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Good afternoon and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson and I am the host of the museum's public program First Person. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 12th year of the First Person program. Our first person today is Mrs. Inge Katzenstein, whom we shall meet shortly. This 2011 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 firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each guest serves as a volunteer here with this museum.

We will have First Person programs each Tuesday and Wednesday through July and then on Wednesdays only in August. The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests. Excerpts from first person programs are available as podcasts on the museum's website. They are also available through iTunes. A podcast of Inge from last year is currently up on our website and through iTunes.

Inge will share with us her first-person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Inge a few questions. We ask that you stay in your seats throughout our one-hour program. That way, we minimize any disruptions for Inge as she speaks. If you have a cell phone or a similar device, we ask that you turn it off. I'd like to let those of you who may have passes to the permanent exhibition today know that they are good for the time printed on your ticket or for any time after that.

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 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 Inge is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction. And we begin with this portrait taken in 1939 of Inge Katzenstein, born Inge Berg. Pictured from left to right is Inge, her cousin, Egon Berg and her sister, Gisella, who is now Jill Pauly. Inge was born in March 1929 in Cologne, Germany. The arrow on the left-hand side of this map of Germany points to the city of Cologne.

The family lived in Lechenich, a small town outside of Cologne. The Nazis came to power in 1933 and life changed for Inge. In 1935, she was no longer allowed to attend German schools. On November 9, 1938, the Nazis carried out a nationwide pogrom against Germany's Jews known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass. Alerted to the danger, Inge and her family fled to Cologne during the pogrom.

Pictured in this photo are Inge on the left and her sister, Gisella. Inge's family decided to emigrate from Germany. And in May 1939, they left for Kenya. In this photo, we see Inge in the center with her sister, Gisella, and her mother aboard the ship Usambara as they sail to Kenya. Inge and her family lived in Kenya for the next seven years. Pictured is Inge standing outside her family's farmhouse in Limuru, Kenya.

And here, we have a group portrait of members of the extended Berg family on their farm in Kenya. Inge is the second from the left in the back row. Her uncle, George, is to her left. And her parents are on her right. Seated in the front are her sister, Gisella, and her paternal grandparents. And as Inge would want me to do, she wants me to point out in the back on the right-hand side is the outhouse because they did not have indoor plumbing.

In 1947, the Bergs came to the United States and settled in New Jersey. And we close our slide presentation with a contemporary photo of Inge. After the Berg family's arrival in the US from Kenya in 1947, they lived in New York City. After a few weeks, Inge's father found her a furnished room, gave her $100, and she began living independently. Inge found work in Manhattan and went to night school in Queens. She later met her future husband, Werner, and they became engaged in 1950 and married in 1951. And as it happens, on 9/11, they will celebrate their 61st wedding-- 60th wedding anniversary.

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They settled in Vineland, New Jersey, where Werner worked in sales and Inge would have a long and successful career in real estate. Inge and Werner moved to the Washington area from New Jersey in 1998. They have three children-- Michael, a behavioral health consultant, David, an attorney, and Deborah, who is in financial services. Inge and Werner have nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren-- one who is four, another who's just turned two, and the third, who was born just this past April.

Inge volunteers for the museum by spending about 40 hours a month translating documents from German to English. She is able to do this from home on a computer. She recently completed translating several collections of correspondence, including a voluminous seven-year series of letters from a Jewish mother in Vienna to her son in England, who left Vienna as a young child on a Kindertransport in 1939.

She also completed translation of a huge collection of correspondence by a family in which the husband perished at the hands of the Nazis, but his wife and two young children were rescued from a train leaving the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. And Inge is now translating the journal of a man who was on the St. Louis, ill-fated ship that brought Jewish refugees to Cuba only to be forced to return to Europe.

Werner helps with the translations when Inge encounters legal and technical terms. Werner and his family came to the US in 1939. He joined the United States Army and fought in France and Germany during World War II. He would later serve as a translator for the American occupational forces in Germany. I'm pleased to let you know that Werner is here with us today. And Werner, if you wouldn't mind holding your hand up in a little wave. There he is.

[APPLAUSE]

I'd also like to mention that inga's sister, Jill Pauly, has also been on our First Person program. And in fact, on several occasions, we've had Inge and Jill here together. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mrs. Inge Katzenstein.

[APPLAUSE]

Handle it all yourself. You did that just fine. Inge, thank you so much for joining us and for being willing to be our first person again.

You're very welcome.

It's a pleasure to have you here. We have so much to cover and just an hour to do it. So why don't we start? And let's begin with your early years. You described to me that Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, was the catalyst for the decisions and direction that your family's life took for the balance of the Holocaust and the war. You were very young, about nine years old at the time. Tell us about your early years, what your family's life was like, what your life was like in those early years, before Kristallnacht and your family made the fateful decisions that they made.

Well, my early years before 1938, where-- when I was nine were not good memories because I had to start going to school in 1936-- or '35, to be exact. And in 1936, Hitler just made a rule that Jewish children were not allowed to attend public school anymore. But there was a law in Germany that children had to be educated. So we had to go to school by law. And we had to go to a Jewish school or parochial school rather than public school. And there was no Jewish school in the little area where we lived.

So at age eight, I had to leave home to go and live with my grandmother in another town about an hour away. And I lived there for about a year. And my grandmother and family emigrated to Holland. So I had to go back home. And at age eight-nine, I had to travel to school in Cologne. I had to travel alone about half hour, 45 minutes either by bus or by train, and from the train station, had to walk to school.

Eight years old?

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Eight years old. And I did it.

And there's no doubt about that. Inge, keeping kosher was forbidden by the Nazis, yet at considerable risk during that time, when the Nazis were taking control in those years before Kristallnacht, your family continued to keep kosher as best they could. And that included butchering animals in the attic. Will you tell us a little bit about that?

As children, we knew very little about it. But we certainly learned after Kristallnacht, when Jews were not allowed to slaughter anymore anything that it became very, very difficult to keep kosher. And not all Germans were bad people. Because we lived in a small town. And my family had lived there for generations.

And people were good to us. And they were friends. But they could not acknowledge it anymore. But there was one lady who, after Kristallnacht, would come and visit my mother weekly. And she had the nerve to bring a live chicken in a basket by bus from the town to Cologne. She knew how to do it. There is a way to keep a chicken quiet.

If we have time, maybe we'll hear about that. So she kept the chicken quiet and brought it to your house?

Yes. And my uncle, who was a shochet, took care of the chicken in the attic. And that way, we were able to keep kosher.

And the risk of doing that was pretty severe.

Oh, yes. If you were caught, that was the end. That was concentration camp and no way out.

Tell us a little bit about your father and his-- he was in the cattle business. And what were his work circumstances like in those several years leading up to Kristallnacht?

He was not allowed to work anymore. And again, as I said before, we lived in this area. And my father had many business acquaintances. And there was one particular man that he did business with. And he did my father's business for him. And then they gave him every penny of what he earned for them. And about 10 years ago, we went back to Germany. And we visited his daughter, who I used to play with when I was a little girl.

The man who actually was managed the business from that point?

Yes, yes. And that's the way we managed to keep the business for a while.

Inge, you were in school in Cologne, nearby Cologne, when Kristallnacht took place on the night of November 9 and 10, 1938. Your sister, Jill, was at home, I believe, with your parents. Please, share with us what you can tell us about Kristallnacht, what that was, what happened, and what happened after that night for you.

Kristallnacht happened the night before. That morning, when I went to school, without knowing anything about it-- in those days, no TV, no telephones, so people didn't really know what was going on. And I went to school as usual. And when I got to school, I found Nazis with German Shepherds standing in front of the doors of the school. And the German Shepherds were wearing muzzles. And to this day, I'm not a friend of German Shepherds. They just-- I keep looking behind me to see if he's going to come after me.

And the Nazis told us-- and we could see that the synagogue which was next to the school-- we could see that the roof had burned out. But we didn't know anything. Nine years old-- what did I know? Except that they said, there's no school today. You can go home again-- and so turned around, got back on the train, and went home. And when my mother saw me, she says, why are you here? And I told her.

And by then, we did have a telephone. And they had found out that some things were going on. But they couldn't quite tell what, except that morning, a school friend of my uncle had come to the door and said to him, whatever you hear and whatever you see, do not leave your house. And what happened was in the afternoon, the synagogue-- the fire alarms went off. And the synagogues were burning.

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And the normal thing would be for the men to run to the synagogue to save the books and the Sefer Torahs. But my grandfather was the president of the shul. And they were afraid because they had been warned. They didn't go. All the other Jewish people in the town ran towards the synagogue. They were all picked up and put in concentration camps.

We escaped by leaving home. My father put his parents, and my sister, and I in a taxi and sent us to Cologne. My grandparents were in the back seat. And my grandmother at that time had a broken ankle. So her leg was in a cast. And they told us to get down on the floorboards of the car. And in order for us not to look out the window, my grandparents put her cast on me.

Weighted did you down.

So I couldn't look. And we went to Cologne to an aunt and uncle of my mother, who had a one-bedroom apartment. And about six or seven of us piled into that apartment. And in Cologne, being a big city, you could disappear for a day or two. And that's what we did. After a day or two, my father, his brother, and a cousin, in order not to be picked up to go to a concentration camp, drove through the city 24 hours a day. They just-- the only time they stopped was to get gas.

Just kept moving, just kept moving.

Just kept moving. And after two or three days, they couldn't do that anymore. So they went across the border illegally to Holland, where they were picked up and imprisoned.

By the Dutch?

By the Dutch. Some of the Dutch people were Nazis. A lot of them weren't, but some were. And they were going to be-- they were going to send them back and--

Send them back to the German authorities.

And that would mean sure death. And we had an uncle in Holland who had lived there for over a year. And he went as far up as Queen Wilhelmina to-- with an attorney to ask for clemency. Because there was a law that the Nazis-- that the border guards had to have a written order to send people back. They didn't have that. And my uncle said to them, you don't have it in writing that you can send these people back. And they didn't. And that's why they could stay in Holland. But they were interned there in Holland for the next nine months. And we didn't see--

Basically detained and kept under arrest during that whole time, yes.

Yes. And we didn't see my father until the following June, when we went to Kenya.

So now, your mother has the responsibility for the two girls and your sister as well as your grandparents at that point.

My grandparents and my very ill grandmother. And it was a very tough nine months to arrange the emigration. The Nazis ordered everybody-- the Jewish people back to clean up the houses that they had destroyed.

I might just interject here for a moment for those in the audience who may not know much about Kristallnacht. On that night of November 9 and 10, vandalism and hooligism-- hooliganism against Jewish businesses and homes took place all over Germany.

All over Germany.

Hundreds of synagogues were burned that night. And as you said, thousands were detained and sent to concentration camps. It was a horrific night. And so broken stuff everywhere-- windows, broken furniture. And so now, you have to clean that up. It was-- they said that the Jews had to go back to their homes and clean them up. So my mother went back. And they would come in and ask her, where's your husband? Because they couldn't find him. And she said, I don't

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know. And next day, they would come back again. Where's your husband? She says, I don't know. And finally, they left her alone.

She had to clean up a 17-room house. And there wasn't a thing that was left that was whole. The books were thrown on the manure pile-- the prayer books. The carpets were on the manure pile. We still have some books with the manure on them as memories. It was very, very hard on my mother.

And Nazis would come to the door looking for your father, right?

Yes. Yes.

Do you know if your mother-- first of all did she know what had happened to your father once he got across the border? No.

No. She found out because her sister and brother lived in Holland. And they were able to somehow find out. And then my father, after he was interned in a cloister, they were able to write. And they occasionally were able to call.

So she knew he was at least OK--

Yes.

--and fortunately, had not been sent back to Germany.

Yes. No, he was-- they didn't allow to send him back to Germany because they didn't have the authority to.

So now, your father's interned in Holland. Your mother's got all this responsibility. And very quickly, the decision is made in the family that you need to get out. That's the decision that's made. Tell us what really helped make that decision for you-- not everybody made that decision-- and what you had to do in order to try to find a place to go.

Well, we had wanted to leave Germany for quite a few years. But in order to do so-- and we had wanted to come to America. But in order to be able to come to America, you had to have a sponsor. And America had quota numbers for each country. And the German quota was horrendously full. And you had to wait. And we had been waiting maybe two or three years. But it would have been another two or three years until it would be our turn. We were on a list. But it didn't help.

You never did get there. Right.

And one of the cousins in the family had a cousin that had studied in England and got a job in an attorney's office in Nairobi in Kenya. And he was able to supply sufficient affidavits for the entire family. He supplied 21 affidavits. And 17 of them were used.

And the affidavit's what allowed you to be able to make that journey to Kenya?

To Kenya, yes. But you had to pay-- I don't remember the exact amount, so and so much money per head to enter Kenya. Kenya, at that time, was a British colony.

Right. But you had to pay a fee for each person.

A fee.

And as I recall, it was substantial.

Yes. It was a substantial fee. But I don't remember the amount.

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Do you know, during that time-- of course, your father's lost his business, he's interned in Holland-- how the family was able to make ends meet during that period while your mother is trying to make all these arrangements for you to get out of the country?

My family, at that point, was a wealthy family. And they had money. They were permitted to use their money in Germany. It was when you leave Germany, each person was permitted to take 10 mark, which is the equivalent of what, at that point, was about $10. And having to leave all our money behind, my mother had to replace all her household goods-- her linens, her furniture, our clothing, everything--

That had been destroyed in Kristallnacht.

--that had been destroyed. And she went into the stores and bought everything. She had the money. But everything that you took out of the country, you had to have store receipts for and also, at that time, pay a export cost to the German government of the exact amount of the receipts. So everything had to be paid twice.

So if you bought, hypothetically, a chair for 100 marks, it cost you 100 marks to take it out of the country with you.

Yes. And the packing of the crates was supervised by German officials who had a list of what we bought and wanted the same amount at the time the crates were closed.

Did those crates ever make it? No.

War broke out and they got bombed-- and they're at the bottom of the harbor in Germany still.

What-- so because you had this relative who was able to work in Nairobi, that became your point of destination.

Yes.

Do you know, from what your parents told you later, what that was like for them to decide to go to a place like Kenya in the continent of Africa?

It didn't need a decision. There were very few countries in the world--

That was your option.

--that were left open. Europe was not-- Europe was-- to leave Europe-- to go to any country in Europe didn't make sense. You had to go overseas.

Were you going to school during that period up until your departure?

Yes.

Your sister, Jill, told me that you were very defiant towards the Nazis. And will you tell us a little bit about that? You were a pretty pugnacious little girl.

Yeah. I remember, once-- this was when I first started to go to school in Cologne. I came home by bus that day. And a little boy called me a dirty Jew. And I took one look at him and gave him a bloody nose. And when I saw the blood running, I ran away. I got scared.

And you told me that you became sort of during that time, with your father gone and your mom very preoccupied--

A procurer. I was a procurer.

--yeah, a procurer and a street person.

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Yes.

So say, tell us about that.

My mother my mother thought I would go to afternoon classes. But I never did. I played hooky a lot. She didn't have the time to give to me. And I did what I felt like doing. I was nine years old. I knew Cologne and the neighborhood where we lived. And there were a lot of stores that said--

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