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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. Thank you for joining us.

We are in our eighth season of First Person. 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. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. With the exception of August 1, we will have a First Person program each Wednesday through August 29.

The museum's website at www.ushmm.org, that's www.ushmm.org, provides a list of the upcoming First Person guests. You'll find it in the public programs portion of the website. This 2007 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Dora Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring First Person.

Dr. Gluckstein will share his first-person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 40 minutes. Before you are introduced to him, I have several requests of you. First we ask that if at all possible, please stay seated throughout our one-hour program. That way we can minimize any disruptions to Dr. Gluckstein as he speaks.

Secondly, if we have time for questions and answers at the end of our program, I ask that you make your question as brief as you can. I will repeat the question so all in the room hear it, including Fritz, and then he will respond to your question. I'd also like to ask any of those of you who have a cell phone or a pager that has not yet been turned off to please do so now, if you don't mind. And I'd like to let those of you who may have passes for the permanent exhibition today know that they are good for the entire afternoon. So, you can comfortably sit with us until 2 o'clock and then go to the permanent exhibition.

The Holocaust was a 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, Soviet prisoners of war, Jehovah's Witnesses, 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. He 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. These contemporary photos 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. In fact, if you'll see right in the middle, in traditional German lederhosen, we see Fritz right smack dab in the middle of this photo.

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. And we will hear more about that a little bit later.

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 a clean up crew for cleaning up after air raids. Throughout these difficult times, Elfride Dressler, Fritz's aunt, shown here 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 immediately after the war, in 1945. Fritz decided to emigrate on his own to the United States and arrived in the United States in 1948, where he would study veterinary medicine.

Today, Fritz Gluckstein lives in the Washington, DC, area with his wife, Maran. Following his arrival in the United

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States after the war, he eventually became a doctor of veterinary medicine. After a stint in the United States 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 a football fan. He volunteers each week here at the museum, translating letters and other documents from German, including handwritten documents. He is among a few people who are still able to read the old-style German cursive script. He has a daughter, Ruth, and two granddaughters, one who is nearly nine and another who is five years of age.

And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Dr. Fritz Gluckstein.

[APPLAUSE]

Fritz, thank you so much for agreeing to be our First Person today. Really glad to have you with us.

Glad to be here.

Fritz, you were a very young boy when Hitler came to power in Germany. Please tell us about your family and about you in those early years, when the Nazis were gaining power but before the war began.

Yes, prior to '33 it was a very nice life. My father was a judge, decorated. He had the Iron Cross. He was quite patriotic. On national holidays, he showed the flag and even taught me how to salute the flag. And actually, my mother wasn't Jewish. And you know, I had the best of two holidays, Christmas and Hanukkah, Easter and Passover.

[LAUGHTER]

And really, it was the best. [LAUGHS]

I got it. Tell us a little bit more about your father. He was a very distinguished man. He was a leader. He was a judge.

Yes.

And an important point, you said he was a decorated hero of the First World War for the German Army.

Yes. Actually, I might mention here something grotesque. He had to leave office in 1933. And in 1935, he got a decoration in the name of the Fuhrer because he had been at the front. First, they threw him out and then they give him a decoration.

[LAUGHTER]

And you had no siblings.

No, I was an only child.

Did you have a large extended family?

Yes.

Cousins and--

Actually, I must say, my mother's relatives stood by us. Above all, my good Aunt Elfride really stood by us. She took care of everything, from birthday parties to shoes. And the cousins and aunts really stood by us. That wasn't always the case.

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I might mention here that my father's colleagues did not behave very well. I still remember one of my father's colleague, he and his wife came with flowers and were so sorry they no longer could have contact with us.

Brought flowers to say they can no longer--

Yes.

--sorry, they couldn't have contact with you.

That's correct.

Fritz, tell us about your father's last day on the job, when he was forced out of his position.

Yes. My father was told to leave his office, to vacate his chambers. But they told him, you better not leave by the front door because there is demonstration by stormtroopers. Well, said my father, I came in by the front door, and I will leave by the front door. And so he did. He left by the front door.

Did you, as a child, experience anti-semitism yourself? Do you recall any incidents?

Yes. But I might as well say, Gluckstein means "good luck stone." And you will see, I had good luck, very good luck. Yes, there was some anti-semitism. For instance, pretty soon you had signs at stores and restaurants, "Jews are not welcome." And in parks, there were special benches for Jews. But on the whole, I cannot complain.

I might point out, in 1936, when the Olympic games were held in Berlin, all the signs disappeared. All the so-called Jews' benches disappeared. Everything was very normal. The moment the Olympic games were over, signs up again and the benches again.

As I recall, Fritz, the Olympics were a big deal. And you remember them very vividly, don't you?

Yes, very much. Actually, the Berliners always had quite a big mouth. I still remember, there was a soccer game, Norway against Germany. Germany, of course, was the favorite. And Hitler went out there. But lo and behold, the Germans lost. And while the Berliners said, oh, Adolf, he went all the way out to the stadium. Look what happened to him.

[LAUGHTER]

The German team lost. And that was quite horrible.

Is that when you saw Hitler for the first time?

Pardon.

Is that when you saw Hitler for the first time, during the Olympics?

Yes. Actually, a friend, my father's cousin, lived at the East-West Highway, and Hitler came by in a car. And there, I saw him.

Your father, as I recall, did try to see if he could get the family out of Germany. Tell us about his efforts and what happened.

Well, of course, wanted to come to the United States. We had relatives, distant relatives. But first you had to get an affidavit. Once you had an affidavit, you had to wait till the-- there was a waiting list, a quota-- till your quota came up. And once your quota came up, well, you had to raise the money to come over here.

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Well, what actually happened, by the time we had our quota came up, it was so late. The war had started, and we couldn't get out.

So you did come up with a quota number, and you couldn't go.

Yes. Well, what it was already--

Too late.

If I recall, barely. But it was too late at the time.

Fritz, you were just 11 in early November 1938, on the night of Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass. Tell us how that affected you and what you remember about Kristallnacht.

I remember going to school. At that time already was at a Jewish school. And I wondered, well, why is that window broken-- maybe an accident or another. And pretty soon, I saw more and more broken windows and also the smoke coming from the synagogues that were burned.

And there is always one fact that's usually not brought out. How did they know what windows to break? They didn't have lists. No. About two-- two or three weeks prior to the pogrom, each proprietor of a Jewish shop had to have his name in big white letters in the upper corner of the window. All they had to do, go around looking for the-- and broken.

Fritz, when Kristallnacht occurred, did you realize that it was occurring throughout Germany, or did you think it may have been confined to Berlin?

No, I had a pretty good idea. In fact, it was worse out in the country than in Berlin. In fact, Berlin, usually the center of bureaucracy, people stuck to the rules and regulations. But out in a little town, the local police or Gestapo chief very often didn't pay attention to the rules an regulation.

For our audience, who may not know about Kristallnacht, maybe just say a little word about it. It was-- because you're right, it was not confined to Berlin. It was all over Germany and Austria.

Yeah. Actually, I might briefly say why, what triggered it. At that time, all Jews that had come from Poland but were not German citizens were deported, were left in No-Man's Land between Poland and Germany. And there was one family who had lived many years in Hanover, deported too. And their son, he was very angry and actually went to the German Embassy in Paris and shot one of the attaches, attache who was not a Nazi at all. Of course, that immediately triggered the so-called Kristallnacht.

And it was vandalizing Jewish homes and businesses.

And people round up to concentration camps and so on-- at random. People were just-- in the school, for instance, my teachers with the school were sent. Half of our teachers were sent to the concentration camp.

And synagogues burned all over the country.

Yes, synagogues.

Tell us, Fritz, I think it was soon after that-- and as you mentioned, you were in a Jewish school at that time. You were not issued your report card for special circumstances.

Yes. That was correct. I still remember, many of our teachers were sent to the concentration camp then came back. And of course, in the meantime, we fell behind in our studies. Well, and time for report cards came around. And I still remember a little note I had to carry home. "Because of the special circumstances, report cards will be issued three weeks late."

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Fritz, despite all the changes that were occurring and your father losing his job and all the impact that you were experiencing, you said things really changed dramatically beginning in September 1939, which of course, is when Germany invaded Poland.

Yes.

And the war was underway in Europe by then.

Correct. There was one in 1938. Jews had to take the name, middle name, Israel and Sara. My name then was Fritz Israel Gluckstein. And we had special identification cards. But once the war started, the vise was closing. Well, actually, we had to, for instance, hand over furs and woolens. We were not permitted to have radios or telephone, not permitted to buy or keep or subscribe to newspapers.

And then of course, ration cards, if you were-- and the Jews did not get any special allotments, no meat, no white bread, and so on and so on. And the Jews had to buy their groceries between 4:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon. Well, my mother was allowed to go there at other times. And if nobody was looking, "Well," said the shopkeeper, "here, let me have your husband's and son's ration cards."

And of course, then the bombing-- I might mention, at that time, we're going to school, and we had a special bomb shelter for Jews. And there we're sitting. You see, there was a rule. If the all-clear came after 1 o'clock, then school started two hours late and classes lasted only 35 minutes. And there we were sitting with two minds. One hand, we hoped it would be over. On the other hand, well, if it would last 10 minutes longer, we can--

[LAUGHTER]

Well, I might tell you about the school. Actually--

This was a child at that time thinking that, of course.

[LAUGHTER]

I'll tell you about the school. It was a Jewish school, but strictly run according to German guidelines, even supervised by the government. And strict, but we took it to its stride. For instance, if you were caught sneezing without your handkerchief, that was very bad. And laughing, ha ha ha, allowed? Oh, no, you didn't do that.

And you know, you talk about the brainwashing. There was something I still can't do now. I still can't do this. If you did that, you were asked, "ah, you're going on vacation." Why going on vacation? Well, you packed your hands already.

[LAUGHTER]

I'm actually going to try that at home.

[LAUGHTER]

Fritz, you mentioned already that, of course, many things were taken away. You were no longer allowed to have radios, no longer allowed to have jewelry, many other things. But the list also included pets.

Correct. We had to give away our-- had a little dog, a fox terrier, Tommy. We found a good home for him. Well, little Tommy was trained. When you gave him something, yeah, that's from the Nazi. He didn't do it. But if you said that's from the Jew, then he took it.

[LAUGHTER]

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But you were forced to give up--

Yes, we are forced.

--were forced to give him up.

Jews weren't fit to keep animals.

In the slide presentation, Fritz, I mentioned the word Geltungsjude, or counted Jew. That was very important, particularly for you. Explain in some more detail what that meant.

Geltungsjuden. There were two types of intermarriages or what they called it "mixed marriages." There was the so-called-- well, the regular, we called the mixed marriage, either there were no children or children were raised Jewish, meaning that the children had to wear the star, and the Jewish parents had to wear the star. And they were subject to all rules and regulations and edicts but usually, not always, escaped deportation.

If the children were not raised Jews, the marriage was considered a "privileged" mixed marriage. And children didn't have to wear the star. The Jewish parent did not have to wear the star. And they were only subject to some of the rules and regulations. But I was raised Jewish and, therefore, had to wear the star.

In 1941, the Jews had to wear a yellow star, to be fixed here, and had to be very firmly affixed. There was a nasty policeman. He came with a pencil and tried to get behind it. And so help you if he could get the pencil in there. By the way, I might tell you, in order to get those stars, they added injury to insult. We had to hand over clothing ration coupons in order to get those stars.

For your classification, you had, of course, to wear the star and comply with all rules and regulations. But officially, you supposedly would have been safe from deportation. But that wasn't a guarantee.

No.

When did deportations begin, deporting of Jews to the camps?

I think it was actually in '42-- first quite organized. People had got notification and lists where they had to list their belongings. And at a certain date, police came, sealed the apartment, and the people had to proceed to a collection point for deportation. Later on, of course, they were grabbed on the streets and so on.

During that time, again, you're still a young child. You're still 11, 12, 13. What were your parents telling you, as you recall, about what was going on around you, especially when the deportations began?

Well, actually, we lived from day to day. Actually, we were ready for deportation. We had our rucksacks ready. We never knew what would happen. Every day something new happened. And well, my father was quite a religious man-- helped him a lot. I would say, you were set for the worst and hoped for the best.

Set for the worst and hope for the best.

Yeah.

We mentioned in the slideshow your aunt. Tell us about her role. Because obviously, as you described, your mother could only shop between 4:00 and 5:00 PM. You had to have ration cards. And your father had lost his job. How were you able to get by at that time?

Well, we had to move to a small apartment. My father did volunteer work at the Jewish Community Center. But it was my aunt-- clothing, birthday parties, and I remember the food. We met at one time, and she just had a package of food and it was given to me. And lo and behold, who came around the corner, one of the big Nazi women of the

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neighborhood. And my good aunt said, well, good evening, Mrs. So-and-so. He's just helping me carry it. She did, I would say, to the very last she stood by us.

Fritz, you continued in school until 1942. And then, of course, your schools closed. After that, you had to go to work. And you had your very first close call with the possibility of deportation. Tell us about that event and then what happened after that.

Actually, at that time, school had already closed. And I worked at, first at the cemetery and then at the Jewish Community Center. And my mother accompanied friends to the collection point. And lo and behold, a Gestapo said, "ah, what are you doing here? You probably have a Jewish husband and Jewish children. Well, tomorrow they are going to report to a downtown collection center."

Well, next morning my father and I reported to the collection center. And there we stayed for a week. The center was commanded by a notorious SS Captain Brunner from Vienna, known for his brutality. He had come to Berlin to expedite the expedition-- the deportation.

And we are sitting in rooms with mattresses. We're not allowed to lie down during the day because the commandant was going around and try to catch us taking a rest. But it's noteworthy, the regular police who guarded the building, whenever he left the office came around and said, get up, get up, get up, he's coming. Noteworthy-- had they been caught, the least what would happen, they would have been sent to the Eastern front.

Well, after a week, suddenly we're told we will be expected down for interrogation. I still remember my father, then some of these distinguished older gentleman, and prepared me for the ordeal. Fritz, don't be a hero. Don't show contempt. Answer all questions fully, but don't volunteer anything.

I remember coming into the room where Brunner was sitting, at the side about a dozen German SS officers watching the proceedings, learned how to do it. Well, actually, he tried to catch me. Yeah, your mother is Jewish. Well, no, I said, my mother is not Jewish. She's Arische. And then he asked some questions. Then after a while, he said, well, I'll tell you something. Tomorrow, you're going to get a real job. Report to the labor exchange. And he let me go.

To my surprise, outside I found my father. And we stepped out in the street with a sigh of relief. That date I remember. It was January 24, 1943, my 16th birthday.

So you were in there, interrogated by this notorious Nazi, by yourself.

Good luck again. See?

Amazing. Fritz, before we continue on, we're going to have to speak up a little bit. I think we're probably difficult hearing us in the back. Go back to the end of when schools closed for just a moment. One of the things that you said to me, you referred to some of your teachers as "everyday heroes."

Yes.

Would you say a little bit more about that?

Yes. Well, actually, school was an oasis. Once the school doors closed behind us, we forgot all the harassment, all the threats. Yes, at times you-- your neighbor wasn't there in the morning. You hoped he was sick. But very often, he was just deported.

But the teachers, they came to teach us in the face of imminent deportation. through their profession, they came every day and helped us to forget and helped us learn. They gave us a foundation on which we could build later on. At the time they did that, at least, we didn't realize that they were everyday heroes. But now I really see that they were heroes. And I thank them.

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When school closed for you, Fritz, in June 1942.

And I still remember the final report card was the reason given why was it, why was I leaving the school. And I quote, "because of the ordered dissolution of the Jewish school system."

And it is said that on your report card.

Yes.

To go back to something you mentioned earlier, when your mother had a very frightening experience about the possibility of being deported, you had referred to going to collection points, centers. This was a place where Jews that were to be deported were grouped together to then be sent by trains elsewhere.

Or people's homes, synagogues, just--

A collection center.

Collection center.

You started working in a factory then, after you had worked for a while in the Jewish cemetery and--

Yes, in a factory, making some instrument for the air force. Then, of course, came the notorious factory aktion. Saturday morning, door opens, SS officer enters. "Everybody out." Outside, trucks-- we are put on trucks and we're moved to collection points.

I remember the collection point. There were various collection points. Collection point that a good friend and I wound up was a former dance hall, actually, [PLACE NAME]. And all tables were put aside and people were waiting there. And actually, we were waiting a whole day. And then the friend and I were interviewed, interrogated by police, actually plainclothes police, quite friendly. And he said, well, get out of here. We don't want you see here anymore.

They shouldn't have done that. They should have sent us to another collection point. Well, good friend and I, we stepped out to the street and violated the law because it was after 8 o'clock. Jews were not permitted to be in the street after 8 o'clock at night. But we went home.

My father-- at home, my father we knew was picked up at his factory job. My mother was visiting an aunt in Silesia. I sent a telegram-- "it would be a good idea if you came back." It was the end of the month. Ration cards have to be picked up.

Well, I set out on Monday morning. The ration card office, front of the office was a van. Everyone with the star was put inside. And we were sent to a collection point. That point for the collection was the synagogue where I had become bar mitzvah, had been confirmed.

There I stayed a short while. And then, again, by moving van to a still another collection point, at the Rosenstrasse. That was an administrative building of the Jewish community. And there were all the husbands and children that were mixed marriages. And there, I remember, put in a room, 15 men, no mattresses. And there we spent our time speculating what would happen to us and standing in line to use the toilet facilities. Obviously, the building wasn't set up for influx of many people.

Well, after a week, suddenly go downstairs, were released. To my surprise, I found the father. We waited till our release slips were filled out by members of the-- secretaries of the Jewish community. And then we were ready to leave. But before leaving, our release slips had to be signed by the commanding-- the sergeant.

And I still remember my father, ahead of me. He signed it and sneered, "Ah, a judge you have been. And you certainly have ruined the lives of many people." Well, said my father, "I hope not." And we stepped out.

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But what we didn't realize, while we were inside there was the demonstration with the non-Jewish women, the non-Jewish partners. They stood. They didn't leave. First they braved the police, then the Gestapo, SS. They even came with machine guns. They might have scattered, but came back.

It was the only demonstration of the Third Reich. And finally--

And it was by the non-Jewish spouses.

By the non-Jewish spouses. They were standing up. We didn't know that they demonstrated that they wanted-- they want our husbands and children back. First, regular police, then the SS, and they came, actually, with a machine gun. A movie has been made. It has been dramatized about what happened.

And they did not leave. Finally, you can tell from the diaries of Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda and Folk Enlightenment. He felt, well, that's not a good time, right now, right after Stalingrad defeat, we can do it later. We can get them later. Well, they let us out. Here I am.

And why do you think-- why do you think they yielded to the demonstrations in that one instance?

Well, let's face it right. After the Battle of Stalingrad-- but let's see, one of the German GIs comes back and his sister has been deported, not too good to have that. Later on-- we'll wait, and then we will deport them. But he didn't get to us, fortunately.

Fritz, after working in a factory and experiencing what you've described to us, you would end up in a work detail cleaning up after air raids.

Yes, and after, work details cleaning-- tearing down ruins, cleaning up rubble-- we worked in labor gangs all over Berlin.

I was struck by something you said to me about while doing that kind of labor, which clearly had to be very physical, very difficult, difficult circumstances in every way, that, yet, the adults continued to try to further your education.

Absolutely. First, of course, one thing the adults had to do, we were very sheltered young men. We were what, 16 and 17 year old. And we had to learn, now, the meaning of certain four-letter words that were bandied around, were explained to us. Came in very handy later on in Saint Paul, when I worked in a factory. Fellows there tried to teach me certain four-letter words, hoping I would use them and embarrass myself. Sorry.

That was your introduction in the United States?

Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

They were of Anglo-Saxon origin and almost identical in German. It didn't worry me. Well, there were about six-- five or six-- or four former classmates working in the labor gang. Well, the older man said the young people, the young men, don't learn anything. We have to do something about that. Well, start a kind of school. For instance, if you came-- your wheelbarrow was filled with rubble, you were given a question-- geography, English, Latin, whatever. By the time you came back with the empty wheelbarrow, you had to have the answer.

Still remember one question I got. When you come back with the empty wheelbarrow, you will name the Great Lakes of the United States. Of course, you all know those, don't you?

[LAUGHTER]

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As you were doing these work details, labor all over Berlin, eventually you would be told that you had to perform at a catastrophic mission. Tell us about that.

Well, we were bombed out twice, and the second time we stayed temporarily in Jewish hospital. Every morning, I set out for my job, the labor gang. One morning, at the front gate, you are hereby-- inside the truck here, you are ordered to a so-called catastrophic mission. Well, we drove half an hour in that moving van. Doors opened and lo and behold, the headquarters of Colonel Eichmann, the driving force behind the deportation. His headquarters had gotten a hit during an air raid, and we were there to clean it up.

And there, too, I was lucky. My direct supervisor was a young lieutenant, always correct, never raised his voice, no anti-semitic remark. He didn't belong there. And I remember some of the other people were-- officers-- were quite nasty. And one day, we were working and suddenly Eichmann is coming. Of course, everybody, every Jew knew who Eichmann was. And I wondered, now, how would he look? And there he came-- ordinary. Nobody would have noticed him in the crowd. Stopped right next to me, gave some instruction, and left.

When times we had to walk in front of the building cleaning up and were guarded by two-- by SS guard, took turns every two hours. One guard, very nasty, completely, always harassing us, the other, I still see him, small reddish face, never talked to us, always walked up and down. And whenever we took a break, he found something else across the street that was of interest.

It was obvious, the man made a point of not harassing us. Why? How did he get into the SS, I wonder. After a week, they told us get home. Every night we were brought by van back to the hospital. After a week, get home on your own.

Well, the next morning, I set out for my regular job, but I didn't leave by the front gate. I climbed over the back fence of the hospital just in case.

Fritz, jumping ahead a little bit, you would later, after the war, be interrogated by the United States forerunner of the CIA, the Office of Strategic Services, specifically interrogated you about your time in Eichmann's headquarters. Right?

They obviously knew-- wait a minute-- they wanted detailed-- in fact, the consorts, ah, you've worked at Eichmann's headquarter. Wait outside. In half an hour, I came back in again. And these, the SO-- what?

OSS.

OSS-- and they wanted to know, who was there? Name all the officers. I remembered many of their names. How was it laid out? They wanted a detail of headquarters. Why, I don't know. But all I gave it to them.

I had asked, Fritz, and I'm sure you all wonder, how does a kid really manage to survive? How do people survive under those circumstances, where many people they know are disappearing and being sent away to their death, and conditions are so harsh? How did you manage? And one of the things Fritz said, humor was really important. And as you might guess, kind of a gallows humor at times. And you might just share a couple of things you shared with me.

It's always Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda and Folk Enlightenment, fell into the river Spree, the river that runs through Berlin. Young man pulls him out. "Oh," said Goebbels. "You saved my life. What can I do for you?" "Well," said the young man, "all I want is a state funeral." Now, why a state funeral? "Well, if my father finds out I pulled you out of the river, he's going to kill me."

[LAUGHTER]

Or, SS man talking with a Jew-- "I am going to shoot you. But if you can tell which one of my eyes is made out of glass, I'll let you go." "Oh," said the Jew, "that's very simple. It's your right one." "Oh, why?" "Well, it looks so human."

[LAUGHTER]

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And there's-- and there's one story. It depends-- the key words, in German, rhyme. They don't rhyme in English, but you still get the idea of some of the thoughts that were going around. A truce has been declared. Hitler, Stalin, and Roosevelt get together. And they say-- each one says what is most important. What's the most important factor to win the war?

"Well," said Hitler, "it's the rasse, the race, the German race." "Oh, no," said Stalin. "It's the masse, the mass the German-- the Russian juggernaut." "No," says Roosevelt. "You are both wrong. It's the kasse, the cash, the money, of course, the American economic, industrial potential."

So even under those circumstances, jokes are circulating, jokes that would have probably gotten you in a great deal of trouble had they been overheard by the Nazis.

Oh, yes.

Fritz, what was the food situation like for you at that time?

Food, of course, was pretty bad. What did we eat? Potato peels, or if you had potatoes, we'd fry them in salt or even in castor oil. You can do that. Once you heat the castor oil, the medical effect goes away.

[LAUGHTER]

But I tell you, it was pretty bad. Well, of that, too, is a joke. You know what substitute means, ersatz?

Ersatz? Ersatz.

Substitute. Everything was-- that's, later, a substitute. Well, when will the war be over? Well, when the British eat rats and the Germans eat rat ersatz.

Speaking of humor again, you were telling me a story that, as the Russians were closing in and the German defense of Berlin was collapsing around them, you said that you and your friends figured it would take 31 minutes for the Russians to get through the defensive barricades.

Actually, we built-- at one time, they got us. We were detached from the labor gang. And we went out to the southern part of Berlin to build tank obstacles. There we worked for a day, and when we're leaving, we said, how long will it take the Russians to get through our tank obstacles? Well, we figured 31 minutes.

Why 31 minutes? The Russian tanks will come to our obstacles. They'll stop. The crews will laugh for 30 minutes. It will take them one minute to get through.

[LAUGHTER]

I want to tell you that, really, actually what happened. Berlin was attacked from two sides, east Marshal Zhukov, from the south, Marshal Konev. Well, Marshal Konev got in very fast from the south, through. And because of that, there are little street fighting in the place where we stayed. It went right through our obstacles. We didn't do a very good job with the obstacles.

Speaking of Marshal Konev, you had said to me that, really, there are three factors that saved your life. One was your mother, another was luck attributed to Marshal Konev.

He came, and they didn't expect him that fast. He came right in. The eastern part of Berlin was very bad. In fact, it was so bad, some of the SS went around to round up Jews in the northern part. But fortunately, in the southern and western part, it did not happen.

Fritz, I've read several accounts of the Russian assault on Berlin and about life in what was then a truly devastated city in the months that followed the war, and you were there. What were the conditions like for you?

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Well, actually, pretty soon we didn't go to work anymore. Shells fell into Berlin. And of course, no water-- at that time, Berlin still had many horse-drawn vehicles. And there were pumps in the street, and you went for water. Well you took two buckets, waited for a lull in, and then ran--

A lull in the shelling?

Shelling-- and then ran out, filled up your buckets. Incoming shell, you hit the ground, lost most of your water, went back, filled it up again. And that way you got water. And talk about luck, I remember waiting close to the house for a lull in the shelling, a neighbor, too. Down came a shell, the neighbor fatally injured, didn't happen to me.

And again, good luck-- once working the labor gang. Windy day, wall came down, I was under it. Well I only have a-- hair doesn't grow here anymore, but it could have been worse-- luck again.

And that shell, had it just been a few feet over, and you were gone.

Just. Actually, well, shrapnel had burst.

Yeah.

But very lucky, extremely lucky.

And the winter of '45-'46 was a particularly harsh winter in Berlin, and you had to manage through those months.

Yes. Actually, once the Russians came, of course, there we had to convince them, too, that we were not Nazis. They'd say, "what, you are Jews, all Jews?" But we showed the store, and some of our people there spoke some Russian. And well, they let us go. Yes, it was quite-- liberation didn't mean everything was rosy. At that time, at one month, the Russians took care of the food, meaning dark bread, and the next month, the Western powers, meaning white bread.

But of course, there were little-- no heat. And of course, sewage lines froze, water lines froze, and it was quite difficult. But eventually, care packages came. And at that time, packages were, I guess, care rations containing enough food for two men for 24 days-- for 24 hours. And the most important thing were the cigarettes.

At that time, cigarettes were the currency. If you had cigarettes, you could do everything. And there too, I remember, Camels were the most valuable, followed by Lucky Strike, Chesterfield, Pall Mall, Old Gold. And I remember, the last one were Raleigh. But they were all welcome.

And of course, the lights went out suddenly without warning. And it was quite something.

Did you, at any point, think about taking revenge on those that had done such horrible things to you and your family and friends?

Yes. We thought, just wait. When the time comes, there's going to go after A, and after B, and after C. Of course, we didn't do it. We wouldn't lower ourselves to their level.

Fritz, tell us then, somehow you get through that. You manage to survive all of that, and your father and your mother, and begin thinking about what you're going to do with the rest of your life.

Yes. Well, actually, I went back to school. After three years without school, it was quite difficult. But I decided it was not my duty to rebuild Germany. And I decided to make efforts to the United States. Well, I applied, and glad to get an affidavit by the Joint Distribution Committee.

Before I left, my father said, "Look, if I were 10 years younger, your mother and I would go with you. But the law is completely different over there. What can I do? But you, go. But," he said, "Fritz, I hope you will choose a profession

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that is not limited to one country like law." Well, I didn't do it. And he told me that, despite, he loved this profession. But he felt things might have been better had he not been a lawyer and could have left earlier.

Was he able to continue his profession?

Yes. They counted the years out of office work [? as is ?] already counted. Yes.

So he became a judge again in post-war Germany?

Yes, he was.

You would stay in Germany for several more years. It would be 1948 before you would--

Actually, I left in '47. I was 21 on the boat when I came over. I came here in January '48.

When you left and your parents stayed behind, did other Jews remain in Berlin?

Some remained in Berlin. Yes. See, some simply felt they couldn't. It was too difficult. You see, you heard stories, people had left earlier-- some success, other hardship, and some stayed. Some even came back that had emigrated previously.

You told us earlier that you had spent your 16th birthday being interrogated by this infamous Brunner and by the SS. And your 21st birthday was spent on a ship coming to the United States.

On the ship.

Had memorable birthdays at that time.

Yes.

So you come to the United States. You're still a young man. You just turned 21. Your parents are still in Germany. What did you do when you got here?

Well, actually, I remember the-- I was asked, where would you-- at that time, Jewish Community Services took a number of refugees. And I was given the choice between Detroit and St. Paul. Well, I had read quite a bit about the United States, and I chose St. Paul, Minnesota. I didn't quite know that Minnesota only had two seasons, July and winter.

[LAUGHTER]

But I was very fortunate, I must say. And I got to work there. And later on, I could go to school.

We mentioned earlier that you are an opera buff and-- but it was in Berlin that you heard your first opera. Tell us about that.

How I got hooked? Well, we were not allowed to have radios. And I had a crystal set, a set without electricity. I had it in a shoe box hidden under the bed. And I used it to listen at night. They usually announce whether an air raid was imminent. And we knew, you usually could tell if they said a flight of enemy planes over the Reich. Pretty soon, the sirens would sound.

Well, one night they said tomorrow night an opera will be broadcast. Well, I said, let's see. There will be no air raid, and I'll listen for half an hour to see how it's like. I knew I had heard about opera. And lo and behold, I put my earphones on. Fortunately, no air raid. I didn't listen for half an hour. I spent all night listening.

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It was the opera "Tosca." It was in German, and I could follow the action. And I was sitting there and listening till Tosca jumped over the walls of Costello St. Angelo. And that got me hooked ever since.

That was a night that Berlin was spared bombing.

That was a night, yes, that I could listen to the opera-- ever since.

Fritz, I have many more questions I'd love to ask you, but I think I'd like to turn to our audience and see if they have some questions to ask of you. And we've got, quickly, one gentleman back there. Yes, sir.

Were the Jews in Berlin organized into a ghetto like Warsaw?

The question is, were the Jews in Berlin organized into a ghetto as in other cities, like Warsaw and many others.

Not officially. What happened, you had to give up your apartment and were given a list of apartments where you could move. And of course, what happened, more and more moved together. For instance, at the final, we lived in an apartment with two other couples. But it was not exactly a ghetto.

OK. Yes, sir?

After the war, a lot of the German people, they said that they knew nothing of the death camps and that sort of thing. Did you-- anybody you knew hear anything about it at all during the war?

Question is that, after the war, many Germans said that they knew nothing about what was going on, did not know about the death camps and the deportations. Were you aware of the death camps during that time?

We knew something. We knew there were deportations. At the beginning, actually, we could send some food, and we could send postcards. And we got cards back more or less-- dear so-and-so, thank you for your card or your little package. We appreciate it. We are well. And that stopped. And we knew something was going on.

We were not fully aware of what was going on. I wonder how many. But of course, people knew that the Jews disappeared. They must have gone someplace. I doubt whether they knew the full extent of what was going on in Auschwitz.

Yes, ma'am.

Could you tell us about the moment you first realized that you were going to be free, you were going to live through it, the war was over?

The question is to tell us about that moment when you first realized that you were going to survive, that for you the war was over. You were, indeed, liberated.

I can tell you. At that time, of course, ration cards-- what we used ration cards is the merchants gave out all the stuff they had. By the way, very orderly, all standing in line and were given whatever was left. And I happened, I was out-- the star was no longer worn. I went out to get some bread. And when I came back, there were already some Russians standing there. They already went out.

And of course, they asked you, what are you doing? Jewish? Well, we explained, and they believed us. Well, there we had survived the Third Reich. In fact, let me tell you one little thing, what was one of-- very close to the end. We walked close to a SS barracks. And one morning, what did we see? Some trucks pushed by SS men-- what a sight. What a schadenfreude. If the SS, if they don't have gasoline anymore, well, then the war must be over.

We have a young lady back here with a question.

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Did you have a lot of friends that went to the ghetto?

The question is, did you have a lot of friends that went to the ghetto. And maybe, if I can just expand on your question, do you know what became of many of your friends?

Right.

Yeah, thank you for that.

Yes. I had many friends, many classmates. I'll tell you. I would say of the class, actually, beginning Jewish class were close to 50. If I, at the end, I believe, survived four or five. Two went into hiding, and three were Geltungsjuden like me. Yes, I lost many friends, teachers.

Before, you might remember in the slide show, there was a photograph of Fritz with his classmates at an early age. And I'm sure you were thinking about that. And Fritz looked at that. We were running through the pictures before you came in here. And he looked at that, and he said, almost everybody in that photograph perished.

And I might mention, in German grade school, there were some friends that emigrated to Holland, three-- three former classmates. Actually, one was a classmate, two were quite close friends-- Holland. And I had hoped they would survived. And here at the library, there's a list of deportees from Holland. And I opened it up, and all three were deported. No, there are many places.

Fritz, we're going to close our program in just a moment, if you don't mind. Oh, incidentally, Fritz will stay behind after the program for a while. So if you have other questions or want to just chat with him, please do so over here by the side. Before we close up in just a couple of minutes, I would like to ask Fritz just one more question. And I'm sure many of you are thinking about it. Over the long haul, what became of your parents, Fritz? Tell us.

Well, my mother died of cancer, and my father only was heartbroken. He died of a broken heart six months later. I tried my father to come over, but it's difficult, his age, to adapt to American life. But no, they died. They did not know their grandchildren, to my regret.

And we'll ask you one more question to follow up. You told me earlier today that you went back to Berlin last year.

Yes.

Tell us what it's like for you to go to Berlin?

Well, we went there last year. I had been there before, some professionally. And last year, we went back briefly to visit the Jewish Museum and the new memorial. When I go to Berlin, you see, interesting, the beer is good. The opera is nice. But after a week or 10 days, I like to come home. Home is here.

Well, I want to thank all of you for being here today. And, of course, thank Fritz. Obviously, in an hour, we can only get a glimpse of what was unimaginable, certainly for me and I imagine for most of you, just a glimpse. I wish we had more time. But thank you for being here. I want to remind you that we have a First Person program each Wednesday until the 29th of August, with the exception of August 1, and hope that you might be able to come back sometime this year. If not, and your plans bring you back to Washington in the future, come between March and August when we do First Person.

We will have another First Person program next Wednesday, June 20. And our First Person will be Mrs. Manya Friedman. Mrs. Friedman, who is from Poland, was in her early teens when Germany invaded Poland. She and her family were forced into a ghetto, after which she became a slave laborer at several notorious slave labor camps, including Gleiwitz and RavensbrÃ¼ck. Before the war-- at the end of the war, she was rescued by the Swedish Red Cross.

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It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. And with that, I'd like to turn the program back over to Dr. Fritz Gluckstein.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have come to the United States. And I will always be grateful for the help received and the opportunity given to me. I value my American citizenship most highly. And sometimes being asked whether I have a message to impart, well, I say, don't put things off. Do it now.

Write that letter. Make that phone call. Pay that visit. And if you have two bottles of wine, drink the better one first.

[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]

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