

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. We are in our sixth season of First Person. Our First Person today is Rabbi Jacob Wiener 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 World War II and during the Holocaust.

Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. Each Wednesday through August 31, we will have a new First Person program. The museum's website at www.ushmm.org, that's www.ushmm.org provides a review of upcoming First Person guests. This 2005 season of first person is made possible by the Louis and Dora Smith Foundation to whom we are grateful for their generosity and for sponsoring this year's program.

Rabbi Wiener will share with you his firsthand account as a First Person for about 40 minutes. We will follow that with a period for you to ask some questions of Rabbi Wiener. Before you are introduced to Jacob, I'd like to ask a couple of things of you. First, we hope that you will stay seated throughout the one-hour program. That way we minimize any disruptions while Jacob is speaking.

Secondly, if you have a question during the question-and-answer period, and we sure hope you will, please try to make your question as brief as possible. I will repeat the question so that all in the room, including Jacob, hear the question before he responds to you. I'd like to let those of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition today know they are good for the entire afternoon. So if you stay until we're done at 2 o'clock, you'll still be able to go 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. 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 Jacob Wiener is one individual's account of the Holocaust. His experience is one among many different experiences from the Holocaust. We cannot say that it is typical. We can only say that it is unique to this one person.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with Jacob's introduction. And we begin with a photograph of Benno and Gerd Zwienicki with a group of non-Jewish children from the neighborhood. And we have a circle that shows Jacob almost to the far right and his brother Benno right next to him on the right.

On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Germany. On the map of Germany, the arrow points to Bremen, where Jacob was born in 1917, the eldest of four children. 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. Our next 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 Wurzburg. This photograph is a view of the Wurzburg Jewish Teacher Seminary. And next, we have a group photo of the graduating class of the Wurzburg Jewish Teachers Seminary shortly before it closed down on Kristallnacht in 1938. And again, our arrow shows us the location of Jacob in this photograph.

This next map of Germany shows synagogues destroyed on Kristallnacht or the Night of Broken Glass. The dots represent cities where synagogues were destroyed. The next photo shows Germans passing the broken window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht on November 10, 1938.

In this photo, Jacob studies outside the Wurzburg Jewish Teachers Seminary shortly before it was closed on Kristallnacht. On Kristallnacht, Jacob was arrested and held for eight days in the Wurzburg jail. This photograph shows Jews arrested after Kristallnacht awaiting deportation to the Dachau concentration camp.

And the next photograph shows Jews arrested during Kristallnacht, lining up for roll call at the Buchenwald concentration camp. In this map, the arrow points to Canada. On May 31, 1939, the Zwienicki family arrived in Canada, where their father had a relative. Jacob later entered the United States on a student visa, and began attending the Baltimore Rabbinical School.

In 1948, he married Trudel Farnrog, who was also a Holocaust survivor. Trudel left Germany and went to England as a member of a Kindertransport.

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 child welfare laws. He also founded a home for children and earned his PhD from New York University.

Today, Jacob lives in the Washington area where he is a founding volunteer here at the Holocaust museum. And you will find him here on Tuesdays as a volunteer. He is presently working on his memoirs.

Jacob lost his wife, Trudel, three years ago after nearly 54 years of marriage. Jacob and Trudel had three children who now among them have produced 17 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren, with the newest born just three months ago. I'm pleased to say that one daughter, Judy, and her two children Shira and Moshe, are right in the front row. If all three of you will wave your hands, if you don't mind. A little bashful. We're glad you're here.

Jacob gives speeches and presentations about the Holocaust and about Kristallnacht, and just for some examples of that, he spoke here at the museum on the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht. He spoke locally on the 70th anniversary of the Versailles Treaty. And two years ago, he was a guest for dinner at the White House with the President and First Lady.

With that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, rabbi Jacob Wiener. Jacob, will join us?

[APPLAUSE]

You'll be very comfortable there. OK?

Jacob, welcome and thank you for your willingness to be our First Person today. It really is an honor to have Rabbi Wiener as our First Person today. Jacob, among the various survivors that we've had on the first person program, I believe you may be the most senior member in terms of your age having been born in 1917. And what that means is that you have recollections of the early years of the Nazi rise to power. So that by the time of Kristallnacht in 1938, you were already 21 years of age.

If you wouldn't mind, Jacob, perhaps we could begin today with you describing for us what life was like for you, for your family, and your community in those years as the Nazis came to power in the years leading up to Kristallnacht.

First of all, I want to tell you that I'm not telling you about concentration camps. But I'm telling you about the way, how it all came about. How was the situation in Germany before Hitler came to power? In the '20s, Germany was nominally at least a democracy. And Jews and other people lived well with each other.

However, there were always signs, even in the '20s, that there would be changes because the situation after the First World War was not very rosy. After the First World War which Germany lost, the victorious nations put very hard conditions on the Germans. They had to pay reparations and other things like this. There were inflations. There were all kinds of things which brought the country down.

And of course, if there are bad situations in a country, then radicals come. And they want to change it. Hitler was such a person who founded the Nazi party. Nazi means from the German word national, National Socialist Labor Party, NASDP. And he formed this party already in 1919. And during the years, he gained more and more followers because the situation was bad.

We felt this already in the '20s. And I remember 1928, when I went on a streetcar with my mother. And suddenly, the Brownshirts, the Nazis who had the brown shirt, came and jumped and rushed into the car. They made expletive discussions informed against the Jews. My mother said at that time when they come to power everything will be different. We have a lot of praying to do.

Jacob, you were born in Germany. Your family lived in Germany. Yet, you were considered stateless. Tell us what that meant. You know that anyone who is born in the United States just by being born there, is a United States citizen. That is not so in Europe. In Europe, you are what your father is. My father was born in Russia, in the Ukraine. But he was not even a Russian citizen. Because when the Soviets came to power in 1922, they made a law that anyone, any Russians who are living outside now and don't come back within three months, will lose their citizenship.

These people then became what we call stateless, people without a state. So I was stateless.

Jacob, tell us about your father, the kind of work he did, and about the Nazi harassment that began to take place against your father.

My father had a bicycle business, not only selling bicycles, but also repairing them. As soon as the Nazis came to power and especially a little bit later, they tried to do some tricks on us, on my father's business and so forth, in order to blame him for something which he didn't actually do. For instance, they sent people in there, Nazis and other people like this, there were many parties in Germany maybe 38 different parties. And they sent these people in to buy stolen merchandise.

If you stole your merchandise, you were sent to prison. But he did not do this. But one day one of the customers made an accusation. And he had to go to court. While he went to court, he looked back and he saw one of his customers. And he knew exactly that he was the one who had done it. He came out free. That's one of this.

And if I remember correctly, the authorities, the Nazis tried to put somebody in business as a competitor against your dad.

As we came closer to the Nazi period in the '30s, they told one of their members of the Nazi party to build a bicycle business right next to my father's shop at the corner. He didn't know very much about bicycle and repairing. So he came always to my father and asked him, how do I do this, how do I do that, and so forth. And he told him.

| in order to make things worse, they told him also to build a big wall, a high wall, between our two houses. And he built a big wall which covered up to 2/3 of our house of windows and so forth. so in order to make it harder and to chicanery.

Jacob, a little bit later, we're going to talk more about your mother. Tell us now about your mother, and what she was like, and she was well known. And tell us about her.

My mother was also born in Germany. She was born in Nuremberg which is in Southern Germany. And she went to school there. When the war came about, before the war, she came with the Kindertransport, children's transport to England. And of course, all in England all the young children and so forth, when they had a certain age, were interned. Then they were sent to the Isle of Man which is on the other side. And then later on--

Jacob-- your own mother, she was the equivalent of a Montessori.

Oh, you're talking about my own mother.

Yes.

My own mother was living in Germany for a long time. And she was always in Germany. And her family came from Germany. They had maybe a 200 or 300 year generations, years where they lived in Germany. So my own mother. she was originally a teacher and she taught a certain method in education, which is called the Froebel method, which is a method where you teach a child from close to far nature, and then other things like that.

And she got married to my father. And afterwards, she took part of the business. My father was the mechanic of the business. And she was so to say the bookkeeper, and taking care of everything in the business. She had a beautiful handwriting. And at that time, we had not much typewriters. Nevertheless, we had no electric typewriters for sure.

So what happened is she wrote in handwriting, and she had a beautiful handwriting. And many people came from far and wide and she did many times for nothing, free of charge.

So they would ask her to write their letters for them?

They were asking her to write letters.

To family and friends and whomever else?

Yeah.

You mentioned the phrase to me one time burnt pancake. Will you say a little bit about that?

Burnt pancake, burnt pancakes, you know what a burnt pancake is? A burnt pancake is something like a pancake, which is not completely burnt through. It is burnt. This pancake is still brown from the outside, but inside it's still red.

Now when Hitler came to power, there were many communists. The communists were one of the biggest parties next to the Nazis and the democrats. But the communists didn't fight for their cause. When Hitler came to power, they suddenly changed. Overnight, they changed. And I saw communists, former communists, who were still actually communists, but they had put on the brown uniform. They were brown from the outside, the brown uniform of Hitler, and the red uniform, which is the red flag of the communists. So because they were burnt pancakes.

Jacob, you actually saw not only Hitler. You saw Goering. You saw Goebbels. Can you tell us about the time you saw Adolf Hitler? I saw Adolf Hitler when he was about one year in office in 1934. At that time, he was still not so sure if all the people would immediately come over to him. So therefore, one day I was in Hamburg. It's not far from Bremen. And he was there.

And he was supposed to go through the main city. However, he thought to himself, maybe I'm safer if I go through the Jewish cities, because the Jews will not attack me. So what did he do? He came through the Jewish city, which in Hamburg is called the Grindel section, if you know Hamburg. And I was just walking in that street. That's a street with trees at the side. It's called an allee.

So I didn't know what to do. Should I raise my hand, or should I just hide behind the tree? What should I do? I said to myself, I wait till he comes and I continue walking. Suddenly he came, and he was standing in an open car. And like always, he had his left hand near the buckle of his belt. In the right hand, he did the salute. You must know there were two kinds of salute.

This was called the German salute until Hindenburg died. Then there was only one salute, this salute, which is called the Hitler salute. And I just tried to hold my hand like this. And I said to myself, this is how deep you brought the German country into trash. Now he didn't hear this of course. And I walked on.

But I saw him. He was not very tall, 5 feet 6, blonde mustache. And-- and there he is.

You told me that at one point the Nazis passed a law that required all Jews to take a, quote, "Israelite" name. But one of them that you couldn't take was Joseph.

Right.

Why was that?

This was later in 1937 or '38. Then he made a law. His laws always wanted to separate the Jews from the others. And every law made a greater separation between them. He didn't want them to talk to each other. He didn't want anything to-- to keep them completely apart. So he made this law that Jewish names should be Jewish and Yiddish names, for instance. So he gave every Jew who didn't have one of these two names, all the male people had to take the name if they didn't have it already, Israel.

Like, for instance, my name is Jacob. I had to take Jacob Israel. The female, the women had to take the name Sarah, if they didn't have it already. So they'd say my mother's name was Selma, Selma Sarah. But Joseph, which is a biblical name-- it's in the Bible, he did not consider a Jewish name. Why not? Because one of his ministers, Goebbels, who was a minister of propaganda, of brainwashing in other words, he had the name Joseph, Joseph Goebbels. And he didn't want him to have a Jewish name, so he said this name is not Jewish.

Jacob, one more question before we move to a discussion about Kristallnacht. I recall actually from our very first time we met, you told me about going to a puppet show in the mid 1930s, as still as a youngster probably 14, 15 years of age, in about 1935. In which in this puppet show it was fiercely anti-Semitic. Can you say a little bit about that?

They had puppet shows in Germany in open places, and the puppets represented Hitler and the Jews, and all kinds of things, all kinds of animals. They were fighting each other, like puppets go. And so I was very innocent, let's call it and naive. Because I went over to one of the people, this policeman there. And I said, why do you show such shows, you see? Why do you show such shows? But that was not answered, because he just shook his hand.

You see, they did not want to be involved in this race. But they didn't want to say anything against it. They'd rather be neutral in order to say the truth. Yeah.

On November 9th through 10th 1938, Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. You were away at the Jewish Teachers Seminary in Wurzburg. On that night, your mother was murdered. Tell us, Jacob, what happened on that night. What happened to you? And how you came to learn about the death of your mother?

Kristallnacht is a night from the 9th to the tenth of November 1938. And many people only know about it that synagogues were burned and people were arrested and sent to concentration camps. But they may not know that people also were killed. Because in my city, in Bremen, five people were killed. A book has been written by one of the teachers. And I got it. It's written in German.

Because in this night, Hitler gave power to his private army. That was the SS. And he told them during this night, you can kill any Jew you want to. Why? How did this come about?

I don't know if you know about it. But many people know about it. It came about because about two days earlier on November 7, 1938, there was a 17-year-old boy by the name of Herschel Grynszpan. And this Herschel Grynszpan he was at that time in Paris. But his parents had been arrested during this night. And they were sent on trains to Poland. Why?

Because Germany negotiated with Poland at that time they wanted Danzig, the only free city that was in Poland near the Baltic Sea. And the Germans negotiated with the Poles and said to them, if you do not give us the city voluntarily, we will make war. So he negotiated with Poles. The Poles did not want to give it up.

So he said, all the Poles who are in Germany, go back to Poland. And they put them on trains. And the trains were leaving for Poland. At one point, they came to an agreement that Poland would give it up. But at this point, part of the train was in Poland, part of the train was in Germany, and part of the train was in no man's land in between. People who were in Poland part side, Poland let them in people. Who were in German side, the Germans let them in. But the one in between, in no man's land, they were being fought and shot at from both sides.

Now Herschel Greenspan's parents were in that place. And they sent a postcard to Paris and told him about the terrible situation. When Herschel Grynszpan heard this, he bought a revolver and he said, I'm going to the embassy, to the

German embassy, and I'm going to shoot the first person I see. He went to the German embassy. And he asked for the ambassador. He was not in.

There was a consul instead. And he said, can I talk to you? Yeah, I have a package for him. Then they came into an argument. And during this argument, he shot him. This consular, his name is Ernst vom Rath. He did not die immediately. But he was wounded, and he died after three days on the 9th of November, 1938.

When Hitler heard this, especially his minister Goebbels and Goering, when they heard it they said, this was not only a deed of one boy, one 17-year-old boy against a German person. This was the whole world Jewry, so to say, that is responsible for it. And therefore, we are going to make an attack against all of the Jews all over Germany.

And they've been meeting on the 9th of November anyhow every year since the First World War. Because the 9th of November was a special day for the Germans. Number one, it was the day of Armistice of the First World War. Number two, it was a day in 1923, the 9th of November, when Hitler had tried to make a putsch against the democracy at that time, and he lost. He got six months in prison instead of six years or more.

So what happened is it was a day when they anyhow gathered. And they gathered in the Beer Hall in Munich. In Germany, beer is very important. And they drink a lot of beer. Now what happened, they were all together and they were probably dizzy and probably inebriated, and they said at this point, Goebbels got up and he said, let's make an attack all Jews. Hitler put the button at 2 o'clock at night. And he said, now, you can go and do what you want.

And they did. They arrested maybe 30,000 or maybe more Jews. They went into their houses at nighttime. The Nazis always did at nighttime, because they didn't want the world to know. That's why we didn't know very much about them until now, until after the war.

But what happened is during this night, they went into all the Jewish houses, and they arrested them, or sent them to concentration. Now as far as I am concerned, our house, I wasn't there. Because I was at that time at the school in Wurzburg, which is about 400 miles away. So they came out into our house, and they called my father. And my father had fled in the meantime, when he heard the noise outside.

And they came in and broke in. And they asked my mother, where's your father-- where's your husband? Of course, she didn't know because he didn't tell her. And they said, if you don't answer us, we kill you. And they did. They killed her.

Later on, when I got the papers of what actually happened, because the Nazis wanted to be correct, they made a protocol of this. And in the protocol, it reads that why was she killed? Because she disregarded the order of a Nazi. She was resistant. Resistant means you didn't answer our questions.

They shot her on the spot in your house?

Yes.

We found the bullet afterwards.

Jacob, and meanwhile, as you said, you're at the seminary many miles away. What happened to you that night?

To me? In that night, it was the night from the 9th to the 10th of November, we were supposed to have a test, a final test in school. And I said to my colleagues, let's go home early. The dormitory where I lived was about 10 minutes away from the school. So I went there. And I said, let's go home early, because we want to be fresh the next morning when we have the test. That never came.

However, I went home. And we were living, there was a big dormitory room and there were some smaller ones. I was in some smaller ones with about three people in there. In the middle of the night, about 2:00, 2:30, they came and they broke in. We heard a big noise. And when I heard a big noise, I didn't know what it was all about because we were so overwhelmed from Daily News that we didn't read the papers, nothing. We didn't want to hear about it.

So what happened is I said to the two fellows next to me. I said to them, better let's get ready and confront it. It's better to confront the situation than to hide behind the walls or behind there.

Tell us about the confrontation and what they did.

Then, a few minutes later, a few people came in. And there was only a little lock, so they just broke in. And we were all already dressed. Because as I said, I told them get ready and confront them.

And they said to us, they were not in Nazi uniform. Maybe in other places they were, but not at mine because they wanted to say this is not the Nazi party that's against you. This is the population of the German-- all of them, the population of the Germans of Germany.

So they said to us, this time, meaning the time when Herschel Grynszpan killed this consular officer, we will not only bend your hair. And I don't really know what that meant for them. But anyhow, so but then it will be very bad for you. OK.

So then they went on. They went along the hallway. And there was an office. They took the typewriters, threw them through the window to the ground floor. They went into one large dormitory room. They were hanging lamps. They cut them off where they hang. There was a sink. They cut out the sink, so that the water was just coming out like that. And then they left.

Afterwards, they came back. They would come back. Our janitor told us that they would come back.

And Jacob, the next morning after you survived that night is that when you decided to head home to Bremen? When did you decide to go home?

I could not head home to Bremen yet, because in the early morning, they came back as our non-Jewish janitor told us. And they told us, form lines of five apart. There were about 50 boys or so in this dormitory. And walk through the street. Now Wurzburg is a southern street in Germany. It's cobblestones not like asphalt or so, cobblestones, old fashioned street. And we passed by the burning synagogue.

And they said, come with us. We were led to the prison. Now the Germans are very meticulous and correct, they claim at that time. And when we came they said, turn over your pockets, what you have there, and they made everything in detail. Wrote down what you have, one penny, two pennies, and things like this. We were put in a prison.

Why were you put in a prison? Because we want to protect you, that we need protection. It was called protective custody. Protective custody means you are imprisoned to be protected from the mob, because the Nazis had incited the mob so much that they would kill anyone. You see? We were protected.

In a Nazi jail?

I don't know if it was a Nazi jail. It was a jail.

How long did you spend in the jail?

About a week, eight days. Every day, they made a call which is called an appell in German, that people came out, they had to stand in line. And they had yellow sheets of paper, and they read everyone's name. If it wasn't correct, it was very bad. And people were sent to concentration camps-- Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald. They were saying there were already some concentration camps before 1940.

So one day, on the eighth day, we were 15 people in one cell, 15 students my age. On the last day, about noontime, they made also an appell, and they said, these people, stand out. Get out. I was one of them. These were the people who were stateless, what I told you before.

Because in other cities, like in Bremen, my brother was also stateless. They sent him to concentration camp, Sachsenhausen, Oranienburg. They sent him there. But they sent me out. I didn't know what that means. I only thought probably they will send us to where our fathers came from, maybe to Russia. But Russia at that time was just as bad. They had Stalin there, Stalin and Hitler fighting with-- OK.

So what did you do then? So now you've been--

What I did, I waited. And in the evening, they called us again, and the eight people. And we heard through the grapevine because there was no connection with the outside world, we heard through the grapevine that next morning, the prison would be emptied. All the rest would be sent to concentration camps.

So at this time, they told us eight people stand to the side. After everyone had left, they told us go downstairs to the prison office, and get your papers. We went downstairs to the prison office and they told us you are free. Free? And they told us, but you have to report to the local Gestapo, you in Bremen, the other ones wherever they were, within 24 hours. OK.

Jacob, during that time, the night of Kristallnacht and the eight days you spent in prison, did you know anything about what had happened in Bremen and what had happened to your mother and your family?

No, I told you, I had no connection with no one and not with the outside world. I didn't know what was going on in the outside world. I only know that we were in prison, and we hoped we would be released from there.

So when you were released, you made your way back to Bremen at that point.

When I was released, I went back to Bremen. Of course, that was very hard. Because I had no money. On my way back to the seminary, I met a woman who was a secretary and she gave me some money, so that I went to the station, railway station, and take a train home. It's about, I don't know, 400 kilometers or so to Bremen.

But I was afraid during that night to sit down in the train because there were Nazis in the train. I didn't know what they would do to me. And so I was standing and walking through the train the whole night. The train left at 12 o'clock, and I came to Bremen about 7:00 or 8 o'clock the morning. The first thing I did when I came to Bremen, I called my parents, no answer.

Then I took a streetcar. They had no buses then. I took a streetcar. I went to our house. I came to our house and we had two doors. One door was to the shop, to the store. And one was to our private quarters. And that on the private quarters there was note, take the key from the police department. The police department was only half a block away from me. So I went there. I got the key.

And while I was about to open up, there was a non-Jew, a good friend of ours on the other side of the street. He had a big furniture business. And he was standing inside, and beckoned me over. He was afraid to come out, because everyone was afraid to talk to Jewish people.

He called me in. Then he said, come with me. He called his wife. And he took me in a very innermost room. No one could hear it. And he said, I will tell you the story what happened last night. And he told me the story. And he told me that they came, they called For your father and your brothers were standing outside, so that no one else should come in, no one else should see it. And your little brother-- my brother was just 13 years old. And told him my mother's last words. Get a doctor.

He was trying to get a doctor. They ran after him. He never reached him. I met him a week or two later in Hamburg. I don't know how he got there, but what's it? So he told me the whole story. And then he said they killed her, and two women buried her. So and that's it.

Jacob, after that, before you would leave the country, you had to manage somehow with your family, without your

mother, and you became very active in the Jewish community in Bremen. Will you tell us about that, what you particularly did during that time?

About one or two days after the Kristallnacht, the Nazis let some Jews out, only such Jews who had some proof that they would emigrate within the next two or three weeks. They had to have an affidavit, or a passport, or something like this to show that they could go out.

Now, I was out because I was stateless. And some of the Jews came back to the Jewish congregation community in Bremen. And they formed again a kind of a group. And then the Nazis came to this Jewish community and said, you have to appoint one person as a liaison. That means as a contact man to the Gestapo. And this person has to report to the Gestapo twice a week or more whatever happens. Because they wanted to know exactly what's happening. They knew it anyhow. But they made believe they don't know. So

I was appointed liaison, because I was 16 years old, 17 years old. And they appointed me as a contact man, liaison to the Gestapo. And I had to go there two or three times a week. I also helped with the Jewish community there to giving some courses, to help something like this.

So whenever I went to the Gestapo, I was always afraid maybe they wouldn't let me out again. So the Gestapo in Bremen, I don't know how it was in other places, but in Bremen it was on a street which was near a trench. They had some kind of a trench around it, so if you know it. And they were having their quarters in a big house. This house had no name, nothing on it outside. But it only had a little bell on top.

So I pushed the bell and the door opened silently. It opened. And when the door opened, I saw a big stairway going up. And before the stairway, there were the big picture with a man putting his two fingers in front of him. What does this mean?

Schweigen. Schweigen means silence. Don't talk here, only when you're asked. So what happened, suddenly I heard a voice. They said, come up to room number so and so. So I went up the big stairway and I went to this room. And in this room they were sitting a Gestapo man, not in Gestapo uniform. I wanted to tell you also that when they broke into our house, they didn't wear the uniform. As I said before, they want to make believe that it was not the Nazi party. It was the Nazi people, the German people.

So he came there and he said to me, Jude, sit down. Jude means you Jew. It's a German word. So I sat down. And he put out some objects, some pens, and pencils, and money, and pictures, and things like this. And he said, you see here these things which I'm showing you now, we found in your house when we started to protect you. Protect you.

So I said to him, I said to myself, I didn't want to say to him. These were not found there. They were stolen. So among these pictures was a little passport picture because, even the week before my mother was murdered she tried everything possible right through the whole world that we should be able to leave.

During that time as the liaison to the Gestapo, they did allow you to open a Jewish school. How did that happen?

You see while we discussed different things, I went to different times as I told you. He had his agenda, and I had my agenda. His agenda was, of course, to know as much as possible. You know that the Nazis were so much going in detail that they not only wanted it from anyone else, they wanted it from the people themselves.

They told their own population, the Germans, they told the children, spy on your parents. And sometimes children brought parents to court and parents were killed because of this. So he had his agenda. He wanted to know from me as much as possible. But I wanted to know from him something else. I wanted to two things from him. I wanted to know, number one, that he should let some Jewish people, children, out of concentration camps.

Sometimes I was successful, and my brother was, for instance released and sent to a hospital. Other things also I was able to negotiate with him, so that he left an out. We also had a secret mission. I had a secret mission. On January 18, 1939, that I was suddenly called to Berlin to a Jewish group. And at that time, the Nazis were still satisfied if you could

prove or could have a written statement that this person would go out of Germany, we let them out. 200 people were let out. I wrote 200 letters.

Anyhow, my agenda was number one, as I said, to let Jewish children who were in concentration camps, out. Number two, was I wanted to make a Jewish school. Because after Kristallnacht, Jewish children were not allowed to have any education. Now I know and I think everyone agrees that education is very important. And if you don't know anything, you can't get anything.

If you want the Jews to get out of here, I said to him, they have to know something. If they go to other countries, you see to get a job or to get this like this, they have to know something. So I want a Jewish school. So he told me, you cannot have a Jewish school. Why not? I argued with him.

So he said, because when do you want to teach the children? So I said, I want to teach them whenever is the best time. In the morning, you cannot teach them. You're not allowed to teach them. Why not? Because Nazi children, our young children are being taught. This would be mixing of the races.

I said, OK, let's have it in the afternoon. He said in the afternoon, we have no place where you can do it. So I was looking around. I found a place. So finally gave he this place. He was so much upset with me that probably because of that he said to me, OK, you can have it already.

So you were able to open the school.

Yes, I opened the school and I had 42 children, I think. I still have the list. And some of them came to America. I met them here. But that was the end of it.

Jacob, during that time, what happened to your dad? What was your father doing?

My father, it was very difficult for him. Because after the Kristallnacht and after I came out of prison, I went-- I didn't know where to go. But I went to Hamburg because I had a sister who was in Hamburg already for some time. And my mother had relatives there. So I went there. I met him there.

But then afterwards, when he wanted to set up, he could not do anything. Because in Bremen, they closed his shop. He had to write down that I'm giving up my business by force. Because every Jew after that date had to give it up, even our house. We just got as much money that we had enough to have tickets for the boat to Canada. Even that was not enough. And he told a certain Nazi woman you buy it from him.

You were successful finally by May of that year, by 1939, to be able to leave Germany and get to Canada. Jacob, how were you able to arrange, to be able to get out of the country? How were you able to make that happen?

Let me tell you this. In the beginning and a long time afterwards, there was a great emigration from Germany of Jews in 1933. And then there was none and very little until 1939. In '39 before Kristallnacht was more, and afterwards came more. So my mother wrote already to many people in the world. The answer was it cannot be so bad in Germany because Germany is a country with great poets, great scientists, and so forth. It cannot be so bad. You will be OK.

Yeah, that's good to say for someone else, but not for us. So what happened is after the year, I started to write also to some of the people to whom my mother had written. And one of my father's cousin who lived in Saskatchewan, which is in the middle of Canada, and in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. And he had a farm.

At that time, Canada only allowed two types of people to immigrate, only mechanics and farmers. So my father was a mechanic and I was a farmer.

[LAUGHTER]

Why was I a farmer? Because I once sat on top of a hay wagon.

[LAUGHTER]

And I once helped a calf out of the womb of his mother. That was when I was at a camp, in summer camp. So I was a farmer. And he was successful only to get us what we call in Canada they didn't call it affidavits. They called it landing card. You were allowed to land in Canada. He was only successful because he knew an MP. MP means a member of parliament in Canada.

And he didn't have many, many requests. So he was able to get for us the landing card. But that wasn't all. Because I needed permission from the Germans to leave. They called this a Fluchtsteuer. That means tags for fleeing Germany. You had to pay that.

They told you to get out, but now you've got to pay the taxes.

You get out, but you have to pay for that. So what happened is-- and then they said to us, you have to take a German boat. The Germans at that time had two great shipping companies, the North German Lloyd and the Hansa American line. They both came from Hamburg.

But they had no place for us for two years, because they were all filled up. People had a quota, a certificate. We didn't have that. So my father was lucky to find in Hamburg a man from the Cunard-White Star Line, from the British line, who helped us to go by ferry from Hamburg to England, and from Southampton to Canada.

Jacob, in just a couple of moments I'm going to turn to our audience and to see if they have some questions they'd like to ask of you. Before I do that, just a couple of comments and a question for you, a question or two before we turn to our audience. So May of 1939, Jacob and his family, your father and your brother I believe, are able to go to Canada because of the relative in Saskatchewan.

But Jacob then wants to come to the United States to go to rabbinical school in Baltimore, and is successful in getting to Baltimore. Jacob, tell us what your status was in the eyes of the United States when you came here.

According to the United States, even though I came as a student, I was considered an enemy alien. Because when I went to the school in Baltimore, I wanted to help, and I wanted to do something for the war effort. And I signed up to be an air raid warden. I was about two weeks an air raid warden. Then he said to me, you cannot be an air raid warden because you are an enemy alien.

[LAUGHTER]

So then OK, so good. So I went to a school to learn English, night school. That I could do. And I had a very good teacher. And later on, he became a governor of Maryland.

And Jacob, you were considered an enemy alien because you were German?

Yes.

Yes. With that Jacob, let's take a few minutes and turn to our audience and ask if they have some questions they'd like to ask of you. And remember, try to be brief, and I will repeat it, and then Jacob will respond to your question. Anybody? Young man right in the center.

How did you deal with all the pain when your parents died?

Question is Jacob, how did you deal with the pain when your mother died, your parents? His mother died. His father was still alive. Thank you for that question.

Thank you. I didn't know what to do. So I wanted to be very close to some of my relatives, my father, and my brothers,

and sisters. And I went to Hamburg where I knew my mother had relatives and there I found them really. They were sitting shiva. Shiva is according to the Jewish tradition, seven days of mourning after a person dies. And I was sitting shiva with them.

And I didn't know, but before I left Germany, I wanted to find out. I wanted to get an official statement from the German government what they did and how they killed my mother. I couldn't get this. So I went into the place which is called the attorney general, and there was a sign, Don't Enter. I entered and I saw people sitting there at tables and things like this. I went to one over, and I said to him, I'd like to have a death certificate for my mother.

So this person was a little bit naive or something like that. So he gave me a certificate. And I have that certificate. It's an official certificate with a swastika on it. And it said on November 10, 1938, Sarah Selma-- they had the name Sarah then-- Zwienicki was found dead. Found dead. Everyone knows that at this time 4 o'clock, 4 o'clock in Europe is 4 o'clock in the morning. 16 o'clock would be in the afternoon.

So they gave me this kind of document. And I have it. So they were afraid to say the truth. But they said she was found dead at this time.

And you still have that certificate to this day, don't you Jacob? OK.

It's in there with you.

Thank you for that question. Young lady right here in--

I'm a boy.

Oh, I'm sorry. It's hard to see, the lights from up here.

What did people do when Hitler died?

One more time please?

What did the people do when Hitler died?

What did the people do when Hitler died? What did the people do when Hitler died?

Hitler died much later. He died in 1945

At the close of the war.

He committed suicide. He was afraid to come before a tribunal. He was afraid to commit suicide, and that's actually what I would call the miracle, that he did not achieve what he wanted to achieve.

Hitler escaped by killing himself facing justice and being tried as a war criminal at the end of the war.

Gentleman here, and then I'll come back to you folks.

The question I would have is in your community, why would they have picked a young man to be the go-to to the Nazis, to the Gestapo, rather than an older person?

The question is why would the Gestapo have picked a young man like you to be the liaison to them rather than an older person in the community?

Actually, the Gestapo didn't pick me. But the people of the community picked me, the people of the community. And why did they pick me? I don't know why they picked me. But-- [LAUGHS]

You didn't necessarily volunteer.

It was a miracle, like everything during that time was a miracle. It was a miracle. I don't know.

OK. I'm going to come here, and then I'm going to come back to the young lady there. Yes, Carol?

Please tell us about your faith.

My what?

Your faith, your personal faith.

The question is to ask Jacob to tell us about his personal faith, having--

Faith?

Faith, your faith, after all that you've been through.

I'm always positive. I don't like to talk about the negative. The negative is when we ask people, what do you want to remember of the Holocaust? The negative answer I get most of the time is it should never happen again. We hope it will never happen again. But I think of the positive too. The positive is that Hitler did not completely achieve his goal, number one. And number two, that people survived and can talk about it. And despite the fact that he did all what he possibly could to destroy them, not only Jews, but also other people-- Jehovah Witnesses, and Catholics, and Blacks, and all kinds whom he killed. Despite the fact, that we are still alive. You see?

So we have to have faith. We have to be positive.

OK. We had a young lady right there, right in the middle. Right-- yes, you. It's very tough for me. Forgive me. You got a question? OK.

When you were in the middle of the Holocaust, how did you cope with the deaths and all the bad stuff that happened?

The question is, when you were in the Holocaust, how did you cope with the deaths and all the bad stuff that happened? Did I get that right? OK. Thank you. How did you, Jacob, how did you cope with all the terrible stuff that was happening? You've answered it in part.

I said, I partly answered this before, because before Kristallnacht, there were new laws every day. I just didn't want to hear about it. I just didn't read the paper. And sometimes it's good, sometimes not so good. You don't always hear the truth things from the papers. And so I just had my faith.

Faith.

And I said, the final answer will not come from Hitler. It will come from above.

It'll come from above. Thank you, Jacob. I'm going to go here and then here.

Yes. What would you like to see us as individuals do? What actions can we take to prevent this from happening again?

The question of Jacob is, what can we do? What actions can we take to prevent this from happening again?

Number one, that's what I actually wanted to say later on. Number one, when we see such a thing happen, we should act. We should not let it happen. In the beginning, you can always do something. If it's already there a long time, it's much harder. So you have to do something right away, or you wouldn't be able to do anything.

And besides this, you have not have so much hatred on people against each other like Hitler had, like the other people. He did not consider them human people.

OK. Sir?

How did your other siblings fare through the war?

The question, Jacob, is how your other siblings-- and I would extend it to other family members do-- during the war?

My brother was in a concentration camp until I negotiated with the Gestapo. And he came to the hospital. Even when he was in a hospital, one day Nazis came and broke into our house and they wanted to search for him. And he came there in the middle of the night, like always, and he said to me, I want to search for your brother. I said, go ahead. When he came out I asked him, what did you find?

So he said, no, he's not here. I say, I told you before that he's not here. You are so smart, you Nazis. Why don't you notice before that he's in the hospital?

Jacob, what happened to the rest of your family members?

The other one, my young brother, he felt very sad. He was put in an orphan home now it's called a children's home. He felt very sad about it, because he was just 13 years old. And my sister was in the house. And by mistake, they went. They passed his house, you see, and they didn't arrest the family there.

OK. I think that there's so many hands up, I'm sorry we're about out of time. And we've got just a little bit more to go in the program. First, I want to thank Jacob for his willingness to be here with us. Jacob is going to stay behind for a little bit over here by the steps. If anybody wants to come up and ask him any of the questions that you were not able to ask here or anything else, please do so. I just might mention a couple of things.

Jacob is featured in a just published book in Germany, the German translation of the title is Children of the Cities, I believe, but about Bremen. And Jacob and his family is prominently featured in this book. I mentioned earlier that Jacob's wife died three years ago, Trudel. Trudel also was a Holocaust survivor, and Jacob has had personally her book that she wrote they've personally published. And Jacob certainly is willing to share this with anybody who's interested as well.

It's in the library. It's also in the library here in the museum. So it's called, As I Recall, an autobiography by Trudel Wiener. Of course what we didn't get into is the remarkable career that Jacob had after the war, the way he established himself, and the way he contributed to our nation's child welfare laws, a remarkable contribution. And you have to wonder, given all that we've heard today, and if we had time I'd ask Jacob about what influence that had on his choice of a career to take care of kids.

I'd like to remind all of you that we have a First Person program every Wednesday until the 31st of August at 1:00 PM. And that next Wednesday, May 25, our first person will be Mr. Robert Behr, who was born in Berlin, Germany in 1922. In 1942, he was arrested because he was Jewish and sent to the Theresienstadt ghetto. In early 1944, he was sent to Wulkow, Germany for forced labor. He had to help rebuild the SS general headquarters that had been destroyed by Allied forces.

Later, he returned to Terezin, where he was liberated by the Russians in May of 1945, and emigrated to the United States in 1947. It is 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 finish our program today.

First of all, I want to thank all of you for coming here and for listening to me. The Holocaust is past now, 60 years ago, 1945. But still, what do we see today? There are still Holocaust deniers. There are still genocides in Darfur, in Sudan, in West Africa five years ago in 2000. You may have heard of my cousin, Deborah Lipstadt, who had to defend herself in

England against an unrepentant denier, Martin Irving.

My cousin didn't say one word at that trial but she won. They are not always, as Barbara Walters wants to say, I don't have anything against her, they are not in every case pros and cons. In this case there is only one way. It happened. The Holocaust cannot be denied. It is a fact. It is history. It is the truth. It did happen.

Thank God Hitler did not see his dream of killing all Jews realized. But survivors, unfortunately in decreasing numbers, can still tell you what they saw first hand. And may the hatred and terrorism of people against each other end. As long as it exists this baseless hatred, we cannot have real peace. But I hope and pray that people will learn to respect each other.

And that is the message I maintain of the Holocaust. Respect each other as human beings. Thank you again for coming and listening to me. I want to say Hitler had four different goals, and that's what the Nazis did. Deceit, they lied to the world, they told people to go into a bath, and they came out gas. They dehumanized people. They took away their name, everything they had, to answer by the number. They deported them. They sent them far away. Why? They shouldn't know anyone, shouldn't have any kind of help. They discriminated and death.

I thank you again for coming and listening to me and I wish you all well. And let us hope that the world will be better soon. Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]