

Good afternoon, folks, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Peter Black. I'm the senior historian at the museum, and today, the house-- the host of the museum's First Person public program. Thank you for joining us today.

It is with great pleasure that we will start our 11th year of First Person. With Mr. Isak Danon. We will meet Mr. Danon shortly. This 2010 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 this program. And Louis Smith is here with us today, if you'd stand up and acknowledge yourself.

[APPLAUSE]

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with the survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand experiences associated with this period. Each guest serves as a volunteer here at the museum. With a few exceptions, we will have a First Person guest each Wednesday through the 25th of August. We will also have First Person programs on Tuesdays from April through the end of next month.

The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides a list of upcoming First Person guests. Excerpts from the First Person programs are available as podcasts on the museum's website and on iTunes. Several are already posted on the website. And Mr. Danon's will be available within the next several weeks.

Isak Danon will share his first-person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 40 minutes. We will follow that with an opportunity for you to ask Mr. Danon some questions. Before you are introduced to him. I have a few announcements and requests of you. And I would like to show a short slideshow that documents his life. I would also like to let those of you with passes for the permanent exhibition know that they are good. The space has been reserved for your bodies until the end of the day. You can go up at any time after the time which is depicted on your ticket.

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-- six million were murdered. Roma, people with mental and physical disabilities, Poles, and Soviet prisoners of war were also targeted for destruction and decimation for racial, ethnic, national, and political reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and civilians from virtually every country in Europe also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny. The life stories-- excuse me-- of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Mr. Isak Danon is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

And as I said, we have a brief slideshow presentation. This first photograph is a 1955 photograph of Isak, his mother, and two of his sisters in Philadelphia when he was on leave from his service in the US armed forces. Isak Danon was born in 1929 in a country that was then known as Yugoslavia. The arrow on the map of Europe points to the country of Yugoslavia. In this map, you will see a closer map and another arrow pointing to the city of Split on the Dalmatian Coast, where Mr. Danon was born.

I just want to take a minute or two to tell you what was going on in Yugoslavia during the first 12 years of Mr. Danon's life because it is a country with one of the most complex series of events during the Second World War. Essentially, Yugoslavia was a union of four major nationalities and several minor nationalities. The four major nationalities were Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, and Slovenes, each entering the union voluntarily to-- in the hopes of forming a protective alliance against revisionist and expansionist ambitions of Hungary, Germany, and Italy.

The Croats and the Serbs entered into the union with very different understandings of what it would look like. And no agreement had been made at the time the union was announced in 1918. The Serbs essentially saw the union as an expansion of the pre-World War I Serbian Kingdom. And the Croats saw their territory as a virtually independent territory connected to the Union only for the purposes of military defense and foreign policy.

This difference of understanding led to significant acrimony during the entire period of the interwar country's existence.

And after 20 years of bickering, an agreement was reached between the Serbian Kingdom and the Croat leadership, called the Sporazum. Unfortunately, it was concluded in early September 1939, shortly after Hitler invaded Poland.

And the agreement was unsatisfactory to many of the nationalities because it antagonized nationalist Serbs and it left out the autonomy ambitions of the Bosnians and the Slovenes. And so the union was a fragile country when the Germans invaded in 1941. The reason for the invasion was that after several-- after much pressure from Germany and its Axis allies, the Yugoslav government decided to join the Axis on March 25, 1941.

Two days later, a Serb military coup overthrew the government. And the new government retracted its promise to the Axis. The Germans decided to invade. Yugoslavia collapsed within 11 days, and had been invaded by four different countries, and was divided in several different ways. The Germans and Italians divided Slovenia. Croatia, together with Bosnia, became a so-called independent state. The Bulgarians took Macedonia in the south. And the Germans and the Italians occupied most of the rest of the country. Split was in the area of Italian occupation.

This photograph was taken in 1939 in Split at a Jewish club's Hanukkah party. Isak was nine years old. And you can see him here at the lower left. Also pictured in the photograph are Isak's three sisters, his mother, and his father. This map shows the route of Isak's escape from Yugoslavia in 1943 to Italy.

Italian forces, as I mentioned, occupied Split. And in areas of Italian occupation, the prospects for survival of Jews and other minorities were somewhat greater because the Italians did not seek out Jews and other minorities with the same intensity as the Germans did. As a result, many Jews fled from more hostile parts of Europe, and particularly German-occupied Yugoslavia, to Split and surrounding areas for refuge, causing the town's population to jump from 200 to approximately 7,000.

In July 1943, Italian dictator-- fascist dictator Benito Mussolini was overthrown by a vote of his own fascist Grand Council. Isak and his father were forced to flee Split, as after the Italians surrendered some six weeks later to the Allies, the Germans moved in to occupy that part of Yugoslavia which the Italians had occupied.

Isak and his father traveled with the underground partisan-- communist-led partisan movement through the mountains. After several months, Isak and his father were reunited in Italy with his mother and two of his sisters, who had gone into hiding. And as I said, there is the map showing the route of escape from Yugoslavia to Italy. And Isak will have more to speak about that.

In 1944, Isak and his family were invited by the United States government to be part of a group of 1,000 refugees to come to the United States. Isak and his family spent the next one and a half years in a refugee camp at the Fort Ontario Army Base in Oswego, New York State. This photograph shows newly-arrived refugees waiting to register at Fort Ontario after leaving the camp. And Mr. Danon will have more to say about that as well.

Isak and his family settled in Philadelphia. This photograph was taken in October 1946 after Isak's family left Fort Ontario. In the portrait are Isak, his two sisters, his mother, his father, and his aunt. Isak's oldest sister did not come to the US with the family, but stayed on in the reconstituted Yugoslav Union after the war.

You will notice that one of Isak's sisters cut out a photograph of the eldest sister and put her picture into the family portrait at the upper left there because they could not bear the fact that she was not in the photo with them. And now, without further ado, you've heard me speaking enough. I would like to introduce to you Mr. Isak Danon.

Welcome, Isak.

Thank you very much.

I have-- I wanted to ask you first to talk a little bit about your family origins, how your family got to Split. I'm especially interested-- most First Person volunteers do not, for instance, speak Ladino. Could you explain about the origins?

OK, well, my family traces its roots to Spain. And they were expelled or they escaped the Spanish Inquisition in 1492--

I mean, 1494 or wherever. And they went to Turkey. And that route, they followed the Ottoman Empire conquest up the Balkan. And they ended up in Sarajevo, which today is Bosnia. And there was no work for my grandfather.

So he went down to Split. They found something to do over there. He had a, I guess, mattress factory, which meant he and a big needle in a room, they would make mattresses like this by hand. So that's how my one grandfather was there. The second grandfather didn't come from Sarajevo. But my father heard that my grandfather had a couple of daughters who were marriageable age. So he came down to meet some of them. And he met my mother. And the rest is history for that.

Did you speak Ladino in the home?

Yeah, we spoke more or less. My parents spoke Ladino. But I had an aversion to it. I said, why are we maintaining this language that made us suffer so much in Spain? But they said, that's right, but this is the language we knew. And the language is called Ladino. It's all Spanish as it was spoken in 15th century.

And then as they traveled through Turkey-- to Turkey, they would run out of words. They couldn't remember a word so they would take the Turkish word and make it into Ladino word by ending like the Hispanics here, they talk what's known as Spanglish. They take English and change it to Spanish. And this is a tradition. And then when they moved to what was then Yugoslavia, they would take some Yugoslav words or Serbo-Croatian words and make them Ladino.

So my parents spoke it when they wanted to talk about us kids. But we started learning. And we never let on. We just OK, so now we know what's what.

Was your family very religious?

They were religious enough. My grandfather on my mother's side was a sexton in the synagogue. And I guess he went to all the services he arranged for them. So we followed the Jewish traditions as we knew it.

Insofar as you can remember, do you have a sense of how people in your family stood towards the Yugoslav Union during the 1930s?

I don't think there was much of a discussion of the people over there. They had two interests-- one was-- the main one was football, and the second, very close to it, was politics. They lived it, they ate it, they slept with it. And they argued all the time. And we kids heard it. And we knew what was going on. And as far as politics-- no, we didn't like what the Croats were doing because they were bending towards Nazi Germany. And we knew what Nazi Germany was all about. And the Serbians, they were too far from us because we were in parts of Croatia. So that wasn't a big subject. The big subject was Hitler's rise to power.

And in what way were you aware of the events of-- that were going on in Central Europe as a small child?

Well, first of all, when I started getting a little older, like-- older, like six, seven, there was a Spanish Civil War. I knew that the Germans were fighting that war with one side. Italians also were helping them. And the other side was the Communist International. And we followed that. Us kids, we talked about that. And then next thing was when Germany took over Austria. And then you have the Czechoslovakia just being split up. And that was very hot subject in those days.

And we knew about Jewish fate under Hitler because he wrote a book called Mein Kampf. We knew about that. We knew what was inside. And he had decided, when he takes over, how he is going to reappportion the world, who is going to do what.

And maybe the Slavs, they were going to be-- just change one letter. They were going to be slaves. And the other ones were going to be the technical support-- and all for the benefit and glory of the German Empire. And the Jews, they were destined for destruction. So that's what we knew. So when-- in 1938, I guess, when there was this big uprising against the Jews throughout Germany, the--

You mean Kristallnacht?

--Kristallnacht. Was called Kristallnacht because they went around all the stores and broke all the glass windows, glass plate, and stole all the stuff, destroyed what they couldn't steal, set on fire over, what, 1,400-1,500 synagogues, killed a lot of people. A lot of them were arrested, sent into labor camps. And many were never heard from. This happened through three days and nights of-- what shall I call it-- looting and destruction. So we knew all that. And that was one of the problems.

Was there-- I assume there was a lot of concern in your family when the Germans invaded Poland in 1939.

Well, that was just the next step. Poland invasion-- and we didn't even think that England and France were going to do anything about it. But they went to war. And German troops, they cleaned pretty fast any defenses, any opposition. And the Russians came from the other side. And they split Poland in short order. So we knew-- like you mentioned before, after the military takeover of Yugoslavia and the break with the Germans, we knew that Germany was going to punish the Yugoslavia very heavily.

Yes. Yes.

We expected that.

Now, the Italians came when Yugoslavia was divided up. Although Dalmatia belonged to Croatia, the so-called independent state of Croatia, that part of Croatia was occupied by the Italians. What was your first impression of dealing with Italian military occupation authorities as a Jewish youngster of about seven?

Well, as a Jewish youngster or any youngster, the first impression was when we saw airplanes coming and dropping bombs. One Sunday morning, we heard the sirens and explosions going on. And we came out of the house, wondering what it is. And then we saw two planes, not many. And we saw them flying by. And there were puffs of smoke behind them. Seems like some of their artillery anti-aircraft was firing behind them, never in front.

But anyway, that was the first impression. Next impression came after maybe 10 days, when we saw Italian trucks and what the military units come. We lived in the suburbs of the city. And right next to our street, there were fields, open fields, like the developer hadn't gotten to it yet. Yeah. Maybe the housing market was down. I don't know.

Yeah, anyway. So they came with their-- they call them cameos and heavy armored trucks. And they set up camps. And we, the kids, came out to see what's going on. And they would let us board the trucks and touch everything. I was, what, 11 years old? And we didn't have school because the war came. That ended the school. So there was our extended vacation. It happened on April 6, yeah.

1941.

1941, yeah. And I was 11 at the time. But hey, people liked being on vacation. I missed school. I liked school because I was a good student, teacher's pet, as far as I remember. No, I had-- my older sister, when she was going to school, she would study loudly whatever she had to remember. And by the time she learned it, the rest of the family had also learned it.

Yeah. So I would come to class a year later. And my teacher is talking about the stuff that my sister learned a year ago. Hey, it was coming right out. So my hand was going up. And they'd say, he's some kind of a little genius here. So it was fun anyway.

What did your dad do for a living? And was he able to practice his profession during the war?

My dad and my mother had a dry goods store. Was a little cubby hole, but there was nothing much going on before the war, I remember, because there was a depression, worldwide depression. When they used to say, when United States

catches a cold, the rest of the world gets pneumonia. Well, we had pneumonia at that time. There was no work, nothing, nothing going on. So I remember, I would go visit the store. And my mother would be sitting there. And what's going on mom? No? Did you have a customer today yet? Oh, it's only 3 o'clock. Maybe somebody will come. Business wasn't too good.

Did the Italians place any restrictions upon the general population and Jews in particular?

Yeah. Well, the general population-- the first thing we saw when the Italians came, within a day or two, there were proclamations. There was big posters all over in the name of the King and Emperor of Italy, and Albania, and Abyssinia, which is-- today, it's a different country. Anyway.

Ethiopia.

Ethiopia, yeah. We proclaimed the Dalmatian area as one of the provinces of Italy. It was absorbed. And then we all had to get ID cards with our pictures. Next thing-- oh, one thing right before that was they said, you are supposed to turn in any arms, any pistols, firearms, anything. Anybody who does not do that will be shot. That was pretty rough.

And then next thing they said, any provocations or any failure to follow orders from the Italian military will be severely punished, all that. But for Jews, they had many other restrictions. First of all, our ID cards were stamped ebreo-- Jewish. That didn't bother me at the time. But later, there was problems with that.

Then the schools had been closed because of the war. So they reopened. Guess what? We couldn't go to school. Jews just not allowed. Then all the Jewish employees of the state or local government were fired. That means all the teachers, all the firemen, and policemen, clerks-- everywhere, they couldn't work. The professional people, they were denied the license. Like if you're a doctor or a lawyer, you couldn't practice. And things got tougher.

Later on, they started telling us, we can't go to the movies, theaters, which is OK. I didn't go too much to the movies anyway. But we weren't allowed to go to the parks. City parks were off-limits to us. Split was right on the coast with beautiful beaches. We weren't allowed there. There was big signs, no Jews allowed. And what else? Transportation-- public transportation, we couldn't use. So it was pretty tough.

Then the whole population was dependent on rationing tickets. There was no food, that all disappeared from the grocery store shelves. There was none to be had. So when something would come, then everybody rushes in lines. And you had to bring your coupons. We had coupons for everything-- bread, milk, cheese, oil, butter, rice, pasta, beans, dry beans. And if there was anything that you wanted, you had to have coupons. And there wasn't much to it.

We couldn't find where it was being sold. Sometimes, like I remember, we went to get potatoes. One store had it. There was a long line. We all lined up. We come to near the end of the line-- no more potatoes.

So whether you have coupons or not, there was no food. Sometimes, you go through the line, and you get to it, and it looks at you-- ah, ebreo-- Jewish, step aside. We have to take care of everybody else. If there's some left, you'll get. So there was a lot of that going on. And life wasn't that pleasant.

Were you and other members of your family physically afraid at that time?

Well, sure, we were. We knew what had happened to the rest of the country where the Germans. And worse than the Germans were the Croats. It's like-- I don't know, if one was a lion, the other one was much fiercer. I don't know what animal is fiercer than lion. But you've seen those little bears with the big teeth, that was Croatian.

Did the Croat-- the Croat Fascist Party was called the Ustasha.

Ustasha, yes.

Did they have a presence in Split?

They had a presence-- before the Italians took over, they had a presence. When Hitler was rising to power, they were supported by the Germans. They would send them money to organize and all that. This is what you call the fifth column, we used to call it. Because if these Germans had four columns outside the country, there was a fifth one inside the country, like the collaborators. And then when the Italians came, they were just not given any power. So we had to live by the rules that the Italians made.

Were there any physical attacks on Jews during this period up until Italy's surrender?

Oh, yeah. There were a few. And it happened. Every now and then, you would hear about somebody getting caught on the street, arrested, beat up. You had to show your ID when the police would come. You, you, show me your ID, who you are. You show it. If they see it says, Jewish, they're going to detain you a little bit, harass you a little bit more. But there was one major event. I had my bar mitzvah. This happened in June, 24 or something, around that date because that's when my birthday is.

Happy birthday.

No, yeah. I just had it, by the way. Yeah. Anyway, so I made-- bar mitzvah, for those who don't know it is, it's like a confirmation. A Jewish boy becomes a man, as far as the religion is concerned. He becomes mature. And he is supposed to follow all the commandments of the Bible. Well, it's customary for boys to lead the service and make a speech. In my speech, I made a commitment to be more observant and come to services every week. Not too many people did that. But this was my commitment.

Well, the following week, I'm coming to the services with my sister. And my sister is over here, by the way. She is over there. And yeah, anyway, we were coming to the services in the evening. And we're going to the services. It was a little early. So we stopped off at my parents' store, which was close to the synagogue.

We said-- our father was there at the time. And I said, come on, Dad, let's close up. And we'll go to the service. OK. Well, what happened? A customer walked in. And like I said, there wasn't much business in those days. So this customer wanted this and that. And my father says, OK. I'm trying to close. Would you please tell me what else you want so we can close? And I'm trying to make up my mind, this and that. OK.

So we were late. So we started going toward the synagogue. And from my father's store to the synagogue, you had to cross the main public square, like in Moscow they have Red Square. And Rome, I don't know what they call it. But in Split, it was called People's Square.

So we start entering the People's Square. And we see a commotion coming from near where the synagogue was. And then we look and we see people running. And this looked like soldiers. But they had black shirts with a military uniform, rifles in their hands, and they're hitting people left and right, knocked them down, kicked them.

Oh, my god, what's going on? And my father understood because he recognized some of the people. I was 13 years old. And my sister was seven years younger. So we didn't know what was going on. He took us by the hand. And we ran around. He stepped back. And we retrace our steps and went all around the city toward our house. As I mentioned, we lived in the suburbs. So we went all around.

And we got home, my mother and the other sisters were wondering what happened, all that. We told them the story. But we didn't know what it was. So we walked a couple of blocks to where a rabbi-- he lived there. And we knocked at the door. He wasn't home. So we waited for him. After maybe half an hour or so, he came limping and holding like this a kerchief, a white handkerchief.

And we asked him, what happened? He says, the services started. And then the black shirts came in and said to him, OK. It's all over. Everybody out. So he repeated what they told him. And then they started-- people started coming out. As they were coming out, these military people or black shirts had formed a gauntlet, as if somebody was coming-- as people were coming.

They used their rifles and they hit them, or kicked them, or knocked them down the steps or whatever. And then as they were running, the only way was through the People's Square. They would run after them and beat them up. And he says, he doesn't know what else happened. He got hit. And he came home.

So we thought, maybe this is what the Germans were doing. And this is our turn. And when we went home, there was not much sleeping that night in our house. We were all worried. And we wonder what happened. So my sister came to my room 6 o'clock in the morning or earlier. And she says, let's go see what happened.

So we walked downtown to the city, where the synagogue was. We're entering the People's Square. And we see a remnants of a big bonfire. And we saw all the sacred objects there, like the Torahs, and the prayer books, and even the curtains, and the drapes. And everything was right there, half-burned and all that. And we were really-- pretty petrified.

And we said, let's go to our store and see if anything happened. Well, we passed a couple of Jewish store. My uncle's store, he had what was called perfumery. That's a perfume specialty. There was nothing left-- everything broken, everything cleaned up and destroyed. Then we went to another photo shop-- empty. Where there used to be cameras and photographic equipment, that was all gone, store broken up.

We went to our store. Like I said, our store was like a hole in the wall, didn't even have a glass window. So nothing was done. There was a sign that says, Joseph Danon and the type of store. And that was of porcelain. So I guess they threw a rock at that. And it sort of dented it a little bit. And that was it.

So after that, we wonder what's going to be next. And why did they do that if they didn't bother us before? But we found out that some of the Germans were coming to help the Italians celebrate their holiday, military holiday or something. So they wanted to show how good they are in the way that they treat the Jews just like fellow Germans. And that's why they put on that show.

And also, later, things were a little bit tougher. We couldn't walk certain streets. The main thoroughfares of the city were off-limits to us. And they had all kinds of posters. They would go to the stores and ask the people to put in their window. It says, Jews are not welcome in this establishment. So they did that to all of the people.

They tried to do it to us. And we said, no, we're Jewish. And my uncle, he was a barber. They came to him. And they said, you have to do this. He was in the prominent place. You have to put it up. And he says, Jews are not welcome? OK. That means I can't stay here. Here are the keys. And here is the razor. You do the barbering. And you cut hair. And they looked at him funny. OK, they left. But life continued, I guess.

But then things got worse after the fall of Mussolini.

Then things got worse-- they really got worse after the Germans-- after the Italians capitulated. That's when--

In September '43.

Right. Mussolini was deposed. And the Italians threw their arms and went home. Well, the partisans, who were pretty active in the mountains, they came down from the mountains. And they took over Split. And they got some military equipment and a lot of new recruits. And my sister, who was two years older than me, she joined the partisans at that time. She went to the mountains. And we didn't hear from her for a long, long time, until the end of the war. And we learned that she fought in many different battles. She got wounded two times.

But things were tough because the partisans couldn't hold a big city like Split. I mean, it wasn't a big city by our standards here. But it was a big city for there. It was the center. And so we knew that the Germans were going to come and force the partisans out. And when Germans come, our fate-- our future is not too well--

Not too rosy.

--defined, yeah.

No.

Anyway, so we prepared for that. Germans would usually take the men first, the Jewish men. When I say take-- as soon as they come, they would say, all Jewish men have to report. And you report and they take you to concentration-- to labor camps is what it was or put you on working in different projects in the city.

So we said, the idea is for my father and me to run away first. And we prepared for that. We had the backpacks all filled up with different cans of foods, and change of clothing, and extra pair of this and that. Excuse me. And we prepared. We also-- thank you. We also practiced how to jump through the window in the back in case they come through the front, so we can escape.

Anyway, so a couple of weeks since the partisans were there, we hear-- one night, on Sunday night, we hear knocking on the door in the middle of the night. Mr. Danon, Mr. Danon. They were calling my father. I was not a Mr. in those days. Anyway, they say, Mr. Danon, Mr. Danon, the Germans are coming.

OK. We grab our-- the backpacks. We put some fresh supplies in there in a hurry, say goodbye to my mother and the two sisters remaining. And my father and I took off to the mountains. Mountains in Split are-- Split is near the coastline. And then you have maybe 20 miles or maybe a little less flat land. And then the mountains go straight up. And we started walking.

And it was dark at the time. But anyway, we kept walking. And we met some other people walking, same thing like us. They were afraid of Germans coming. So they're going to the mountains. These people were not Jewish, most of them. But because when the partisans were there, they had compromised themselves as being partisan supporters. So that meant that their life was in danger. So we walked to the mountains.

And we got to the mountains. And when I think of mountains, I think of a resort area, and all these beautiful motels there, and golf courses. That's not what these mountains were like. You walk up the rocks. And you try to find out how you can walk between the rocks where the donkey paths were.

And you don't know where you're going. You're going in one direction. You see the sun in back of you, that means you're going north. That's good Yeah. And we walked. And in the daytime, we see airplanes, German airplanes coming. Sometimes, as we're coming, we see them behind a peak someplace. They come. And they were-- these planes were called Stuka planes.

Dive bombers.

And they are dive bombers. And they were kind of uh, like this, making a lot of noise as they come down. And that psychologically scares you enough. But then they start with the machine guns. And the idea was don't let them see you. So you throw yourself in the ditch or someplace and try to stay without moving, just silent, and no motion until they go by. And then you learn that you never walk in the exposed areas. You always try to walk where the trees are.

And we walked for-- well, first three days, we never met any partisans. And eventually, we met some. It was really difficult for partisans to accept all these people because they didn't know who they were. They could have been Germans sympathizers. And there was no-- what do you call it when you want to enlist-- enlistment offices there for the partisans. There was none of that.

But we just walked. And we met some people. They talked to us. And we tell them, we like to join the partisans if we can. So eventually, we were taken in. And we did what all the good partisans do. They walk by night. And they hide during daytime.

And when you know some Germans are going to be coming, sometimes, you try to surprise them. They didn't have too much armed equipment or all that. But they would put little mines or something and attack them. Sometimes, they

attack you while you don't know they are there. And we lived that life for a while, going through the mountains for several months, maybe three-four months.

And then we ended up at the coastline someplace else. And that's where we found a little boat. And we got on the boat. And they took us to one of the islands over there. There are many islands along the coast of Yugoslavia. We went there. And we thought, maybe that's better. There was nobody there to disturb us. But the islands were just as dangerous because the Germans could come there also.

Well, anyway, we stayed there for a while. And by that time, the Allies-- the Americans and British-- had made the invasion of Italy. And they were moving up to the Italian Peninsula. And they started recognizing the partisans as a fighting unit.

And they would send their PT boats or some other boats with supplies to the Yugoslav Army. And they would dock at the nearest island. Well, we would-- if we would get there to that nearest island, they come with supplies. And we would get on the boat and go to Italy. And my father did that one time. It's a long story. I don't know if we have time to.

Maybe they could ask about that story after. I want to bring you to Italy. Yes.

We were-- in this island, we were regular partisan units. I was assigned to an ammunition repair unit. We had to fix all the military equipment that would not be working in the field. They would bring it. Rifles-- we had to put new springs and all that, and different-- well, the machine guns, and the mine-throwers, what do you call these?

Anyway, the equipment, we were fixing. And my father was in the kitchen. He was supply sergeant. He had to get the flour to make the bread and then the food for all the military, all the partisan that were there. And he had a lot of problems because there was not enough food to go around. And they would have to give a little smaller pieces every now and then.

And what was happening was sometimes, the people didn't have anything else, just their piece of bread for whole day. And they would accuse my father of not doing enough for them, not getting enough food. And the partisans would go out to attack some of the Croatian units to get some of the flour and all that. And we never saw meat or anything like that, sometimes fish.

Anyway, so they would all tell my father, you're not doing your job. We're going to shoot you, and replace you, and all that. This was a tough love-- life for him. So at one point-- well, he was religious. Every morning, he would go behind the little house where the kitchen was. And he would go and say his prayers. He would face the wall and mouth the prayers. And he would cover his head. And a farmer must have seen him. And he thought, maybe he was calling the Germans in or something. And they denounced him.

These were the words-- there were too many spies around. And always, somebody is caught reporting to the Germans that there are partisans around. So they took him in. And they started questioning him, says, OK, Comrade Danon, you better admit. We know everything. And he says, what everything? What did I do? Well, he says, you have been observed talking to the Germans. No, why would I be doing that? If they knew that I was here, they would come and kill me anyway. He said, OK.

And after maybe three-four hours in this, what was a kangaroo court, they say, OK. Go home, do your job. So my father was very petrified. He didn't know what he was doing anymore. And he didn't want to stay with the partisans anymore. So he disappeared. They were asking me, where is your father? Is he AWOL and all that? I haven't seen him. I didn't know where he was.

So then later, maybe a couple of weeks later, I get an official-looking telegram, says, you are required to report to this island someplace else. This was the island where the British were coming every day. So I said, OK, look, I have to go. So I show my commander. Yeah, OK, go. So I went there. I learned that my father was the one that sent this. And he went to Italy. He boarded the boat.

Oh, my goodness. So I did the same. I waited when the British boat would come. But again, the British boat would come at night without any lights on because the German guns would start firing at them. So they would come in quietly. So we would go quietly to the docks, help them unload. And then I got on the boat. And this was night.

Next morning, I was in Italy, this town called Bari, Italy. That's where a lot of people who were escaping Germans ended up. And I went around. And I met my father there. And we got reunited. And we stayed there. But we were supposed to be shipped to Egypt, in Africa. And who wants to go to Africa? We didn't like that. I mean, it would be good if you're a native of that area. But I never been to Africa.

So we went-- we sort of escaped from this group. And we went to live in the city, mingle with the Italians there. Then we heard about an invitation by the US government. They said, all these refugees that were throughout Europe and throughout the world, somebody has got to take them in. We're willing to take 1,000 of them. There was millions upon millions around there, but 1,000 for United States.

So we signed up. And there was like here to get a secret clearance-- I mean, even to enter this museum, you know what you have to go through. Well, we had to go through all kinds of investigations. And I understand, there was thousands of people who had signed up. We made it. We were selected. And just as we were getting ready to go to the United States, my mother and two sisters came, the same route that we came. And we learned about that. And we got reunited.

From them, we heard the story about what happened. When we left them, they stayed in Split for a little while. And then the Germans, they came. And life was very tough. They were hiding. And then they decided to go to another place, where they had a friend who took them in. And like Anne Frank, they had a little place where they stayed for a while. But that wasn't secure.

They were in hiding for a long while. And then they went to a farm or a vineyard where there was a small cabin where the farmers, during the season, growing season, they would stay there because it was too far-removed from their regular house. So they didn't want to lose any precious daylight where they can work.

So they stay there until they couldn't keep them there either. Then they went to the partisans as refugees. And partisans helped them. And they came down. And anyway, we were ready to go to the United States. And we gave their names. And they were accepted. And finally, we were taken to the boat for the trip to the United States.

Isak, do you want to-- we're running out of time. I want to leave a little bit of time for questions.

OK.

Do you have sort of a summarizing comment that you would like to make for the folks who've come here today?

OK. There was this event about two weeks ago. There was a guard that was killed a year ago in June. Somebody that had antisemitic feelings came armed. He wanted to kill some Jews and right this museum. So he came, and started firing, and killed a guard, and I don't know who else or whatnot. But they had a memorial two weeks ago. And I came for that.

And I thought of that. And I thought. And that's one thing that I think is a hate of humans, one toward another. And I just wanted to-- I wrote it down while we were having lunch. And I want to say something about this one little word hate. If any of you have toured this museum, you have seen what hate can do to the world, actually.

Usually, it surfaces in bad economical Time it comes from a small group. And then it gets bigger and bigger. People look into the history and see what somebody did to them that made them unhappy in the historical times or whenever, what they perceived was an injustice made to them. And then this hate grows like wildfire. And children learn from their parents. And then they teach their own children. And this goes from generation to generation. And I'm thinking, how does this start? Where does it go?

So I have a little story here. It says, here-- one day, in a school yard a boy starts hitting a little Jewish boy, his classmate.

The teacher separates him and ask, what started this fight? And he killed our Savior, yells the attacker. I didn't kill anyone, said the little boy. And the teacher admonishes the attacker and tells him, look, this happened more than 2,000 years ago. Why are you doing that now? He says, yeah, it may have taken place more than 2,000 years ago. But I just learned it now in church or whatever.

So this is what's happening from generation to generation. And this story or similar stories are repeated all the time. This is what-- it happened to me, I know. And it happens to a lot of Jewish children as they enter the public school. Before, they lived sort of sheltered. Now, they exposed to that. And I think this is how hate continues from one generation to another. And all I have is a desire-- may all of us adults decide to keep our prejudices and our perceived injustices to ourself, and if we cannot burden the children and the next generation with our own personal hate.

[APPLAUSE]

OK. I think we've got to wrap up. But Isak, you'll stay on for a little bit now.

OK. Yeah, I can go over here.