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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
***FIRST PERSON* SERIES**
HARRY MARKOWICZ

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. Harry Markowicz 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*. I am pleased to let you know that Mr. Louis Smith is here with us today.

[Applause]

Thank you, Louis.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each guest serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The Museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

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

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

prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

We begin with this photograph of Harry and his siblings, Rosa and Manfred, or Mani as he was known, taken in 1941. Harry was born on August 9, 1937, in Berlin, Germany. His parents, Max and Marja, emigrated from Poland shortly after World War I.

This photo shows Harry's mother's family around 1914 in Widawa, Poland. Harry's mother is the second from the left in the back row with the long hair. The others in the picture are Harry's aunts and uncles, 11 in all, and Harry's grandmother who is in the middle sitting next to her youngest child, Bolek. Those in the photograph, only three survived World War II: Harry's mother, her youngest sibling, Bolek, and her sister Leonia who is third from the left in the back row.

Here is a picture of Harry's father, Max, in Berlin, Germany, in front of the building. He had recently arrived to Poland. On this map of Germany, the arrow points to Berlin where Harry and his family lived when he was born. In 1938, a family friend who was a policeman, warned the Markowiczes of an impending outbreak of violence against Jews in Germany. Harry and his family escaped to Antwerp, Belgium.

This arrow shows where Antwerp is located. When Germany invaded, the Markowiczes tried to cross the border and were denied entry. They rented a house in Belgium. They stayed until Belgium surrendered to Germany in late May 1940.

In 1942 Harry and his family went into hiding in Brussels. Harry and his siblings were placed in children's homes and with different families. Harry lived with

the Vanderlinden family until September 1944. Here we see Harry with Mrs. Vanderlinden.

After the war, the Markowiczes resumed their life in Brussels. Here we see Harry and his family in Brussels. Harry and his parents emigrated to the United States in 1951, joining his siblings who emigrated in 1949 and 1950.

After arriving in the U.S. in 1951, Harry and his parents settled in Seattle, Washington, where his brother and sister had gone to their move. He went to the University of Washington for his undergraduate studies then attended Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, for his graduate degree. At Simon Fraser Harry's study in linguistics and particularly in sign language led to his career working with people with deafness.

After his studies, Harry spent a year in France he would return to France later to work for five years before becoming a professor of English at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the world's only university with programs and services specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard of hearing students. It was established by an act of Congress in 1864. After 30 years at Gallaudet he retired in 2008. Harry also taught English has a second language in Israel and Canada as well as French in the U.S. and in Canada.

Since his retirement, Harry has become very involved with this museum. He presently works a volunteer in Visitor Services and you will find him at the Information Desk on Tuesday morning -- or Tuesday afternoons.

Harry and his wife, Arlene, whom he met in Washington, D.C. but to whom he proposed in France when she came to visit, just celebrated their 36th wedding

anniversary on June 27. With their son Michael they live in Silver Spring, Maryland. Arlene is here with Harry today. If you wouldn't just mind a wave of the hand so people know you're here.

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

[Applause]

Harry, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. I'm glad to have you with us. We're going to start right away because you have so much to share with us and we have just one short hour to go.

Your father settled in Berlin in 1919, married your mother in 1926. By the time you were born in 1937, Hitler had come to power and had been in power for four years. Before we turn to the war years, tell us what your family's life was like, what your life was like, in those years before the war began.

>> Harry Markowicz: I was very young being born in 1937. My father -- [Indiscernible], my mother was a housewife. My brother and sister were born. We were somewhat religious but not too religious. They led kind of a middle class life.

>> Bill Benson: Your father served in the First World War, hadn't he?

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. He was in World War I. He was 15. They lied about his age, so he was drafted at 15. There were skirmishes in Poland and Russia which led to the war in 1920, 1921. He didn't want to go back in the Army, so he left Poland to go to Berlin.

>> Bill Benson: And how did he meet your mom?

>> Harry Markowicz: He met my mom at a wedding which took place in Gdansk, an international city. The wedding was -- also left Poland in 1919. So he couldn't go back to Poland to marry this Polish young woman. So they arranged for the wedding to be in Gdansk and my father was invited. After the wedding, his partner said, well, now it's your turn. Said, "Why don't you pick somebody among the guests."

[Laughter]

My father picked my mother.

>> Bill Benson: And history was made.

>> Harry Markowicz: I guess so. The funny part about that is that my mother was planning to go back home. They were going to have the wedding later, but my father insisted that they get married right then. Said, "Send a telegram to your mother." My grandfather was dead by then. "Have her come, and we'll have the wedding." We have pictures of the two weddings. They took place a few days apart. Within eight days my father and mother were married.

>> Bill Benson: What was life like for them, to your knowledge, in Berlin in the late 1920's, early 1930's, before Hitler came to power? What was their life like there?

>> Harry Markowicz: I don't know much about -- I assume that they had, as I said, a middle class life and were satisfied living there until the Nazis took over.

>> Bill Benson: You had two siblings. How large was your extended family?

>> Harry Markowicz: My mother had, as you said earlier, 10 siblings. There were 11 children. My grandfather was dead before the war. And my father had seven -- no, there were seven together. Of those, four survived, four who had left Poland. The whole family that stayed in

Poland all perished.

>> Bill Benson: You had told me, Harry, that your father was one of those who believed that after Hitler came to power that he wouldn't last, this wouldn't last for terribly long. Say a little more about that.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. He wasn't the only one. The Jewish people who were affected most were professionals, civil servants, teachers who were fired from their jobs, doctors, lawyers couldn't practice. So for them it was crucial to leave. And many of those emigrated. But my father's business wasn't affected. He had no street representation to have a shop or anything, so he wasn't hurt economically by living in Germany. And he assumed that it could not go on the way it was, that the world wouldn't let it happen; wouldn't tolerate this kind of condition. It was wrong.

>> Bill Benson: Kristallnacht or Night of the Broken Glass took place November 9 through 10, 1939. Sometime around Kristallnacht your family fled Berlin for Belgium. But just prior to that your father had taken your two siblings with him to Aachen, Germany, but then came back. Tell us what you can and what you learned later about the events that led to him taking your two siblings and then returning and then about the family's flight to Belgium.

>> Harry Markowicz: As I understand, shortly before Kristallnacht, a friend of my father was a policeman; he came to him and told him that terrible things were going to happen and that it was absolutely necessary for us to get out of Germany. So my father took my brother and sister with him. They went to Aachen, a spa resort close to the border of Belgium and Holland, to be smuggled. We were to be smuggled into I don't know which one of those countries, one

of those two countries they arrived there. They went -- it was all arranged. There was going to be a smuggler.

Unfortunately there were many other German Jews who wanted to leave, and they wanted to leave immediately. So there was a group of about 40. All of this I learned from my brother. They weren't prepared. They had to walk through the forest of the women in high heels, babies were crying. They were very obvious, too, because they were well-dressed; not like the kind of people who would go for a long walk in the woods. So they were caught by a Dutch patrol at the border and they were held and turned over to the German authorities.

Then my father was put in jail, the other adults, too. My brother and sister were placed with Jewish families in Aachen. A few weeks later the police called my mother in Berlin and asked her if she knew where her husband was. She said, “Of course I know. He's in Aachen with our children.” Somehow my father, brother, and sister were lucky because the authorities were convinced that they were there on vacation. And they let them go.

They came back to Berlin and then my father went back to the border by himself. And this time he succeeded in getting into Belgium. Then he arranged for us to come over later with the Belgian who lived by the border and worked in Germany. He commuted back and forth and brought us across the border in his car.

Again, we were lucky because Hitler happened to be giving a speech when we arrived at the border, so the German border guards were not interested.

They were listening to the speech. And I heard this from my brother.

>> Bill Benson: So they're not paying attention made it easier for you get across.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Wasn't there an incident with you, as a little guy, playing with the car keys?

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. I was something like 1. I was 1. Somehow they gave me the keys or I got the keys. And when it came time to go, they couldn't find the keys to the car.

>> Bill Benson: But fortunately they did.

>> Harry Markowicz: They did.

>> Bill Benson: So at the borders they were able to get through. So that took them into Belgium.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. My father had already settled in Antwerp, found a place to live for us. So we lived there in Antwerp, 1938. So it was before the war. My brother and sister both went to school there. We were illegal but we were allowed to stay. But my father was not allowed to work. So he was involved in the black market, change of currency, the dollar and the British pound. So he traded, for instance.

>> Bill Benson: And that was how basically you survived, by doing that. I think you told me he also may have been involved with black market with diamonds and things like that to be able to make a living.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. Antwerp is a center where they cut the diamonds, cleaned the diamonds. I know I've seen the little packages of diamonds around.

>> Bill Benson: Before we go on, Harry, we've mentioned Kristallnacht. Tell us what

Kristallnacht was. Say a little bit about that so people know.

>> Harry Markowicz: Ok. Kristallnacht was a national program in Russia. There were various times -- I say demonstrations. It was more than that, attacks against Jewish communities and Jewish stores. Sometimes they killed people, too. And what happened, Kristallnacht, was it was organized by the Nazis all over the country the night of November 9 and 10.

>> Bill Benson: 1938.

>> Harry Markowicz: 1938. And they attacked and burned down synagogues and demolished, vandalized Jewish businesses, arrested -- I've forgotten now, 30,000 or 60,000 Jewish men, only men. They put them in a concentration camp. Most of them were released later on the condition that they leave the country within a short period of time.

>> Bill Benson: And literally hundreds of synagogues burned all over Austria so Kristallnacht or Night of the Broken Glass, crystal night. So you're now, though, in Belgium, living in Belgium. In May 1940, of course, the war began in September 1939 when Germany attacked Poland, but in May of 1940, the Germans attacked Belgium and France, Holland, what they call the low countries. A few days after the Germans attacked Belgium, your family fled for France. Tell us about that tell us what you know about the attack on Belgium and then the decision to get out of Brussels and head -- or Antwerp and head for France and what happened.

>> Harry Markowicz: Belgium had declared itself neutral. But the Germans didn't respect that. France had built up very powerful fortifications on their border. So the Germans chose not to attack the French where the best French fences were located. They went through Belgium,

which was easy.

Within days of May 10, hundreds of thousands of Belgian people were trying to get into France where they thought they would be safe of before this, when Poland was invaded by Germany, England and France declared on Germany. So England sent over several hundred thousand soldiers stationed in France, the Expeditionary Forces. When Belgium was invaded, some of the troops came in into Belgium as well. They tried to stop the Germans.

May 14, my brother reminded me, his birthday. My sister's also. So on May 14, we left Antwerp together with four other families. They arranged to rent a van or truck to bring us to the border. We got to the coast --

>> Bill Benson: Before you continue from there, Harry, when you described this scene, literally, as you said, hundreds of thousands of people fleeing. My images, what we've seen in movies, of people fleeing destruction somewhere on every kind of transport possible. You were in a van. Is that the scene that you have in your mind of what was happening as people fled?

>> Harry Markowicz: This was before -- I don't remember that.

>> Bill Benson: From what you've been told.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: So everybody's trying to get to France.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. When we got to -- the driver said, "This is as far as I go." He dropped us off on the road.

>> Bill Benson: That wasn't the plan.

>> Harry Markowicz: That wasn't the plan. I don't know what his reasoning was. It was also hard to drive because there were so many people on the road walking, horses, bicycles, everything of so he turned around and left us there.

Then one other family, the couple whose wedding my parents met, met and got married, subsequently, were with us we were walking. And then at some point they bought a four-wheel kind of pedaling bus used in various resorts and piled all of their stuff on top of it.

>> Bill Benson: Like a cart on pedals?

>> Harry Markowicz: Yeah. You pedal like on a bicycle., on a bench kind of seat. They piled up all of this stuff on it. And then the other family had a little girl, Lisa, my age. They put us on top. And everybody else pushed and pulled until they got to the border.

At the border, the French, Belgian and Dutch citizens but we were stateless so they didn't let us in.

>> Bill Benson: What does that mean, you were stateless?

>> Harry Markowicz: We didn't have citizenship.

>> Bill Benson: Because you had fled Germany and there were you weren't recognized as Belgian.

>> Harry Markowicz: No. We had no citizenship. No papers.

>> Bill Benson: So you were considered stateless.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. So my sister, I remember telling me, that my mother was talking

with this Polish-speaking custom guy, trying to convince him to let us in but he didn't. So we moved back from the border. My parents rented a house in a resort town close to the border. I don't know what their plan was. I assume they were going to try to go back to the border and try another time get across.

Meanwhile, around then, Belgium -- well, King Leopold surrendered, without telling the other allies, the British and the French, so they had no warning. The Germans had been kept back a little bit, but they moved right in and were getting close to the border. So we stayed at the house, I really don't know how long.

This was at the time that the British were evacuating their troops in Dunkirk. There's a harbor just across the border from Belgium, in France. Their ships couldn't come in. The harbor had been bombed so eventually they got hundreds and hundreds of small boats to come across the channel to pick up these soldiers, English, French, from Belgium, Dutch, and take them to the large Navy ships that were further out.

My first memories from them, memory that I have are just like an image, a picture.

>> Bill Benson: Please. Yeah.

>> Harry Markowicz: I remember -- what I remember is lying in the ditch next to the road, my mother's next to me. There were a lot of other people in the ditch.

>> Bill Benson: Before you go on, I wanted to ask you earlier, one of the reasons for being in the ditch is you had been strafed by German planes.

>> Harry Markowicz: I didn't know that. I don't remember that at all.

>> Bill Benson: You found out later at the time.

>> Harry Markowicz: Next to me on the road there was an officer. I don't know why I knew he was an officer. And he was looking -- he was tall. I was lying in the ditch. He was probably tall, straight. Looking at the sky with binoculars. Somehow -- the confidence, a sense of security. I think a lot of the feelings that I had, the emotions, were not my own. They came from my mother and other adults.

So then I fell asleep in the ditch and when I woke up, this officer, a British officer -- I don't think I knew he was British. I knew that he was not a threat to us. He was gone. I asked my mother, “Where's the soldier?” And she said, “They're gone.” Because they were being evacuated. At that point I felt my mother's anxiety because now there was nothing between us and the Germans.

>> Bill Benson: So at some point then the family decides that there's no option but to go back.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. To Antwerp, where we were living. It meant walking back the other way.

I want to go back about the strafing. I had no idea what was going on except for what I described. And we never talked about any of this, my family, with anybody else. It's only the last few years that I started talking with my brother about it. My sister's dead. My parents are dead. So there's only the two of us. I asked him about that scene, that image that I have. And he said he doesn't remember that. I said, “Why would we be in a ditch?” Something was obvious to him. He said, “Because the Germans were strafing the roads.” I said, “Why was he looking up with his binoculars?” He said, “Well, there were

dogfights," German planes fighting British planes above us. But that I don't remember.

>> Bill Benson: So now it's back to -- back into Belgium.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. On the way, we got picked up by German trucks who were returning empty from the front. I suppose they wanted to get the refugees because many people were not going back to where they came from in Belgium. Get them off the roads, clear the roads. My brother said they fed us. There was no stores open or anything. They gave us bread that they had.

>> Bill Benson: And took you back.

>> Harry Markowicz: And took us back most of the way to Antwerp.

>> Bill Benson: What happened once you got back to Antwerp? You tried to leave there. So now you're back.

>> Harry Markowicz: At the beginning for the first few months nothing happened, apparently. Life went on. Even some of the people who had gone into France came back into Belgium because apparently everything was ok. The Germans weren't going to do anything. So they decided to come back.

Gradually, the Germans started having increased regulations concerning Jews. Jews had to register with a Jewish Council. The Germans set up Jewish Councils wherever they were to carry out their decrees and to get the Jews themselves to do whatever they wanted them to do. It was easier than trying to give orders directly.

>> Bill Benson: And it was things like, you couldn't own bikes, you couldn't own radios. You, of course, couldn't have cars. Everything was restricted at that point.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. They requisitioned all cars. There were no gas anywhere. Bikes. Just were not allowed to have radios. My brother said we didn't have one anyway, so.

Then they started requesting, again, through the Jewish Council, started requesting young able-bodied men to go to work, which made sense, work in factories, farms, because so many Germans were in the Army. So some people went. At the first batch they even wrote home everything was fine. Then they came back. My father was convoked to go to work.

>> Bill Benson: Forced labor.

>> Harry Markowicz: Forced labor. Yes. And then first batch did work on the factories. Then after that they worked on the fortifications that the Germans were building on the French coast, building bunkers. Those were never heard from again.

My father refused to go. He didn't show up at the time that he was supposed to report. My mother went to Brussels -- Belgium was very small. Antwerp and Brussels are one hour apart by train, probably less today. She found an apartment. We immediately moved into Brussels.

My parents didn't speak French. But my mother got out of the train station and heard Yiddish spoken. So in no time she had an apartment for us.

>> Bill Benson: There were only, I think you told me, just a few communities in Belgium that Jews were allowed to live at this point.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. Brussels, Antwerp. The largest cities. Most Jews lived in Antwerp. The next was Brussels.

>> Bill Benson: So your mom finds a place for you, and you all move there now, in Brussels. What was that period like for you?

>> Harry Markowicz: The Germans still were only, at this point, taking able-bodied men. They weren't doing anything about women, young women. So my brother and sister went back to school. My father went back to business.

>> Bill Benson: Black market, I assume. Yeah.

>> Harry Markowicz: And I stayed home with my mother. Until 1942, the beginning of 1942, January 1942. The Germans had a high-level conference at which they decided on the “final solution,” when you go through the Museum, the main exhibit. There were 15 top administrators got together. I think eight or 10 had Ph.D.’s, which tells you something about who was involved at the top of the movement. They decided on the "final solution." Probably just rubber stamped it because it probably was decided before that they were going to kill all the Jews.

So the meetings to plan how all of this was going to take place. Eichmann, who was in charge, came with men who planned the transportation, trains, taking Jews to Poland, was there, was one of them. So shortly after that, things got -- changed. In Belgium Jews had to wear the yellow star. In other countries it started earlier. There were restrictions.

>> Bill Benson: And then roundups began, right?

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. In August 1942, the Germans rounded up Jews at night, they would come at night, surround the areas that were predominantly Jewish. There were no

ghettos, per se, but neighborhoods where a lot of Jews lived, surrounded.

In Antwerp they had the cooperation of the police. They picked everybody up. They had the addresses because you had to register. And they just came to the houses, apartments, knew exactly where to go and took everybody away: old people, young people, sick people, everybody; happened twice, at the end of August.

The word got back to Brussels. So at that point we stopped sleeping in our apartment because they would come at night in Antwerp. During the day my mother and I were in the apartment. But then at night we slept -- my mother had a brother who lived nearby but outside of the Jewish area. Some of us slept there. Others slept with friends. Who were living in the non-Jewish neighborhoods.

At the beginning of September there was the big raid in Brussels. They did the same thing as they did in Antwerp, took everybody away. We were lucky because we were not at home.

>> Bill Benson: So that's when I think precipitated your parents really making the very serious decision, now you really needed to go into hiding.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. Besides the official Jewish Council, there was also an underground Jewish-Belgian organization which actually fought the official organization of the Jewish Council. They advised people to go into hiding, to hide the children separately, wherever they could.

I should mention that in Belgium, 90% of the Jews were not citizens. Only 6,000 Jews were actual citizens. The rest were all illegals like we were. They

were easy targets because obviously they didn't know the language well. But children, you learn language very quickly. Children could pass.

The first place we went, my parents placed us, was all three of us together, my brother and my sister and I, with an elderly couple. Did it for the money. My parents asked them to move out of that Jewish -- they were neighbors, nearby neighbors. They paid them to move to another neighborhood where they wouldn't be known and could pass us off as their grandchildren. So that's what happened. But it was not the best situation. For one thing, their 18-year-old grandson was living with them.

>> Bill Benson: Where they placed you, in the same house.

>> Harry Markowicz: In the same house. And he -- in Belgium, like in other countries, there were nationalist organizations, Nazi type of organizations. And he joined. They became soldiers in the German Army. Their uniforms were black. I remember. So it was not ideal because probably wouldn't have turned in his grandparents, but still.

Then the other thing was -- oh, my brother said he joined just to have a job. He was not interested in ideology.

>> Bill Benson: So might not have been a real fascist but nonetheless belongs to their organization.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. Most of them were shipped to the eastern front and were killed there. The other thing is, this couple moved back to their old apartment because they didn't like the new area where they were living. So that immediately -- my mother got us out of there.

Next, I was with my sister in a children's home in the

countryside. I don't exactly know what the situation was there, but my mother came to visit. We found out there were Jewish adults hidden there. So that was not ideal because Jewish adults were more easily identified.

My mother took us away from there. I think I stayed with my parents for a while. I should mention, my parents lived in the house their parents -- had been vacant. Neighbors brought food, brought it to them, also mail from us when we wrote. So our parents would write to this one couple. They would take my parents' letters to us also, and mail them. My father didn't go out for two years. My mother did occasionally.

>> Bill Benson: Staying in this home that for all practical purposes was perceived to be vacant.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. You know about the Anne Frank family. Similar situation.

>> Bill Benson: And where did you -- you ended up with another family. Tell us.

>> Harry Markowicz: That was the Vanderlinden family. You saw Mrs. Vanderlinden in one of the pictures. They took in my sister and I, since I was little, together with my sister. They lived on the border of Brussels. It was a whole area built for working class people, by the city.

What I didn't know is that my brother was also living there; not very far, but they didn't tell me because they were afraid if I told anybody else. My sister knew we were some somewhere but didn't know where. Only my brother knew where we were which was important because of what happened.

The Gestapo went to the house where my brother was living. There were two other Jewish kids there. The Gestapo spoke to my brother and the other kids

in German. They said, “Oh, you're the Jewish kids.” They knew ahead of time. But they didn't come for them. They were looking for the son of the family, an adult son, who was working for the Germans on the railroad yard. He was a railroad man. He was working in the railroad yard in Germany. He and others had gotten leave to go home for five days. It took them three days to get home because the trains weren't running the way they normally are. So their return back late.

There had been a raid on -- an allied bombing raid on the railroad yard. So they suspected that one of the Belgians had given information to the allies. So they came to the house, searched everything for a radio transmitter. They didn't know that at the time that this stuff was there but later they found out. That's what they were looking for. They would look behind pictures on the wall, everywhere.

>> Bill Benson: So for the moment they left your brother alone.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yeah. They said, "We'll come back for you tomorrow." Well, my brother didn't wait. So he came over to where we were, and we got out of there.

Then I was back with my parents for a while. My sister and brother, I think they were staying in a commercial laundry, behind a dirty laundry bag, keeping out of sight. My mother asked the Vanderlinden family to move right into Brussels.

>> Bill Benson: The family that you had just been with?

>> Harry Markowicz: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Harry Markowicz: So they did. They moved into Brussels where people didn't know them.

It was a big city. So I could pass for their son. And almost an adult daughter. I'm not quite sure how old she was. She was maybe 18.

>> Bill Benson: Both during the time you were with the Vanderlindens when they lived -- were out in the country but also once they moved back into the city, they were a Catholic family. Am I right?

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And you were hidden -- I mean, you were hidden in the home. What was your life like there, to your knowledge? You actually, I think, went to school for a period, to a Catholic school?

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. They were Catholic like most Belgians but they were not practicing Catholics. They did send me to a school that was Catholic. Instructors were nuns. We were taken to church.

>> Bill Benson: Did you adopt the family name?

>> Harry Markowicz: Oh, yes. I was Henry Vanderlinden.

>> Bill Benson: So you had to really learn to be able to answer question as though you were their child.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. It was a little more complicated. Because this area was Flemish speaking. I didn't know it. When we lived in Antwerp, I wasn't going to school. I was too young. Stayed home with my mother. So only some of the nuns spoke French. But the kids didn't. And I didn't know what was going on in class. I guess it didn't matter.

Eventually there was an altar boy who spoke to me in French. I

don't remember how this came about. He told me I was Jewish. I don't know how he found out, but he told me. Then he introduced me to other kids.

>> Bill Benson: So there were others in the school.

>> Harry Markowicz: About a dozen.

>> Bill Benson: About a dozen.

>> Harry Markowicz: I guess -- we left that area. You asked me about the Vanderlindens. They were very good to me. Mrs. Vanderlinden, she was an extremely loving mother. I had a hard time at first because I couldn't stand the food. There was no food, but what we had to eat was very limited, roots, vegetables. For protein we had besides the rabbits that Mr. Vanderlinden raised, only had so many rabbits, but it was lard. It made me choke just to try to eat it. I couldn't eat it. So Mrs. Vanderlinden would cut it up in tiny, tiny pieces and mix it up with the mashed potatoes. And then she would feed me.

>> Bill Benson: And that was the protein source. So you were able to then live with the Vanderlindens in Brussels itself in hiding again. What can you tell us about that period?

>> Harry Markowicz: Well, I was hidden in a way but I could go outside.

>> Bill Benson: Because you were their son as far as the outside world knew.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. So I did normal things with them. Already mentioned, sometimes I had to go back to my parents before because -- I don't know why. But I spent time with my parents where I couldn't go out. The windows were covered with newspapers. That was a sign that it was a vacant building. And there was a little hole that my father made I could look through the hole to look up on the street. But I couldn't play outside. I couldn't go outside.

When I was with my mother, sometimes in public, not very often, we didn't talk. One time we were on the street car. I don't know where we were going. Two German soldiers got on in front. We were in the back of the car. They used to go through the car and ask everybody for identification papers, which would have indicated that we were Jewish. So my reaction, I don't know, I didn't feel anything, but I knew my mother was panicky. And we got off at the next stop. And that night I had a nightmare involving the Germans.

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

>> Harry Markowicz: I just want to contrast, being with my parents and being with the Vanderlindens. With them it was normal. We were in the street. I could speak openly. With my parents, with my mother, it was scary. Not that I was scared because I don't remember being scared, but I knew that it was dangerous. I could feel it from my mother.

Also, my mother was much more reserved person. Mrs. Vanderlinden played with me, hide and seek and all kinds of things. She was a very warm person.

>> Bill Benson: And you would continue in these circumstances until 1944. Tell us about the period that led up to liberation and what liberation, what that meant for you and meant for your parents and your brother and sister. Tell us about that time.

>> Harry Markowicz: Before we knew that the allies were coming, one day my mother showed up and said she was taking me home. She called it home. But she was taking me to where she and my father were staying. It was kind of a shock for both Mrs. Vanderlinden and myself. My mother said, well, after the liberation you can come back and stay with the Vanderlindens

again. So she took me.

We were on a street car. All of a sudden she whispered to me -- because we spoke German. “Look out the window.” There was a small German truck. In front there was a horse pulling the truck. It ran out of gas or broken down. I don't know. And on top of the truck there was a German soldier lying on his stomach with a heavy machine gun, but he was acting strange. He kept looking around, up at the buildings. And my mother said, "They're running away. The Germans are running away.” Won't ever forget that.

So she brought me to where my father was. By that time you could hear the bombing getting closer. Everybody was kind of waiting for the allies to arrive. They liberated Brussels September 3. The Germans left. My parents expected that there would be a battle; that the Germans would not give up. I learned this later. My mother said, “Well, if we're going to be killed in the bombing, we might as well die together.”

>> Bill Benson: So she brought everybody together?

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. She couldn't get my brother and sister because by then they were living far away. Only way to get there was by train. And it was difficult and especially dangerous for my parents, for my mother.

So the next day -- the British arrived that night, in the evening. The next morning my mother took me. I didn't know where at the time. I asked, "What about my father?" She said, "He's not ready to go out. He hasn't been out for two years." Can't face people, something like that. I don't remember the exact words.

So as we were going -- I knew I guess we were going to a park.

There were more and more people in the street going the same direction I didn't know what, why. We were in the street where there was a tank on fire. I was fascinated. It was probably a German tank. I'm not sure. I assume it was a German tank. Someone had thrown a Molotov cocktail on it.

So I'm standing by the tank watching and my mother said, "Come on, you got to go." She grabbed me. We got to the park. By this time hundreds of thousands of people were there. My world changed.

>> Bill Benson: These are not German tanks. These are British tanks. We don't have a whole lot of time more. Tell us about you being lifted up to the soldier on the tank, your mother lifting you up.

>> Harry Markowicz: I may have to stop.

>> Bill Benson: Yes. Take your time.

>> Harry Markowicz: So there were all of these happy people cheering the soldiers. My mother took me to a tank where there was one soldier standing on the tank. We looked at each other. But we didn't have a common language. I think he bent down and stretched out his arms. My mother lifted me up. He held me in his arms.

I don't think I can continue.

>> Bill Benson: No. That was liberation. That was liberation. Of course, your brother and sister are still somewhere else. And the war, of course, is still going on.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: It would continue for another nine months after that point.

>> Harry Markowicz: Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: So you weren't sure that it was safe. But for the moment you were safe. But eventually your mother and father -- you would go back to the Vanderlindens, and they would go to retrieve your brother and sister. And they had a scary incident when they went to get your brother and sister. Can you tell us about that?

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. They were on a train. This is my parents. They whispered to each other. People heard them.

>> Bill Benson: Whispered in German, their native language.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. So they were taken off the train and almost --

>> Bill Benson: Because they thought they were Germans. And did somebody intervene?

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes, a policeman.

>> Bill Benson: And saved your parents. And you had gone back to the Vanderlindens for some time to live with them again.

>> Harry Markowicz: Right. As far as I remember, I didn't know how long I stayed there. I thought it was just a short time. But reading more about history and putting things together, I realized I stayed much longer than I expected.

Right after liberation everybody hung up flags, the allies, American, British, French, Belgian flags that were size of double sheets. I don't know where they got the flags, how they made them, obviously in secret, but I have no idea. They were hanging down the facades of the houses. And one day I noticed no flags. All the color was gone. It was pretty obvious. So I asked Mrs. Vanderlinden, "Where are the flags?" At this

point she told me. She sounded scared. She said the Germans might come back. Later I realized that was the Battle of the Bulge, which was in December, Christmas time, just before Christmas.

So we were liberated in September, September 3. And the year I was still living with the Vanderlindens after the liberation for all of these months. I asked my brother recently why. I don't know. He said maybe because my parents' apartment was very small, with like three rooms, and they didn't have any furniture. Also, they took in a cousin of mine. My mother's brother and his wife and their son were deported on the last transport from Belgium. So their daughter was with herself, a little older than I am. They took her in. So there was not enough room.

>> Bill Benson: And you were in a safe place.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Before we close, Harry, tell us a little -- the Vanderlindens, they took you and your sister in when they lived on the outskirts of town. Your mother asked them to relocate into Brussels to protect you. They did that, which meant that when they went into Brussels -- because you told me they had to get new occupations, new jobs. There clearly had to be significant risk to them for doing this. What do you think motivated the Vanderlindens to do all of that?

>> Harry Markowicz: You know, we never talked about it. Many years later, Arlene, my wife and I were visiting. We used to live in Paris. We visited the Vanderlindens in Brussels. By that time he had died, but. Arlene did what I never did. She asked "How come?" The

explanation was kind of simple. "Somebody knocked at the door and asked would you take in a child." They didn't say whether it was a Jewish child or anything. But Mrs. Vanderlinden assumed.

I should say that many Belgians, unlike other countries, were very help if many to the Jews and took risks; not the same risk that they would have taken in Poland. Poland helping Jews was an immediate execution, including the whole family, and the neighborhood visiting, too. In Belgium I don't think they did that. I think they might have sent them to concentration camps.

>> Bill Benson: Last question for you, Harry. At what point was the family completely reunited and stayed that way? I know your brother and sister would leave first to go to the United States. But at what point did you really were all back together?

>> Harry Markowicz: In 1951.

>> Bill Benson: 1951.

>> Harry Markowicz: But that didn't last because as soon as we arrived, my brother was drafted and sent to Korea.

>> Bill Benson: We're at the end of our program. I'm sorry we didn't get a chance for you ask some questions and there's many more that I wanted to ask. So we'll have to do another version, I think.

Harry, when he's finished, he's going to step down off the stage. If anybody would like to meet him or ask him a question, please absolutely feel free to do that. I'm going to turn back to Harry to close our program in a moment.

I want to thank all of you for being with us. I remind you that we'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August. So I hope you'll come back and join us either this year if possible, look to put us on your schedule for next year if you can.

It's our traditions at *First Person* that our *First Person* gets the last word. So on that note, I'm going to turn back to Harry to close our program.

>> Harry Markowicz: Thank you. Some people ask, “Why didn't the Jews resist? Why did they go to their death like sheep?” Well in fact, Jews resisted in every possible way that they can, they could; everything from emigrating as soon as the Nazis took over to crossing boarders illegally when it was no longer to do it any other way, by hiding, bypassing for Christians, by giving away their children to strangers to help the odds that they would survive, by fighting back, underground, by sabotage. The Germans had made some concentration camps work in weapons factories, being making bullets, for example. There was sabotage going on, putting sand in the bullets along with the powder, things like that; and also rebellions in ghettos and in the concentration camps. That doesn't sound to me like going to their death like sheep.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Harry.

[Applause]

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