Thursday, April 11, 2013

1:00 p.m. – 2:08 p.m.

**UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM**
***FIRST PERSON:* CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS**
**CHARLES STEIN**

REMOTE CART

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**ROUGH DRAFT TRANSCRIPT**
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>> Bill Benson: Good afternoon. I'm Bill Benson, host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. This is our 14th year of this program. Our *First Person* today is Mr. Charles Stein whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2013 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. 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.

Charles Stein will share with us his *First Person* account as a Holocaust survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows towards the end of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask him a few questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Charles is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

Charles Stein was born in 1919 to a Jewish family in Vienna, Austria. His father was a printer. On the left side we see Charles at age 8. On the right are his parents, Eugene and Cecilia. This photo was taken after World War I. Eugene served as

an Austrian soldier in the First World War.

In 1937, Charles was admitted to the Medical School of the University of Vienna. When the Germans marched into Austria and arrived in Vienna on March 13, 1938, Jews were no longer permitted to study at the university. That is when Charles began to search for a way out of Austria, which was now a part of Nazi Germany.

This picture is of Charles' 1937-1938 student ID card.

By August 1938, he found a way to leave Austria. On August 12, he said goodbye to his parents and fled to Luxembourg. The arrow points to Luxembourg. When he arrived, he received temporary asylum with the help of ESRA, a Jewish aid organization. Later he contacted distant relatives in the United States and asked them for help. After many attempts, Charles was invited to get his visa in October 1939. He arrived in New York on December 18, 1939.

By October 1941, two years after receiving his visa, Charles was drafted by the U.S. Army. He was eventually commissioned a Second Lieutenant, Lieutenant in the Field Artillery, and was soon transferred to Military Intelligence. He served in World War II in combat from Normandy to the Czech border and again in the Korean War.

Here we see Charles with fellow members of his Interrogation Unit.

In early 1946, Charles found out that his parents had been deported to the Lodz ghetto in 1941. He received this notice from the Jewish Committee in Vienna confirming his parents' deportation to the Lodz ghetto. In 1995, and we'll hear more

about this later, he finally learned that they were killed at Chelmno on February 28, 1942.

After his discharge from the Army after the war Charles went into the export business in Latin America, learning Spanish from the Berlitz Language Institute. As a reserve officer, he would be recalled back to active duty to an intelligence position.

When war broke out in Korea, he was sent there. After 13 months in Korea, Charles was transferred to Tokyo where he met his wife, Barbara. They returned to Washington, D.C., where Charles served in Air Force Intelligence until it was integrated into the Defense Intelligence Agency in 1962. He stayed there until 1966.

Charles then began a diplomatic career with the U.S. Department of State including running the Office of Humanitarian Affairs' U.S. mission to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. After leaving Geneva in 1978, Charles and his family returned to the Washington, D.C. area where he continues to live today. Barbara died in 2003. They raised three sons and have seven grandchildren whose ages range from 12 to 25. He volunteers with this museum's programs and greets groups.

Charles is also active in the program in which survivors have informal conversations with small groups. That program will be on Fridays and begin later this spring. Please check the museum's website for the start date.

In 2008, Charles and another survivor were invited to Austria by the Austrian government for the 70th Anniversary of the Annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany. I might also mention that just this past Tuesday, "The Washington Post" had a terrific article about Charles. So you can get your hands on a copy online. It's worth reading

that wonderful article.

With that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Mr. Charles Stein.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Charles, thank you for joining us and for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. We're glad to have you here. I know you have just a tremendous amount to share with us. So we'll start right away.

You were a medical student in Vienna, Austria, in 1938, when the Nazis banned Jews from university studies. Before we talk about the events that happened after that, what happened with the war and you were trying to get out of Austria and coming to the United States, first tell us what your life was like before those events began, in your family, your community.

>> Charles Stein: Right. I was born in 1919. 93 years ago. That's a long time.

[Cheers and Applause]

What amazes me is I'm still talking. 93 years ago I didn't talk. It was a different sound.

Anyhow. I went to school. As a matter of fact, as some of you might know, the European education system is completely different from the United States. When I was 6 years old, I entered elementary school. That lasted for four years. Elementary school is a four-year course.

After that, in Austria, at the time, you had a choice. If you

wanted to go into one of the trades, a plumber or electrician or something like that, all you had to do was go to school for another four years. You had to stay in school until you were 14. And then you went off. If you wanted a higher education, as I did, you went to a different school where you sat for eight years. And this is completely different from any of your schools here.

Those eight years we all, all of us that started those eight years, were still together. And the program was, again, completely different. It was all academic. There were none of the nice things that you have in your middle schools and high schools here. None of that. Everything was the subject, including such very important things at the time. Maybe not today.

Seven years of Latin? Five years of Ancient Greek. I read everything. And the last time I saw those things was at the end of the eight years when we took our final exams and said goodbye to all the books that we had translated, and off we went.

The final exam was a two-week exam and still is today. There were four subjects, one on each, when you sat in there, got your questions, and then wrote. Math, of course, you did -- you solved your problems. On all the others you wrote essays or translations.

The only thing that we could do other than -- was foreign languages. For the last four years of those eight years you could either take English or French. And that should take one hour after the regular school hours. The school system at

the time was five hours a day, six days a week. Saturday we went to school.

At the end of that, of course, I finished. And you got -- at the end of these exams, you got a certificate that said you are now eligible to enter a university in whatever subject you had. I opted for a medical school. And this is not, again, like in the United States where you have -- my kids and my grandchildren right now are waiting for the answer from all the universities to get in. No. That certificate made you eligible to move in. In those days we didn't write. Everything was done in person. Registration.

>> Bill Benson: Nothing online. That's for sure.

>> Charles Stein: There was no line. There wasn't even an on.

Well, at that point we picked up some forms that we had to fill out. As I was filling them out at home, it was mainly your name, rank and serial number type of thing. Just the regular things. For your registration.

I came to the last item on there. And that puzzled me. It said, when you come in, bring that piece of paper, your birth certificate. Ok, no problem. And your sign. My what? I had no idea what that was. Never heard of it. So I turned to my father and I said, hey, I got to have this sign. The sign, by the way -- I should translate this for you. Citizenship certificate. Apparently everybody in Austria had a citizenship paper. They got it at birth, I think, or whatever. I never did find out all the details because I didn't have one.

So my father told me we don't have one. I said, well, how come? And he explained to me that at the end of World War II, when Austria became what is now Little Austria --

>> Bill Benson: At the end of the First World War

>> Charles Stein: Before that, Austria, of course, as you probably know, the Austrian emperor ruled over what then became Austria, Czechoslovakia, most of Poland, most of Romania, Yugoslavia and the northern part of Italy. All of that was Austria. Everybody was an Austrian citizen who lived in there.

Well, when Austria became Little Austria, they passed a law immediately that all people born outside of the new borders of Austria had to get -- apply for citizenship. And it was a routine thing.

Now, 19 years later, my father tells me that he didn't think he needed that because, as you saw in the picture, he was in the Austrian Army.

>> Bill Benson: So he was a veteran thinking he wouldn't have to do that.

>> Charles Stein: He was in the Austrian Army. He was an Austrian. There was no question about it.

Now, going back to why -- both of my parents were born outside of the present -- the new borders of Austria. But I had lived in Vienna for most of my life.

Anyhow. So two years later, my father now tells me, we became stateless. Again, a difference between America and Europe. In America if you're born here, if your parents are, whatever, you are an American. Not so in Europe. In Europe, if you're born in Austria, for example, you are -- you have the citizenship of your parents. Until you're 21. Then you can apply.

Well, in my case, I was stateless. And what that meant at the

time was that my tuition at the university was now three times that of an Austrian. Things were not good. Pretty bad, as a matter of fact. Still in 1937. But my parents scraped up enough money, and I was a proud medical student in about the end of August 1937. Walked into the university, and it was great.

Well, then came the 11th of March 1938. I had finished the first semester. I had taken two exams. And I was now eligible and could apply to be equalized in tuition. I turned in this those papers. We were now in the second semester. And by March of 1938. I went to the university, walked in.

Now, the classroom at the medical school, the anatomy building, is something like this theater. You walk in on top and you sit down. And the professor sits down below, and all of that. Anyhow, I walked in up there. And I noticed on the top row, the top row there were men standing. The entire top row was filled. All the men were standing. And all of them wore storm trooper uniforms. Nazi uniform.

The puzzlement about that was that the Nazi party four years before that was outlawed. There was no Nazi party. There were no -- you didn't see any. And on that day they were there. I had no idea what that meant. Some of them had pistols sticking in their belt. They didn't say anything. They just stared at everybody.

>> Bill Benson: None of them -- they were not fellow students?

>> Charles Stein: Could have been.

>> Bill Benson: Could have been.

>> Charles Stein: Could have been. I had no idea who they were.

So anyhow, the rest of us went down, sat down. We went through the lecture. Got finished. In the afternoon I spent upstairs in a room where I was dissecting a body, as part of medical training. And around 4:00 I left. Walked out. Went down the street. And I heard noise behind me. I heard people yelling. So I turned around. And I noticed that these storm trooper characters were chasing one student. And what I heard were things like "kill all the Jews" and things like that.

Anyhow, I decided that that was not for me. I better get out of here. I went down the next corner, turned the corner. This is an area where there were apartment buildings. I went into the basement of the apartment building and waited there. It felt like hours. It was probably just a few minutes. I came up, looked around, everything was quiet. I went home and told my parents about what I had seen. And we had no idea what it was. This was on a Friday evening.

On Saturday morning we found out. There were “Extras!” all over the street. You opened the windows and heard the boys, "Extra! Extra!" Went down and got one. Found out that the German Army, Hitler had crossed the Austrian border at midnight, was on his way to Vienna. There was no resistance. All of a sudden no resistance.

On Saturday morning there was going to be a big parade in Vienna. Hitler, Goebbels, the topnotches were going to be there. It was going to be on -- there's a main street in the old area of Vienna, an avenue that goes from the Danube on one side to the Danube on the other side. That's where it was going to be.

Well, Sunday morning I got up and I said to my parents, I'm

going to go down and see -- we had no idea what was happening. We didn't know who these people were.

>> Bill Benson: So you wanted to see what was happening.

>> Charles Stein: Yeah. And my parents told me not to. And, of course, at that age, I went.

If you have been in the museum or if you're going into the museum, look -- you're going to the fourth floor. Going around. There's a barrier there. And right before you get to that barrier is a video that shows exactly where I was standing. I must have been standing right where the camera was. Directly across the street from the Vienna state opera house. And as you can see on that video, on this picture up there, I saw a couple of cars with police or military. And then a big open limousine with Hitler, Goering, Goebbels. There were two because of all the VIPs. And all of Austria was there. It was jammed. The streets, there wasn't room for one more, I don't think. And all of them were standing there with their arm up yelling "Ay! Hitler."

>> Bill Benson: Thousands.

>> Charles Stein: Must have been a million people. Well, at that point., I did not look at the rest of this. Now I knew. And I ran home. I walked in. I remembered the words I said to my parents. I walked in and said, time to start packing, we got to get out of here. And my parents said,well, we don't know.

It didn't take long to find out. It was about two days later. The first proclamation came and blasted all over town. The Jews were no longer allowed to enter the university.

>> Bill Benson: So you're acting --

>> Charles Stein: I was an ex-medical student.

The next thing I found out, the following day -- this was on Tuesday. I was out somewhere. I was coming back. I noticed in front of my apartment building, on the ground floor in the apartment building, there was a store -- in those days there were apartment buildings that had tiny little shoe stores, owned by the husband and wife operating it, lived in the apartment behind the store. As I came up there, I noticed that there was a truck standing in front -- or was it the other side of the street? A truck standing on front of the store. I saw storm troopers in uniform walking out of the store with boxes of shoes, putting them on a truck.

Well, I didn't cross the street with them around. Not only were the storm troopers there, but there were two policemen there from my police station, which was right on the corner, just around the corner from where my house was.

As a matter of fact, on the fourth floor, again, you will see it. Or have seen it. When you come around the first bend there, there is a big, large picture of a wall with lots of people standing in line in front of a police station. That is the police station where I lived next door to.

Anyhow.

>> Bill Benson: So they're looting this store.

>> Charles Stein: Yeah. The store was completely empty. I walked across the street. I said, what happened? He was in tears. He said, they took everything; there is nothing left. They

told him that he had a requisition to requisition all boots, military, whatever. In the process they took everything that was in there. There was absolutely nothing left. Not a box. Everything was gone.

My thing started. First thing I wanted to do was get a passport. I knew I had to get out. I went to the police station long before there was a line. As a matter of fact, there was no line at all in those early days. People just hadn't figured it out yet. I knew I had to get out. I knew you had to have a passport.

Now, at the time, remember, we had no idea what emigration meant. Nobody emigrated anywhere. We didn't know what to do. But we found out very quickly.

My friend and I got together, and we started moving around. We went to embassy. And we said we'd like to come to your country. And they told us where to go. It wasn't exactly their country.

Except for the American Embassy. The American Embassy was a little different. We got there and they told us that America, there was a quota system for each country. And it was not by citizenship, but it was by your place of birth. I signed up. Filled out the forms and all of that. I didn't know anybody in America that would bring me in, at that time.

Anyhow, I went on. Then the other things started. And you see lots of it up in the museum. They started dragging people out.

Now, how this is done is very simple. At that time everybody in

Austria had to register with the local police, no matter where you lived. You had to register with the local police station and you had to give your religion on that thing. Well, it was simple for the Nazis and their cohorts in the police to figure out who lives in this area, all Jews. And they go to the door, knock on the door, take a bucket of water and a toothbrush and come with me. They dragged them out into the street to scrub the street.

>> Bill Benson: With toothbrushes.

>> Charles Stein: With toothbrushes. Down on their knees. You see the pictures up in the museum. People would gather around.

One day I was at one of my cousin's homes. Her husband was out. She was older than I was. Her husband was out. We talked. There's a knock on the door. She opened the door. There was a man in uniform out there: Storm trooper. And he says, hey, Jew, get a bucket of water and a toothbrush. She stepped aside. She went to the kitchen to get that. And he saw me standing there. He said, you, you Jew -- why I did at that point what I did, I have no idea. I reached into my pocket, and I pulled out my ID.

You saw something similar to this ID. This is the ID card we carried. The other one, the one you saw there, is similar to this but all the pages in there, this is where your record is. It's professor for that course, signed in and out. Beginning of the semester, that you were a student, at the end that you passed.

Well, I put this up and I just held this up. My picture here. And again, here is that -- you may have seen it up there or noticed it. It says Auslander. This is the booklet in which you had on the next page a stamp that says you paid your tuition. And this is

the one you had to show as you walked into the building.

Ok. This little thing saved my life. And this is about the only document I still have.

>> Bill Benson: So he thinks you're just a foreigner.

>> Charles Stein: Yeah. At that point the guy looks at it and says, get out of here. Again, the reason for that. I thought about it. I talked to people. At the time, they did not touch foreigners, whether they were Jews or not. It didn't matter. Because the foreigner was going to leave the country way and go out and tell what they saw or what they did to him. So I was free.

And I used this thing. And many times for the next few months, I didn't wear a swastika armband or pin. Whenever I was stopped, I just pulled this thing out and did the same thing, and it worked.

>> Bill Benson: Charles, you would, of course -- you've made the decision -- you're working hard to get out.

>> Charles Stein: Oh, yes. I had to get out. We were looking around. As I said, we went from one embassy to the other.

>> Bill Benson: You end up finally going to Luxembourg. Tell us what made you decide to go to Luxembourg.

>> Charles Stein: Well, Luxembourg, I didn't decide to go to Luxembourg. Luxembourg decided to let me in.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Charles Stein: It was the other way around. Well, one day -- oh, let me back up. Before then, a couple of months after all of this happened. I came home one day and I was told, my mother told me, that two of my former classmates -- the parents knew all the classmates, the same people for eight years, so. Two of my former classmates now in storm trooper uniform came looking for me, knocking on the door and said, is he home? Mother said, no, he's not. They didn't say anything and walked away.

Well, I knew these kids back in 1929 when I entered that particular school, the eight-year school. They were in the Hitler Youth. Long before Hitler even took over Germany. Hitler Youth, it was a small group in Hitler Youth. Well, they were in there. And I knew they weren't coming to wish me well. At that point I went into hiding. And from then on I just didn't go home any more. I called in. Every once in a while, late at night, I'd sneak in, do something, get out again.

Many of my friends, some of my friends, their parents let me stay for a couple of days. There were some days when I didn't have any place to stay, but it was summer time and I'd stay -- get into the bushes in the park somewhere.

Anyhow. I lived through it.

Now, Luxembourg. So this one day I am downtown again. Downtown was the safe area. I'm downtown. I was with some of my friends. And one of them said, hey, don't you have a stateless passport? I told you I started looking. I got a stateless passport since I was an Austrian citizen. I said, yeah, got it in my pocket. He said, I just heard a rumor -- and this is what we did every day. We exchanged rumors. Most of them didn't

mean anything. And he said, I heard that Luxembourg would give people with stateless passports a 14-day transit visa.

I heard that. That was good enough for me. I said, well, the Luxembourg Government, the Luxembourg Embassy? No idea. Or Consulate. It turned out this was an honorary consulate. Luxembourg didn't have --

>> Bill Benson: An embassy.

>> Charles Stein: We didn't have an embassy in Luxembourg either. Luxembourg was too small at the time.

Anyhow. I went into a phone booth and looked in the phone book and found the Luxembourg Consulate was about two blocks from where I was standing. It didn't take me very long to get there.

I got there. I got to the building and looked at the number. There was an apartment building. I had no idea -- I thought it was some kind of a big thing, like the other embassies. But it wasn't. I noticed on the side of the door a brass plaque that said Luxembourg Consulate, third floor. I walked in. I got to the third floor. It looked like apartments. And, again, I saw this little thing. I was standing there, took my passport out of my pocket. And I was thinking, what am I going to do? This is what the man told me was a transit visa, that means you go in and you go out. 14 days later, you're out. Where am I going to tell him where I'm going? There's nothing in my passport, no Visa, nothing. In those days you had to have a visa for everywhere.

It took me about half a minute or so to decide I'll try it. See what

happens. Knocked on the door. Lady comes out. She said, yes? Can I help you? I said, yes, I would like -- I understand I can get a transit visa, I'm stateless. I'm waiting for an answer or a question or something. It didn't come. She says, come back tomorrow morning at 9:00. Yes, ma'am.

That is the day, this is now 19 -- the summer of 1938. I think, not on the record but I'm pretty sure, I broke the four-minute mile. I got out of that place and I ran home for the first time in the daytime. I hadn't been at home. I told you I was in hiding. I just ran home. And I told my parents. You should have gotten a passport. They still didn't have a passport. They said, ok. Everything's fine. I told them I'm leaving. My mother said, God bless you. Ok. So I said, I'll be leaving in a few days.

The next day I called. My mother told me that she had told what happened to me to a friend of the family a young couple that they were friendly with. And the husband was in a concentration camp.

I didn't mention that before. One of the first things that happened was any Jew that owned any kind of a business at the time in Austria, if his employees wanted to get rid of him and take over the business, all they had to do was go down to the secret police, the Gestapo, and tell them get the Jew out of there. And they did. And all of these people that were arrested and taken out were sent to the concentration camp. But at the same time, in Austria, at that time, or in Germany at that time, if anybody -- not as a criminal but only because they wanted to take his business away, was in a concentration camp. If he had a place to go, if he had family, got him a visa to someplace, they would

release him.

>> Bill Benson: As long as he leaves the country.

>> Charles Stein: As long as he leaves the country. He had 48 hours to leave.

So when I called home the next day, my father got on the phone. My father told me that this young couple, husband had lost his business that way, was ready -- was on his way home. Again, his wife had gotten a Luxembourg visa and could I please wait because she was afraid that they might be in bad shape. And she was right. A couple of days later, got there the next day and then a couple of days after that, told my parents to meet me at the railroad station. I was headed to Luxembourg. He was going to be there, too.

I got to the railroad station, and my parents were already there. And my father hands me -- I told him, just a little bag. I have no idea where I'm going. 14 days. I may have to cross the river or something. Go into France or Belgium. And my father hands me like a gym bag, a small gym bag.

I looked over to my mother, she had in her hand my violin. My violin case. She hands it to me. I said, mama, what am I going to do with a violin? She said, well, maybe someday -- this is her saying now, maybe someday you're hungry and you won't be able to eat. So maybe sell the violin and have something to eat for a few days.

At the present time, we were in tears anyway at the time, I couldn't talk to her anymore. I said, all right, mama, I'll take it. We got on the train. Took off. This was around noon on that day. We sat in the train and we were scared. But nothing

happened.

We had to change trains about four times in the next 24 hours. Usually it takes eight or 10 hours. It took us 24 hours because we had to change trains in Munich. And every time we got to a railroad station, we sort of got out of the way where hopefully nobody would find us. And it worked.

We got to the Luxembourg border, still in Germany. We had to change one more time, close to the border. Got on the train. And just before the border, which is the Moselle River, just before the bridge across from Luxembourg, the train stopped and two storm troopers walked in and said, "All Jews out." There were only the two of us in there. We got out. And they took us to a couple of buildings, small buildings, different rooms.

I was in there with a German officer, a man. I don't know what exactly he was. But it was not military. Customs or something like that. Anyhow. So he looked at my bag. He looked at my violin. He opened up everything. And talked very nice and gentle. He was an older man. He then finally asked me what I was going to do, what I did. I said I was a medical student. He said, are you going to study again? I said, yes, I hope so. And away we went. He hands me my thing and says, go, go back on the train.

At that time my mind was such that I did not believe that they were going to let me go. I don't know.

>> Bill Benson: You thought that was the end of the line there. Yeah.

>> Charles Stein: Well, he opened the door. I figured somebody's going to grab me. Walked out. There was nobody out there. Went back to the train. Not even as far as the end of this

room. Went in there. Went out and waited for Max.

The train was about to leave. Max came out, came running, got on the train. He told me his story was a little different since he was in a concentration camp. They searched him. They took everything apart that he had. They made him sign a piece of paper.

Now, the Germans at that time, this is somebody that's going to leave the country. Not going to be there anymore. Made him sign a piece of paper that he will never tell anyone that he was in a concentration camp. German mind at the time.

Well, anyhow. We got on the train. About five minutes later we're across the border. And we take a deep breath. And Luxembourg being a huge country took us another 10 minutes to get to the center of the city, Luxembourg City. We got out. We walked into the station, the waiting room in the station where the ticket office was. It was about a quarter of this room. Very small place, but lots ever people in there.

And for the first time, we thought -- we looked at each other. We had no idea where we were. We didn't know what language we heard them speak a language that we didn't understand. We got used to it. And it turned out to be a little deviation from German. Just recently they applied to the United Nations to make it a real language.

Ok. We didn't know where we were. We didn't know where to go from there. And, again, luck is with us. From the corner over there comes the voice. "Max, when did you get here?" Looked around. Saw this guy. Somebody he knew in Vienna. Came over. Turns out this man had been the same as we, gotten there the week before and

knew all the answers.

It was around noon. He said, have you had lunch? We said, no, we haven't eaten since yesterday, noon yesterday. So he took us to a place where we got something. And we found out that this organization ESRA had various places we could go to eat. Then he took us to the organization who then took us to the police, took our passports away, gave us another piece of paper. And this is when we found out, finally, this was not a transit visa. We were now in the legal hands of this organization. And for the next few months they had an agreement with the government that they would get us out of there to someplace. They had lots of places around the world they were sending people.

Well, I was there. Shortly after I got there, I received a letter from my mother saying that she had just found out that a cousin of hers, who around the turn of the century, back around 1900, had gone to America. He was a boy then from the time when she was born. She just found out from somebody that he was still alive and this address. Said write to him. And I did. I wrote to him.

About a month later I got a letter from him saying, yes, I remember your mother, and, yes, I'll help you but I don't have the means to fill out one of those Affidavits of Support, the paper you need to go to America but I have someone who is working on it right now. And a few weeks later I got that piece of paper.

And now I have to go to the American Embassy and I said, where is the American Consulate? And I found out there wasn't any in -- any in Luxembourg. It was in Belgium.

So the organization that helped us, fed us, found quarters for us, they were doing everything for us and they said, no problem, you'll get a Luxembourg stateless passport. The Austrian passport was one of those gray passports with big, black stripe across that said stateless. In Luxembourg, something much nicer. It was a green one with the big stamp. But still stateless. Ok. But I had a passport. And I went to Belgium. I didn't need a visa. Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland, and even then were working together as a unit and you didn't visa, just a passport.

I went to Belgium. I turned it in. And the American Consulate, a young man was very happy with me. I was apparently the first one that had come in there that spoke English. I told you I took four years of English after school, at my school. Oh, he was very friendly. He said, no problem.

About four weeks later I get a letter from the embassy. I thought that was it. It says everything's fine, but we need from your sponsor one more piece of paper. Some document.

>> Bill Benson: From the sponsor in the United States.

>> Charles Stein: Yeah. In the United States. So I write to the United States. Slow mail. A few weeks later I get that. I go back to Belgium. I turn it in. And the guy looks and says everything's all right.

Make a long story short. A year later I was still bringing in papers. The last paper I brought in was -- this is now a year later, in August of 1939, the end -- the last week in August, brought back one piece of paper. Turned it in. And the man told me

the same thing. Everything's fine now. And two days later, first of September, war breaks out in Europe. France and England declare war on Germany. Germany on them. And we're sitting right between them.

I have time to tell you this little thing.

>> Bill Benson: And I want you also to talk about your parents.

>> Charles Stein: Yeah. I'll get that shortly.

So at this point there were five of us, all about my age at the time. And we decided if the Germans come in and the war starts, France is here, Germany is here and we're sitting between, we're dead. So we do something.

And this is for your entertainment I'm telling this. Because it was for our entertainment, too, at the time.

So we got on the train. We went to the French border. We walked out. We walked into the place there and proudly announced we are here to join the French Foreign Legion. And they educated us. We saw some movies. Guys riding the camels and all of that. We figured Africa. Africa is about close enough for us to get away from. And they explained to us that the French Foreign Legion was composed of mainly escaped prisoners, murderers, killers, thieves that fled their country and found a home in the French Foreign -- well, they put us on the next train back to Luxembourg. And I guess for about two, three days, we were in hiding. We were kind of ashamed to have done that. The movies did that to us. Anyhow.

The war was on. Two weeks later, on the 15th -- yeah, 15th of

September, I received a letter from the embassy, and my mind was, oh, another piece of paper. But that was different. It said come to the embassy on the 7th of October to get your visa. Get there. And got it.

Now, fast forward to about middle 1980's. I picked up one of the magazines, newspapers one day, "Time," "Newsweek," something like that. And I found an article in there that tells me that in 1938, its time that I was trying to get my visa, there was an -- a secret order from the State Department from the U.S. State Department to all the consulates in Europe. Not exactly in those words. But it says, hey, we got all of these Jews want to come in, keep them out as long as you can. Put all possible obstacles.

Now, one of these -- there actually were two of them. And one of them said at the end, all kinds of things, do not -- keep them out as long as you can. And delay and delay. Twice. That was done by a man named -- and look him up. You'll find him now probably in your encyclopedia, computer, anyway. A man named Breckinridge Long, a very high, number two, number three man in the State Department. He put out that order. It was classified.

>> Bill Benson: Until the 1980's.

>> Charles Stein: Declassified 30 years after the war. Anyhow, that is why I had to wait all of this time.

>> Bill Benson: For over a year you were stalled. You were stalled.

>> Charles Stein: Yeah. Well, finally, I had the visa. At this time I guess there was a new policy with the war on. I went back and they found me, the organization found me, a ship. But

not until December. This was October. Not until December. And on the 18th of December, 1939, I arrived in New York.

>> Bill Benson: Charles, before we continue from there, our time is getting short. When you were in Luxembourg, you tried to get your parents to come.

>> Charles Stein: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about it.

>> Charles Stein: Oh, yes. Right.

In 1938 -- I left out this one thing. On the 9th of November, 1938, we get the message in the newspapers and on the radio the night of the broken glass. Kristallnacht, known in Germany. One night, 9th of November. They went out and destroyed everything, every Jewish store, plundered it. Like Washington in 1968, much worse. Killed about 3,000 -- oh, every synagogue, every single synagogue. I think there were about in Germany and Austria somewhere like 1,000 synagogues, big and small. They were burned down. The fire department came out to protect the buildings around so the fire wouldn't spread. But let that burn down. While all of that happened, 3,000 Jews were taken into concentration camps. It was murder.

>> Bill Benson: Is that when your parents realized --

>> Charles Stein: At that point -- at that point, right after that, I found out that there was a man in Luxembourg who smuggled people across the border, people without the visa. For money. I had some money.

I mentioned my violin. That violin came in handy. Because

musicians could get a work permit. And I worked as a violinist and made some money, saved some money. But not enough. So I borrowed from everybody. And we helped each other. And got enough money together. And I went to the man, talked about it, and he said, yeah, I'll get them.

But I wrote to my parents. This is now going into January of 1939. I wrote to them. It was a message in code. I said, please -- Aunt Fanny -- we didn't have an Aunt Fanny -- is having her 60th birthday, she insists -- she hasn't seen you in a long time, she wants you to come and celebrate with her on certain date. And she had moved to a new apartment, and the address.

I wrote that and I figured my parents would understand. And they did. And they came back. We corresponded in postcards. Letters didn't make it through anymore. They stopped all letters. Postcards they could read and send on. On the appointed day, my parents were there. A man went there. And I had some of my Luxembourg friends offered to hide my parents until they could get legalized. This is possible. It's been done before.

On the appointed day, I went to the friends. The man told me he probably won't get there until about 3:00 in the morning. So a night operation. Well, 3:00 came along. I stayed up all night. 4:00, 5:00, 6:00. Finally at 10:00 there's a knock on the door. I opened the door. And there is that man, the Luxembourg man, standing there all by himself. He tells me the story. He said he picked up my parents. He took them -- they got almost to the bridge, the people in the bridge were part of his --

>> Bill Benson: At the border.

>> Charles Stein: Yeah. They got to the border, the Moselle River bridge border. A German Army patrol came through and stopped them, told them they had to -- can't go through here. We're out maneuvered. He told them he was Luxembourg. Showed them his passport. He says, hey, I come here all the time. I go here for my business. I'm going home. So they said, all right, you can go. Turned to my parents. They were still standing there. And they said, who are these people? At that point he said, well, I just met them. He couldn't say. Passport Luxembourg. Showed them their German stateless passport. They said, you don't have a visa. You can't go in there. They won't let you in. Go back home. Go back.

This is what the man tells me. I didn't believe it. I have thought that was the end. It took about 10 days before I got another postcard. I found out, yes, that we were back home. We wrote in code. Yeah, we had our vacation, and we're back home. Shortly after that -- this has started in Vienna particularly. Any Jew that had a decent apartment or home, the Gestapo would come in and say, one suitcase -- one suitcase per person, leave everything you own right here, all the furniture, everything you own, books, whatever you have. Just one suitcase, and come with us.

At that time they evacuated some slum buildings and put all the Jews in there. All over town. This happened to my parents. They moved about two, three times before very shortly, this now the end of 1939, early 1940, and then everything stopped. I had no idea. I was in New York by that time. I was trying to find a way to get them, but nothing happened.

Meanwhile, I'm in New York and I want to go to medical school and find out my other big surprise. In America, at the time, all medical schools had a very tiny Jewish quota system. I think it was 1% of the student body was allowed -- Jews were allowed, 1%. People who were familiar that I talked to told me forget it. At that time I worked -- I found a job. Some of the young people -- you're all young people.

[Laughter]

But probably -- may not believe this, but I lived on $14 a week. The people that sponsored me, I said thank you, and that's the last time I saw them. They didn't invite me in. I didn't want to be a burden.

Anyway, I was in New York.

>> Bill Benson: So you were completely on your own.

>> Charles Stein: Completely on my own. I had some friends that had come from Austria, had gotten a visa. So at least I had contacts.

I found in a rooming house on 38th Street, somewhere off Broadway, in New York. I found a rooming house that let me sleep there for $3 a week. $3 a week? You can't even get downtown for $3 a week.

I found this job in a textile factory, in a shipping department. Made $14 a week. Five and a half days.

>> Bill Benson: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

>> Charles Stein: Just let me finish the money. How I made $14 went a long way. I found right on the same street, the same block, had to go down a couple of steps, a Chinese

restaurant. I ate Chinese from then on. A full meal, 55 cents. That's the way I lived in 1940.

>> Bill Benson: We're close to the end here, Charles.

>> Charles Stein: It's the military now.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us when you first learn about your parents, what happened to them.

>> Charles Stein: My parents, it was not until after the war.

>> Bill Benson: Not until after the war.

>> Charles Stein: After the war. Short war story. I got in the Army. Of course, two months before Pearl Harbor I was drafted. After Pearl Harbor Congress passed a law to make all of us who were not citizens who were in the Army became citizens immediately. I went to officers' school, transferred.

>> Bill Benson: Which you couldn't have done without becoming a citizen.

>> Charles Stein: Without becoming a citizen. Right.

Shortly after I graduated from officers' school I was pulled out -- well, I was in Oklahoma. I was in a classroom somewhere. MP man came in. Talked to the inspector. Said Lieutenant Stein, go with him. Took me out, into a office in headquarters. There was a major sitting there. He said, close the door. Closed the door. He said, raise your right hand and swear. I had no idea what I was swearing to. That I will never tell anything what happened here. Oh, it must be good. Ok. I swear. And I found out. He pulls out orders. I just graduated from artillery school. Big guns, you know, I knew all about them. And he hands me the order. And it says, report to Camp Ritchie, Maryland, Military Intelligence Training Center. It's confidential. Don't tell anybody where you're going or what you're going

for. So the Military Intelligence Training Center.

At that time somebody in Washington apparently had woken up one day and said, hey, we have all of these people that speak the enemy language, German, Italian. All of us were pulled into a brand new thing, Military Intelligence. U.S. didn't know military intelligence before then. Somebody invented it. They talked to the British. And there we were. Anyhow, we were trained. On D-Day I was in Normandy.

Now, you asked about what happened to my parents. After the war was over, I came back and I started looking for my parents. I tried everything I could, Red Cross, a number of things, but nothing.

I found out in 1940, somewhere in 1946, that the Jewish Community in Vienna was reconstituted, opened up again, and that they had all the records -- the reason why all the records were still in the old Jewish Community was because Eichmann, the big killer, Eichmann had taken over that building as his headquarters and everything just stayed where it was. Well, when the Germans left --

>> Bill Benson: All of those records.

>> Charles Stein: All the records were still there. So finally about a year after the war, the reorganization was reconstituted. I wrote to them. And they wrote me back. Saw that little piece of paper there that says your parents were deported to the Lodz ghetto in October of 1940. The same time I went into the Army. The same week, I think. A couple of weeks difference. But anyhow, same month, anyway. And the piece of paper said do not appear on a survivor list.

It took me until 1995, 50 years after the war, right in this building, on the fifth floor, that I found out what happened to my parents. I was up there doing a study for the director at the time. I had an appointment with the head of the archives. I walked in. I introduced myself. He asked me some questions. Where are you from? Ok. How about your family? And I said, all gone. I've been looking for them for the last 50 years. I have no idea. I know they got to Lodz, all the Jews from Vienna were deported to Lodz and on to Auschwitz, but I had no idea.

And he said, I think I can help you. Right next door, one of our teams -- we had at that time and still have teams in Europe finding documents and things about that time period. At that time that our team had just found when the Germans left, when the Russians came and the Germans left Lodz, the ghetto, they left all the records there. The Pols found it and put it in the basement of some government agency. Our team a couple of months ago found it in that basement.

>> Bill Benson: In 1995.

>> Charles Stein: In 1995. 50 years after the war and brought them back. And they're sitting right next door. Go.

I went in there. I talked to the man who had them. He unlocked the thing. It said Stein. Five big volumes. Well, got to be in this one. He handed it to me. Put it on the desk. Flip over. Alphabetically I get to the s-t's, get to the page, right on top of the page is my mother and further down my father, my uncles, my aunts, and my cousins. Finally found out 50 years after the war what happened to my family.

By that time I had done a lot of things. As you mentioned, I got out of the Army for a while. I was recalled. Normandy.

All of these people with the jeep. All of these were former Austrian and American Jewish refugees. They all spoke German. We all knew how to interrogate. We were on a interrogation team.

>> Bill Benson: Interrogating prisoners.

>> Charles Stein: German prisoners. We kept in touch after the war for a little while but not that much.

>> Bill Benson: Charles, we've got to close now. I'm going to turn back to Charles to close the program in a couple of moments. As you can see, we just touched the surface. We could have spent so much more time hearing more detail about up until the time Charles came to the United States, about his extraordinary career afterwards in the intelligence, in the military, State Department. I wish I could spend hours listening to that. Maybe you'll find another opportunity for that.

I want to thank all of you for joining us. We'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So we invite you to come back.

When we finish in a moment, Charles, you can stay behind and talk to some folks?

>> Charles Stein: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: So he'll sit down over there.

>> Charles Stein: I'll come down. We'll talk.

>> Bill Benson: Since we didn't have a question and answer period, if you want to ask a question, get your photo taken with him, whatever you want to do.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* gets the last word. So on that note, I turn it back to Charles.

>> Charles Stein: Well, the last word, I will use somebody else's words. If you've been in the museum or if you're going in there, please look at the very last thing you see when you're coming out of the permanent exhibit on the third floor. There is a wall, an engraved thing of a German pastor, Pastor Martin Niemoller whose statement was published. You see it in many of the books. When he was arrested and was in jail for a while at the end of the war, he was released, he made a statement. As I said, you see it in many of the history books. He said, first they came for the socialists and I did not speak up for I was not a socialist. Then they came for a trade unionist and I did not speak up for I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up for I was not a Jew. And they came for me. And there was no one left to speak up.

Please, don't be the last one.

Thank you.

[Applause]

[The presentation ended at 2:08 p.m.]