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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
MARCEL HODAK

REMOTE CART

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>> Bill Benson: Good afternoon. Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson, host of the public program *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today.

We are in our 14th year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Mr. Marcel Hodak 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 weekly series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share their first-hand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here with this museum. Our program will continue until mid August. The museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Marcel Hodak will share with us his *First Person* account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows toward the end of our program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask a couple of questions of Marcel.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Marcel is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

We begin with this portrait of Marcel Hodak taken in 1940.

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Marcel was born to Jewish parents on August 25, 1937, in Paris, France.

Marcel's parents, Jules and Feiga, were both born in Romania but moved to Constantinople, now Istanbul, in Turkey, with their families. They met and married in Turkey. Marcel's sister Esther was born in Turkey in 1921, and one year later Marcel's parents immigrated to Paris, France. Marcel and his two older brothers, Jean and Achilles were all born in Paris.

In May 1940, German troops invaded France and quickly captured Paris. The terms of the Armistice divided France into two parts, with the northern part of the country under direct German control. Southern France remained unoccupied but was ruled by a French collaborationist government, headquartered into the city of Vichy. The map shows the invasion routes of the Germans into Western Europe in 1940.

This photograph is from between 1940 to 1942 and shows members of Marcel's extended family wearing Jewish stars. Shown here are Marcel's uncles, aunt, and cousins.

Marcel's family fled German-occupied Paris in Vichy in the summer of 1942. They ended up in the town of Bride-les-Bains in Haute Savoie, where they would remain for the duration of the war in France.

In this photo we see Marcel's mother, second from the right, and three of her sisters taken in Bride-les-Bains during the war. The family lived in a local boardinghouse.

Marcel and his family returned to Paris in May 1944, and allied

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forces liberated Paris on August 25, 1944, also happened to be Marcel's birthday. Marcel watched American troops parade down the Champs Elysees after the liberation of Paris.

With his two brothers, Marcel immigrated to the United States arriving in New York at age 9. His parents followed in 1950.

In 1956, when he was 19, Marcel joined the U.S. Air Force. After his training, he was stationed in Paris, where he met his first wife, his wife Mimi, who was from Israel. They married in 1958. Their first son Marc was born in Paris in 1959. Over the next few years Marcel was stationed in Omaha where his second son, Michel was born in 1962 and in Spain where Manny was born in 1966. Marcel also had posts in upstate New York, Wyoming, and Andrews Air Force Base here in the Washington, D.C. area. Marcel left the Air Force in 1967 and has remained in this area since then.

Although he is trained as a high-wire electrician, Marcel moved into the computer field. He was with Freddie Mac until 2004. In 2004, Marcel's wife passed away after 47 years of marriage. Their three sons have given them five grandchildren, who are between the ages of 5 and 24. Marcel became a volunteer with this museum in 2007, and you will find him here, besides today, on Friday mornings working with Volunteer Services.

Elaine is with us today, Marcel's significant other. If you wouldn't mind a wave of the hand, along with their good friends David and Florence accompanying Marcel today as well.

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

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[Applause]

Marcel, thank you for joining us and the willingness to be our *First Person* today. We have so much for you to share with us in a limited amount of time. So we'll get started.

Before we turn to the war years which began with Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939 followed by their attack on Paris, on France, in May of 1940, let's start first with you telling us what you know about your parents, your family, their life before the war began.

>> Marcel Hodak: My father was a presser for women's clothes. And my mother was a seamstress, one of the best seamstresses in the world.

As far as I know, there's not much I could remember, I was 3 years old, but as I can remember, we had a happy life. I went to school. My brothers went to school. All of us did what normal people do before a war, anyway.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what took them to live in Turkey and then eventually to come to Paris.

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, there was a -- they actually lived in Kichenet which was very popular at the time for Pogroms.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what a Pogrom is.

>> Marcel Hodak: That's when the Russians do whatever they feel like when the Jews got in their way. In other words, they beat them up, killed them, and nobody said anything.

They went to Turkey to escape this. My father met my mother in Turkey. There's a little story about how he ended up --

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>> Bill Benson: I want you to share that.

>> Marrying my mother. One of my uncles, which we hadn't seen in the pictures, came up to my nose right now, but in those days he was very tiny in my eyesight. He actually got mad at a Russian that was in the Pogrom. And they split him apart with an ax. The Russians came back the next day to find my uncle. And the family put him in a coffin and carried him out and said he was killed during the Pogrom.

And then Turkey, my father was going out with my mother, unbeknownst to me, I wasn't there yet. What happened is that he asked my father, what do you plan to do with my sister --

>> Bill Benson: The uncle did, who had taken care of the Russian.

>> Marcel Hodak: He said, what's your plans with my sister? My father said, I'm going to marry her. Shotgun wedding.

>> Bill Benson: And he did.

>> Marcel Hodak: He did.

>> Bill Benson: What was the life like in Turkey? Do you know?

>> Marcel Hodak: They lived in a hotel. They got their mail at the hotel. In Maryland, we actually met a descendant of the owner of the hotel. My aunts recognized them when they knew who he was. It was a fantastic reunion.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother had 15 siblings, I believe.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. But not all of them lived.

>> Bill Benson: Right. How large was the extended family between your mother and father?

>> Marcel Hodak: My father had two brothers and one sister. The sister lived in Brooklyn. One of the uncles lived in the Bronx. The other one lived in Brooklyn. They were very close. Every Sunday we used to go to the Bronx, which was high up compared to down in Brooklyn. The Bronx was known as the ritzy part and Brooklyn was the peasant.

>> Bill Benson: Marcel, your father was a presser, as you said.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: With clothing. He also was self-educated. Tell us a little bit about him.

>> Marcel Hodak: My father spoke several languages, Russian, Turkish. He never went to school. He learned how to read Hebrew by himself. He learned how to write by himself. Although it was not very good penmanship, but it was readable.

What else would you like me to say?

>> Bill Benson: Your sister was born in Turkey in 1921. Your brothers came in 1926 and then another in 1928. In Paris you had come along much later.

>> Marcel Hodak: I was an accident.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: You were an accident. Ok. Why did they leave Turkey, and what was life like for them in Paris?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, the whole family on my father's side and my mother's side were all in Turkey. When my father got married, he decided to go with my mother's family. The other ones went to New York.

>> Bill Benson: So the family moved to Paris.

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>> Marcel Hodak: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: What was Paris like for Jews at that time, to your knowledge?

>> Marcel Hodak: To my knowledge, at that time we had particular street where all the Jews met. It still was alive when I went back in 1956.

What happened is that when the Germans came in 1940, there was a stipulation in there that no Frenchman would be hurt by the accord between the Frenchmen.

>> Bill Benson: Petain was the head of the French government.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yeah. In 1942, the Germans had a decree saying that all the Jews who came from the east were to lose their citizenship. That way when they deported them, they could say they didn't touch the French, they only touched the foreign Jews.

>> Bill Benson: And when your parents moved from Turkey to Paris, they did get French citizenship at that time. They were bona fide French citizens.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. But what happened is that I was born while they were citizens, so I became a complete French citizen whereas my brothers were given citizenship when my parents got it. Theirs got taken away, but mine didn't.

>> Bill Benson: Because you were born in France, unlike your parents.

>> Marcel Hodak: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Before we go further into the war, tell us what -- to your knowledge, knowing how little you were, when the Germans came in, in May of 1940, occupied Paris. What happened then for your family? What was life like?

>> Marcel Hodak: Around 1942, in Germany 1942 --

>> Bill Benson: Before that happens.

>> Marcel Hodak: You saw a picture of me in what we called Luxembourg. It was a place where we went to the park. We marched down the big boulevards of Paris. My father never had a car. Neither did my mother. A car was a luxury that not everybody could have.

>> Bill Benson: And then you found out later from your parents that when the Germans first attacked France in 1940, Paris was bombarded.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And you would have to go into the underground to get away --

>> Marcel Hodak: You call it underground. I call it a subway.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Marcel Hodak: Or Metro.

My mother ran in a panic, had me wrapped in the blanket, the blanket over me. The blanket got hit by shrapnel and actually left a burn on the blanket. I didn't feel a thing. I'm still here.

>> Bill Benson: But your parents had to be terrified.

>> Marcel Hodak: They were scared. We all were scared. They were scared.

>> Bill Benson: You talked to me the first time we met about that time and what you've learned since then. The French had what they called imaginal lines. And that was intended to basically keep the Germans from attacking.

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>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. They did what we call -- the Germans would go around the line and came up the other end.

>> Bill Benson: Just hopped around it.

>> Marcel Hodak: And one of the aunts that you saw in the picture, her husband was wounded and was taken to a German hospital. And the Germans let him die with gangrene because he was Jewish.

>> Bill Benson: You had told me that that period, as you're going to tell us about, in 1942 between the German occupation in May of 1940 and 1942, that generally things were relatively normal for the family and for Jews in general.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: But then in 1942, things had changed dramatically and your parents decide it's time to leave.

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, they didn't decide. There were rumors around Paris that they were going to start roundups. And in anticipation of that -- the idea was to get rid of all the Jews, to get out of Paris. My parents decided, among the entire family -- I think they all made plans. At least my significant other suggested they probably discussed this and they all went down to the south.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit so we know what Vichy, France, was.

>> Marcel Hodak: It was supposed to be what they call Free France, where nobody was going to get picked up, nobody was going to pay the price for being Jewish. But significantly -- this significantly changed when the Germans came down to the south of France.

>> Bill Benson: Up until the time they did that, the understanding was they would leave Southern France alone.

>> Marcel Hodak: That's correct.

>> Bill Benson: So your parents decided that's where they had to get to.

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, there were not many other places to go. Except England.

>> Bill Benson: Or stay put and get deported.

>> Marcel Hodak: But you couldn't go to England. Jews could not get passports. So stamped on the passport.

>> Bill Benson: So for them the only option was to flee to Southern France and then did.

>> Marcel Hodak: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us how they did that and where they went.

>> Marcel Hodak: We boarded a train. It was packed. Good thing I didn't get lost, because they would never have found me. Everybody was jumping on the trains. The people were standing all over the train. There was no space. We went all the way down to a town. It's very funny. It is spelled and sounds like exactly what it is. I don't know how you explain that. The derriere.

>> Bill Benson: That probably explained it.

>> Marcel Hodak: We got off the train. And then they wouldn't let the Jews go back to Paris. They say all Jews are going to stay at this point. The non-jews could go on the train and go back to Paris.

>> Bill Benson: Why would you even want to go back to Paris?

>> Marcel Hodak: It's a question. You want to be where your home is. And what happened is that they wouldn't let us go back home.

>> Bill Benson: You had told me that as the rumors were circulating and the deportations began, that there were French that would denounce Jews just for the --

>> Marcel Hodak: Possibility of getting the apartments.

>> Bill Benson: To get their home.

>> Marcel Hodak: It was very hard to find apartments in France all the time. It still is hard today. What they did to get the apartment, they would denounce the people to the Germans.

>> Bill Benson: So when you couldn't return to Paris, is that when you went on to Bride-les-Bains?

>> Marcel Hodak: That's when we went to Bride-les-Bains. My father found a job as a lumberjack.

>> Bill Benson: Why Bride-les-Bains?

>> Marcel Hodak: Just happened to be on the way and where we could find a job. You got to imagine, my father is a presser, which is literally one who presses clothes. In Bride-les-Bains he became a lumberjack. All his fingers, hands and feet -- if you stubbed your feet, you would understand what his fingers looked like.

>> Bill Benson: Didn't have lumberjacks in Paris. Tell us about Bride-les-Bains. It was a mountainous town?

>> Marcel Hodak: Actually, Bride-les-Bains became very famous in 1992. That's where they had the Olympics. They had hotels. It was also a town where people went for the cure, you

know sulfur cures, bath cures, all of that stuff.

>> Bill Benson: Sort of a resort-like town.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir.

>> Bill Benson: And obviously mountainous.

>> Marcel Hodak: Very mountainous.

>> Bill Benson: Was that the Alps?

>> Marcel Hodak: The bottom, that's --

>> Bill Benson: I didn't know. As we get into the fact that it was mountainous, played a big role probably in your survival.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. My brother belonged to underground. Their encampment was all along the mountains. And the Germans really were not very happy to go in that area because they would have got shot.

>> Bill Benson: And the resistance, I think --

>> Marcel Hodak: That's what we called --

>> Bill Benson: That's the French resistance, Les Maquisards. Tell us about that.

>> Marcel Hodak: They came down from the mountain at least once a month with supplies that they had gotten from parachuted to them. He brought food, which we didn't have that much of where we were.

>> Bill Benson: Bride-les-Bains was a hotbed for the resistance.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. And we were treated -- well, we tried to assimilate that we belonged to them, as folks of that area. I went to church. There's a story that goes with that. I used to

go to church with my beret on my head. And the priest would come, take my beret, put it on my lap. I didn't know I had to take off my hat, put on my lap. I left it on my lap. Come to be a few years, quite a few years later, my brother came back and said, you know the priest that put your hat on your lap? He was actually an underground guy. He was spying on the town to make sure who was doing what so that during the war we could know the situation and bring them out.

>> Bill Benson: So the priest was actually a member of the resistance and he was Jewish.

Tell us about what life was like then in Bride-les-Bains as best you can. This is a place where, as you mentioned, the Germans didn't do all-out assaults on it. They sort of left it alone. Why would they even leave it alone?

>> Marcel Hodak: Because actually, the people in charge of that earlier were the Italians. If you know the map, you know Italy was right next door. And were Hitler -- not for a long time, but he got overthrown. And that's when the Germans came down from there and started --

[No Audible]

>> Bill Benson: What was life like for your family?

>> Marcel Hodak: Made goats clothes. It was made out of goat skin.

>> Bill Benson: Were you in hiding in Bride-les-Bains?

>> Marcel Hodak: You can say that. I don't remember wearing the Jewish star at that point. My aunts, who you saw a picture of, was in Paris. And when they came down, I don't remember anybody wearing the Jewish star.

>> Bill Benson: And I think you told me that you didn't change your names. So you're

somewhat clandestine but not really hidden, living sort of openly.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. Open hiding. That's the hardest thing to find.

>> Bill Benson: So clearly, clearly, people must have known you were Jews in that town. Or did they?

>> Marcel Hodak: They may have, but they were more protective than they were to give away people. They knew retribution would be had by the underground. On top of that, I have one of my cousins lost their parents there. She's the one that wrote the book.

What happened is that the Germans sent her little sister to find my cousin. And the underground told her that she shouldn't go back to her cousin, her parents, because the Germans would take them all away. That's how she was saved. She ended up joining the underground with my brother.

>> Bill Benson: Is she the one who wrote the book?

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about her.

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, that's how I was able to find most of my storied -- to me, that part of my life was blank. One, I was awfully young. I was the youngest of the whole family, actually, except for the baby that you saw in the picture. I really -- I thought it was all basically a game to run away. I guess I was frightened of Germans. Yes, I knew about the Germans. My parents would be speaking in Yiddish. And I would understand what they would say. So, yeah, it was an exciting time.

>> Bill Benson: As you were describing, just sort of to summarize it, because you were

somewhat protected by the mountains, the resistance was around, they tracked who they thought were collaborationists.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: So in some ways I think you've explained that anybody who might have been inclined to denounce a Jew or not friendly to the Germans, they did that at risk because of the resistance.

>> Marcel Hodak: And they paid dearly at the end of the war.

>> Bill Benson: I'm hoping when we get to that, you'll tell us about that.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about your siblings at that point. They're older. They're doing different things.

>> Marcel Hodak: My middle brother, Achilles, as you mentioned before, continued his schooling. My older brother stopped his schooling and decided he would rather be fighting against the Germans. And he joined the underground.

>> Bill Benson: What did he do?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, I don't think he did very much -- my brother-in-law, also in the underground, called him one time. My brother was a wise guy. He aimed that he was going to shoot a German who was on the balance -- you know, on the tree, started to swing. My brother wanted to be a wise guy and shoot him. My brother-in-law says, get down, don't shoot. They were surrounded by Germans.

>> Bill Benson: So he stopped him from doing that.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: You had told me that when the resistance Maquis folks would come down into the town, that was a big deal.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir. I got to carry my brother's rifle. It was bigger than me. I was dragging it more than carrying it.

>> Bill Benson: As you said earlier --

>> Marcel Hodak: And I was proud.

>> Bill Benson: I'm sure you were very proud. And when they came down to the mountains often, as you mentioned earlier, they brought food stuff.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir.

>> Bill Benson: Where did they get that?

>> Marcel Hodak: From the Americans who parachuted food stuff from the Free French in England. They would send food over to feed the troops.

>> Bill Benson: Feed the resistance as well. Right?

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: So they're supplying the resistance with food, dropping it in their mountains. And then they would bring it down and share it in the town.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. Well, they had no choice. We had to eat.

>> Bill Benson: But still, the fact they came down and did that.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Despite the fact that you were somewhat protected from the Germans

because of the resistance, there were still times they came into town.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. One day, the balcony that we saw where my mother was standing, we saw six trucks parked in front of the house. I'm not sure that these were not the trucks that picked up my aunt and uncle. But they would park on the bottom of the apartment. And we were playing in the balcony. When we saw them, we actually ran in and hid under a table. And then we heard a knock on the door. A "knock." It was more like a banging down the door. My friend who I was playing with was a French person. He went and opened the door. The German at the door says:

[Speaking in foreign language]

It means I want a glass of water. And like a big dummy, my friend says, I don't understand German, in French we're talking. And he asked several times. I says he wants a glass of water.

>> Bill Benson: In German.

>> Marcel Hodak: In German. I translated it into French. My friend gave him the glass of water. Then the guy turned around to me and said -- [speaking German]

Which means, you are Jewish. And I said, no! And my friend also said, no. The more I think about it, the more I realized that those trucks were picking up the Jews at that time.

>> Bill Benson: He thought he had one here. You said no.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yeah. In reality they could have taken me and I would never be here. You would never hear my speech.

>> Bill Benson: You also described a really tragic incident where one of the trucks --

>> Marcel Hodak: The kids used to play around. You know, girls, boys. Used to play around. A 5-year-old girl was playing. And one of these trucks ran over her, completely smashed her. There was nothing left. Could pick it up by a sponge. The whole town went in a panic. But they couldn't do anything because these Germans had guns with them. It was very tragic.

>> Bill Benson: As you started to say a little while ago, for those that might have been inclined to be collaborationists with the Germans or to denounce Jews or members of the resistance, that retribution would come. We'll jump ahead to after the war. Tell us a little bit about that.

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, after the war what happened is that they would gather all of these people that they knew, the girl, women with the Germans, dancing or drinking or whatever you want were brought into the town square. And they sat them down on chairs and sheared their hair off. And when I mean shear, they cut their hair -- you know, when they use scissors. You actually make cuts in the head. These gals were sheared down. And the men were beaten up. Some of them unconsciously. They were beaten up in the main square.

>> Bill Benson: As the retribution for having --

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir.

>> Bill Benson: Corroborating. Yeah.

Your sister married a local fellow. Right?

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that. During the war.

>> Marcel Hodak: During the war. Well, he was not Jewish. Broke my parents' heart. His mother owned one of the hotels in the town. I don't really -- he was in the underground.

>> Bill Benson: Did that make it more acceptable when your parents realized?

>> Marcel Hodak: No.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Marcel Hodak: Not at all. There was always fireworks between them.

>> Bill Benson: In August of 1944, your family moved back to Paris.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir.

>> Bill Benson: What made that possible and what happened?

>> Marcel Hodak: The Germans were completely losing the war. As they went back, we went forward. There was, what I imagine -- because I don't really remember -- is that we kept on going until we went back to our house.

>> Bill Benson: So D-Day June 6, 1944. But by August you were able to get back to Paris.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir. And that's when I saw the parade. What a nice parade. The Americans march with 12 across. But this was 24 people across. And there was thousands and thousands of American troops.

>> Bill Benson: You described it as just an extraordinary event.

>> Marcel Hodak: Of course it was. It was even nicer because they were Americans.

>> Bill Benson: And Eisenhower, De Gaulle, all of those folks.

>> Marcel Hodak: All of those fellows were there. And Leclerc.

>> Bill Benson: You also said that even though the Americans, the allied troops had come in, D-Day at Normandy, making their way. The resistance, you told me, played a really important

role.

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, they were fighting in the streets and shooting the Germans to make them go out of town. Paris, if you ever go to Paris, you can see bullet holes all over the big buildings. You can see plaques that were set up for all of the French that died fighting.

>> Bill Benson: I think you said that the resistance really were the ones who liberated Paris itself.

>> Marcel Hodak: The resistance, if you look at it. The communists as well as the Jews were the fighters.

>> Bill Benson: A lot of Jews and communists made up much of the resistance in France.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir.

>> Bill Benson: When you got back to Paris, August 1944, the war itself would go on for -- until May 1945. But not in France. Were you able to move back into your home?

>> Marcel Hodak: We went back to our home, yes. You want the address? I could give you the address. I'll never forget it.

>> Bill Benson: That's right.

What was life like for the family, to your knowledge?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, I went back to school. My mother made me arms, protections, you know. We used to write with ink. It was so your shirts don't get dirty. We used to wear aprons when we went to school so we don't dirty our clothes. I learned the alphabet. Just what you learn in school.

>> Bill Benson: Even though, as you said, France was liberated, you're back in Paris. What

were conditions like during -- because the war is still going on?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, food was still scarce. And we used to, actually, get care packages from Brooklyn.

>> Bill Benson: From Brooklyn?

>> Marcel Hodak: My aunt used to send us care packages. We had all of this food stuff coming in, which brings up the story you learned before.

>> Bill Benson: The story I'm waiting for.

>> Marcel Hodak: My aunt sent us a box of soap. Tide or something. I don't know. Did they have Tide at that time? Oxydol. And my sister, who was taking English, she wanted to be a stenographer, she was taking English. And she saw S-O-A-P and said, that means soup. My mother finally got a chicken, and she put it in a big pot and put the soap, the suds, in the soup. And water to make chicken soup.

>> Bill Benson: I did want you to tell that story.

>> Marcel Hodak: And we had the cleanest chicken you could ever make.

[Laughter]

And we had soap all over the kitchen.

>> Bill Benson: At what point did your parents think that they wanted to leave France?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, they saw the anti-Semitism that had gone on in France which really had not stopped. It's still going on today. And my aunt kept begging my father to come to live in New York. She says, I'll find you a job, you'll be able to eat and have food on the table. Come on down. And my father said, sounds like an idea.

Well, the only problem was is that America had quotas during that period. And the quota says when you leave from a certain country, you have to be part of that quota. Well, my brothers and I were born in Paris. So we were considered French. And nobody in France really wanted to come to America. Everybody liked the Eiffel Tower, I guess. But at that point we weren't able to get the papers to come to the United States right away.

>> Bill Benson: So the quota was large enough and not enough people choosing to go that you could come under the French quota.

>> Marcel Hodak: We came right away.

>> Bill Benson: But your parents couldn't.

>> Marcel Hodak: My parents couldn't. We ended up in Brooklyn and in the Bronx.

>> Bill Benson: They had become French citizens. I know the Germans stripped it away.

>> Marcel Hodak: It's not counted. It's where you were born.

>> Bill Benson: So even though they were French citizens, the fact that they were born in Romania, and Romania had a small quota --

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir. East Europe. And you come from East Europe, almost the same requirements as the Germans gave it.

>> Bill Benson: So they couldn't come at that time.

>> Marcel Hodak: That's correct.

>> Bill Benson: So you and your brothers. What about your sister?

>> Marcel Hodak: My sister didn't want to leave. She had a husband and child.

>> Bill Benson: Did she stay in Bride-les-Bains?

>> Marcel Hodak: No. She stayed in Paris. She went back to Paris. When they retired, they went down south where it's warm, not where it's cold.

>> Bill Benson: So how old were you and your brothers when you leave?

>> Marcel Hodak: I was 9 years old.

>> Bill Benson: And your brothers were?

>> Marcel Hodak: My brothers were 20 and 19.

>> Bill Benson: 20, 19, and then you as a 9-year-old. They bring you.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. And I was very sad. I was looking for my parents when I went on the boat. And when we got to New York, we arrived at a time when the AFL's or CIO, one of them, decided to go on strike, longshoremen's strike. We stayed on the boat for a week without being able to get off the boat.

>> Bill Benson: What --

>> Marcel Hodak: What was that like?

>> Bill Benson: What was it like for you as a 9-year-old, after all you had been through, leaving your parents behind?

>> Marcel Hodak: Very hard. When I looked over, my uncle, my brother, my father's brother came to visit us at the boat. They knew that we were stuck there. They came. And I saw my uncle. I said, that's my dad. And my brother says, no, that's not your father, that's your uncle. That's the only time I cried.

>> Bill Benson: Did the three of you stay together once you got to New York?

>> Marcel Hodak: We stayed together, me and Achilles stayed together. My other brother

went to the Bronx.

>> Bill Benson: He was 20. Living by himself.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yeah. When he was going to get drafted, he decided it would be better in Canada.

>> Bill Benson: So he went off to Canada.

Do you remember what your perceptions were, your recollection of what it was like to come to the United States?

>> Marcel Hodak: Food was plenty. I found that the education wise, I knew more than the American children of my age. But I still had to start out with the first grade.

>> Bill Benson: You're 9 years old, know more than your counterparts, but you are put in the first grade.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. That was pretty tough.

>> Bill Benson: Yeah. How long did you stay in the first grade?

>> Marcel Hodak: I went fast. Passing. They treated me like -- well, I was a foreigner. I had to learn the language. When I learned the language, I kept jumping grades.

>> Bill Benson: You said you took four English courses in one semester.

>> Marcel Hodak: When I was in high school. One was a foreign language class, English foreign language class, something like that. The other one was my regular English class. The other one was a speech class because I had a foreign accent. The other one was another English class for something else. They kept on finding reasons why I needed to speak English.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: So you lost your French accent but picked up your Brooklyn accent.

>> Marcel Hodak: That's correct.

>> Bill Benson: All the kids called you Frenchy.

>> Marcel Hodak: That was the older days.

>> Bill Benson: When you came, was it with the total belief your parents would be behind you soon?

>> Marcel Hodak: They came five years later.

>> Bill Benson: Did you think it would take that long when you came here?

>> Marcel Hodak: No. Nobody told me. It got to the point where I was fairly lonely for my parents. Didn't pay to cry, because it's not across the street. But, yes. I missed my parents.

>> Bill Benson: And it took five years for them to get here.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir. They came for my bar mitzvah.

>> Bill Benson: And were able to stay at that point?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, yes.

>> Bill Benson: That was it.

>> Marcel Hodak: My mother -- you had to take a test, American test, where you had to know how to write. My mother never went to school, didn't know how to write. So she came to the United States with the knowledge that she couldn't be an American citizen. Or she could be an American citizen without the right to vote since she couldn't write. My father became an American citizen because he faked his way through it.

**ROUGH DRAFT TRANSCRIPT
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>> Bill Benson: And had the faculty for language and everything, as you described.

Your brother, I think you said Jean, went to Canada. Achilles did end up getting drafted. Right?

>> Marcel Hodak: He did get drafted. He went to Germany, matter of fact. He worked for headquarters because he spoke French. And the French were through there, so he became the interpreter.

>> Bill Benson: Interpreter in the U.S. Army.

Do you know what those five years were like for your parents, while they remained in France?

>> Marcel Hodak: Not at all. I know that they were close to my sister because she was the one that was there. But otherwise whether they cried for me or not, I can't tell you that.

>> Bill Benson: What was their adjustment like when they came to the United States?

>> Marcel Hodak: It was very hard. You have to really come to a foreign country when you're young. It's a lot of adjustments to your way of life to understand what you're doing, to understand what's going on around you. My father had to learn all of that stuff.

>> Bill Benson: Was he able to make a living?

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. He became a presser.

>> Bill Benson: Became a presser. Not a lumberjack.

>> Marcel Hodak: No. He became a presser.

>> Bill Benson: In 1956, you're 19 years old. You join the U.S. Air Force.

>> Marcel Hodak: I do.

>> Bill Benson: How did you end up in Paris as your first post?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, it was a very interesting thing to happen. I'm walking through the base. And I saw this place says base locator. I go there. I said, I'm looking for this guy, his name was Weinstein. He was my best friend in Brooklyn. And the guy looks at his thing, he points. I said he was my cousin. So he found him. He says, he's right next door to you. So I went to see him. Knowing this type of knowledge, I went to electrician school climbing poles and -- electrician, house to build the system.

One day I'm walking. I said, you know, I'm going to go see my commander. I went to see him. And I says, I have a sister in Paris, and I'd like to see my grandmother. She happens to be still alive at that time. Send me anyplace in Europe. I'd be very happy.

Well, I got my orders. And it has the airport right outside of Paris. And the next class one guy went to Okinawa. And that was supposed to have been my spot. So if I hadn't seen the commander --

>> Bill Benson: You would have gone to Okinawa.

What was it like to be back in France now as a member of the U.S. military?

>> Marcel Hodak: I was completely astounded. It was very hard to breathe because of the happiness that I found. The first day I was there, a worker took me to see my sister. She almost fainted, because I was at the door with a uniform on. My brother-in-law happened to be a Communist fan. So it didn't look good to see me.

>> Bill Benson: That's what he did after the resistance.

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, they all were part of that gang. 90% of the resistance being Communist. They all stuck to it.

>> Bill Benson: That must have been an awkward moment.

>> Marcel Hodak: Not for me.

[Laughter]

For him, yes.

>> Bill Benson: How long did you spend in France?

>> Marcel Hodak: That first time I spent four years.

>> Bill Benson: Wow. Did your parents come back to France to visit?

>> Marcel Hodak: Once or twice. When my mother passed away, my father decided he liked France better.

>> Bill Benson: So he returned to France.

>> Marcel Hodak: He went back to France.

>> Bill Benson: Your brother Jean, who moved to Canada, you referred to him as sort of the family historian. Just say a little bit about him.

>> Marcel Hodak: Destroyer?

>> Bill Benson: Historian. Historian.

[Laughter]

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, he was that, too.

[Laughter]

**ROUGH DRAFT TRANSCRIPT
NOT A VERBATIM RECORD**

My brother knew everybody. He was a furrier, which today he wouldn't make a dime. But he was a furrier. He spoke Yiddish. It was a Yiddish trade, a Jewish trade. He spoke Yiddish to a lot of people. He found cousins. He found uncles. He found out that I had a cousin in Russia that was a colonel in the Army. He found all of these things.

My brother knew everything and he remembered everything. He met a friend of ours. He sat down. He looked at him up and down. He says, you I know. He says, you were in the school at this time with this teacher. The guy says, you're right. He says, I was in the same class as you.

>> Bill Benson: Wow. Marcel, you and your siblings all survived, and your parents. But you came from a very large, extended family. What about the rest of the family?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, they stayed in France. The French stayed in France. They had their own children. They had their own -- my father kept in contact with everybody. And then when he went back, they were all happy to receive him. But he ended up being heart broken by he lost his wife.

>> Bill Benson: Let's turn to our audience to see if they have some questions. I think we can probably get some questions from this large group.

If you have a question -- we have a hand up already. We're going to bring you a microphone. Wait until you get the microphone before you ask your question. Try to make it as brief as you can. And if I think it might not have been heard by everybody in the room, I'll repeat it. Otherwise we'll rely on the microphone.

**ROUGH DRAFT TRANSCRIPT
NOT A VERBATIM RECORD**

Roberta, we have a volunteer right here.

>> I don't think you shared what it was like when your parents did come to New York. What it was like when you saw them.

>> Bill Benson: What was it like for you when your parents came to New York? What was that like for you?

>> Marcel Hodak: Well, I was very happy. I was a family again.

>> Bill Benson: You were 14, I think. Right?

>> Marcel Hodak: I was 14. It was something, to have your mother tell you what to do and to have a mother that cooks the food that you like.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember the day they arrived?

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes. We had to go to the pier to pick them up. And they didn't have to go through -- they came down directly off the boat. They were on land. Whereas when I came, usually you went to Ellis Island. I am in books in the Ellis Island. I never went there. Because of the strike, they decided we were enough on the boat.

>> Bill Benson: In that five years, that changed so they didn't have to go to Ellis Island.

>> Marcel Hodak: Right. It went out of style.

>> Bill Benson: Another question?

Right in the middle back there, Roberta.

>> Bonjour, Marcel. You came here and made a life for you in America. What was it like after leaving the Air Force?

>> Bill Benson: What was your life like after leaving the Air Force?

**ROUGH DRAFT TRANSCRIPT
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>> Marcel Hodak: The Air Force taught me a beautiful job. Ended up in computers. So at that time computers was the biggest thing that you could ever do in your lifetime. I had beautiful jobs. Lots of money. Spent it all.

[Laughter]

But I had a very good life.

>> I just noticed you speak in French and English interchangeably. Do you ever speak French and not know you're doing it, not know the difference between French and English?

>> Bill Benson: Do you ever speak sort of French and English interchangeably and not realize you're speaking French?

>> Marcel Hodak: That's correct.

[Speaking foreign language.]

On the plane I did it. I was watching a French movie. Then I turned to her and said something. She didn't understand what I said.

>> Bill Benson: Another question. Right here. A young man right in the middle.

>> [Audience comment]

>> Bill Benson: What would you do to solve things like the Holocaust from happening again?

>> Marcel Hodak: That is a very good question. If anybody knew the answer, it would be a wonderful world. The only problem is everybody wants to have what the other person has. When that stops, maybe it will work.

>> Bill Benson: Good question.

A question I want to ask you before we end. You've said to me

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that you're the only one now remaining from your family.

>> Marcel Hodak: Yes, sir.

>> Bill Benson: That's very painful. Would you be willing to say a little bit about it?

>> Marcel Hodak: It's more than painful, actually. You have really nobody to speak with -- well, she'd get mad if I say it. But you really have no closeness that you have with your own siblings and your own parents. That's lacking. It's almost like going back to 1946, except I can speak better.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: We're going to close the program in just a moment. I'm going to turn back to Marcel to close the program. But before I do, I'd like to thank all of you for being here, for being such a good audience.

We'll have *First Person* programs every Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. If you have the chance to return, we hope you will. You can also get a lot of information about all of our *First Person* guests on the website at the museum.

When Marcel is done, he'll step down off the stage here. So if anybody wants to come up and speak in French to him or ask him more questions, or just say hi, please, absolutely feel free to do that.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. And so on that note, I will turn it to Marcel to close our program.

>> Marcel Hodak: I really don't like to have the last word, but at any rate.

**ROUGH DRAFT TRANSCRIPT
NOT A VERBATIM RECORD**

I didn't know I was a survivor until a friend of mine actually threatened me to go to the museum and talk to them and see if they would hire me because I have a lot to offer. She remembered -- it was a childhood friend. She remembered that I had come from France.

A thing I forgot to speak about is when I got to the United States, I was given fruits. I ended up with an orange. I really didn't know what to do with an orange because I never saw one before in my life. I ate it like an apple. Everybody got excited. Good thing I didn't do that with a banana.

[Laughter]

At any rate, I didn't know I was a survivor until the museum more or less advised me that I was a survivor because of what I had passed through. They asked me to give them a history of my life. I wrote down a lot of what we had just discussed. And they said, you are now a survivor.

My thing is, for the young man that just asked me the question, it goes along the same thing. When you're in the middle of a war or anything, you don't realize what's happening to you. And the way to combat this thing about the Holocaust is to keep up the will to fight the prejudices that go on in the world.

That's my advice.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Marcel.

>> Marcel Hodak: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Marcel.

[The presentation ended 1:58 p.m.]