

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 fifth season of First Person, and our first person today is Dr. Fritz Gluckstein, whom we shall meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust and World War II. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. This is our final First Person program of the year. For information about First Person for 2005, please check the museum's website later this year, and that website address is www.ushmm.org. That's www.ushmm.org.

This 2004 season of First Person has been made possible through the generosity of both the William Goldring and Woldenberg Foundation and the Helena Rubinstein foundation, to whom we are grateful for sponsoring this year's program. Dr. Gluckstein will share his first person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 40 minutes. We will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask Dr. Gluckstein some questions.

Before you're introduced to him, I have a couple of requests of you. First, if possible, we ask if you stay seated throughout the one-hour program. That will minimize any disruptions for Dr. Gluckstein as he speaks.

Second, we'd like to ask you that if you have a question during the question and answer period, and we hope you do, please try to make your question as brief as possible. I will repeat the question so all in the room, including Dr. Gluckstein, hear the question before he responds to it. I'd like to let those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition this afternoon know that they are good for the balance of the afternoon, so you can stay with us through the one hour program and still get to 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. Over 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.

What you are about to hear, from Fritz Gluckstein, is one individual's account of the Holocaust. Fritz survived the Holocaust by managing to stay in Berlin throughout the war. As you will hear today, despite several arrests and other close calls, Fritz remained a part of labor details until liberation by the Russians when they took Berlin. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Fritz's introduction.

We begin with this picture of Fritz Gluckstein, who was born in Berlin, Germany on January 24, 1927. He was the son of a Jewish judge and Christian mother, Georg and Hedwig Gluckstein, whom we see in this photo with Fritz. These next contemporary photographs show places where Fritz lived, attended school, and played. As a child, Fritz enjoyed the companionship of friends and school gatherings, as we see in this photograph.

After the Nazis came to power, Fritz's father lost his job as a judge. And because of his father's and mother's background, Fritz was considered a Geltungsjude, a counted Jew. In 1942, his Jewish school was closed and he was sent to work at a Jewish cemetery. Later, he was forced to work in a factory, and then in a clean up crew for after air raids.

Throughout these difficult times, Elfriede Dressler, Fritz's aunt, shown here with him in the previous photo with Fritz, provided the Glucksteins with much-needed extra food as their rations continued to decrease. At the end of the war, Fritz's parents stayed in Germany and Georg Gluckstein resumed his judicial career. Here we have Fritz with his parents after the war.

Fritz decided to emigrate on his own to the United States and arrived in the US in 1948, where he studied veterinary medicine. Today, Fritz Gluckstein lives in the Washington DC area with his wife, Marin. Following his arrival in the United States after the war, he eventually became a doctor of veterinary medicine. After a stint in the US Army, Fritz began a long and distinguished career with the federal government where he became an expert on diseases that are

transmitted from animals to humans like mad cow disease.

Fritz is a self-described opera buff and football fan. He volunteers each week here at the museum translating letters and other documents written in German. He has a daughter, Ruth, and two granddaughters-- one who is 6, and another who is 3 years of age. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming today's first person, Dr. Fritz Gluckstein.

[APPLAUSE]

Fritz, thanks so much for joining us and your willingness to serve as our first person today. You were a very young boy when Hitler came to power in Germany. Why don't we start with you telling us about your family, about yourself, and your neighborhood, and your community in those years before the war began?

Well, I was six years old when Hitler came to power. And before that, everything was normal. However in, I remember, January 30, 1933, my father lost his job. And then, from that moment on, things began to happen. And I must say, all through the time, my mother's relatives stood by us, supported us. Never distanced themselves from us. And my good aunt, I must say, once my father lost his job, money, of course, was quite tight. But she took care of everything from shoes to birthday parties.

You will see that I always have been very lucky. My name, Gluckstein, means lucky stone. And you will see luck has always been with me. Right from the beginning in 1933, I was ready to go to grade school. And at that time, Jews still were allowed in public schools. I went to a grade school and was lucky again.

In most schools, the Jewish students were harassed, separated, were forced to sing patriotic songs and other things. The school I went to, that didn't happen. I was treated like everyone else. There were six Jewish students. Our homeroom teacher was a party member. He treated us like anyone else.

I might as well point out right now the fact that someone was a party member did not mean he was a dyed in the wool Nazi. Some of the most vicious people I knew were not party members.

Fritz, your father, as we know, was a judge, but he was also a veteran of the First World War.

Very much, too, yes. He, in fact, was quite patriotic. And on holidays, he had a flag, and he showed me how to salute the flag. He was decorated, but he lost his job in 1933. And in 1935, he received a certificate and a medal in the name of the fuhrer.

Everyone who had served at the front, the trenches, received that medal, Jewish or not. First they threw him out, and then they gave him a medal.

The logic is just unbelievable isn't it? And he had actually-- not only had he served, but he had won the Iron Cross.

Correct. He had Iron Cross, yes.

We're, of course, right now we're in the time of the Olympic games. 68 years ago were the 1936 Olympic games. You remember those?

I remember.

Tell us a little bit about your memories of that.

See, at that time, '36, already certain restrictions had occurred. You could see signs in restaurants, Jews not allowed. Or in towns, Jews-- you entered the small towns, a sign, Jews are not welcome here. And someone looked Jewish, he frequently was harassed on the street. Not for everyone, but there were some people who had nothing else to do, and going around harassing Jews.

Came the Olympics, all signs disappeared and people were instructed, behave very well. You could go everywhere, and it was quite normal for about the two weeks of the Olympics. The moment the Olympics were over, the signs appeared. And again, benches in parks, there were special benches for Jews only. They reappeared, too.

You saw Hitler during that time, didn't you?

Yes. In fact, during the Olympics, I was watching-- he came down driving to the Olympic stadium. And I stayed at the balcony-- the apartment of a friend, and I watched him coming by.

If you don't mind, you told us a story over lunch about Norway and Germany.

Yes. Something-- the story during the Olympic games, I believe it has never been reported. Germany was to play Norway in a soccer game-- heavy favorite. And Hitler appeared to witness it, but that didn't go well. Germany lost pretty badly, and Hitler left during the game.

And of course, the Berliners always had a big mouth. And he could say, hey, look, old Adolf. He took the pains going outside to watch it, and look what happened! Ha ha. Really.

[LAUGHTER]

Fritz, tell us about your father's last day when he-- of his job, when he lost his job.

Yes, he told me. He was told that his services were no longer needed, and he'd better leave. And somebody told him, you better not go out from-- because as a demonstration Nazis. You never know what would happen. My father said, no, I came in the front door, and I go out the front door. And he went out around the front door.

Your father, Fritz, of course, during his time as the power of Hitler grew and he was consolidating his grasp on the country, your father did try to get the family out of Germany. Tell us a little bit about that.

Yes, of course, you had to have a lot of money to emigrate. Or if you wanted to come to the United States, you needed someone who gave you an affidavit, which was not always easy. And even then, if you had an affidavit, you had to get a means to get out. Booking passage was very difficult. And in our case, we finally got an affidavit. But that time, it was just before America entered the war, and it was too late.

And the doors closed at that point for the family and getting out?

That is correct. But I might as well tell you, my father always said, he felt very strongly that he couldn't leave-- that he and-- we had to stay. And he said, look, I wish you would choose a profession that is not limited to one country like law. Well, I didn't.

One that is universal in your case. That's right.

A portable profession, if you wish.

You were just 11 on the night of Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass. What do you remember about that time?

Well, I remember going to school, and lo and behold, there was one broken window. And I didn't pay attention. Then another one, and a third one, and then started to dawn upon me what was happening. And by the way, we mentioned there's something else, in my opinion, as far as I know, has never been reported. How did they know what windows to break?

Well, about two months before that, each Jewish store owner had to have his name in large letters-- white large letters ye high on the window. You could tell right away who was Jewish, and all they had to do looking for the letters and break the windows. I remember that distinctly. But I make it clear it was not a public outburst. It was staged.

In fact, to be fair, most people were quite embarrassed to see the broken glass, the burnt synagogue, the flames-- synagogue in flames.

Did you-- was it a while before you realized that this horrible night, this night of terror, was not just in Berlin, that it was, in fact, all over Germany? Pretty soon we realized that. In fact, it was worse in the provinces. In Berlin, you always-- there were foreigners and diplomats, and they kept that somewhat in check. But at that time, people realized, well, for Jews there is no future in Germany.

Tell us, I think it was during that time that you were not able to get report cards because of, quote, "special circumstances." What did that mean?

I don't know.

You told me about there were special circumstances why you could not get report cards in school, if I remember right. I may be wrong about that. During the Kristallnacht and right after that, you were not able to get your report card.

Yeah. What happened-- I see, sorry. I remember distinctly. Of course, in school, some of the teachers were arrested and put into a concentration camp. And result, a note had to take home to our parents. Because of the special circumstances, report cards will be late this spring.

And this is because the teachers had been--

The teachers were not there, you see. Actually, a substitute teacher had to come and remember the English teacher had to help out in mathematics. And anyhow, report cards were about three or four weeks later. That's correct.

Kristallnacht was in November of 1938. And of course, in September 1939 is when war really broke out in Europe. And things changed dramatically after that.

Absolutely. In fact, the war started in August, and in January of '39 each Jew had to take the name Israel or Sarah. And we were given special identification cards with a big J. And whenever a Jew went to a government office, he had to take out the card, announce in a loud voice, I am a Jew, and present it.

And every time you signed your name to any document, you signed your name, so and so. And I came as Fritz Israel Gluckstein. I did have a Jewish identification number, so and so and so, had to put down any time.

But the moment the war started, the vice started to close. Of course, immediately we got ration cards, and there, too, Jews were only allowed to shop between 4:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon. Occasionally, we had a shopkeeper who, when nobody was looking, didn't observe the regulation.

And of course, the ration card first, no bread. Then no white bread, no meat, and so on. Anyhow, they cut ration cards quite a bit. And as you said, my good aunt helped out very much.

Fritz, in our slide presentation, we used the word Geltungsjude.

Yes.

That was very important. Tell us about that.

Yes. That is-- there are actually two categories of mixed marriages in Germany. Let me explain. A mixed marriage without children, the Jewish partner had to wear the star. A mixed marriage where the children were not raised Jewish, that was a privileged mixed marriage. The Jewish partner did not have to wear the star. The children didn't have to wear the star. And a mixed marriage where the children were raised Jewish, there the children were considered Geltungsjuden, considered Jews. In my case, the Jewish partner had to wear the star, and the children have to wear the

star.

You had said to me that that label had-- or that phrase was essential to your survival. How did it affect you directly, you and your family?

Actually, this having non-Jewish relatives, the fact helped me to survive. Eventually, you might have heard about the Wannsee Conference. A conference was convened to make decisions regards to the Jews, and there they already planned to deport everyone. But the war ended, and they didn't come to it. But we were always under the gun. We had our rucksacks and suitcases ready. We never knew what would happen.

Fritz, I believe you said to me that when you had the star sewn onto your clothing that police officers would actually-- what would they do to test its--

It had to be very tightly, and they came with a pencil and tried to get behind it. And so help you if they could get behind that star.

Actually, if they could slip it behind, you were in trouble.

Yes. Of course, you had remove it from one garment to the other. You only get two or three stars.

Right, right. Of course, Jews had to give up jewelry, furs, radios, bikes, and something--

Pets.

That's exactly right. I hadn't heard that till you told me, including pets, and including you lost a dog as a result of that.

Yes Oh, a dog. We had-- even though my mother wasn't Jewish, we had to get rid of the pets. And of course, no radio, no phone, and so on.

There was something very unique about your dog apart from the fact that you loved it. If you would tell us about it.

Well, the dog was trained, if you give him a treat and said, from Nazi, And when you told him from the Jew, he grabbed it.

[LAUGHTER]

I knew we'd have to get that one out. Fritz, tell us when the deportations began.

Deportations began in '41. And at the beginning, they were quite orderly. People received so-called lists. The lists-- they had to list their belongings. And at a specified date, sometimes SS, sometimes regular policemen came. And they had to leave, and the apartment was sealed. And they had to make their way to a collection center.

Later on, of course, they were just grabbed. And in school, you came in the morning. Your neighbor wasn't there. You never knew, was he sick, or had he been deported?

During that time, which must have been just so, so frightful for everybody-- your family and everybody in your community, how did-- your father had lost his job. At that point, rations were scarce. How did you manage to get by? I know your aunt was crucial to that.

Well, actually, you dreaded one day at a time. You did the very best, and you enjoy the jokes that went around. They really helped you. It was a rough time, but you came to work in the morning, and someone told a funny story. Something like this really helped you.

And I'm hoping in a little bit we can talk a little bit more about the humor that was necessary, and we'll get to that. At

some point, the Allies began bombing Berlin.

That was correct. The Allies, during the night, the British, and during the day, the Americans. They went-- of course, the Jews had to go to special air raid shelters. And let me mention if there was an air raid that lasted beyond 1:00, school started--

1:00 in the morning.

1:00 in the morning. School started late, about two hours late, and class is only 35 minutes. And there we were sitting, the students. On one hand, we hoped there would be an all clear soon. On the other hand, we hoped that it would last just 15 minutes longer beyond 1:00. Then we have--

[LAUGHTER]

That is a commonality with kids everywhere, I think. During this time, Fritz, you're still very young of course. What did your parents tell you to try to explain what you were experiencing, what was happening to the Jews in your community, what was happening to your family? What were they able to tell you to try to offer some understanding of all the events around you?

Well, my father, actually, was very quite religious, and that helped him a lot. And he imparted that somewhat onto me. And actually, as I said, one day at a time. You didn't have much time to think. You were glad that you made it to another day.

June 1942, the schools are now closed for Jews. You're forced to go to work. And it was soon after that that you had your very first close call with the deportation.

Yes.

Share that with us.

Actually, it was three calls. Once, my mother helped someone-- escorted friends to the collection center, and some Gestapo officer wanted to know what you are doing here. So you have a Jewish husband and son, have him report tomorrow morning to one of the collection points. And I had to-- my father and I had to report to one of the notorious Grosse Hamburger Strasse. It had been an old people's home. And at that time, a special SS officer had come from Vienna.

But lucky again, they interviewed, they interrogated me and my father, but well, they let me go. And I still remember before I was called for interrogation, my father and an older gentleman, he was a journalist, told me, Fritz, no heroics. Just answer the question. Nothing more.

Don't have an attitude. Just answer the question. Well, so I did, and they let me go.

The second time actually was a famous factory aktion. I was working at a factory, and every-- the SS came around in trucks to collect all the Jews that were working in factories. And I was picked up, too, was brought to a collection center, and strangely enough, some very decent plainclothes policemen were-- who let me go, get out of here. And they let me go out after shouldn't have.

In fact, they let me go after 8:00 in the evening. By going out after 8:00 in the evening, by being in the street, I broke a law. No Jew was allowed after 8:00 outside.

Anyhow, but it was the end. I went home. My father wasn't there. He had been picked up at another factory. My mother had been away to visit an aunt, and there was no one there to pick up the ration cards. And I went to get the ration cards, and lo and behold, before I get in was a moving van. Everyone with the yellow star was put into it and sent to another collection center.

From there, all those that had non-Jewish relatives were put to another collection center, Rosenstrasse. And we were inside, and Rosenstrasse, right now, a movie is opening up in films being shown here in Washington. And we were kept inside, and of course, we didn't know what would happen. Spent the time speculating now what would happen.

And actually, standing in line to use the toilet facilities were hundreds of people in a building that wasn't set up for that. But outside, mothers and wives, non-Jewish partners, staged a demonstration. They wanted us out. And apparently, Goebbels thought, well, right after the debacle of Stalingrad, it might not be a good idea to--