Good afternoon. And welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, First Person. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 13th year of the First Person program. And our First Person today is Mrs. Inge Katzenstein whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2012 season of First Person is made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin 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.l Each guest serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue until mid-August.

The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests. Inge Katzenstein will share with us her first person account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 40 minutes. If time allows towards the end of our program, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Inge a few questions.

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 Inge's introduction. Inge Berg was born March 29, in Cologne, Germany. The arrow on this map points to the city of Cologne. The family lived in Lechenich, a small town outside of Cologne.

This 1939 portrait shows from left to right Inge, her cousin Egon, and her sister Gisella. The Nazis came to power in 1933. By 1935, Inge 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 from Lechenich back to Cologne. Pictured in this photo are Inge on the left, and her sister Gisella. Inge's family was able to emigrate from Germany and in May of 1939, they left for Kenya. In this photo, we see Inge in the center and her sister Gisella, and her mother aboard the Usambara en route to Kenya.

Inge and her family lived in Kenya for the next seven years. Here we see Inge standing outside her family's farmhouse in Limuru, Kenya. And here we see 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. In 1947, the Bergs came to the United States, settling in New Jersey.

After the Berg's arrival in the United States 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 and married her future husband, Werner. They became engaged in 1950, and married in 1951. Their anniversary is 9/11, as it happens.

They settled in Vineland, New Jersey where Warner worked in sales and Inge would have a long and successful career in real estate. Inge and Werner moved to the Washington DC 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, ages five, three, and one, with a fourth due to arrive in August.

Inge volunteers for the museum by spending about 35 to 40 hours a month translating documents from German to English. She is able to do this from home on a computer. She has 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.

Inge recently finished translating the Journal of a man who was on the St. Louis, the ill-fated ship that brought Jewish refugees to Cuba, only to be forced to return to Europe. Now, she is working on about 160 pages of correspondence from a family in Switzerland who sent their daughter to Pittsburgh in 1938.

Werner helps with the translations when Inge encounters legal and technical terms. Werner and his family came to the United States in 1939. He joined the US 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. Werner, who recently celebrated his 90th birthday, is here with Inge today. Werner, if you wouldn't mind raising your hand? There you go.

[APPLAUSE]

Inge's sister, Jill Pauly, has been with us at First Person, and we've also had Inge and Jill here together. You will find Inge and Jill together in the museum on Monday mornings where they work at the donor's desk. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Inge Katzenstein.

[APPLAUSE]

I still have my button.

Good.

Inge, thank you so much for joining us and for being willing to be our First Person today. We have a lot to cover in just one hour. So I guess we should probably just jump right into it.

Good.

OK.

You've told me that Kristallnacht or the Night of Broken Glass was really the catalyst for the decisions and direction that your family would take for the remainder of the war and the Holocaust. You were very young at the time, just nine years of age. Tell us about those first few years of your life in the 1930s, and the events in your family and community leading up to Kristallnacht. Tell us about your family and you.

We had a very close, large family that lived in a large home. It had two apartments in it. My father, mother, sister, and I lived on the ground level. And my grandparents and uncle lived on the second floor.

And I had to start school in 1935, '36. And about at that time, I went to school in the little town where we lived for about three months. And after that, the Hitler regime decided that Jewish children should not attend public schools anymore.

But there was a law in Germany that said children must attend school. So I had to leave home and go and live with my mother's mother, my grandmother. In a town about 40 miles away. And that's where I lived for about a year and a half, until they-- my grandmother and my aunt and uncle-- moved to Holland. And I had to go home.

And since I couldn't go to school where we lived, I had to travel to Cologne, which was about 17 miles away from where we lived. So every day, at eight, nine years of age, I had to either go by bus or by train.

By yourself?

On my own to school in Cologne. And that way I got to know Cologne quite well until Kristallnacht.

Before we talk about Kristallnacht, Inge, tell us a little bit about your father's occupation, about your family business.

My father took over his father's business. My sister, Jill, traced back our ancestors to the 1700s in this area. And my father took over his father's business. They were cattle dealers. They would buy cattle in East Prussia and transfer the cattle to the West, and then sell it to the farmers. And they had this business for years, and years, and years. We were a well-known family in the town.

And it didn't matter whether we were Jewish or non-Jewish. We all lived together in peace until Hitler came.

And I don't remember the year that Hitler then made a rule that German people could not do their business anymore. But my father had done business with people all his life, and they continued to do our business, and give us every penny that they made on the sales for us.

Even though the rule was that no Jews could--

No Jews could--

--have businesses anymore.

No. And that's why we didn't try to leave earlier. But my family had been trying to get American visas for many, many years. But at about that time the quota, I don't know. There were quota numbers for each country. And about at that time, the quotas from Germany were so overcrowded. I think it would have been our turn by now, if we had stuck to that quota.

Inge, as Hitler's power grew and the Nazis grew in their power in the 1930s, they began imposing restrictions on Jews, like prohibiting them from continuing running their businesses. One of them was to also forbid preparing kosher foods. And yet at considerable risk, your family continued to do that. Tell us a little bit how.

We had-- in the family we had cousins and also my uncle who were kosher slaughterers. There is a certain way an animal has to be slaughtered so that it's painless and instant. And they had done this. Now, you weren't allowed to do that anymore.

And I remember that vaguely, very vaguely, that they would take chickens up to the attic, and slaughter them in the attic. But big animals, they couldn't do that. And a cousin had a slaughterhouse, and they would slaughter the animals. And then immediately shoot it after it was dead. So that shot could be heard, and if they came to look that's how it was done.

And if I remember right, the ritual knives would also be hidden like in the fireplace.

Yeah. They were buried in the garden.

Buried in the garden.

You were, as you told us, you were going to school in Cologne. And you were there when Kristallnacht took place, the night of November 9th through 10th, 1938. And your sister, Jill, was at home with your parents, with your mother. Please share with us what you remember about Kristallnacht and the events that occurred right after that.

Well, communications weren't as good as they were today. And we did have a telephone, but not something that was used on a daily basis. And my mother sent me to school on the train. And the train happened to go by our house. And when I got to school. The Gestapo was standing in front of the school with the German shepherds. And the school was right next to a synagogue. And I looked up and I could see that the cupola of the round part of the synagogue wasn't there anymore.

And I just saw wooden slats there. And the man said to us, you can go home today. There's no school. So I turned around and got back on my train. And as I'm passing the house, my mother is looking out the window. And she sees me. And she's shocked.

Like here, you're coming back home.

I'm coming back home. So when I got off the train and went home, she says, what are you doing here? I was known not to go to school every day. But I wouldn't go home.

Yeah.

She said, what are you doing here? And I said, well they said there was no school, and so I came home. And that day, all of a sudden, there were uproars in the house. The phone started to ring. And we had lived in the town for so long, so my parents had a lot of friends. And a Righteous Gentile came over, a Righteous Gentile came over, a friend of my uncle's, came over to the house and said, whatever you do today, do not go to the synagogue.

And we still didn't know what was going on. But my grandmother said, we're leaving. We're not staying here. We're going to the big city. So my father hired a taxi. And my grandmother who had her leg in a cast, because she had a broken ankle, and my grandfather, and the two of us, my sister and I, were put into that car.

And I remember that my grandmother had the leg that had a cast on-- the children were made to sit on the floorboard. And--

In the back seat.

In the back seat on the floor. And my grandmother put her cast on my back because she didn't want us to look out the window. And we left for Cologne. And my mother and her mother, and an aunt and uncle, came in another car. And we all went to a relative's, of about seven or eight people, moved in with relatives that had a one or two bedroom apartment. And we were there for seven months.

And we went to Cologne. My father, his brother, and a cousin decided to drive. Because they didn't go to the synagogue when the synagogue was burning, because they were told not to go. All the men that ran to the synagogue to try to rescue the Torahs and the books, each and every one of them was picked up and put in concentration camp. And the town was looking for my father and uncle. They couldn't find them.

And the Nazis absolutely ruined our house, a three story house. They threw everything possible into the yard. There wasn't a dish left in the closet. There wasn't a towel left in the closet. Everything was outside, including carpets on the compost heap.

And we were in Cologne. My father and uncle drove around Cologne for a couple of hours, a couple of days. And then they went across the border to Holland illegally, where Dutch Nazis picked them up.

So they thought they were going to safety, but they were immediately picked up by Dutch Nazis.

Picked up, and they would have been sent back, but the uncle that lived in Holland already had got in touch with someone that was close to the queen. And the queen wrote, made a decree that these three people were not to be sent back. And because the Dutch didn't have written authority to send them back, they had to have it in writing, and they didn't have that. So they stayed in Holland and were interned in Holland for the seven, eight months.

So we didn't see our father from November till June '39.

So he was actually put into a prison like situation?

He was put into a camp, a detainee. It wasn't a prison. But all these people that went across the border, Holland couldn't absorb them all. So they gathered them and put them in some type of restraint.

Do you know if during that seven month period was your mother able to be in touch with your father?

By letter.

By letter?

Yes. Yes.

The night of Kristallnacht and the following morning when you left for Cologne, and then realized of course, that your family home had been completely hooliganized and destroyed, was there any awareness of how extensive the damage had been done to Jews all over Germany, and even Austria?

That came slowly.

Slowly.

Slowly you found out on the radio, and from relatives, and it was in the papers. They called it the Night of Broken Glass. And it was all over Germany. It was horrendous.

Along with your synagogue, hundreds of others.

Hundreds, well I saw the one right next to my school in Cologne. And I was just one little girl. They wouldn't chase me. But they-- I don't know if any of these people have been through the permanent exhibit. But there were benches that said Jews not wanted. You couldn't sit on a bench. There were stores that said Jews not wanted. And Jews wouldn't go in there. I did.

Yeah, you were feisty from all that I've gathered from your sister.

I stood on line. At that time there was a shortage of coffee. And I stood on line. And everybody was standing on line, because you got coffee a quarter pound at a time. And I would stand. Whenever I saw a line, I lined up. I didn't know what they were selling. But I lined up. I would come home with a pound of coffee. And then my mother would wonder where I was.

Well, they sent me to Cologne alone, so--

And you'd even go in lines where there are signs saying no Jews.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

Oh, sure.

My mother and aunts wouldn't line up there. I did.

And you actually had an encounter with a young hooligan or a kid who was giving you a hard time.

He called me a dirty Jew, one time too many. I gave him a bloody nose.

[LAUGHTER]

And I don't think anybody here doubts that at all.

I wasn't afraid.

No.

And you've described, and Jill your sister has described you as kind of a street person. You were really pretty street savvy wise.

Oh, yeah. Look, eight years old, I traveled alone to Cologne, which was a big city. And my mother would-- she had so much on her mind and so much to do. And I would hop on a streetcar, and go to a bakery, and buy cake for my grandmother. So they couldn't be mad at me, because I did something for my grandmother.

And I was supposed to have private lessons. And the teacher would call and say, where is she? My mother said, isn't she with you? No. But I wouldn't go home. By the time it got dark, I'd go home.

You would show up?

Yeah.

During that time, Inge, right after Kristallnacht, you're with a relative in Cologne now. And there's a number of you living in the house. And your father, of course, is interned over in Holland. At what point did the family make the decision that we have got to get out of Germany?

Oh. We had wanted to get out of Germany for years and couldn't find a country that would admit us. We tried South America. We tried America, England. And just there wasn't.

And we had one of the cousins was married to a girl who had family in England. And the family in England had a brother that went to law school in England, and who was hired by a British attorney firm in Kenya. And through him, we got 19 visas to go to Kenya.

And Kenya was part of the British empire at the time, right?

Was part of-- was a British colony. And we got permission to go to Kenya. So in June 1939, 17-- my father and two cousins went to Kenya in May. And the rest of the family, my grandparents, my mother's mother who was ill, and she was carried on to the train, and my cousin Egon and my sister and I left for Kenya.

Before we talk more about leaving for Kenya, tell us more about that period of time, what it was like. You mother now has the complete care of you and your sister, plus your grandparents.

And the Germans-- the Nazis insisted that the homes that they had ruined, that the family come back to straighten it out. So who was left? My mother. My mother went back to try and straighten it out. And the Nazis would come and question her, and would say, where's your husband? And she says, I don't know.

And she says, well, don't you know where your husband is? Two or three times a day they would come and question her. And she says, look, I don't know where he is. You can question me from now till doomsday, I don't know. And for a while there, she really didn't know.

But then we found out that they were interned in Holland. But she wasn't going to tell them that. And there were some very good friends, non-Jews, that did help her, and that were very good to us. And as a matter of fact, my sister is still in touch with the maid of my aunt who is still alive.

Tell us about the preparations. This was a big move, what 17 family members are all leaving in June. What were the preparations for that? Because you were allowed to legally leave at that point.

Oh, yes. You could take anything you wanted. But since they ruined everything in our house, my mother went-- fortunately, my family was not poor. And my mother went into any store and bought whatever she wanted. She outfitted a new house. She bought clothes for my sister and I from the time we were 10 to the time we were 20, in all sizes. Because she knew we couldn't take money with us. We were each allowed 10 marks to leave Germany.

Period.

Period.

10 marks?

10 marks. And she knew we couldn't take money with us.