

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 today.

We are in our 11th year of the First Person program. Our First Person today is Mr. Freddie Traum, and we shall meet Freddie in a few moments. This 2010 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis and Doris Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring First Person.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their first-hand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each guest serves as a volunteer here at this museum.

With few exceptions, we will have a First Person program each Wednesday through August 25. We also have First Person programs through the end of July on Tuesdays.

The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests. Excerpts from our First Person programs are available as podcasts on the museum's website. They are also available through iTunes. Freddie's podcast from 2009 is presently available on the website and will be updated shortly with today's program.

Freddie Traum will share with us his First Person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for a few questions from you of Freddie at the end of our program.

We ask that you stay with us throughout our one-hour program, that you remain seated. That way we minimize any disruptions for Freddie as he speaks. If you have a pass to the permanent exhibition this afternoon, please note that it is good for the time marked on your ticket, but it's also good for any time after that today. So that will allow you to stay with us throughout the one-hour program.

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. Roma and Sinti, or Gypsies, people with mental and physical disabilities, 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 Germany.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades what you are about to hear from Freddie is one person's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. And we begin with this photo of Alfred, or Freddie Traum.

Freddie was born in March of 1929 in Vienna, Austria. The arrow points to Austria on this map of Europe. And on this map of Austria, the arrow points to Vienna.

Freddie had one sister. His mother and father owned a business. Pictured here are Freddie, who's on the bicycle, and his cousin Joseph, taken in 1938. On March 12, 1938, German troops invaded Austria. The following day Austria was incorporated into Germany in what was known as the Anschluss.

After Freddie's parents learned about the Kindertransport, a rescue effort which brought thousands of refugee Jewish children to Great Britain between 1938 and 1940, they decided to send their two children to England. In 1939, Freddie and his sister Ruth went to live with a family in London.

This photo was taken on the afternoon of Freddie and Ruth's departure for London. Pictured from left to right, we see Ruth, Freddie's grandmother, his father, Freddie, and his mother. And in this photo, we see Freddie's passport that he used for his journey to England.

Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and World War II began. When England declared war on Germany on

September 3, 1939, the Traum children and thousands of others were sent to live in the English countryside. Freddie spent the next three years of his life there. Here we see 12-year-old Freddie and his sister Ruth at an evacuation residence near Luton, England.

After the war, Freddie found out that his parents had perished. He remained in England and later joined the British Army. After having spent time in the Israeli army, Freddie would then become a merchant seaman and eventually move to Israel.

He met his wife Josiane on an Israeli ship upon which they would be married. We close the slide presentation with this photo from Freddie and Josiane's wedding aboard the Israeli passenger liner SS Zion in 1958.

After the birth of Freddie and Josiane's first child, he gave up his career as a merchant seaman and went to work for IBM in Israel. Upon the advice of medical experts in Israel, Freddie and Josiane would relocate to the United States in 1963 to obtain care for their son Michael, who was disabled.

Freddie was able to transfer to IBM in New Jersey, and they began their new life here. They would have two other children, daughter Yael and another son Jonathan, who is also disabled. Eventually Freddie would go to work for Boeing as an engineer in telecommunications, and they would move to Vienna, Virginia.

Today Freddie and Josiane live in Silver Spring, Maryland. Freddie is retired from Boeing, and Josiane retired two years ago as a clinical social worker, working with abused children for Child Protective Services in Montgomery County, Maryland. Josiane and her mother, Fannie Aizenberg, are both Holocaust survivors and were recent First Person guests.

Freddie is active in the local Kindertransport Association, which is made up of fellow survivors of the Kindertransport. He chairs the local association. Freddie also volunteers here at this museum on Tuesdays as a researcher with the International Tracing Services archive. He also serves as a tour guide for the museum's special exhibitions, including this year's special exhibition on Nazi propaganda, as well as the 2008 exhibition about the 1936 Nazi Olympics.

Freddie also speaks about his experience as a survivor on behalf of the museum, including recently at two Christian colleges in Tennessee, King College and Milligan College. He has also spoken at such places as the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi. And Freddie contributes to the museum's publication, "Echoes of Memory," which features writings by survivors who participate in the museum's writing class for survivors.

After today's program, Freddie will be available to sign copies of "Echoes of Memory," which is also available in the museum's bookstore. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr Freddie Traum.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you for your welcome.

Freddie, Thank you so much for your willingness to be our First Person today. We have so much to cover in one hour, so let's begin. Freddie, when we first met, you described to me that your early life, your childhood, was a really happy time. Tell us about those first years of your life before you went away on the Kindertransport, before the Anschluss. Tell us what your life was like and your parents and your community at that time.

Well, we lived in a secular type of location in Vienna. And most of the kids I played with were not Jewish kids. But it was a working class area. Played in the streets and in backyards.

It wasn't like it is today, where everything is formalized, you have soccer practice and this practice and that, and your time is organized. Our time was not organized. But at the same time, I was engaged in many, many things.

There was a cowshed near where I lived, and I used to go there. And I thought I was helping out, but they used to let me come in, and I learned to milk the cows and groom the cows and go out and get hay with the cart.

And there were all kinds of activities that we got involved in, mainly because we didn't have iPods, all the other type of activities that kids have today. So my life was full, and I didn't know anything different. And I had a happy home life.

My mother was a great cook. She spoiled me for the rest of my life. So I still only like to eat food that is within about 250-mile radius from where I was born, which doesn't go down too well with my wife and some of my friends that are more adventurous. But all in all, I had a good, happy home life.

Freddie, your father was a disabled veteran of the First World War. How did your parents earn their living?

This is a period before people had credit cards where you could buy something and pay off on time. As a result of that, there were some people, like my father and others, who would have catalogs. People would come and purchase, whether it was a radio, tablecloth, linen, and they would pay off.

And so we had that kind of business. My mother would go out and collect monthly from people. And they would come to the house and order whatever they wanted, and all kinds of purchases-- radio, bicycle, or dry goods. And that was a business.

So it was installment payments that they actually made [CROSS TALK] for its time.

That's right. [CROSS TALK].

And because they didn't have a store, so it wasn't like you had a big inventory. They would go out, and what people ordered, obtain.

We didn't have an inventory at all. People would come to the house and pick up whatever they had ordered, and that was it.

Freddie, do much about your father's wartime experience?

No. I know he served in Italy. And he used to tell me all kinds of stories, which I used to like to listen to. And I'm not sure exactly what his injuries were. All I know is that he had great difficulty in walking, could only walk with the assistance of two canes.

But once he was seated, he was able to do anything. He actually had gifted hands and he could do all kinds of stuff. And I learned a great deal from him.

You told me that you actually spent a lot more time with your father than you did with your mother.

Yeah, because he was always home when I came home from school. And he would help me with schoolwork. And I know we spent a great deal of time together.

I have to share with the audience that I was really struck the first time I met Freddie with just the clear love and reverence, almost, that he had for his father. And he pointed out an addition to their house that he built, Freddie built, and he said, I did it because my dad taught me that I could do anything, because despite his disabilities, he could do anything. And I was very taken by that. Your parents, were they Austrian citizens?

No, they were not, because when they were born, they lived in a part of Poland, which is Galicia, which was part of the Austria-Hungarian empire. So they were considered like Austrians. That's the reason he automatically went into the Austrian army when the first World War broke out.

But at the conclusion of the war, Poland became an independent state. And unless they would have applied for citizenship, they still remain-- their nationality would have been Polish. But then afterwards they lost that nationality, and they actually had none-- stateless.

They were stateless.

And that passport that you showed of mine, actually it said on there "stateless."

So no citizenship rights whatsoever. Tell us just a little bit about your sister Ruth. I think she was three years older than you?

Yes, to the day.

To the day.

Yeah.

Tell us a little bit about Ruth.

Well, she actually would have liked to have gone to Palestine, because we knew quite a lot of people and Cousins of ours that went to Palestine on a program called Youth Aliyah, where they would go to kibbutzim in Palestine. But our parents didn't want to separate us, so much to her chagrin she had to come with me to England, because I was too young to go on that program. But she never seemed to hold it against me.

Good.

[LAUGHTER]

But the fact is, I was always there spoiling some of the things that she might have wanted to do.

We'll talk more about it a little bit, I think. Freddie, you told me when we first met that as Hitler's influence grew, some of your friends, non-Jewish friends, began to belong to Nazi youth organizations.

That's right.

What do you remember about that? And what can you tell us about what your parents were experiencing during that time leading up to the Anschluss and the German annexation of Austria in 1938 before war even broke out?

Well, I was reminded of it when I went-- if you go through the exhibit of Nazi propaganda, for example, it shows you that there's a plane flying over, dropping thousands of little swastikas, come down like a cloud. And I remember when that happened. It happened on the 20th of April, 1938, because that's Hitler's birthday.

And at that time, it was only a month after the Anschluss. And I was playing with my school friends there. We were going around looking for these little swastikas and seeing who collected the most and all that sort of thing. At that time, we were all friends.

And very soon after, they were enlisted in various youth organizations, Hitler Youth, or there was another one for the younger kids called the Deutsche Jugend. And they would get their uniforms and all kinds of paraphernalia.

And at first they used to come and show it off to me. And if anything, I was probably a little jealous. They seemed to be having a great time. But that gradually changed, and I guess they were being indoctrinated against Jews in general.

And since I was one of them, so at first they just distanced themselves. And then afterwards it became outright harassment, sometimes physical as well. And these were the same kids that I grew up with and I used to come home from school on a daily basis.

Will you tell us about one incident that you shared with me in which your school satchel was ripped away from you?

Yeah, yeah, that's-- well, there's one thing to remember. In Vienna at that time-- I haven't been back, so I don't know what it's like now. But in the parks, they would have little railings around all the lawns and flowerbeds and all that. And you couldn't put your foot on that grass-- very different to England, where people were outside Buckingham Palace, they're laying on the grass having picnics-- but not in Vienna.

And the kids came by, calling names, and one of them ripped off my satchel and threw it on the grass. And so I stepped over the railing to pick it up. And there was a policeman right there. He must have been there all the time.

And he grabbed me by the scruff of my neck and started shouting at me and all that sort of thing and then took down my name and address. And then we got a notification by mail to come to school. And my mother came to school, and then the school teacher was giving her insults, one after the other, about Jews having no respect for the beauty of Vienna and all that sort of thing.

And it wasn't long after that I was expelled from that school and went to a school which was for Jews only. In other words, they herded us together so that we wouldn't contaminate their kids, I guess. And in many ways, it was much more pleasant. Because at least I was amongst friends.

But it was a long way. And since I lived in a non-Jewish neighborhood, I used to walk home-- excuse me-- about a half an hour or so. And sometimes kids would hang around outside school and try and set upon us. And I was usually by myself, so sometimes I'd get chased for quite a bit. Fortunately I was pretty fast.

[LAUGHTER]

In November of 1938 is when Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, occurred. Freddie, what can you tell us about Kristallnacht and what it meant for your parents?

Well, I know that the synagogue when where I used to belong, or at least I was in the choir there, that was burned down.

This was the night of November 9, 10, 1938.

My sister's best friend, they had a store on the main street. There was a very nice corner store. And that was smashed and looted. And her father was taken into Buchenwald, the concentration camps.

And ironically, that saved his life. Because when he was let go after about two months, they gave him a matter of days to leave the country. And so he and his wife just packed the suitcase and went to the border.

How they got across the borders, I don't know. But the fact is they did. And they ended up in Palestine. And their daughter came and lived with us. And she also went on the Kindertransport. So that's how they survived.

Now, other people who didn't have that ultimatum stayed at home and hoped for the best and hope they could ride out the storm or whatever. And of course, they didn't. They were eventually deported and lost their lives.

So when they went to Palestine, their little girl ended up living with your family until you left. How old was she? Do you remember?

Pardon?

How old was she?

Well, she must have been 13 years old. She was the same age as my sister. They'd been friends since they were little kids.

What happened to your father's business in the aftermath of Kristallnacht?

People simply refused to honor their commitments and pay. So since we didn't have anything and didn't have a store, everything we had as far as assets was already in the hands of whoever made the purchases. And for the most part, as far as I know, they just didn't honor that.

Beforehand people were so nice and honest about it that sometimes on a Sunday my sister and I would go to some places, which were in Vienna Woods, and just knock on the door. And the people would just pay us, and we could go and collect, and there wasn't any fear about anything. But these same people afterwards, they said, well, we don't have to pay you.

The Night of Broken Glass, or Kristallnacht, took place throughout Austria and Germany. So in hundreds of towns and villages, thousands of synagogues were burned. So this event was occurring everywhere in those two countries.

After Kristallnacht, after that night, your father's business began to suffer terribly. It wouldn't be long after that your parents then made this extraordinary, profound decision to take advantage of the Kindertransport and send you away on a Kindertransport to England. Tell us what you can, from what you know and were able to piece together, about how they reached that decision, how they made it happen, and then about your leaving for England.

Well, I don't know how they made the decision or how they learned about it. But it couldn't have been a big secret, because there were about 10,000 children altogether that left Germany and Austria and some from Czechoslovakia and came to England. So it must have been fairly well known.

I remember lining up or being in queues waiting to get visas and all that. And it didn't come as a tremendous surprise that we might be going somewhere. Because four of my cousins had gone to Palestine, and we knew quite a lot of young people who left and went to Palestine.

So there was almost a feeling like, gee, when is it going to be my turn? Because they wrote letters back, having a great time. I remember one of my cousins, he sent her a picture where he and his wife are standing in front of a tent. And that tent is their home, really, and they're smiling like they're having the most wonderful time. And I guess the idea of being free was wonderful.

So there was a kind of a feeling like, gee, when's my turn coming? And we were, my sister and I were-- or my sister, I should say, was involved in a Zionist youth movement. And I used to kind of tag along. And so we knew lots of people who were going. And so it didn't come as a shock or surprise.

And so not that sense of you were somehow singled out to be sent away from your parents because of that.

No, I never we never felt rejected in any way. Now, we hoped that this would be temporary and that we'd be reunited.

In fact, you pretty much as a youngster assumed it was temporary.

Yeah, yeah, I think as a youngster you always have a positive attitude. And we knew to whom we were going. And that's not always the case, because the kids that came on the Kindertransport were two categories. Some were considered guaranteed. That means a place had already been found for them. And others were unguaranteed, which meant that they would go to hostels or some kind of a temporary place to stay until perhaps something more permanent might be found for them.

So we knew that we were going to the Griggs family. We knew that he was an engine driver who drove those humongous locomotives between London and Glasgow. And my dad used to tell me that maybe he'll let me go on one of these engines. Because to a little kid at that time-- today kids don't think too much about locomotives. And at that time, that was a big deal. Kids used to go to railway stations and wait for them to come in, and it was sort of an exciting thing.

So here's your parents saying, Freddie, you're going to get to go to England. You're going to go to a home of somebody who drives a locomotive. And so--

And their little boy, who was a year younger than me, had a bicycle. And that was a big deal for me, because I didn't have a bike. I used to spend all my money to rent a bike in the park. So they softened the idea.

So the day comes. You go to the train station. Tell us about that day, what you recall.

OK, my mother took us, and we were standing through the open window, kind of talking, holding hands, not really knowing a whole lot what to say. And then almost shortly after that, my school teacher came carrying his little five-year-old son. They passed him through the window. He knew I was leaving on the Kindertransport on that day, and he'd managed to get his son accepted.

So he passed him through to us and asked if he could sit with us and I'd look out for him until we get to London, where somebody will pick him up. And that's what I did. I never knew what happened to him beyond that date.

Freddie, we saw in the slide presentation a picture of you with your mother and father and one of your grandparents on that last day. Tell us a little bit more about that picture and another one that you have.

Well, my dad was an amateur photographer. He used to do his own developing and printing and all that. And of course, since he wanted to get into the picture himself, he put it on the delayed shutter, so he couldn't tell people to hold your head up and smile or anything. So it really reflects more the feeling than it does anything as far as photographic experts. And it's a sad picture.

But soon after we arrived in England, he sent us a small copy, and that's blown up. I did as much as I could with Photoshop but couldn't put smiles on people's faces.

And he wrote the farewell on the picture, didn't he?

Yeah, one of them did. In Germany he said, [SPEAKING GERMAN], which means farewell.

During that time, your parents were also trying to make their way out of Austria if they could. Tell us about that.

They did much, much later get an affidavit to come to the States, which they could never exercise because, even though they had an affidavit, which meant that they would not be the wards of the state here, nevertheless you'd have to have a visa to get in, and you have to be on the-- what's it called?

Quota?

Quota to be able to come here. Now, the difference-- my parents must have known that they-- almost impossible for them to get out, because first of all, he was crippled. And secondly, he didn't speak the language and didn't have a profession that he could just go into in a seated position. So I think they knew the severity of their situation more than we did.

Do you remember your actual trip?

Yeah, sure.

Tell us a little bit about it. Was it a scary thing? Or for you, a kid, it was more of an adventure?

It wasn't scary. There was one moment when the SS came through, looking at different papers. And I don't know what they saw in our papers that they didn't like. Next thing I knew we were being taken out. And then afterwards everything was OK, and we came back in again. So it was a momentary hitch there.

But then afterwards when we came into Holland, there was a sort of an exhaling. Everybody felt relieved that they were out of Germany. And then we went right to the boat.

And the only thing I remember, really, on the ship is the breakfast the next morning. I'd never had English white bread before, which was so different to the European bread that we used to have, which was heavy. You felt like you were eating something. And this was like Wonder Bread, so.

[LAUGHTER]

And English tea-- I'd never had tea that looked like coffee but tasted like nothing.

[LAUGHTER]

So that was a surprise to me. But they gave us a nice banana, which was a real luxury in Vienna at that time. And those are the only things that I can tell you about that trip. Then next thing, we were on a train going to London, Liverpool Street Station.

Freddie, clearly when you left Austria on the Kindertransport, you were accompanied by adults. What do you know about the adults who accompanied the kids when they went?

I don't know a thing about them. I can't help you on that. The only thing I know is that these people must have been very brave, because they had a taste of freedom stepping ashore in England, and going back for another trip and knowing the risks that they involved with that. So this is something I learned afterwards.

I didn't know much about Kindertransport. I didn't know-- once I reached England, I was not in touch with anyone from the refugee organizations. In fact, I didn't even know any Jewish people until way after the war. I was completely immersed in a Gentile world, not from a religious aspect, because my guardian, they never went to church, but just from normal lifestyle.

So you and Ruth and all the other children make it to London. You're in England. What happened then?

Well, I immediately signed up for school.

And you're living with the Griggs family?

Yes.

OK.

And they put me in an age-appropriate class. I have to tell you, I didn't know any English. For some reason we learned "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean"

[LAUGHTER]

And that didn't do me a whole lot of good.

[LAUGHTER]

And I knew "yes" and "no." And I remember at playtime once one of the kids came over to me and said, do you want to fight? So I thought he's trying to be friendly, so I said yes. And the next thing I knew, he punched me.

[LAUGHTER]

I quickly learned that I've got to increase my vocabulary. [LAUGHTER]

But English came so quickly. It's amazing. One day I didn't seem to know anything, and then afterwards it just evolved.

And two months later, 1st of September-- it was a Friday-- 1939, that's when the Germans marched into Poland. And in London, most of the schools were being evacuated to the country. It was amazing how well organized the Women's Voluntary services were.

We all got on trains, and my sister actually came with me as well. But I went with my class, and we went to a little place outside Luton. And when we arrived there, they had lists of the streets, every house, how many people lived in that house, how many bedrooms there were, and how many kids or if they could take anyone in.

And I don't think the people living there had too much choice about it. They gave them a choice of either take a family that's evacuating or a couple of soldiers or evacuee or one or two evacuees. And the people we went to, which was a young couple, actually, took the lesser of these three evils, and they took two evacuees, my sister and I. And I stayed there for about 3 and 1/2 years. My sister stayed there about a year and a half until she actually graduated and left school.

Freddie, this was the Clissold family?

Clissold, yeah.

Clissold family. Before you tell us a little bit about them, what was your stay like with the Griggs? It was a short stay, but--

Yeah, it was pleasant. I mean, I had the bicycle.

[LAUGHTER]

And it was very different to our home. It was much more strict. Mealtimes, you don't speak, which in my home was a time when everybody speaks, usually at the same time. So it was a different kind of a household. But on the other hand, they treated me exactly the same as he treated his own son and didn't make any differences in this regard.

So you felt very welcome in their home.

Oh, yeah, I was welcome. It just the cultural differences between English and Jewish, if you want to call it.

But you would find a very different experience in the countryside.

Yeah, the Clissolds were-- first of all, they were fairly young married couple. I think she was about 27. Certainly didn't want to have two kids living in her home. That's the number-one thing.

And she was paranoid or a fanatic about cleanliness. I think she had been in service before being married. Probably if you saw Upstairs Downstairs, she would be the parlor maid dusting and vacuuming all day long, every day, rooms that you never went into except one day, Christmas Day, they opened the front room, which was furnished. But she would be there vacuuming and dusting every day.

Unfortunately she never got near the kitchen, wherever she worked. So she was terrible as far as cooking. And so I was not allowed in the house except when it's time to go to bed and time to eat. Those are the only two times.

Now, if you're familiar with English weather, that meant I was outside a lot when it was cold and raining, sheltering in doorways of the shops just to get out of the rain. But when the weather was good, I was out there playing with the kids.

And your sister, did she have a similar experience with them?

No, she went to a different school. She went to kind of a trade school. And she had a very good friend, and they used to be in their house all the time. And so she used to show up at the right times. But other than that, she didn't have any of

that problem.

I remember you telling me that in addition to essentially not being allowed in the house except to eat and go to bed, that you were also not allowed to bring any new friends that you'd made in.

None, yeah, that's true. But not only that, she didn't want me to go into anybody else's house. Because if you go there, they'll expect to come to her place. And so that was kind of cut off. And I used to adhere to what she told me.

And at some point, I think at age 14, you left there.

Yeah. At that time, unless you were signed up in school, in a grammar school, normal school leaving age was 14. So at that time, I left school and I went back to London. And then I had to find myself a job.

I would really like it if you shared with the audience your pursuit of your job. I think that is a truly wonderful story.

I was afraid you might ask me that.

[LAUGHTER]

This is how I demonstrate how naive I was. My guardian and his brother were discussing me, as far as what kind of a job I should go after. Now, they were both--

Were you back at the Griggs at this point? Yeah.

So you'd gone back to London and were back with the Griggs, which probably was a happier environment for you.

Oh, yeah, yeah. And they were staunch union type, so you had to find a place with a strong union and all that sort of thing. And I remember my guardian's brother saying, newspapers, that's the thing. It doesn't matter what the situation in the country. If it's bad or good, they always have to have newspapers.

And so I thought, OK. The next morning-- here's a little 14-year-old, looked about 12, descending on Fleet Street, which is London's news capital. Walked down there. I don't know what I thought I could offer anybody. But I was standing outside the Daily Telegraph office. And they had these big picture windows with photographs of whatever was appearing in the newspapers.

And while I was standing there, a kid came and stood next to me. And he was one of these messenger boys that had a uniform and pillbox hat on. And I could just read Telegraph on the side. So I said to him, what's it like working for the Telegraph?

He said, oh, it's a great company. Are you looking for a job? So I said, yes. So he said, well, the head office isn't here. Come with me. I'm going back there. So I followed him, and we got to this place, 64 Cannon Street.

And we went upstairs. There was a waiting area, coffee table with a few Daily Telegraphs laying there. And he said, well, wait here. So I waited. Pretty soon a guy came out, and he said, I understand you're looking for a job. So I said, yes.

He called me in his office. He said, what kind of work do you want to do? So I said printing. So he looked at me and said, how do we do printing? And I thought this was either a trick question or a stupid question. So I said, well, everybody knows that.

So he let it pass. He said, right, OK. And he said, well, we don't do our printing here. We do it in Tring. It's about 30 miles north of London. And I thought to myself, that makes sense. Doesn't matter how bad the air raid might have been the night before. The papers are always there on time. So that's how they do it.

And so anyway, he hired me. I have no recollection of such discussions about wages or benefits or anything like that. I felt so excited. So he gave me a ticket. He said, go to Houston Station Monday morning. There's a train leaving at 8 o'clock. So I said, OK.

So I came home all excited. I got a job with the Daily Telegraph. And my sister wasn't that excited about it. I had only just come home and I'm off again. And the idea is that I could come home weekends. They would give me tickets to travel.

Anyway, so Monday morning came, went and got on the train. Everybody every man I saw wearing a trench coat, I thought that had to be a reporter or journalist or something. Anyway, we got to Tring, got off. Quite a few people got off. There was a bus waiting there for us and took us up to a village called Hastoe.

And when I got there, there was a woman who sort of took care of everybody who came. She said, you must be our new man-- a new man, huh?

[LAUGHTER]

Anyway, so I said yes. And they made arrangements for us to be billeted out throughout the village, different homes, especially a place out where I stayed. Their son was off somewhere in the Navy, I think. So they had room to put up another person. And the Village Hall was taken over with a cook. And we would have our meals there, breakfast, dinner, and lunch.

And so then after going through all these rudimentary things, she told me to go across the street. There was a big bond there. I mean, there was a humongous bond there. And she said, go upstairs and ask for Mr. Carter. He's the manager there.

So I did that. And I went upstairs. I saw a bunch of small printing machines. And they were all chugging away like crazy and taking photographs with big cameras and all that.

And so I was looking around, and I couldn't contain myself much longer. I said, where did they print the newspapers? He said, what newspapers? So I said the Daily Telegraph.

So he burst out laughing. He said, you thought this was the Daily Telegraph? So I said, isn't it? He said, no, no, this is the Exchange Telegraph. We do printing, but it's financial reports. And we get the information on the teleprinters, and then we assemble it and photograph it, make plays, and all these little multilift machines, American offset lithographic machines. He said we print it on that.

So that was a bit of a disappointment to me. But in actual fact, it worked out fine, because there were quite a few young guys there they were older than me. I was the youngest, but everybody waited until they became 18, and then they would get called up and go into one of the services. So they filled it by having somebody young come in and get a few years out of him.

And they made sure that they passed us through all the various departments so that when somebody gets called up, they can always move people around and we get a rounded education there. And I stayed there till the end of the war.

And actually it was wonderful. They took over a mansion that had belonged to Rothschild family. And it was like an extended family. All the women, young women there, they all stayed and lived in the house. And the guys were kind of distributed around the village. But we had all kinds of recreation facilities for us.

But that was the end of your journalism career.

Yeah, yes.

[LAUGHTER]

During that time, the war ended. As you said, Freddie, you were 16 years of age. When you first got there with the Griggs then went to the countryside as an evacuee, did you continue to hear from your parents? Were you able to stay in touch at least for some period?

We got letters in the beginning until about 1940. I think '41 we got a letter that was sent through Switzerland. So I had a relative there.

And then afterwards we got a Red Cross message, like 25 words. I forgot exactly the date when we got that. But that was the last communication. We didn't get anything after that.

What did that last communication say?

I don't know. I don't remember.

Do you still have any of the letters?

I've got quite a few letters. I gave them to the museum. They made photocopies for me, and they're going to translate them. My German isn't good enough to read through that correspondence.

So the war is over, Freddie, and you're 16 years of age. And it wouldn't be long, though, you would join the army yourself. Tell us about that.

Well, first of all, in 1946 my guardian retired. I forgot to mention that his wife died at the beginning of the war.

Mrs. Griggs?

Mrs. Griggs. So when my sister came back to London, she pretty much had to do what was expected of the older sister to do, keep house for Mr. Griggs. And anyway, once he retired, he became sick, became ill, and not long after died.

It was really strange. I mean, all these years with his bad stomach and whatever he had, he managed to keep going. But as soon as he retired, he couldn't settle down to the retirement life.

Anyway, so he died, and the house was to be sold. His children went off to live with some of their family. And my sister and I were basically out in the cold. Now, I mentioned about my sister's friend Lily.

The one that came with you on the Kindertransport?

She didn't come with us. She went on the Kindertransport.

She went on the Kindertransport, OK.

And she went to Wales, and she was living with a school mistress who insisted that even though she wasn't Jewish but that she would have Jewish friends or places to go to the high holidays and all that. So she was kind of connected to a Jewish community there.

And my sister and her were in contact all the time through letters. When she told them about our situation, she must have mentioned it to some of her friends. And so some guy, Mr. Nevis, came down to London to meet us. And he had a two-fold purpose. [COUGHS] Excuse me.

He wanted to help us, but at the same time, being a religious person, he had that feeling of saving Jews to maintain the Jewishness. So he told us that his sister in Manchester would be happy to have us stay with him for a short while until something more permanent as far as lodgings and jobs could be found.

So I was not keen on it. My sister was very keen on the idea. And anyway, she went out, and we went to Manchester. And we stayed with these people, the Millers. They made us feel very welcome.

We stayed there about two or three weeks, and they found a place for me to live and a place for my sister to live and found jobs in the field that I had with the Exchange Telegraph, except on a much smaller scale. But since I'd learned all the ropes, I could do the whole bit.

And so I had a job, and then I joined a youth movement, a Zionist youth movement. Got very much involved with that. And pretty soon London seemed far off. I wasn't missing London anymore. I thought I had found a much happier and friendlier situation in Manchester.

And then in '47, Britain recognized that they had thousands of children, about 10,000 kids on their hands, most of whom have lost their families and had no place to go. So they passed another law, which was to offer citizenship.

Now, usually applying for citizenship is quite an involved, bureaucratic type of factor. But this wasn't. Just had to appear at some office downtown, sign, and that automatically gave me a British citizenship. And I could get a passport, could travel.

In the case of myself, a boy, it meant that when I become 18 I would be called up for the army or for the services, which wasn't something that I dreaded. On the contrary, I looked forward to it, because all of my friends had gone through that same thing and had joined up, and I was really looking forward to that. And so that's what happened.

And in the remaining time we have, Freddie, I have a couple more questions for you, but tell us if you would about starting to join the British army but then going to--

Yeah. [LAUGHS]

--going to Israel.

It's kind of funny. I got my call up for the medical. So I went through the medical and a certain number of tests that they give you. Passed all that. And they told me, go home and you'll receive your orders.

And during the intervening time, the war broke out in Palestine. Israel became a state and immediately was attacked by surrounding armies. And so I thought, this is crazy. I shouldn't be joining the British army now. I should be joining the Israeli army.

So there was a kind of an underground movement for people who wanted to volunteer. So I volunteered. And after a few amount of weeks, I was in Israel in the army there.

And so I was in the army there for about 18 months. And meanwhile I got my orders to report in England. And the police came around looking for me. And finally, my--

So in their mind, you were AWOL.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So finally, my sister told them where I was. So they stopped bothering her. But I was on their AWOL list. And so when I finished the army in Israel, I made two decisions. One was I liked the idea of living there. But I wasn't sure how I was going to live there, what kind of a job I would get, where I would live. And language was a problem.

And I met somebody who was in the Merchant Navy, and it sounded like he had a great time. And I thought, this is the thing for me. I'll go through a Merchant Marine Academy in England. I'll look for the job then.

And so I came back to England, and as soon as I arrived in Dover, they told me, the army wants you. So I said, yeah, that's why I'm here. And they were very civil with me. They didn't throw me in irons or anything like that. They just said, when you get home, report to the police station. They'll take it from there.

So I did just that. And about two weeks later, I got my orders to report to a place called Catterick Camp in Yorkshire. And when I got there-- where everybody goes up and down looking for their pay book, because that's the most important document that you have there, and they were all in alphabetic order-- but where mine should have been, there was just a note saying, see adjutant.

Now, the adjutant is in charge of discipline. So when I mentioned it to the sergeant who was showing us around, he said, oh, you've decided to come back, have you? He seemed to know everything about me, which really astonished me.

Anyway, the next morning they marched me into this captain's office. And I thought, boy, I'm in for it now. But instead, he was very, very civil with me. He told the sergeant to wait outside. And then he started asking me questions.

And he said, look, if I would have thought that you were trying to evade service, I would throw the book at you, and you'd spend two years in Colchester. That's the army prison in England. He said, but you weren't trying to evade. I respect what you did, so we'll wipe the slate clean. And you just do your normal two years.

Then he was asking me a lot of questions. Was the [NON-ENGLISH] finally destroyed? Or was it damaged? And some of the questions I could answer. Many of them I couldn't answer.

And then it turns out, I've learned that this regiment that I had been sent to was one of the last regiments to leave Palestine. They had been stationed there for years. So they were very familiar with all the scenes, everything that was going on there. And when they came back to the UK, they became a training regiment. That's how I happened to be there.

Anyway, everything went well. They treated me very well. And after my three months' initial training, I was sent to Germany, and I was in the Armored Corps Regiment. And I finished up with the Royal Scots Greys.

So you served in the Israeli army, then you served in the British Army, then became a merchant seaman.

Yeah.

And then and then met Josiane and married Josiane. Freddie, before we close-- and I'm going to turn after this question back to Freddie to close our program in just a couple of moments-- when did you learn for sure what happened to your parents?

Well we knew that they hadn't survived. And the first real documentation as far as the deportation and that sort of thing, where they went to, was what I learned here. I got the document. Actually, I work and help out in that department. I was going through--

This is the International Tracing Service?

Yeah. Through lists of all the deportees, and then I came across the deportation from Vienna. And there I found my parents' names and my uncles and my cousin's name. And it showed you the date, where they were deported to.

And the thing that struck me about that is that how meticulous they were. The cover sheet of this deportation lists, of which there were several in that particular transport, the cover sheet, the handwriting, could have been an engraved invitation the way it was beautifully handwritten. And all these people were being sent to their death. It is hard to understand the minds of some people.

And it told you precisely where they went.

Yeah.

And this was just very recently, wasn't it?

Yeah. That was recent, yeah.

We're not going to have time for questions and answers with Freddie, but in a moment when we finish he's going to go up and sign copies of "Echoes of Memory," which he's a contributor to. So you'll have a chance if you want to say a few words to Freddie there.

I'd like to thank you all for being here very much. I'd like to thank Freddie for clearly giving us just a glimpse. We could spend hours up here and wish that we could do that.

I'd like to remind you that we will have a First Person program every Wednesday through August 25, as well as Tuesdays through the end of July. Our next First Person program is tomorrow, June 16, when our First Person will be Mr. Marcel Hodak, who was born in Paris, France.

Marcel's family fled German-occupied Paris in 1942 for a small town in Southern France, which was considered free France at that time. They remained in that town, which was a hotbed of French resistance to the Nazis, until Paris was liberated in August of 1944. So we hope you'll come back and join us another time for a First Person program.

It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. And so with that, I'd like to turn back to Freddie to close today's program.

OK, thank you. I would like to close with the fact that it's not so much my story. There were 10,000 stories, all different. But the one thing that we have in common is what Britain did at that time when most other countries closed their doors.

And I think as we know, November the 9th was Kristallnacht. On November the 21st, the House of Commons debated the Jewish refugee issue. And on the same day, the government announced its decision to permit an unspecified number of refugees up to the age of 17 from German-occupied lands to enter the UK as trans-migrants. A bond of 50 pounds Sterling had to be paid for each child.

The first of the Kindertransports arrived in the UK on December the 2nd. And on December the 8th, the former prime minister, Stanley Earl Baldwin, issued a radio appeal with these words-- "I ask you to come to the aid of victims not of any catastrophe in the natural world, not of an earthquake, nor a flood, nor of famine, but of an explosion of man's inhumanity to man."

He also formed a fund called the Baldwin Fund for people to contribute to. And by mid-summer, over 500,000 pounds had been collected.

Now, I think this is something that stands in contrast to what was happening around the world, where all the doors were closed. And I think this is why I like to speak about it, because what they did mattered. And what the Griggs family, just an individual person, what he did mattered, too. And that's why I'm here.

Freddie, as we close, you're still in touch with Kathleen Griggs, aren't you?

Oh, yeah.

You remained lifelong friends.

Yeah, she's been here visiting us. I've been there. We called each other every few weeks.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]