

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 Mr. Haim Solomon, whom we shall meet shortly.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand experiences associated with the Holocaust. Each First Person guest presently serves as a volunteer here at the museum. We will have a new First Person guest on each of the next two Wednesdays before closing our 2007 season on August 29.

The museum's website at www.ushmm.org-- that's www.ushmm.org-- provides a list of upcoming First Person guests. You'll also be able to go to that website to see the program for next year, our 2008 season. You will find it in the Public Programs portion of the museum's 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. Haim Solomon will share with us his First Person account of his experience as a survivor of the Holocaust for about 40, 45 minutes.

Before we introduce you formally to Haim, I have several requests of you. First, if possible, please stay seated throughout the one-hour program. That way we will minimize any disruptions for Haim as he speaks. Secondly, if we have time for any questions at the end of our program-- and we hope that we will-- please make your question as brief as possible. I will repeat the question so all in the room, including Haim, hear the question, and then he will respond to it. If you have a pager or cell phone that has not yet been turned off, please do so now.

And I'd also like to let any of you who may be holding passes for the permanent exhibition today know that they are good for the balance of the afternoon. So you can stay with us through our program and still get to the permanent exhibition.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims. 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 Haim Solomon is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction to you.

Haim Solomon was born November 5, 1924, in Bivolari, Romania. He was the youngest of five children. Here we see Haim's parents-- Bercu Solomon and Sofie Haltar Solomon. This photo was taken in 1941 or 1942.

On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Romania. After Germany and the Soviets signed their non-aggression pact on August 23, 1939, and divided up Eastern Europe, the Soviets occupied Bessarabia, 1 kilometer from Bivolari. The Romanian authorities, suspicious of Jewish loyalties because of the close proximity of the Soviets, ordered all Jews to leave Bivolari.

The first arrow on this map of Romania points to the town of Iasi, where Haim and his family moved. Later, to escape fighting and chaos that eventually erupted in the streets, Haim and his family moved to Bucharest in June of 1944. They remained there until the end of the war. The second arrow on this map points to Bucharest.

In the summer of 1947, as Haim, along with thousands of other Jews, made his way to Palestine by ship, the British captured his ship and took all passengers to Cyprus for internment. In this photograph, taken in Cyprus, Haim stands behind a barbed wire fence at the internment camp.

Finally, in December 1948, Haim escaped the British internment camp on Cyprus and succeeded in reaching Israel.

Haim came to the United States in 1952. Today, Haim and his wife, Malva, live here in the Washington, DC area. He retired January 1, 2003, following a 38-year career with the US Food and Drug Administration, where he was a microbiologist. He is one of the world's experts on the microorganism that causes botulism. He has over 30 scientific publications under his name. In this day of bioterrorism concerns, I have no doubt that his name is on a short list of people to call if there is a major outbreak of botulism.

Malva, his wife is a physician with the Veterans Administration. Haim and Malva have two sons. One was awarded his PhD in microbiology just last year and is now with DuPont in Delaware. The other, taking a different path, is a producer with a local sports talk radio show, the one that I tune to listen to Orioles games.

Haim and Malva are grandparents and very proud of their nearly two-year-old grandson. Haim serves in the museum as a volunteer translating Holocaust-related documents from Romanian into English. He does this each Tuesday and Thursday for eight hours each day. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our "first person," Mr. Haim Solomon.

[APPLAUSE]

[INAUDIBLE]. Very good.

Haim, thank you so much for joining us, and for your willingness to be our "first person" today, and thank you all for being here with us. Haim, you described your early years before Germany and the Soviet Union signed their non-aggression pact as almost idyllic times for you. Tell us why this was so, and what life was like for you and your family in the years before war broke out in 1939.

My odyssey during the Holocaust in Romania consisted of hiding, moving, bribing, under the astute guidance of my father who knew when to be first and when to be last, and when to stand up and when to stay low. It all started in a small village on northeastern Romania called Bivolari. On the east side of Bivolari, 1 kilometer away, was the River Prut that divided us from a province called Bessarabia-- Bessarabia populated by a Russian-speaking population.

Our small village had consisted of one long street, unpaved, plus a shorter one at the middle of the long street and perpendicular to it called the gypsy alley, something like that. On that, at the end of that street, the Jewish community built all sorts of institutions, a [? Robena ?] Israelite Romana public school, or elementary school, communal baths, a matzah factory, and several other institutions.

On the main street, aligned one after another, were Jewish stores. The community was composed of 200 families, about 1,200 people. And each had these stores of all sorts, and ateliers of all the role needs-- tailors, and bakers, and cobblers, and butchers, et cetera.

What was your father's occupation?

My father's occupation was a store of yard goods.

Yard goods. OK. Cloth and things like that?

Yes There were no ready-made items. Customer bought his material, and next door was a tailor who would take that to the tailor and immediately construct or tailor them, whatever they needed.

At the elementary school, when we finished that, the same teachers would prepare it, a group of-- a smaller group of us. And twice a year we would go to a larger city, like Iasi we saw on the map, and be examined in advance for the next grade.

Around our village were about 4,000 or 5,000 peasants. And beyond-- behind them was a large grass field where they send their animals to pasture, and where we engaged in sports activities. On Sundays and Mondays, they would come to town with all their produce, sell it to Jewish buyers, and with their money, buy, for the Jewish stores, items for their

needs. The relationship was amicable but cautious. Nobody ventured outside the city at night or alone.

Then came 1939, August 23. Germany and Russia signed a non-aggression pact and divided Eastern Europe by ethnicity. That brought the Russians up to the River Prut, where their population was speaking Russian. And that was 1 kilometer, or half a mile, from our village. Therefore, the Romanians, as Mr. Benson indicated, they were suspicious of our allegiance, and asked all the Jews to leave, all along the Prut and all along the eastern border.

Why would they have been suspicious? What would make them--

Well.

--be that way?

Jewish was equivalent to communist.

In the Romanian authorities' minds?

Authorities. And later on, the Romanians [? indicate-- ?] justified their oppression of Jews on the basis of the Politburo in Russia, where 16 of the 24 leaders were Jewish.

So equate you all with communists.

Exactly.

Yeah, OK.

So, mostly the merchants initiated the move. And early in 1940 we packed up in one truck everything we could and left whatever we couldn't. And we stayed on top of the truck, and we moved to Iasi, about 50 miles-- 50 kilometers south and 10, 15 west.

We established ourselves in Iasi, on a apartment building that was on a corner of three streets. Came in very helpful later on.

Haim, just one quick question before you go on to tell us about the new life in Iasi. Had the family been in Bivolari for many years?

Oh, two or three generations.

Two or three generations. So lock, stock, and barrel you pick up and the entire community moves.

Whatever you could, yes.

I think I remember you telling me that essentially you then took the keys, and whatever was left over, and just left it behind, and off you went.

No, we had a woman that used to work for us, and gave her the keys.

Gave her the keys to your place.

Mm-hmm. With all the furniture and all the things. But in Iasi, the parents and the older two brothers found a store, and started the same kind of business that we had in Bivolari. And poor customers, instead of coming around the corner, and they had to drive up to Iasi now, and find us. So commerce was more or less similar or the same as we had in Bivolari.

So Iasi was more or less quiet for a while, until 1941. In June 21, that Germany invaded Russia. And German tanks and

troops came through the city, and the Jews were shivering.

Three days later, Iasi was a very central point for the Germans to gather before going on their eastern front. So the Russian air force bombed the train station on the 26th of June. And because of that, on the 28th or 29th, they initiated a pogrom, a vicious pogrom, that left thousands and thousands of Jews on the streets dead. Some writers call it 12,000 Jews. Others indicate there were 10,000. But it was around there.

A pogrom, tell us what a pogrom was.

A pogrom was that the Romanian police and soldiers would come around and ask all the Jews to go to the prefecture, the main police station, to exchange their ID cards for new ones. And they would march them in groups.

And once they arrived there, the German Todt units took over, and pushed, and beat, and shot Jews as they entered this main police station, which was a building with a large yard surrounded by a brick wall. And as the people arrived there, they were beating and shooting, and so my older brothers, for safety reasons, for security, slept in the store 10 blocks away. We had no contact with them.

And they decided to go to that place for changing the ID cards. The younger brother. Lost his old ID card. So on the way, he stopped and went back. But the older brother went there.

And once he got to the police station, he was pushed to the end of it, of that yard, that court. And later, in the evening, he and a few others jumped over and looked for shelter. They found a shed of firewood stacked all the way up to the ceiling. They removed the top portion, crawled into it, and replaced it so that several times Germans would come and look, and couldn't find anything, and left.

They stayed there for five, six days up on the-- what--

Haim, before we go on, just to summarize so that we all know the sequence of events, and the family and the rest of your community moved to Iasi, life resumed pretty much as normal there. You said that the former customers came great distance now still to shop. And then, when Germany turned on the Soviet Union, That's when the Germans invaded Iasi, and when all this terror really began.

Correct.

You referred-- you told me one time that as somewhat there was a sense of normalcy in Iasi up till that point. But you said it was a-- I think the word you used, it was a fool's paradise.

Paradise. Of course it was.

And just say a little bit about that.

Because antisemitism in Iasi was ripe. It was a large city, maybe half and half, Jewish and non-Jewish. And a lot-- the center of the Iron Guard was in Iasi. And--

The center of the Iron Guard.

Yeah. This is the brown-shirted.

The Brownshirt. Kind of like the Blackshirts elsewhere.

Yes.

The fascists--

Correct. And they were subsidized by the Germans. And when the Germans came in to-- in order to go to Russia, they really had a feast. So the atmosphere was tense. But there was nothing else to do but continue.

But then, once the Soviets bombed the railroad station, that unleashed this--

That's when everything came out in the open.

OK. The numbers are stunning. Between 11,000 and 12,000 Jews were killed over-- what? Six or seven days.

No, just two or three days.

Two or three days, by being brought in groups into the main police property.

Well, most of them died in the trains, because after two days of gathering the Jews in the court, shooting start, and they marched the survivors to the train station--

And deported them.

--where they pushed them into animal carts, 150 people in each. Train, the carts that withheld 50 to 60. They started on a trip to nowhere, back and forth. And this was June 29 through July 1, July 5, until the-- in every station they stopped to take out the dead. And instead of leaving the living, as they were, they accumulated them in train in the cart-- again, 100 per cart.

So finally, after five or six days, they arrived to the last destination in Calarasi, south south in Moldova. And there they took them out into a camp and kept them there for three, four month.

So that was the pogrom in Iasi. Wherever you looked, you could see dead people.

We had this triangular apartment bordering three streets. And the best part was it had a basement with three entrances. So whenever they came to look for male, we could go out the other way. And they left us alone.

My father--

They left you alone because they couldn't find you.

Exactly.

Right.

My father and a few of the neighbors, he insisted we not go anyplace until it quiets down. And indeed, after five, six days, after they took all the people from the police to the train station, things quieted down. My brother sent out one person to indicate where he is, and father went to pick him up.

This was the brother who was hiding in the-- had escaped into the wood pile?

The older brother. And slowly, things went-- came back to normalcy. Normalcy meant that now all Jews have to send one person of the family to do forced labor. And at such a meeting, I raised my hand, that I know how to keep bookkeeping when they asked for a bookkeeper. And I was taken to the military hospital, usually-- formerly the Jewish hospital. And there I worked 10 hours a day for the officer in charge of bookkeeping.

Because of the-- we couldn't go out, he would come and pick me up early in the morning, take me to the hospital, and keep me locked up there late in the afternoon and the evening. And then he drove me home. And I did that for almost a year.

While you were doing that-- so you were the one member of the family who went to forced labor.

Right.

While you were doing that, what was the rest of your family doing? How was your father able to make ends meet, having survived the pogrom, and still living in Iasi with your family.

It was possible to pay for someone to be taken to the forced labor.

OK. How did your family make ends meet during that time?

Well, the store was still--

Oh, the store was still operating. OK. So commerce continued in its own way.

Continued, and things quieted down fairly well.

So Iasi became more or less livable until the Russians started advancing. And by 1944, in March, they arrived to the River Prut, and stopped there for a long, long time.

They would send in their air force, bomb the city. They would send in spies, or otherwise people to help them, because they kept sending rumors that battles would be house to house and street to street, so that most of those who could do it again decided to move out. And at that point, we took another truck, and loaded up.

Before you tell us about your next move, you said that the forced labor that you were doing, the bookkeeping at the hospital, went on for about a year, I think.

For me.

Tell us-- I think I remember you telling me a story about why that came to an end, because here you are doing forced labor for them 10 hours a day, and then it stopped. Why?

Because he stopped coming to pick me up.

Just didn't show up?

No. Because he found somebody else that paid him for letting them take-- do that.

So he got a better deal.

He did. And he started doing it more often.

Mm-hmm. What was that experience like for you, to have to work under forced terms for a year, 10 hours a day, for this person?

That was on a third floor. And looking down, I could see all the goings on. German wounded soldiers and Romanian. And I mean, the atmosphere was tense.

During that time, Haim, before you made the next move, as you just said, you could see the wounded German soldiers and Romanians at the hospital. Were you and your family aware of what was now taking place throughout Europe to the Jewish population?

Very little.

Very little.

No papers, no radio, no nothing. Just more or less rumors.

But we could hear about villages no longer on that border, but inside, that suffered fatalities, and abuse, and things like that. And many reported dead people on the roads and in the streets.

So at some point, then, your father makes the decision to move the family again.

Yes, again. We packed up. And this time we traveled 600 kilometers southwest to Bucharest, the capital. And the capital was waiting for the Russians to arrive.

Why they stopped there, we don't know. We know now that the Romanians tried to approach the Americans to find some solution to their allegiance with Germany. But the Americans send them to Moscow. You can do what you want to do with the Russians. And of course, the Romanians were scared of the Russians.

And as you said, the Russian army had stopped at the river.

All along the river. Yes, you could see them, they said. We were 20 miles away, now . But the people who came to us from Bivolari would tell us in Iasi that the Russians are getting ready to come.

Was there, for you and your family, for the Romanian population, you just said they were afraid of the Soviets.

Of course.

For you in the Jewish community, was there a hope that the Soviets would come.

Yes.

And then I assume frustration because they weren't. They were just stopped at the river.

Correct. But at that time already, the American Air Force came to bomb Romania. And we laid on the roofs, saluting them, greeting them, from Italy.

Laid on the roofs greeting the American bombers as they-- but they're dropping bombs on your city, right?

Not the city. They passed the city to the oil fields--

So you're cheering them on.

--north of Bucharest. Yes.

So Bucharest was a short period that we accommodated ourselves to. And early in 1945, the Russians came in. They liquidated the government, and they opened the prisons, and they took out all the communists, and socialists, and formed their government.

They insisted that all minorities have representatives in their government. And so our chief rabbi, E~afran, was part of the government. And he advised us to pack up and leave Romania. But in the meantime, he was protecting.

What was it like when the Soviets came in? Was there fierce fighting when they came into Bucharest?

No.

No.

Not in Bucharest.

Did the Romanians pretty much capitulate at that point?

Yes. In Iasi they were fighting, as we expected. And our road to Bucharest was in older roads to avoid the Germans retreating. And by that many Romanians deserting. And so we used-- a few, up to 10 families, went together on a long trip.

The Russians arrived, and there was very-- I mean, celebration, until they started grabbing whatever you had. And people started staying away from them.

Did they mistreat your community at all?

Well, they were-- they were hungry. They were devoid of everything. The principle of communism was to not let them know what day it is, or month, or time.

So the main attraction was watches. If you had a watch, you were a victim. And--

The Soviets-- the soldiers wanted watches?

Watches. Watches most of all. They ask you what time it is, and they say they don't understand. You show them. Then they take it away. Fill up their pocket full of watches.

Lined up on their wrists.

No, they opened up, and they had them--

Had them in their pockets.

[LAUGHTER]

Was your-- during that time, when the Soviets came in and occupied and set up a government, was your father able to maintain his business--

Yes, they insisted. They insisted that merchants returned to their occupations, and lift up the economy, or to bring normalcy to life. They insist. They encouraged all the restaurants and all the places for entertainment places to make it attractive [CROSS TALK].

Did your whole family at that point remain intact?

Yes.

And were your-- were family members helping with the business or starting their own lives at that point?

Well, my other brother, in '45, later in '45, was able to leave Romania by boat to Turkey, and from Turkey by train to Palestine.

Your oldest brother?

Yes.

When did he go?

In '45.

In '45. OK.

December or November.

Now for you, essentially, the war is over.

Yes.

It's still relatively early in 1945. So the war isn't over elsewhere in Europe.

Correct.

By that time, were you-- did you have a good sense then of what had happened elsewhere?

Yes. Personally, I went back to school and completed high school. And by 1947, I could receive my high school diploma. And that's when the large, illegal immigration to Palestine was beginning to be organized, in August of '47.

August of '47. So really, two full years after the war had ended.

Yes.

So you were under the Russian occupation for--

Correct.

--well over two years, two and a half years. Did conditions for you remain pretty much the same, the family, or did things get rougher under the Soviets at that point?

Not yet. I was able to pursue my studies continuously, with no vacation, to do four classes in two years.

Four grades, essentially, in two years.

Four grades, yes.

And I take, it since you were under the Soviets, that the Americans, you really had no encounters with the Americans at that point because it was completely under the Soviets.

Correct.

When the war ended in August of 1945, because you're now fully under the Soviet control, did you know-- was there a lot of information about what was happening--

Yes.

--once the war was over elsewhere?

Absolutely, yes. Auschwitz and Majdanek, and all of this.

You became aware of all that.

Yes. Slowly, slowly. Because most of these illegal aliyah to Palestine came through Romania. And people or survivors from Poland, and Hungary, and Czechoslovakia came--

Were coming through Romania?

Yes. Getting ready to join one of these illegal immigrations.

So you were able to hear firsthand accounts of what they had experienced.

Oh, yes. Exactly. Numbers, we were-- were not yet publicized or known. But the ferocity of the Germans was already spreading all over Europe.

So in 1945, your brother went to Palestine. And now it's 1947, and figured, it's time for you to go?

Yes. By August, when this huge, 15,000 people, were organized for illegal immigration, I joined in to this move. And by-- in the meantime, the British, that still occupied Palestine, were adamant against it. And they insisted that Romania, or warned Romania not to be part of this kind of illegal, dangerous emigration.

The Romanians replied that no such thing is being initiated in Romania. Therefore, in December, when we were gathered to go by train eastward to the Romanian port city of Constanta, where the ships were waiting for us, Romania insisted that no ships will leave Romania. Therefore, our trains moved, turned south to Bulgaria.

And there, at the port-- Bulgarian port city of Burgas, we entered the ships and started a trip through Constantinople, Bosphorus, Dardanelles, and through the Aegean. Finally entered the Mediterranean. And there, the British Navy picked us up and followed us--

Were you on a large ship?

Yes. 7,500 people.

7,500 on the ship.

Yes.

And the British captured it.

Yes. It was a cage, not a ship, because you couldn't stand, or sit. Only lie down in the shelves that they arranged, the ship. And instead of going to Palestine, they turned us to send us to Cyprus.

And what then, once you got to--

Cyprus was a British colony, and they had ready-made camps where they kept German prisoners. And they left the Germans, or send the Germans out, put us--

Send them home?

Yeah.

And filled the--

They exchanged with the Germans, or prisoners, whatever. They had no use for them.

They put you in their place?

And put us in their place. And that was kind of like going from the pan into the fire. And again, these are camps surrounded by high barbed wire fences, double fences with barbed wire rolls in between, and high towers every 200

yards.

The British did not come into the camps. And the Greek laborers were servicing our camps.

They guarded them, but they didn't come into the camps?

Correct. That's some kind of international arrangement.

OK. So that left you some liberty inside the camp.

Oh, yes.

Would you tell us about that? Because you took full advantage of that.

And the island itself a beautiful Island. It was 20 miles from Turkey and 60 or 70 miles from Israel, on the east side. So while it's closer to Turkey, its population is 90% Greek. And our friends were the Greeks. So they facilitated all our needs.

And as for myself, I joined the Haganah, which was the precursor to the Israeli Army.

While you were inside the camp.

In camp. And the camps, where the occupants were, where-- the Joint Distribution Committee managed the camps. We in the Haganah were managed by shlichim, so-called Israeli or Palestinian, Jewish emissaries. They came to the camp as doctors, teachers, nurses, et cetera. And in fact, they were well-trained military experts.

But their disguise, if you will, was coming in as doctors, lawyers-- OK.

Yes. And they had access back and forth every day. They came in in the morning and left in the evening. And that was exactly what we needed. So we in the Haganah were-- our times, our days were divided into three activities. One was paramilitary exercises, one was studying Hebrew and Bible, and the third one, most important, was preparing for escapes from the camps.

And I trained as one of a pair that would approach the fence. We had small-- we lived in tents, but we had larger tents for schooling, and very large tents for meetings. We looked-- used one of those very large tents to simulate a fence like the one we were surrounded by.

And we had the concertina, that road of barbed wire in between. And we practiced in the dark for the actual thing. At night, we would watch the guards changing, when and how. And in the daytime, depending on the position of the moon, we decided where to do it.

But we always had to be close, or come back to the position of the front entrance to the camps so that our emissaries knew exactly where to stop to pick us up.

I trained as one partner, as a one person in a pair that approached the fence, cut a opening, crawled into the wire role-- because if you split it, it starts running, and makes noise-- and then cut the other fence. We took out eight, nine youngsters. Military-age youngsters were particularly in need, or the British would let women leave or elder people, but not military-age youngsters.

So we took out eight, nine youngsters. We tied up the fence and returned to observation posts-- that were men's bathrooms-- to see the results. The understanding was that if caught during the escape, they would raise their hands and be taken to their posts for interrogation. And then, as a punishment, they would transfer us from the summer camps, where people stayed in tents, to winter camps where people lived in Quonset huts.

You would end up actually making several escape attempts.

Absolutely.

I would like to be sure, before we end, that you tell us about a couple of incidents when you escaped.

Well, the first time I escaped, they caught us. And the interrogation was simple. They put us on a truck and took us to the winter camps.

At the winter camps, when I arrived and was dressed in the special clothing for crawling and opening the fences, they gave me the best clothes, the cleanest. So the second time when I escaped, the arrangements were, once the escape was successful, the escapees were to crawl for a while, and then rise and walk to the road one mile away from the camps, lie down in the grass, and wait.

It's one between 1:00 and 2:00 at night, a truck would stop, turn off the lights, and the passenger come out and whistle a tune that we knew, an Israeli tune. And then everybody ran into the truck, and the truck took them to a warehouse in a large orange grove.

If the escape was successful, that was the procedure. If it wasn't, then again, the second time, if it-- the second time, when I escaped, the arrangement was for not meeting the trucks. Either the truck didn't come, or the youngster-- escapees didn't get there in time. So the understanding was that they must find shelter for the day, and at night, return to the same place.

This happened to me when the second time I escaped we did not meet up with our truck driver. So we looked for a shelter, and found a large hole in the ground. And we descended to stay there all day, when two British soldiers patrol and patrol, were passing by, and kicking a empty can as a football. And the can comes right into our hole. So the British soldiers, with rifles shooting in the air, and screaming, brought us out and took us to their interrogation.

This time, the interrogation was a little harsher. And they have these little leather sticks that they use to obtain information. And after such an interrogation of being beaten, they dropped me into a dark, empty, cold room in December. And I recovered, and started to sing.

When a British officer comes in, you dirty Jew, you love life, he says. I like that.

He said you-- he called you a dirty Jew.

Yes.

But then he said you love life.

Love life. I like that. So dress up and wait for at the other room.

So then they sent us back to the summer camp where I came from. And finally, on the third attempt, I was able to get to that warehouse and the orange grove. And after three, four days, an Israeli fishing boat with license to fish in Turkish waters would come with flashlights and other signs, approach the coast where the trucker would now place us, and by inflatable rafts put us on the ship, on the fishing boat, and take us to Palestine.

And there you would stay until what? 1952, when you came to the United States?

Yes, November 1952.

So you were there for the birth of Israel.

That was our big gripe, that December '48, when we attempted to be--

Oh, you were still at Cyprus.

We were still in Cyprus. Israel was already independent. And we couldn't take that. And that's why I was singing, that they cannot hold us back there.

Haim, I know there would be a whole lot more to talk about once you got to Israel, but why don't we turn to our audience and ask them. We have a few minutes to see if our audience has some questions to ask of you before we close our program. And Haim will say a few words at the end of the program. But if anybody has any questions-- yes, ma'am.

You started your talk by mentioning your father, and how it was his wisdom that got you through the war alive. And I wondered if you could talk a little more about some lessons that you learned from him, and also tell us what happened to him.

The question, Haim, is you talked about the wisdom of your father helping you all to survive. The question is, what-- can you tell us about things that you learned from him, and what happened to your father?

Mm-hmm. Thank you. As I touched on it, he was astute, decisive. He could evaluate the situation exactly.

So here he had five children, but three boys. And so many ideas of how to protect us. At no time did we all sleep at the same place.

As I mentioned, the brothers were in the store. The store was such that European streets, commercial streets, are aligned on a street, but there is an entrance to a court, the large court. So all stores have a opening in the back. And the brothers slept in a store which was locked from the outside, invisibly arranged so that you can see it locked, assuming that nobody's there. Other times we were placed with older relatives, one in a different place. Once a week or so we would get together for Sabbath meal.

And the second part of her question was, what happened to your father? When you left, you left without the rest of your family.

Yes.

What happened to your family who were still in Romania?

They stayed in Romania till '49. They came to Israel. And I would go every year to see them.

Did your father stay in Israel, and your mother, till their death?

Yes.

OK, do we have another-- yes sir, right here.

Mr. Solomon, what would you say to somebody that's living today that says the Holocaust didn't exist.

Question is, Haim, what would you say to somebody, a denier who today would say the Holocaust didn't exist.

We live in a very funny world, in spite of its problems. Germany insists there was a Holocaust. Iran says there wasn't. Eventually, the Iranians will pay for it.

No question that the youngsters in Iran know what's going on. We have friends who have friends in Tehran who communicate with them, and by telephone, public telephones they use over there. And they insist that America take off its gloves in dealing with Iran. Or-- let's leave North Korea out.

But the young people in Iran know exactly what went on. And the Holocaust deniers, how they function in a normal condition in a normal world is unbelievable. It must take a complete shutters to take-- to keep out the truth and the light. It's a disease that we pay for it, but they suffer of it.

In this remarkable institution here, outside are some quotations on the outside of the building. And one of them that really always strikes me is the one by Dwight Eisenhower. I can't quote it exactly, but he says when he entered one of the camps after the war, I've come here to bear witness in case somebody should ever say that this didn't happen. I think the fact that Dwight has that--

Unbelievable at the time.

Absolutely. Another question, I think. Somebody-- yes, sir.

I'm just curious. So after the pogrom in Iasi, were there no deportations from Romania to death camps?

The question is, after the pogrom in Iasi, in which so many people were killed, after that, were there not further deportations in Romania?

There were to Transnistria, not to Germany, because Romania was given Bessarabia back, and part of Russia itself. Between the Prut and the Dniester was Bessarabia. Between the Dniester and the Bug was Ukraine. So Romania was given dominance to all that territory. And they deported hundreds of thousands of Jews to these areas, to the effect that before the war there were 800,000 Jews in Romania. After the war there were only 400,000.

So pogrom in Iasi was followed by pogrom in Bucharest, pogroms in other little villages. But most of them were in Transnistria, where, to this day, they find group graves.

We're almost at the end of our program. And I want to thank all of you for being here. I want to thank Haim for being our "first person" today. Obviously, in an hour, we can only just touch the surface of what Haim experienced both during the Holocaust and the war. But certainly, his experience after the war, and going to Israel, and then coming to the United States, and establishing a remarkable career here in building a family.

Before I turn back to Haim to close our program, I'd like to remind you that we will have two more First Person programs this year on each of the next two Wednesdays, and then we'll conclude our program for 2007 on August 29. If you happen to be in town over the next two weeks, please come back. But otherwise, look for the First Person program between March and August of 2008.

Next week, on the 22nd, our "first person" will be Mr. David Bayer. Mr. Bayer, who is from Poland, survived a ghetto, Auschwitz-Birkenau, labor camps, and a death march. We hope you can join us again this year or next year.

It's our tradition at First Person that our "first person" has the last word. And with that, I'd like to turn back to Haim to close our program today, to offer us whatever thoughts you'd like to share with us.

Thank you. I want to thank you for taking us back gently to our past. I want to thank Ellen Blalock and Leslie [PERSONAL NAME] for-- they are in charge of survivors' affairs, for taking good care of us. And I want to thank the Smiths for their sponsorship, and mostly the audience for coming here, for choosing to come here, and become witnesses for you, for your children, for your children's children, and for joining us when we say, never again. This is not-- was not just something that happened to Jews. It happened to the whole world. It happened to the Western civilization. Thank you for coming

[APPLAUSE]

Haim, if anybody would like to come up and chat with you for a few minutes, will you be available for a few minutes over here? OK. Please feel free to come up and say, hi, or ask Haim another question if you would.