

Wednesday, June 12, 2013

1:00 p.m. – 2:03 p.m.

**UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
DAVID BAYER**

REMOTE CART

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>> Bill Benson: Good afternoon, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 14th year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Mr. David Bayer, 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 firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The Museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our *First Person* guests.

David Bayer will share with us his *First Person* account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor. The life stories of each Holocaust survivor are unique. What you are about to hear from David is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. And we begin with this 1945 portrait of David Bayer taken in his hometown after liberation.

On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Poland, where David was born September 27, 1922, which means in September David will celebrate his 91st

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birthday.

On this map of Poland, the arrow points to the approximate location of Kozenice, David's hometown. Here is a contemporary photograph of David's home in Kozenice.

In this 1938 photo of a Zionist youth group, we see David's brother, Joshua. He is in the third row, third from the left.

In 1939, German troops invaded Poland, starting the Second World War. The next year the Bayers were forced to move into the Kozenice Ghetto. Here we see a view of the Kozenice Ghetto through the barbed wire fence that enclosed it.

In September 1942, the ghetto was liquidated and its inhabitants, including members of David's family, were deported to the Treblinka killing center. The arrow points to Treblinka. David was taken to Pionki, an industrial complex that produced munitions. In 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz. Our second arrow points to Auschwitz. This photo shows a fence around the barracks in the main camp of Auschwitz 1.

As the Soviet Army neared, David and the other prisoners were sent on a Death March. However, David managed to escape into the forest and was found by the Soviets. He spent two years in the Foehrenwald Displaced Persons Camp in Germany. Here we have a map of the major camps for Jewish D.P.'s, or displaced persons, with the arrow pointing to the Foehrenwald Displaced Persons Camp.

In this next photo, David, in the first row, third from the left, and his friends pose at an airport near the D.P. camp in 1946.

Here we see David with a friend at the Foehrenwald Displaced Persons Camp, D.P. Camp, in 1947. Later that year David moved to Panama. We close with two photos from Panama.

First, we see David in front of a gate to a synagogue in Panama City. And second, we see David standing by his employer's horse in Panama City.

After a remarkable year in Panama, David went to Israel as a soldier in the War of Independence. He saw a great deal of combat as the state of Israel was created. Eventually David returned to Panama before coming to the United States to start a family and a new life. Today David and his wife Adele live just outside of Washington, D.C. The Bayers have two children, daughter Sandra and son Mark, and two grandchildren. Their grandson, Josh, who served in the Israeli Army, is here in Washington, D.C., working as an engineer. Their granddaughter, Jennifer, just graduated from the University of Kansas.

David volunteers his time in the museum's Registry on Wednesdays and often on other days. The Registry is the office where he researches and compiles lists of those who survived the Holocaust, as well as those who perished. Among other purposes, The Registry helps make it possible for survivors, family members, and others, to find those whom may have survived.

In addition to our *First Person* program, David speaks frequently about his Holocaust experience. Next week, for example, David will speak at Montgomery College in suburban Maryland.

With that, I'd like you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*,

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Mr. David Bayer.

[Applause]

David, thank you so much for joining us.

>> David Bayer: Hello.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. You have so much to share with us in this -- just a short period of time.

>> David Bayer: Not enough time.

>> Bill Benson: Not enough time. We'll get as far as we can. Let's start very briefly, David, with you telling us a little bit about your family, your life, your community, and you in those years before the war began.

>> David Bayer: All right. I was born September 27, 1922. My father had a shoe factory in a town, Kozienice, Poland. When the Germans came in 1939, I was 16 going on 17, a young boy going to school, playing soccer, living in a nice house, helped my family and the factory. I had a sister, 19 years old, a little brother 12, and a little sister 8. My father and mother were 41 and 42.

The Germans came in. We ran away to the forest. We came back. We came to our house. It was full of German soldiers helping themselves with shoes, leather, private things, particularly my mother's dishes. They cluttered the whole house. We walked in, the Germans were laughing. They were telling us, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" "This is our house." They took everything that they could. My mom was crying. They took my mother's Passover dishes and broke half of it.

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>> Bill Benson: Those Passover dishes had been in your family for hundreds of years.

>> David Bayer: Hundreds of years. All antiques. They took the silverware. Everything they could. Even the sheets for the bed. Everything. Took everything they needed. And they keep coming back because the house was visible. It was close from the church. It was a big house. We had a backyard with a shop. We used to have about 25 people working for us. My father was selling the shoes all over Poland.

Well, we came in one day to the house. The Germans, they took me to work for them. Clean the truck, take out the battery from the truck, which I never could do that because I never had the truck. We never had cars in our home. And I struggled to take the battery from under a truck out. They gave me a pair of pliers only. I was cold. It was September. It was snowing, on the ground. I spilled the acid from the battery on top of me and made a hole -- my skin was visible. I was crying. And the Germans were laughing and taking pictures. I begged to go home to change my clothes. They didn't let me go. Finally it was dark until they let me go home. No food, no nothing.

This was going on every day. One day they took my father. Came into the house. "Let's go," with guns in their hands. And my father had been working behind the church, covering ditches. My father and a lot of other people. The Germans were laughing and making fun of them. My mother was home crying. She asked me, "Please, exchange yourself for your father." That's what I did. I went. I motioned to my father to sneak away, and I took his place. I could take it. And then they let me go again.

Then they took my uncle, my father's brother. And this time it

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was a big Gestapo man who treated my uncle very nicely. My uncle was shining his shoes, cleaning his room, washing his laundry like a house boy. So my uncle asked the Gestapo man if I could be exchanged for him. He agreed, and I went to work for that German. He was a husky, big guy. He was in charge of the whole area in my town.

They kicked out the police out of the complex. They took over the whole area: farms, cows, horses. This guy was very good to me. He gave me food every time I go home in the evening. And also I was translating for him from Polish to German and German to Polish. And one day he put me to a dungeon, in another room which -- with an open door and steps going down. There was a Polish young man locked up there. He was maybe 18 or 19 years old. Young, handsome young man. He asked me to translate for him. They accused that boy of having a gun. They find him sleeping in a barn. There was a gun somewhere hidden there, and the Germans find the gun. And they accused him that he had the gun. He keeps saying this was not his gun. He didn't even know there was something like this over there. He was crying. He said -- I didn't know that boy. He was not from my hometown. Must have been from somewhere else. Maybe three, four days he was trying. He said this was not his gun.

One day, I went down with him, with the Germans. German took a pistol and shot him. Talked, talk, talk. He would keep saying "It's not my gun." So he shot him. I had to pick him up. Another guy helped me bury him in a field. He's probably still there. And this was a good German to me. He could shoot me for nothing.

So then I stopped work over there. He moved somewhere else.

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He wanted me to go with him. I was like, I cannot go. I had to work in an irrigation canal. You had to work for the Germans. If you don't work, they send you away to who knows where, to Auschwitz or somewhere.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to stop you for a minute. There was an incident that you told me about. I thought it was with the same Gestapo officer involving the veterinarian.

>> David Bayer: Yeah, Dr. Gonszer. Gestapo used to come in. People make fun of him. Jewish people. One day they brought in a group, maybe 10 or 15 old men and also one heavysset guy. I recognized him. He was a doctor. He was a veterinarian. He was named Dr. Gonszer. He was a Jew, who in other towns we called him assimilated. He was not religious. He was always speaking Polish. The Jewish people in Poland had two languages: Polish and Yiddish. This man only speak Polish. His wife is a dentist. A doctor played tennis. Like high society.

This Dr. Gonszer said, "Sorry, I'm not Jewish, I'm not Jewish."

But they know he was Jewish. Somebody probably told them he was Jewish. But he was not practicing no religion. And there was one Jewish man carrying a bible, parchment, Holy Book of Moses. They made him dance in the fire, around the fire. And then they pulled it apart and throw it on the fire and burned it. They made Dr. Gonszer dance, too. He was too heavysset and couldn't do it. He fell on the fire a few times.

Then when I walked out to see, they grabbed me and made me dance around, too. Then my Gestapo man saw me. He right away took me away. He said, "This is my man. Don't bother him." I told him about Dr. Gonszer, that he's a veterinarian. So

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the German came and took the doctor away from the group and put him in the stables, because he was a veterinarian, knew about horses and everything else.

In Auschwitz, you keep coming back to work every day. He came back maybe two times. The third time he didn't come back no more. What happened to him? He and his wife and daughter commit suicide. They cut their veins. His wife, the daughter was raped by a bunch of Germans. So Dr. Gonszer was gone.

I still worked with that Gestapo man. After that, when he left, I went to work for the canal. But 400 to 500 young people were digging a canal, 70 kilometers from my hometown. Why digging the canal? The Polish government, before the war, started an irrigation canal because the big river in Poland overflows the fields. So the Germans continued that, but with Jewish labor. A shovel. No machine, nothing. We have to dig canals. And they gave us a piece of bread, soup. That's all.

Meantime, they kicked us out from our house. All of the people who lived outside the Jewish neighborhood had to move out to a ghetto. About 8,000 people in a small area. We have got one room. My family got one room. I couldn't even -- I slept on the floor. I had no other place to sleep.

The Germans took everything away. We only carry what we could carry. Our machinery, everything was taken away. Then from there, I went to work in the canal every morning, early in the morning, came home late at night. And one day they don't tell us I cannot go home -- they tell us, I cannot go home no more. I have to stay at the canal. They build a barrack. We stay there.

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What happened? They took my whole family, my hometown, and they shipped it away to Treblinka. This was September 27, 1942, my birthday. My birthday, September 27. And this was 1942. They killed my whole family and all the people in my town. We didn't believe they were going to kill us. Nobody believed that they were going to kill all the people at one time. They would keep you working somewhere or something. Nobody believed.

Then I worked in the canal. And every day I slipped away. Where did I go? To the fields to look for potatoes. I went to farmers, begged for bread. And one day when I came back to the canal, there was nobody near the canal working. Only the shovels. What happened? I met the farmer. He told me the Germans took everybody away. Where did they take them? The factories in Poland.

I didn't know what to do. I went to a farmer I knew. He kept me for two days in his barn. And then he told me that some people left my hometown in the ghetto, some Jewish people. So I said, "Take me there." So he arranged for me and he took me to that town. There was about 30 or 40 people left. The German left them to clean up. What do you mean clean up? Take everything out of the houses. And the Germans would -- for the farmers. Furniture, clothing, whatever. 8,000 people. Something was left. They sold everything, give away everything.

And from there I went to Radom, a big city. The Germans took everybody, cleaned it up, went to Radom.

>> Bill Benson: One question. When you went back into the ghetto as they were cleaning it

out and you knew your family were all gone, did you know what happened to your family?

>> David Bayer: No. We knew they took them away. They shipped them east. But we didn't know if they took them to an extermination. They used to call it resettlement. You go and build houses and resettle. But this was all lies. I find out about that later. Right there I didn't know. We didn't believe that somebody would kill people for nothing. So I went to work in a factory, Pionki. It was a big complex in the forest. I knew it was there, but they build it before the war. A big, tremendous factory. They make powder for bullets. And I went there to work. How did I go there? When the Germans came to pick up young people in the ghetto, I volunteered. But every time I volunteered, they didn't want to take me because I didn't have no suitcases. I didn't have nothing to carry. I just had the clothes that I was wearing. They pushed me away.

One day, a few trucks, Germans, German soldiers, came and asked for volunteers. So there was a couple of elderly people, which they didn't want to take old people. Only young people. Came over to me. They knew me. They knew my parents. They said, "Dave, here, two bundles." They give it to me. When I walked over to the truck with the two bundles, the Germans took me. And I went to work at the factory.

What happened when I came to the factory? They took away my bundles. That's why they wanted bundles. Every Jew had money, gold, things like this. So they robbed me. I never knew what was inside anyhow. So then I worked in the factory. I became an expert in making powder. The Germans taught me how to make powder for bullets.

For two years I was an expert. There was sabotage over there, explosions, fire. There were things that we did that was unbelievable stories. But I don't have much time to talk about it, but I will tell you about one story.

There was one guy who was a smoker. For cigarettes, would give away his rations, breads, everything for a cigarette. And one night, the night shift, his job was to take the cotton, which we produced the powder, put on a conveyor, and the conveyor was coming to my department, which I mixed in with chemicals. He was smoking the cigarette, fell out of his mouth, and there was a fire. Why did it fall out? Because he was so tired. He worked 12 hours a day for himself and for somebody else who give him cigarettes. Bread or something. He gave away his ration for a cigarette. The fire went to my building. We stopped working. The Germans came in. They're going to kill us. That's what they do. They killed you right away for anything you do wrong.

There were two Germans. I have to mention their names. One was Dr. Vitta, and one was another doctor. Two German civilians charged in my factory. They persuaded the Gestapo not to kill us because we are experts. We know what we are doing. If they kill us, they have to train other people, and the factory would not start working. So they saved our lives.

In the meantime, they -- they beat us bloody. The next day they said, "Go back to work." So that's what happened in the Pionki.

>> Bill Benson: David, two things. First, the work that you did was very dangerous in the munitions factory. But tell us, also, what your life was like. How did you eat? What were the

conditions like there?

>> David Bayer: Ok. We worked with civilians, Polish people, who were coming to work in the factory and then would go home. We worked together next to them. The Polish people brought their lunch, their food. And the Germans gave us only one ration. In the morning they gave you bread. When you come home at night, they give you soup. But nobody wants to keep the bread because you're scared you will lose it, somebody will steal it. So you eat everything at one time. The whole day you're starving.

But they also gave us clothing, clothing from people who they killed and we didn't even know. Shoes, jackets. The people who the Germans took away to kill. So sometimes I got a good coat. I have sold it to a Polish worker. He gave me sandwiches, food. And then I met a woman who was working with the cotton. She, every once in a while, left me something. Her lunch, she left me. She said, "I bring you something." Every day she brought me something. So this made strength in working. Otherwise we would fall apart.

>> Bill Benson: David, you tried to escape from Pionki.

>> David Bayer: I escaped, yeah. I wouldn't have time to tell everything.

>> Bill Benson: Not everything, but tell about your one attempt to escape with the other fellow.

>> David Bayer: Everybody wanted to escape all the time. I escaped twice. One time I got shot in the leg here. And I was lying in the snow, pretending to be dead. And they killed three other guys next to me.

But one time there was a guy. He was a Pol, big guy. His job

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was to take out the chemicals from the tankers, to connect it to the building. He said he wanted to run away. "We have a place here. We can join the underground fighters in the forest. There's Polish underground soldiers fighting the Germans." I say, "I'm ready." So we sneaked out and we walked in the forest. We walked. We walked. We walked. We came to an intersection. There was a big poster, 10 liters of vodka bring in a prisoner. 10 liters of vodka bring in a Jew. We saw this and started turning back.

There was a farmer standing there cutting wheat or whatever, grass. He motioned to us. Motioned back. Said "run." I don't trust him. "Run." We saw the poster. We know that for 10 liters of vodka, they give away their mother. Alcohol is big in Poland. So we run back. This was in the factory, not in the camp. Because the factory -- in the camp, where we slept, it was different. I went back to work. And that's it.

>> Bill Benson: I was going to ask, as the Russians began to get closer, they took you out of Pionki.

>> David Bayer: I have one thing before. When I went to school in Virginia one day, young children, 13, 14 years old. And a boy asked me a question. Did I ever encounter a good German? So I told him a story what happened in Pionki in the factory.

When the Russians were pushing the Germans back, the Germans tried to dismantle the factory, take the machinery out, ship it to Germany. We didn't go to work anymore. We stayed in camp. And every once in a while a German with escort came in, 20 people, 15 people, 10 people. He wanted people to work. And nobody -- they didn't give us food, didn't give us water. We had no electricity. It was really bad. So everyone

was hiding under the bed. The camp was a tremendous, big camp. 2,000 people in that camp. The Germans grabbed whoever they could.

One day a good German who I used to work with, engineer, a civilian, a nice guy, he came in. We saw him walking in from the gate. Whoever saw him was running to him. Everybody was raising their hand, "Take me! Take me!" People were stampeding to him because he was a nice guy. He pulled a pistol and shot in the crowd. Killed a man. This was a good German.

I told that boy that, and the boy was like, "I don't understand. I'm going to have to talk to my father." I don't understand to this day myself! And he was a good German. He said hello to you. He said thank you. He was polite. He speaks to you. He never hurt you, never kicked you. He would only take care of his job. So this was good German.

>> Bill Benson: But, David, as the Russians get closer, now they take you out of Pionki and take you to Auschwitz.

>> David Bayer: Well, when the Russians were advancing, we had bombardment and everything else. We were waiting. We had no food, no nothing. The Germans got the train. They wanted to take us to Germany. They didn't tell us where we were going. But I had to tell a story about a man's wife.

There was one guy came in to Pionki when I was still working in the factory. He was in the ghetto, my hometown. He was shipped to Treblinka with the whole family. And all of a sudden he came in to Pionki. He said, "I went to Treblinka, and they killed

all 8,000 people." We called him crazy. We didn't believe him. He told us -- "so how did you come back?" He said the Germans picked him up because he was a tall, handsome, big man. He was loading the trains to take the people to Germany. He hid in the wagon. He came out, jumped the train from somewhere. He came to our camp. Because his sister was working there, too. His name was Max. He told us the Germans killed everybody. I asked him, "Max, did they kill my father, my mother, my sisters?" "Everybody. They're dead. They gassed them in one night." So we called him crazy.

When the Germans were taking us on the train in Pionki, shipping us to Auschwitz, he says, "I am not going on no train." He run through the barbed wire and tried to escape. They shot him right there and was hanging on the wire. Dead. This was Max. The reason I mention his name, I don't want to ever forget about it.

Finally we came to Auschwitz. But what happened to me in the meantime, in Pionki -- I still have to tell what happened to me in Pionki. The work I was doing was very dangerous. The gases eat me up. My glands were swollen. I have to have masks. The Germans and Poles were given masks. We didn't have no masks. We just put rags in our face. No food. Butter, milk. We didn't have no good food at all. Potatoes, that's all. And everybody -- I had a Polish supervisor. I begged him, "Would you give me another job?" Finally he did give me a job in a locomotive. Transfer the cotton and put it into rollers for other department. And I was transported in a little train. And one day the train exploded, and I got burnt: my arms, my face, my legs. So I didn't go to work anymore. I stayed in the camp. But I came to Auschwitz. I still had the crust on my face. When I got off the train, a guy who

was helping us getting off the trains asked me what happened to me. So I said that I got through an explosion. "I'm a chemist. I made powder. If the German ask you, tell them you're a chemist and make powder." Sure enough, an officer came over, "What happened to you?" "I'm a chemist. Make powder in a munition factory." He put me aside. I didn't go to the back to be killed. And I stayed with about 30, 40 people, groups, on the side. And they put me in the gypsy camp where all the gypsies were living. It was a barrack. I was there recuperating. My arms, my hands. A guy came in, a doctor came in -- also a prisoner. He says, "Here, clean this. It will help." And it cleaned up.

Then the Germans kept me for a while. All the big shots, Germans, came and took me to work in a coal mine. This was the worst place on earth. You go down eight miles underground. 100, 200 people, 180, 150 come out alive and you're lucky. Every day somebody else died there. No food. They don't give you much to eat. They give you some black water. It's not coffee. And a piece of bread, like glue. And you have to go a few miles to the coal mine. You go down there. You never know if you get out.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what your quota was.

>> David Bayer: Yeah. We had to make 18 wagons of coal, 18 wagons to produce.

>> Bill Benson: Each of you, each person.

>> David Bayer: Little wagons, in the coal mine. You have to produce the coal. They give you a number. You hang the number underneath. If you don't produce, you stay over another shift. You don't get out.

A lot of people had cheated. That's what we do when we took

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the number off from the other previous one and others. Continue, the same coal was going here, back and forth. We never produced much. And then the shovel. They give us a shovel. The Germans give you a heart-shaped shovel, weighs 10 kilos. I couldn't lift it. A lot of times I picked the coal up with my hands.

And then there was a German supervisor. A Nazi, a murderer. He used to walk around with a walking stick with a copper handle. He was supposed to check. But he was -- he hit people for nothing. If you didn't rush fast, he hit you over the head and killed you. He killed a lot of people for nothing.

There was a Polish miner, a nice guy. He was the one putting the dynamite in. And one day he told us, "When I tell you to move, you should move." All of a sudden, the Germans came around. And the Polish miner blow the explosion. The Germans got killed. They decided it was an accident. He stepped on it. But actually the Polish killed them. What happened? There was a young man working with us. His name was Rubin, a religious -- he was 16 years old when they brought him from Auschwitz. He was a replacement for somebody who died in my group. Rubin was continually praying, day and night, morning. Whenever they looked at him, he whispered in sound. Prayed all the time, in Hebrew, from memory. He wasn't religious or nothing. We called him crazy. Said, "He's crazy." When the Germans die, the explosion, he said, "Didn't God help us?" He prayed to God all the time. Then I said to myself, maybe he got something there. You know? From then on -- God is not going to help us. My mother prayed, everybody prayed. Didn't help us. From then on -- I had my doubts. I said, maybe. Maybe. Till today I still have trouble believing in the guy up there,

which I'm sure after I die, I'm going to do that, if I meet him.

>> Bill Benson: David, while you were at Auschwitz, you had experimental surgery done.

>> David Bayer: What?

>> Bill Benson: You had surgery done on you while you were in Auschwitz.

>> David Bayer: In Auschwitz. One day, there was a subcamp of Auschwitz, called Blechhammer, where the coal mine was. Every morning there was roll call. They line you up and call your number. My number, B74. I had no name. They took away my name. My name is B74. The guy with the list called the number. You have to raise your hand. Here it is. Well, B74. The Germans, guy with the stick, walked over to me. Said, "What are you hiding?" I had my lapel like this. My glands were swollen. He took me right away out from the line. Shipped me -- took me to a clinic in the camp. The same day they operated on me right in here. No antiseptic, no injection, nothing. Lied me down, tied me up like a pig. The puss came out, the blood came out.

Here, here is the Museum. Find the document, the German doctor who did it with his name, with the diagnosis, in Latin. Everything in Latin. With my name and my number, written on the document here. It's a copy of the document.

The doctor was named Fisher. I see his face wherever I go. He smiled when I was lying there, tied up on a table. The war was over 1945. He disappeared. They could never find him. In 1965 in East Germany somebody snitched on him. He lived 20 years after the war in a little town as a doctor. They hanged him, 1965, by the Russians.

>> Bill Benson: David, this report done by this doctor, with your B74 and your name on it, you

only recently came across it.

>> David Bayer: This was two years ago I find it. The Museum went to Germany. There's a town in Germany now which all documentation the Germans had made from all over Europe is concentrated there. And they find my name.

The people from here went to Germany. I mentioned to them before they left, "Look for me." And they got it. So the denying that it couldn't happen, it's there, black and white.

>> Bill Benson: In January 1945, one day in January 1945, you were told to come up out of the coal mine and then you were forced on a Death March after that.

>> David Bayer: When the Russians were advancing, the Germans were escaping, the highways were full of German trucks and tanks running to Germany. They took us out from our camp, from the coal mines, from everywhere, and made us march. What for? Made us stand in factories. They still want us to work.

I came out of the coal mine. And then they line us up. Everybody had to hook up arm to arm and walk. We didn't walk the main highway. We had to walk the fields, country roads, in the snow, January 1945. It was cold and snow, winter. People were dying. This is what they called the march, we had to march. We named it the Death March. Because if you fall down, a bullet in your head. Hundreds, hundreds of thousands of people were killed. My camp was maybe 2,000, 3,000, 4,000. I don't know how much people were there, but half of them died on the way.

One evening, the German soldiers went into the houses to warm

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up. Made us lie down on the snow. I noticed a lot of dogs coming and going. So the one that was praying over time, stick to me like glue. He said, "Don't go. Don't go. They're going to shoot you. They're going to shoot you." I said, "I have to go. There's dogs. There must be food." Sure enough, I crawled over in the ravine, and there was a dead horse. Dogs were grabbing pieces of meat. I grabbed a piece of meat, too. And Rubin, he was a religious boy, and he cannot eat no -- only kosher. You know? So he said, "God will forgive me, to survive." He told me to eat everything. I said, "I know that." And I ate a piece of meat. He chewed like a popsicle, himself. He survived the war and lives in Jerusalem. He's a rabbi, 11 children. What happened to him is another story. We don't have enough time.

>> Bill Benson: If we get to the end, maybe we'll have a little bit of time to say that.

You were at one point on the Death March forced into a barn.

>> David Bayer: Well, the barn. What happened, they ordered us to get in. Not because they were worried we cannot work. The Germans couldn't work themselves. Every once in a while they stopped us. "Lie down." They wanted to go eat, go warm up. But thousands of people lying on the snow. You look back and see thousands of people. That's all you see, snow and humans. Nothing else.

So one day I see a guy, a German, with a car. There was a young man. I knew him very well. He was working with me in the mine. He walked over to the Germans and said, "I fix your car." He didn't want to fix the car. He wanted to warm up under the hood. The Germans shot him. He couldn't fix the car. The Germans left the car anyway and him lying on top of the warm engine. That's what happened there.

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The barn. Talk about the barn? There was a couple. I don't know if people know it was a couple. In our camp was a German who killed his mother, and the German took him out of jail and put him in our camp, to be a murderer, to kill us. He walked around with a gold club and hit people. I got hit by him one time with a shovel. A murderer. Big, husky German with a black beret, black uniform, a band on his -- here. It said in Italian "Leader." He was marching with us. We walked into the barn. He had to go in with us, too. He never came out alive. Stampeded on the inside. And then the barn, somebody put it on fire. A lot of people didn't make it out. We were stuffed in like wood, like straw. The barn caught fire. A lot of people got burned. Didn't make it.

>> Bill Benson: David, eventually on this march you would end up at a place called Blechhammer. What happened once you got there?

>> David Bayer: The Germans stopped us in a camp called Blechhammer, also a concentration camp, but was in Germany. Over there they promised, "Tomorrow morning we will give you bread, food. Keep marching." Nobody wants to get out. Half of them cannot walk. There were Englishmen, Russian prisoners. They pushed them in that camp. I went in Block 16. I now remember that block. Not far from the barbed wire fence. This was in the forest.

The Germans were yelling, "Out!" Walk through the gates, get the bread. Nobody wants to go. Thousands of people. So they start throwing hand grenades in the barracks. Started burning them. So the Russians -- the Russian prisoners had more guts, more strength. They attacked the warehouses. There were warehouses in the middle.

The Germans were shooting. Nobody cared. We got killed. We got killed.

I was running, Russians running in the warehouse. In the warehouse there was only margarine. Margarine stuck to margarine. Wherever you look, there was margarine. So I tied up my pants. I have piled here, margarines in my shirt. I couldn't even walk anymore. Also, I find out, a can of marmalade. And there was some bread, but it went very fast. I got a piece of it.

I was afraid to go out. A lot of people didn't risk to get into the warehouse. They were waiting for me to come out. Hungry people, they're going to grab me. I had a stick in my hand and was fighting myself back to my barrack.

At my barrack, friends lying in the bunks. They wanted to go nowhere. Rubin said, "I'll go." I left him some of the margarine. Most of it I couldn't carry. Me and Rubin and some Russian prisoners went out the barbed wire and went through the forest. I stayed in that forest for six days and six nights eating the margarine and bark from pine tree, mushroom roots, and snow.

>> Bill Benson: And, David, you said that eating the margarine, a lot of it had just melted on your body.

>> David Bayer: Melted. We were running. It melted. And my body was full of dust from the coal mine. It was dirty. And we took off the clothes and scratched it off and ate. Off my body. I slept in the middle one night. Then the next night, the other slept in the middle. Three guys. We lie under a pine tree covered with snow. A lot of snow. It was snowing.

Then we decided to go out because we didn't know if the

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Russians were there or the Germans were there. Finally we came out. The Russian Army was already taking over.

A Russian soldier picked me up and carried me. When we walked out, we didn't know if they were Russian or Germans. The Russian soldiers told us, if you were walking back, they would have shot us. They didn't know who we were neither. So they picked me up and carried me like a piece of wood. They took me in a house. A German woman lived there with her daughter. He told the German woman to take care of me.

>> Bill Benson: How much did you weigh?

>> David Bayer: I weighed maybe 60 kilos. I didn't weigh myself. I couldn't walk.

>> Bill Benson: I think you lost --

>> David Bayer: I was a skeleton.

>> Bill Benson: You lost more than half your body weight.

>> David Bayer: The clothes I was wearing, the underwear I was wearing, everything fall apart already because I never changed clothes. I never got new underwear. My body was so dirty, it took the German woman two, three days to clean me up. She bathed me. This meal I got from her was a cream soup. I don't remember what kind it was. It was some kind of cream soup. Lucky she had that, because otherwise, if she had food, I would have probably died from eating.

I stayed there for maybe a week or 10 days. I don't remember exactly how long. She didn't want me to go. She said I should stay there. Then she told me why. She said because of the Russian soldiers. The Russian soldiers, the men in the house,

they don't bother the woman. But the daughter was a young woman. They raped them all.

Then when I walked on the highway, the Russian didn't take me anywhere neither. They said, "You're free. Go where you want." I walked in a German house. I stole a bicycle. Stole the bicycle. German woman started screaming, yelling. She sent the Russian soldier after me. Because the woman in the house, the German got friendly -- the Russian got friendly with the German people there. So they took away my bicycle.

>> Bill Benson: Where were you headed?

>> David Bayer: Home to Poland, my hometown. Where do I go? I had nowhere to go. I go home, and I find the home. Nobody. There was no home no more.

>> Bill Benson: You walked all the way to Kozenice?

>> David Bayer: I took a train. Sleep in some stations. Work in the German houses. Slept in empty houses. Took about a week, maybe two. I don't know how long. On the way I find people which I knew. I find my teacher. He didn't come home. He came home later, but it took him maybe two months to come home. I find my teacher. I came home to Poland. I went to tell his wife that he's alive. Made a big party for me, because I brought good news that he's alive.

>> David Bayer: Did you make it to Kozenice?

>> David Bayer: I came home, and there were people living in my house. I said, "This is my house. I lived here." They said, "No more Jews." They didn't find nothing. Didn't find nothing. I went to the big yard, the garden. This was the second time we came to Poland. I pretended that I was measuring with my feet, measuring near a tree that I supposedly buried something

there. Sure enough, I left. I come back half an hour later, people were there with shovels and digging, looking for gold. I did it purposely.

People who knew me -- I grew up there. I have so much to tell. I don't want for you to have nightmares.

You want me to tell about the woman, what happened to her? I mention before Max. He had a wife. Her name was Salta Benda. She was a nurse. She was a nurse. Her father was a barber. Her brother was a barber. But Max was an intelligence guy. He married her. She was pregnant. Maybe during the war. I don't know. But she was pregnant. This was in the ghetto. There was a Nazi. His name was Schmidtke. A murderer, Austrian German from Austria. He come into the ghetto every day with his dog, a big German Shepherd. He sees people, put the dog on them.

That day he came in. It was 1941. It was hot. Ghetto was closed. We cannot go nowhere. We have no food, no water, no facilities, no outhouses. The outhouses were falling apart because people were taking wood from the outhouses and burn for fire to keep warm, or cook or something. Salta Benda walks by, heavysset, pregnant. He put this dog on her. I was maybe a block away watching because I was scared of him. Me and another guy. She slipped. She falls in an outhouse, a hole of the outhouse. You know what the outhouse is? And after a rain, and the outhouse was never cleaned. All over the houses, oh, smells miles away. She almost drown. He was laughing and smiling. She was drowning. He walked away because he couldn't take it, the dog couldn't take it. So we pulled her out. Dragged her to our little stream. A lot of water there. Cleaned her up. She was

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sobbing and crying. She didn't live far from there. We took her home. She didn't survive the war. She had the baby. The baby survived. She gave the baby away just before September. The woman knows the story.

I met that woman in Miami years ago. That baby. She grew up. She came here. She lives in the United States. She has children. Married and everything else.

>> Bill Benson: David, you would spend two years in the Displaced Persons Camp. We're about at the end of the program shortly, but you ended up, in 1947, going to Panama. Why Panama?

>> David Bayer: All right. Why? There's hundreds of reasons, but I will tell you one reason. After the war I was free. So free man. No home, no nothing, no wife, no children, no possessions, no nothing. So I was like a bird. I was everywhere. I traveled all over Europe. I went to Russia. I went to France. I went everywhere. I had nothing to lose.

In Germany I lived in a D.P. camp. but I never was there. I roamed around. I was in competition with the American soldiers. Why? American soldiers -- the German girls. I was in my 20's. Young man. I was free. You know? So I got the whole of my hand. Americans had candy, cigarettes. I didn't have anything to compete. So I said the soldiers who liberated Europe came -- American soldiers, were -- the new ones who came in, they were competition. Me, them, we competed. So I said, eh, I go to America later. I don't need to go to America. I could have gone to the United States right away.

So Panama came up. A friend of my parents who lived in

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Panama, they saw my name on the list of survivors. Ok, go to Panama. So I went to Panama.

>> Bill Benson: And had an amazing experience there.

>> David Bayer: I went to Curacao. I lived in Paris for three months. All the money I had, I spent it in Paris, France. And I got only \$150 left. I went to Holland, to Curacao, to Colombia, Venezuela, and then Panama. I stayed there for eight years. I lived in a jungle with Indians for a year in Panama and the border of Panama, Costa Rica. This was the best year of my life, the best year, living with Indians. I was making leather for them. I was very happy there. I didn't need no television. I didn't need no radio. I bathed in the river. I was happy.

One day the Indians took me to a big town called David. The town is called David, on the border of Panama and Costa Rica, in the province. And over there I met a Jewish man from Germany. His name is Sam Sands. He had a store. He was sitting like this. It was hot. He saw me. He said, "Hey, what are you doing here? You're crazy. What are you doing here?" "What do you mean?" I lived in a place called Concepcion. Look at me, I've been here maybe 13, 14 years. I have nothing. Working here. I knew nothing. Said, "What happened to you? Why don't you go to Israel?" Israel becoming independent." It was 1948. "Israel becoming independent. The Arab going to attack them. You are a young man. You can fight for your own people." He persuaded me and I went to Israel. That was a year. Then I went back to Panama. Stayed there until 1955 and came here.

>> Bill Benson: I wish we had you for several more hours because what David would tell you about, once he left Panama, the exploits, if you will, to get from Panama to Israel and then to

fight during the War of Independence and then return to Panama, just an entirely different story to be told. Maybe someday there will be a place for you to share.

>> David Bayer: And I met Rubin. Rubin was standing in a place. I didn't recognize him. He recognized me. He had the beard. What happened to Rubin, when I was out from the camp in Germany, Rubin had a problem with his leg. He couldn't walk anymore. So he was hiding in a barn. The Russians find him and healed him. Then he was in a D.P. Camp in Germany, went to Israel. And the British stopped him. He lived there for two years. He went illegally on a ship to Israel. Then Israel became independent. He was free. So then I met him. He saw me. He started yelling. "Duvtche," "David." He said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I live here." He got married. 11 children, maybe 100 grandchildren. He became a teacher in Hebrew.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to David in a moment to close our program. I want to thank all of you for being with us today. I remind you we'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So we very much hope you can return again this year or next year. The website will provide information about next year's program. It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. So on that note, I'd like to turn to David to close our program.

And when he's finished, David, you'll step down over here and stay around?

>> David Bayer: I have never the last word.

>> Bill Benson: Ok, your second-to-last word. And if you want to come and chat with David

afterwards, ask him a question, just say hi, absolutely feel free to do that, please.

>> David Bayer: My last word is going to be -- but I still am upset for my family. I was crying all the time, every time I mentioned my sister. She was 19 years old. She sneaked out of the ghetto. She saw a pair of boots. She never come back. Never saw her again. I want justice for her. And I can't find no justice for her.

I don't know what happened to my sister. She was 19. She had been out from the ghetto. Took a wooden cross. Dressed beautifully. She had a wooden cross which I got from a Polish man. She put the cross on, a big wooden cross. The cross is still in my mind all the time. No justice.

Then if I got to heaven, why did he attack Japan with the Tsunami? God did it. God put the Tsunami in Japan. Why didn't he put it in Germany? Forget about it.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, David.

[Applause]

[The presentation ended at 2:03 p.m.]