if you think in terms of fighting, because I was in a remote village. But when I was actually walking on the road to visit my sister, there was a whole convoy-- German convoy stopped on the roadside. And up to now, I'd never seen too many of them, because now they were fleeing the coast.

And then at that point, I saw actually like a squadron. There were like six, eight airplanes that came above. I mean, they obviously were not German airplanes. And, in fact, you could see the star under the wings. And they were what you call P-38, if that means anything. But the reason I'm mentioning that, they were double fuselage airplanes with two tails, which was so amazing looking. It was like seeing a space war, you know?

And I was so astonished by that. And I walked by all these German soldiers and everything else, and was all a bit scared, because I was always scared seeing German soldiers. But nobody bothered me. I said, hi. They said, hello, you know?

And about half a mile later, the planes went by, came back, and they just dove down, and just strafed and bombed the whole convoy, which erupted in flames. So that was as close as I was from that particular moment there.

When did you realize that you actually were free to return what you hoped in Paris?

Well, the American soldiers, liberators, the 6 of August. It's a date which I still have in my head. And what happened, I wasn't-- they were fussy that way. And I was looking around. And I'm walking on top of a hedgerow.

And now, you have to visualize the Normandy countryside. Every field was separated by tall hedgerows-- would be as high, sometimes about 15 feet high, with trees. So you could hear voices, but you couldn't see anyone.

So I heard voices, so I climbed on the hedgerow. And then I saw my first American soldiers. They were-- there was a patrol, about 8 to 10 soldiers with the guns at the ready. They were actually walking across the field. And they saw me,

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and they beckoned me. And, of course, I realized they were American soldiers.

And I think that was one of the greatest moments of my life. I started to cry like a baby. I was pretty much of a baby then, but I really cried, because I realized that was the end of the war in some manner.

And so they asked me-- it was funny. Of course, I couldn't speak English then. So they asked me for some water, but I couldn't figure what they were saying-- something to drink. So one guy took his canteen, and they showed me upside down there was nothing. So I said, oh, [SPEAKING FRENCH]. So you know, so all say, oui, oui, oui. That was the extent of their language.

So we went back to the farm. And, of course, we didn't want them to have just water-- cider and all the trimmings and all that. It was an amazing moment really.

So from that time in August to when you actually found your sister's bicycle, borrowed it to get back to Paris, how much time-- how long did it take? And how did you part with Mrs. Prim? How did she feel about your leaving?

What happened is that I got my first letter from the Bonneau after a couple of years, telling me that the liberation had taken place. Only Paris had been liberated. And that as soon as it would be possible for me to go by some kind of transportation back to Paris, they would want to have me back. But, of course, the trains were not running. Nothing worked. It was a chaos.

So my sister had a bike. Interestingly enough, which I never knew-- I asked my sister-- the Bonneau had shipped her bike. You know, I don't know why not mine. You never asked too many--

She asked for it.

Yeah, but we never asked too many questions. You know, there was always a blank to memories why. But anyway, my sister had a bike, you know, ladies bike style. And anyway, the liberation took place, and, of course, the American troops went through the village and so on.

And then I had that letter that told me about possibly coming back from Paris. But, of course, things were not happening. And I think a few months later, maybe about, let's say it was August, September-- no, maybe October. Then I had an inspirational thought. Why couldn't I go back to Paris and borrow my sister's bike?

And I told my sister, and she said, what are you thinking about? And I persuaded finally. And, of course, without question, my sister was much more practical than I was always.

So anyway, I persuaded to loan me a bike. And I just told Madame Prim. I said, look, I have the permission to go back to Paris. She couldn't hold me back. So my sister gave me the bike, and I said goodbye to everybody.

And the farmers there, they gave me a little pack. I mean, what I was carrying were my drawings, and just enough food for one day, and an extra shirt that I had. That's it. I travel light all the time.

And no money.

What?

And no money.

Oh no, no money, nothing else. But you know, I always felt I'd managed somehow. I was always very optimistic about the future.

So it took me like about 12 days to get back to Paris, which was over 200 miles. But, of course, I never could track the principal roads, because there were convoys on it. So you had to go by little byways, which were dirt roads and so on.

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And, of course, it wasn't the greatest bike, you know.

But anyway, at night what I would do, before the night, I would go to farmhouses that I would see. And I would ask permission to sleep in a barn. And I said to them, well, if you could give me a piece of bread or something, I'll work for you. I'll stack some wood or whatever you want me to do. I'll do it.

And most of them were pretty agreeable. They would let me and they would feed me a little bit. And that's the way I went.

And there were a couple of nights that I, too, had no food, and I slept on the ground outside. So that was it was. But I did make my way back to Paris.

And when you arrived at the Bonneaus?

They were shocked. Yeah. They were shocked. I was afraid that they would really be very annoyed at me, but they were not. And I remained with the Bonneau for a while, actually.

Right, and your sister came back--

Yeah. Yeah.

--eventually and stayed with them.

I remained with the Bonneau until the next summer. And they were wonderful people. They were really terrific. I went back to school. To it, it would be like, I would say-- what grade would that be? The ninth grade.

Ninth grade.

Yeah, the ninth grade. And, you know, it was very hard to catch up really. But Monsieur Bonneau was an engineer. And he had his-- I think he-- I don't know if he owned his own factory. They were well-to-do people.

And he said to me, well-- he said, you know, what would you like to do, my boy, when you grow up, so to speak? So I said, I would like to be an artist. He said, well, that's a great hobby, he said. But, you know. So he said, no, I think we have to talk seriously about your future.

So he wanted me to go to a professional school where he would have a technical school, basically. But you needed actually to have an entrance examination, and I failed. I was not very good in math. I was terrible in math-- good in everything else but math, my weak subject. So Mr. Bonneau was very, very angry at me. It was a personal insult.

Right.

And at that moment, at that time a few months ago before that, of course, we had-- at that point in time, our parents had not come back. And, of course, we didn't want to think why. We thought, well-- I always had the idea that perhaps Russian troops had taken them away someplace, and they were not able. I just could not face up to the idea that they would be dead. I couldn't do that.

But meanwhile, from the blue, my mother's brother, who had lived in France at the time, but never spoke to my brother, because they always had a quarrel, like families have. But he found me, my sister. And he came back, and somehow-- I found this was miraculous, too, because he had no idea where we were.

And he took us under his wing, and he decided to become our guardian. And then Monsieur Bonneau was very angry at me for not passing the test. And my uncle said, that's not such a big deal. He said, you know. So we kind of left the Bonneau. He took us away from there and sent us to a Jewish orphanage, because he wanted my brother and my sister and I to be together. But I had not seen my brother in three years.

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Your younger brother.

That's the time we were reunited.

Right. I'm afraid we're going to actually have to wind up if we want a few minutes for questions.

OK, I'll just make it very quick here for a few minutes. And for the succeeding years until I came to America, we actually were in a Jewish orphanage, which were called, actually, children homes. And that's where I really learned about Jewish religion. I had no idea about the Jewish background.

And anyway, my uncle, we had family in the US. He's the one who connected with them. And he had thought that the best thing for my brother, my sister, and I would be to go to America. Perhaps we'd have a better future there, because we had no real family outside of him. And this is why we came to America.

Thank you, Simon. Well, we'll have any questions if anyone is interested in asking more details.

Are we running short of time?

Yes, we're actually at 2:00.

OK.

We have a few more minutes since we started late. Is there anyone in the audience would like to ask Simon some additional details? Yes.

Yeah. Yeah.

Did everyone hear that?

Everybody heard the question? Was she a social worker connected with any organization. That I don't know. I wish I had known. I have no idea at all. She was a young woman in her early 20s. And I suspect she might have been, but I don't know. So that's a blank that I have.

But you did meet her after the war.

Yeah, I did. At that time, we never bothered to question people. We were sort of living our lives. So I wish I had asked, but I didn't. Yes.

What year was it that you drew the picture of the bus? And could the year 2000--

Yeah, right. Well, I drew those pictures, in a year, about 1943, when I'm about 13 years old. And that's about the time I drew them.

That one was dated actually 1944.

Oh, maybe so it was '44.

That particular one had a date on it. Not all of them did, but we can check it. It's in the exhibition and we can--

Right.

Yes.

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I'm sorry, I didn't catch your question. Do I still do a--

Do a lot of artwork.

Yeah, actually I became a professional artist. As a professional, I became a designer, a packaging designer, my career. And also, I find artists which have exhibited a lot of my work. So my life continued on that path, luckily for me. Yes.

Yes.

Have you ever gone back to retrace any of those steps?

Oh, yes, very much. I went back to Normandy to the place where I had been hidden. That little humble house you saw with the red roof there, still looked the same, except the interior. They had a VCR and a TV.

And a floor.

They had a beautiful floor, beautiful tile floor, you know? And the antique part of it had remained. The wood ceiling was there. They kept the integrity of the antique look, but they really fixed it up. And instead of a milk cart in the back, there was actually a 2000 year-- I mean, it was a new car, you know? And it was-- I mean, we did go back. We did go back to most places where I'd been. It was sort of a pilgrimage, which I made several times, actually.

And just for people to know, whoever is still alive, I'm in contact with them, with all those families, the ones who were connected with me and the one connected to my brother. And we connected with their children, who have come to this country and stayed with us. So we feel that. We always felt an enormous debt, which I still feel to this day for those people who saved us, really basically. So this is something which you never can repay really fully, but you try to do so.

Theresa?

Yes.

Obviously, character-wise, you're very much like your mother, as you described her.

Yeah.

And since you are probably the only source of information for your brother and maybe for your sister, about your parents, what other information can you scrape from your memory about your parents?

Well, you know what's interesting about your question, about what memories can I scrape about my parents in discussing things with my sibling, my sister is two years older, so she would have better memories than I have. But somehow, because I think I'm an artist, I've kept this incredible visual memory of my parents and people in general. And also, I must say that to me, my inspiration to this day are my parents-- very much alive in my heart. Because I think they were so exceptional for me.

Because when I was 12 years old, you're still not at the point where you want to rebel against your parents, that you feel they're total failures. To me, they were heroic figures, because I lived with them through a period of stress, where they demonstrated their character.

I mean, in normal life, you don't see your parents having to do heroic things to survive. But I inspire myself for my parents. My father gave me my optimism, because he was a very optimistic person. Of course, he's also very-- he was a very precise, ready to attack any task, and that's the way I am.

And my mother was a very exuberant person and very welcoming. She always sang at home. She was very spirited and also artistic in some ways, I think, because she collected very lovely things around the house. And she was waiting some time, a long time to just buy the right thing to buy. So I knew she was discriminating in her taste.

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And I remember she had very lovely paintings around the house. So to me, there were impressions of my childhood that were very important. And what it is, any time I think of my parents, I feel this enormous warm glow in my heart from them. And to me, I still feel that my parents gave me the-- it made me able to do what I did in my life. And this is the way I view my parents.

So they're not-- they're not abstract. And what I'm saying-- another thing, too, which I always feel sorry for my brother, who is seven years younger than I am. He did not know my parents really. And I can't imagine. He doesn't say much. I mean, I'm very loquacious and you could see. But my brother is very quiet about his past. And I think he was never able to come to terms with this sort of invisible kind of thing, where you cannot grasp the past, but it's there.

So for me, I've seen my parents and so vividly. I feel so enriched, and especially that in the past, I'd say, two years ago, my book was published. And I was able to have a catharsis of writing my story and thus sort of-- well, trying to find some solace about the way I felt about my parents having lost them, which I really never did totally. It's something you never come to terms with. But in some way, looking at the positive of their legacy, that's the way I feel good about things.

And another thing, too, I think my parents also taught me, and I want to finish on that note, that I never felt like a victim. Because I really felt so enriched by them and their presence and their memory. And I never felt a heroic figure either for having survived, because I knew so many others are dead.

So here I am in front of you today feeling so privileged, really, to be alive and to be able to share a little bit of my story. So I thank you all for coming. I think it was very nice of you to come out from the cold.

And I want to thank Genya for being the facilitator of this event today. And thank you all.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

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