

Thursday, July 25, 2013

1:00-2:05 p.m.

**UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM**  
***FIRST PERSON: MANNY MANDEL***

Held at:  
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW  
Washington, DC

(Remote CART)

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CART Services Provided by:  
Stephen H. Clark, CBC, CCP  
Home Team Captions  
1001 L Street NW, Suite 105  
Washington, DC 20001  
202-669-4214  
855-669-4214 (toll-free)  
[sclark@hometeamcaptions.com](mailto:sclark@hometeamcaptions.com)  
[info@hometeamcaptions.com](mailto:info@hometeamcaptions.com)



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>> Bill Benson: Good afternoon, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson, and I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 14th year of *First Person*. Our *First Person* today is Mr. Manny Mandel, 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 guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. We will continue our program through the middle of August. Each of our guests, you can go to the website at [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org) and it provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Manny 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 an opportunity toward the end of the program, you will have a chance to ask him a few questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Manny 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 Manny Mandel. Manny was born to a religious Jewish family on May 8, 1936, in Riga, Latvia. Manny was just 3 when World War II started. Though he was born in Riga, Latvia, Manny's family were Hungarian Jews. They moved briefly to Latvia because of his father's work. Here we see a portrait of Manny's parents, Yehuda Mandel, holding their infant son Manny.

Shortly after Manny's birth, his father accepted a post as a chief cantor in Budapest and the family returned to Hungary, where they had lived before 1933. Hungary is highlighted on this map of Europe. Budapest is highlighted on this map of Hungary.

Manny's father was based at the renowned Rombach Synagogue. In this picture, we see Manny and his father on a street in Budapest.

The Hungarian government passed anti-Jewish laws beginning in 1938. In 1940, Hungary joined the Axis Alliance, and in 1941 Hungarian troops participated alongside German troops in the invasion of the Soviet Union. The war and increasing restrictions made life for Jews in Hungary increasingly difficult. The photo on the left shows Manny outside his apartment on his first day of school in 1942 in Budapest. On the right we see a contemporary photo of Manny standing outside the same apartment.

German forces occupied Hungary in March of 1944. Manny and his

mother Ella were fortunate to be included in a program where Jews would be transported to Palestine in exchange for trucks. Within a month, they were transported by the Nazis to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Hannover, Germany, in preparation for the eventual departure from Europe. This photo is of the Bergen-Belsen camp.

Negotiations for their transport to Palestine broke down and in December of 1944, about six months before the end of the war, Manny and his mother were released from Bergen-Belsen and transported to safety in neutral Switzerland. There they stayed at the Heiden Children's Home, which is pictured here, where Ella worked as a teacher. Manny is lying down in the front on your left. His mother Ella is standing in the back, in the middle.

After the war, Manny and his mother reunited with his father in Israel. They subsequently emigrated to the United States and lived in Philadelphia. Manny is a graduate of Temple University and did his graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a clinical social worker. He met his future wife, Adrienne, in Philadelphia and they were married in 1958. They have been married for 55 years.

After working for the B'Nai B'Rith Youth Organization in Cleveland and in Michigan, Manny and Adrienne moved to Washington, DC where Manny became the national program director for the B'Nai B'Rith. He would later go to work for the Peace Corps before beginning his own psychotherapy

practice in 1980. Manny continues his independent practice today.

Adrienne's many accomplishments include having served in the Maryland Legislature as an elected member of the House of Delegates. She is presently a member of the Board of Commissioners of the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, the nation's eighth largest water and wastewater utility. Manny and Adrienne live in Silver Spring, Maryland. They have two children and three grandchildren. Their daughter Lisa has a 24-year-old son, Zachary, who graduated from the University of Maryland, and a 21-year-old daughter, Gabrielle, a University of Michigan senior. Manny and Adrienne's son David has a soon-to-be 16-year-old daughter, Alexandra, who is presently in a summer Bolshoi Ballet Program at Julliard in New York. She will be a high school junior this year. I'm pleased to say that Adrienne is here today with Manny, as are their children, Lisa and David. If you wouldn't mind raising your hands. Great. Thank you.

Manny speaks regularly about his Holocaust experience in various settings such as schools and synagogues. He volunteers at the museum and leads tours about genocide in the learning center where you will find him every other Friday. Manny celebrated his 77th birthday on May 8. With that, I'd like you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Mr. Manny Mandel.

Manny?

[Applause]

Manny, thank you so much. Thank you so much for joining us, for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. We have a great deal for you to cover in just an hour. We'll just jump right in. You were born in Riga, Latvia, in 1936, but your family stayed and certain yours was a short one before you moved to Budapest, Hungary. War began in Europe with the invasion of Poland by the Germans in 1939, September 1, when you were 3. Before we turn to the war years, tell us what you can about your family, their life, in your very early life before the war began.

>> Manny Mandel: Well, are we on? Yes. People often ask me how come I was born in Riga when my family is ethnically Hungarian. I usually respond by saying there's a rule that says you must be born where your mother is.

[Laughter]

And interestingly enough, part of the reason we were in Riga had something to do tangentially with the later-on Holocaust issues. Bill mentioned that some of the enforcement of the anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic laws in Hungary was in 1938, but something called the Numerus Clausus, which were the anti-Jewish laws in Hungary, began in the 1920's, about 10 years before the Germans started the Nuremberg Laws in 1933.

As a consequence, because of the nature of Europe, let me tell you what that was. My father is from eastern Hungary, born in the Austro-Hungarian empire's days in 1904. When he was 18 years old, he was

drafted into the Czech Army, because after the First World War, this is 1922, Czechoslovakia had been created. For those of you who remember, it was created after the First World War. So my father's now in the Czech Army, he's a Czech citizen.

As a Czech citizen, when he finished his training in Vienna in 1927 or so, he was looking for a job in Hungary. They would not give him papers. First, he was a Czech citizen and a Jew. The laws that were enforced made him unable to get a position that he wanted in continental Hungary.

He did a number of investigations as to where to go and found a job, which was very much in demand, it was in Riga. Went there in 1933. In 1936 I was born. By that time, he was able to get the papers required for him to go to Hungary and he goes to Hungary in 1936, has a job in the Rombach Synagogue that Bill mentioned and he thinks he has just reached heaven on earth, because it's the job that he wanted and the place that he wanted, ethnically Hungarian.

If not for the fellow with the little mustache, you remember him, he would have been there, I would never have come here to talk to you in *First Person*. That's how we wind up in Riga.

>> Bill Benson: You told me a story that your mother had recounted along the lines of someone saying, well, today you now speak Yugoslavian.

>> Manny Mandel: My mother comes from southern Hungary. This is part of the Austro-Hungary empire, which was chopped up after the war. Southern Hungary, better known as Yugoslavia, today known as Serbia. Illustration, her hometown is Novi Sad. It doesn't matter. My mother told the story after the First World War ended, Yugoslavia is created in 1918, she's 10 years old, they come into school, they say OK, tomorrow, we're going to change language. They'd been studying Hungarian. The language to be changed to was Serbo-Croatian. These two languages don't have a syllable, period or comma that are similar. They were bilingual. The kids said fine. The point is this was not unusual in Europe. My father, through his career, probably was conversant in probably eight languages. He was not a linguist. But you heard some here, some there, some someplace else, and you used these.

Part of the reason my mother, you saw the picture in Heiden, the children's camp, after we were taken out of Germany on this barter basis, 20 Hungarian kids were sent to this children's home in Heiden, in the German part of Switzerland. They wanted to send somebody along who could speak for the kids and to the other people in the place. The other people included the director, who is on the picture, they were all German or French speaking. My mother had very good German. And acceptable French. From school. She had been a schoolteacher before she was married. She was the likely choice. As a consequence, here she is, speaks Hungarian to us, German



and French to the rest of the people, and in Europe this was as routine as going to have 7-Up at McDonald's.

>> Bill Benson: You lived in Hungary, and war began in September 1939, but the full effect would not come to your community until 1944. Yet, there were many difficult times in those intervening years. Before we move to that period, once it really hit home to you in 1944, tell us what life was like once the war began in Europe for you and your family living in Budapest.

>> Manny Mandel: Life for me as a child was fine. For two reasons. You need to know, those who have studied anything about the Holocaust, have gone through this museum, the experience of Hungary was unique. Because aside from Italy, and of course Japan, about which we're not speaking, that's a different part of the world, Hungary was an ally. As a consequence the impact of the German occupation, the impact of the SS, of all things German, did not happen in Hungary. Hungary was ruled by a region and a political party called the Arrow Cross, which was the Hungarian equivalent of the Nazi party. But on a day-to-day basis, people went to work, came home from work, went to the movies, and people ate lunch.

What I'm saying, in many ways, until almost 1944, the impact on Hungary is almost unfelt. Well, not quite. We want to remember that the Holocaust takes place in the middle of an even larger conflagration called World War II. We are bombed almost every night. On one side come the

western allies, on the other side the Russians. They're bombing Budapest, because it is an enemy capital. Well, people living in Budapest, Jews, non-Jews, anybody else, were affected by this bombing. Budapest was not quite destroyed as much as Warsaw was or Hamburg or Dresden was. It was a significant impact. Other than that, much of the impact did not affect the child.

Well, I take that back. I went to first grade, you don't see in the picture, I went to first grade with a star on my coat. Jews had to wear a yellow star. Those of you who have gone through the museum or will do so will see samples of these stars. In certain places they're being displayed, pictures and actually actual stars. The star that I saved until after the war was lost when we came to this country, unfortunately, for reasons that are totally unrelated. We came here by plane, not ship, in 1949. On the plane, you can only carry very few things. I left that star and some other important papers of mine with an aunt in then-Israel, who was going to ship it to us afterwards. She changed houses. My important papers and star disappeared. I never forgave myself, but that's life.

>> Bill Benson: You described in some ways, as a very young child, the wearing of the star, it made you feel the same as the adults, because they had to wear the stars. So it had a different impact on you from that perspective. Can you say more about that?

>> Manny Mandel: I thought that being 6 years old, 7 years old with a star, exactly as Bill says, made me an adult, and that made me very proud. Let me tell you very briefly at this point I began to realize maybe this is nothing to be proud of. The rule was that you had to wear that star on your outer garment, outside of the house. If you didn't, the consequence was being shot. That's all. On the spot or somewhere else. Very simple.

The rules were simple. As long as you lived within those rules, there was no problem. I thought that was great. Until I was about 7 or so, I said to my father, I outgrew my tricycle. I'd like to have a bicycle. A small-size bicycle. To which my father said fine, no problem getting the bicycle, except two reasons, minor and a major, which will prevent me from getting you a bicycle. The minor was we live on the fifth floor of the apartment. We had an elevator. The elevator was a 50-year-old elevator. Frequently was out of service. The parts to repair the elevator were made in the same factory that was making munitions, guns and things. Elevator parts were very low on the priority for mechanical kind of engineering.

So the elevator is one. My father said I have to trek the bicycle down -- in Europe you didn't ride the bicycle in your backyard. Nobody had backyards. Go to the street, to the park, you ride the bicycle, come back. I'm willing to do that. That's very small.

The larger issue is if you ride the bike in the park with the yellow star

and you're out of my sight for 12 seconds, somebody might decide to hit you on the head and take the bike or hit you on the head and leave the bike, as long as they can hit you, because that yellow star is a magnet of certain behaviors. That I'm not willing to risk.

I was very upset. The yellow star cost me a bike. At 7 I had a difficult time putting those two things together. I can tell you in 1949, when I was 13, we lived in New York. Not the first day we arrived, but within a very short time, my parents said this afternoon we're going to the store. What are we going to buy? A bicycle.

>> Bill Benson: What were some of the other restrictions that were imposed on Jews at that time?

>> Manny Mandel: Several. One day the man comes to the door, says we must take your telephone. There's nothing anti-Semitic about phones. That was a restriction.

Next time, now, remember, that in Europe living in those days there was -- we all had washing machines, dryers, freezers, dish washers, and all the other stuff, except they were called a maid.

My mother and the maid were the dishwasher, the dryer, the washer, the other things. This was routine in a middle class family. Had nothing to do with being aristocratic. The maid was my buddy, a young woman from the hinterlands. Closer to me in age. 18, I was 6, 7, 8. That was my buddy. In

the daytime, when I was in school, she was home.

They told us that the maid had to go. Why? Jews could not have maids. You survived these things somehow. My mother did more work. I don't know how she managed it, but there were three of us. Much of the time only two of us, because one of the consequences of being under this kind of rule was something called the slave labor camps. This is not what you see upstairs in the museum about being taken away into camps. The Hungarian male population was conscripted into the army. It was called the draft. In this room, I don't see too many people who would know anything about the draft, which in this country was eliminated some time ago.

The point still remains that the draft took men into the army. Hungarian military forces fought in Russia with the Germans. To replace these Hungarian men with labor, they conscripted battalions of Hungarian Jews, my father being one of them. In 19 whatever, 1940, he was 36 years old, a young man, strong as an ox. He and all of his colleagues and doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs who had absolutely no knowledge of physical labor were conscripted to do mining, road repair, crater repair. My father would get a phone call, letter, or visit that would say on Tuesday at 3:00 you are to appear at this train station. You will be gone for a day, two, five, undetermined period of time. So for 3, 4, 3 1/2 years my father was out of the house, much as a traveling salesman. I didn't miss him after all, because

he wasn't home. It was routine for not being there. The fact that he wasn't there meant I grew up for those three years without a father.

It also meant my mother's work was less, because she was only taking care of herself and me. The maid was gone. My father wasn't home. My father's youngest brother, who was named David, after whom we named our son, David, he was a university student. Restrictions? He was the last graduate at the university in Budapest with a star on his chest. When he was called into these labor camps after he finished school in 1943, he threw a fit. My grandmother, who was visiting, fainted. It was unusual for David to go into the labor camp. But my father, routine. They were 10 years apart in age. So my father was 36, he was maybe 26.

>> Bill Benson: Manny, you also mentioned that there is the larger context of the war going on, so there was bombings and other deprivations. What was your food situation?

>> Manny Mandel: If you recall the pictures at the very beginning, my father is in the big furry coat with the hat. Coming home from the market.

Obviously, it was home at the time.

I have absolutely no recollection of food being a problem in any fashion, but perhaps there was some rationing. My wife, who grew up -- my wife is a survivor also, of New Jersey.

[Laughter]

She loves it when I say it. My wife tells me that during the war, we're the same age, there were rationing, certain things here, butter was restricted, gasoline was restricted. I don't think that we experienced restrictions in Budapest at the time that were any more severe than those restrictions.

I have no recollection of food being a problem. Although, it's interesting to me that my grandparents, who lived in Novi Sad, had a backyard where they lived, and they began to raise a couple of chickens and a rooster. They were not farmers, but there was some land, all fenced-in area. I remember they either brought or sent a bird. Maybe for holiday time. It isn't because we were starving, but there was perhaps some more difficult time. After all, the war is going on. Everybody has a little less of all the good things. Basically, food was not a problem, as I can recall it at that time.

>> Bill Benson: Manny, in December of 1941, I believe it was, might have been Novi Sad, you went to visit your aunt.

>> Manny Mandel: My grandparents.

>> Bill Benson: There you encountered a truly horrific experience. Please share that with us.

>> Manny Mandel: Sometimes the questions are asked what was my first experience with the Holocaust and I tell this story. The star was something. The bicycle was another. But this is different. This is earlier. This is 1941, 5 1/2 years old. Visiting Novi Sad, the visit wintertime, my grandparents.

There were also two aunts, my mother's two sisters lived in Novi Sad. They never left.

We're staying at the apartment of one of my aunts, been there two, three days, somebody comes up the stairs, says, "There's something going on outside. Somebody will surely be coming in to tell you about it." Within five minutes, two policemen come upstairs. In the most courteous way say please, ladies and gentlemen, get dressed warmly, you need to be outside. We're going to conduct a census.

We know that the census in this country takes place every 10 years. The census in Europe during the war under any kind of German controlled occupation took place about every 15 minutes.

They felt if they know precisely where everybody is at all times, it helps to control the situation.

Census. We didn't think anything of it. We got dressed warmly. Wintertime. It wasn't a bitter, terrible day. Go outside, told to turn left by the apartment and walk in that direction.

We did. We walked. My mother carrying, my father carrying, now 5 1/2 years old. I don't remember that to be in any way a difficult time. It was a little chilly, but nothing serious.

Until we arrived at a place where I recognized. I'll tell you in a minute why. A fence in on left, told to walk along this fence. Slowly. Advancing



forward. By this time, my grandparents came and some others, huddled together, a dozen, 18 people, friends, relatives, acquaintances, marching in that direction.

I recognize the place because in Europe, in cities which are not on the ocean but are on a river, most of the capitals, if you think, are on rivers, for obvious reasons. They created these very lovely beaches. This is the Danube river that flows through Novi Sad. Famous non-blue Danube. And you are along this fence, and inside the fence in the summertime are wave pools and heated pools and thermal pools and all kinds of restaurants. It's a very lovely place. It's a beach.

Winter, when it's frozen, the river is frozen and the places shut down. I recall from the previous summer, my parents recalled it from being there many, many times when they lived in Novi Sad before they went to Riga. They met in Novi Sad.

We're marching along, as we're marching, slowly ambling forward, we notice that the big gates of this place are open. People are told to go there, turn left into the gates. To the best of my knowledge then and since I never knew why we were there, but I knew what happened, but not why we were there.

As we begin to approach these gates, there's a policeman standing on the right side. He says to my father, "Mister, what are you doing here?"

He says I'm here visiting family. I don't mean that. That's your business. You don't belong here. You're not from Novi Sad. You and the crowd you're with if they get counted in the census, it will mess up the numbers. You're from Budapest. How do I know that? I'm a traffic policeman two blocks from your apartment. I've seen you dozens of times. I recognize you.

Saved our lives. Why? He said to us step aside. We get out of this census thing that he thought was going on. Maybe he knew better. As we step aside, within moments of this a staff car comes down the road, they have a powwow, and somebody gets on the bullhorn says, ladies and gentlemen, the requirements of the census have been met. There's a school right over there. There's hot coffee and chocolate. Please have some and go home.

What we didn't know, until later that night my parents found out, and the next day, I didn't find out, I certainly didn't understand it till much later, everybody who turned left in those gates was marched about 300 yards to the Danube, where the ice had been chopped open, were shot. Their bodies, if they were found, were found next March when the river thawed.

Ladies and gentlemen, I just described to you a pogrom, senseless, meaningless, useless exercise in power that you can perpetrate because you can.

Something happened in some village where the partisans, these were the guerilla outfits, did something, and in order to make a point of saying don't do that, they killed 350 people. That was my first experience with the Holocaust. Those going through the museum, or have been through, you may become familiar with a much larger pogrom of a similar type, where the area was enormous. It was called Kristallnacht, in German "The Night of Broken Glass."

>> Bill Benson: The staff car that came along and actually stopped this event from occurring was, as I recall, a German staff car. It had been Hungarians that had been doing the census, pushing people into the Danube. It seems ironic that Germans would have stopped that from taking place. Do you know why?

>> Manny Mandel: No. Apparently, what happened, this had been not a one-day process. But the German leadership had the most peculiar sets of inconsistency. They would stop something, because somebody decided they should.

By the same way, we got out of Hungary, you mentioned the group we were with, because we produced papers and claimed to be displaced persons. Folks, I was about as displaced in Hungary at the time with my mother -- not my father, he survived, an entirely different story -- I was about as displaced as I am in this chair. If you have triple stamps and

quadruplicate copies, it was acceptable. The most famous, upstairs, one Raoul Wallenberg, if you look outside, 14th street is one side, the other is Raoul Wallenberg Place, named after the Swedish diplomat who issued thousands of passes. They were as phony as \$3 bills. There was this inconsistency. For some reason nobody precisely knows, they said enough. There's no rhyme, reason, or logic.

>> Bill Benson: You were able to return to Budapest after that?

>> Manny Mandel: The next morning at 6:00. Here is an interesting point, my recollection. I thought it was an adventure. My father calls a taxi. 6:00, go to the train station, about 3 1/2 train ride to Budapest. The taxi, this is winter, in the snow, happens to be a one-horse taxi. It's a sleigh. Very common. There were motorized taxis and horse-drawn taxis. I thought it was a great adventure, I'm a kid, with this troika in front of me, thinking I'm going to be --

>> Bill Benson: Manny, the Germans end up occupying Hungary in March 1944. Hungary was an ally of the Germans. What led to the German occupation and then what did that mean for you once the Germans arrived?

>> Manny Mandel: The First World War, where Hungary was an ally of Germany, produced a regent who was the ruler of Hungary. The regent was a man named Horthy. Horthy was an admiral. You got to say to yourself, folks, how in heaven's name can an admiral in a landlocked country? But it's

legitimate.

In the First World War, for those who know, the map of Europe, you think about the Adriatic Sea, think about the top of the Adriatic, where Italy and Yugoslavia connect, which had been disputed territory and to some degree still is. Many sea battles of the type that took place in the First World War took place there, and that's where Horthy earned his spurs and was a legitimate admiral. I don't know exactly how many shims he had, but he is an admiral, the leader.

He makes a pact with Hitler to become an ally. That pact continues. While that pact continues the Germans do not occupy Hungary.

Now, in 1942, a conference takes place in Berlin called the Wannsee Conference. The Wannsee Conference has a number of people in it. They come up with the term that becomes a terrible term for us to remember. Namely, they come up with the answer of the final solution to the Jewish problem. What is the final solution? Complete and utter destruction.

They appoint a man to conduct that process, his name is Adolph Eichmann. Eichmann, who was then caught in Argentina, tried in Israel and executed. Well after the war.

Eichmann's job is to clean Europe of Jews. The Nazi position clearly outlined in Mein Kampf, Hitler's book which he wrote in prison, said let's get them out of Germany, then Europe, then the world. He didn't quite achieve

that. The point is Eichmann clears all of the countries of Europe. That's where the people come from to go to Auschwitz, Birkenau, Treblinka and all of the other camps. The last country he cleans out is Hungary. The last city is Budapest, by which time the alliance had broken up.

He gets to Budapest on March 19, 1944, deportations begin at the rate of 12,000 a day.

I don't know where you folks come from, but some of you come from towns and villages that are less than 12,000 people. Think about your village, town, township, city, being removed, never to be seen again, in one day.

He arrives on March 19. That's how he gets -- how Hungary becomes actively a victim of the -- not of the invasion, but of the occupation.

I never saw a German in Budapest until March of 1944.

>> Bill Benson: Then they were there in full force?

>> Manny Mandel: Absolutely.

>> Bill Benson: At the rate of 12,000 a day, if I remember right, over a 6-8 week period almost 600,000 Jews were deported.

>> Manny Mandel: That's right.

>> Bill Benson: Staggering sum.

>> Manny Mandel: Budapest was a city of a million people, 20% Jewish, 200,000 people before the war. Because of the nature of the alliance and the

apparent better situation in Hungary and later in Budapest, people came, and it swelled by an additional 400,000, thus created the 600,000. Not all 600,000 were killed, but a large portion were. Most were from other places, who migrated to Budapest, because they thought it was a safe place.

>> Bill Benson: You lost your grandparents in that time.

>> Manny Mandel: My grandparents were deported from Novi Sad, my mother's parents, with the two aunts I mentioned, and the daughter of one of the aunts. They got to Auschwitz Birkenau, the grandparents and daughter, my cousin, a year younger than I at the time, 7 at the time, told to go this way, never to be seen again. I don't think they lived out the day.

The aunts, who were 30-something-year-old women, were told to go the other way. They worked in labor, starved and they survived.

>> Bill Benson: While that's going on, there comes this proposal to swap Jews for trucks. This audacious proposal. Tell us how this originated, what the swap was supposed to be and, of course, it had huge implications for you and your family.

>> Manny Mandel: Eichmann arrives March 19. Probably within days, if not hours, he's approached by two members of something called the rescue committee. Not totally, but to some degree self-appointed. They were not really representing the Jewish community's establishment, because one of them came from another city. The man's name is Kostner. Lawyer. Kluche

in Romanian. He and his family moved to Budapest earlier, not quite then.

He and another man, who had essentially trained and lived in Germany by

the name of Joel Brand, approached Eichmann, demand to see Eichmann.

Ladies and gentlemen, you don't demand to see Adoph Eichmann.

You beg and cajole, but that's not what they did. Thank God they did that,

because the kind of arrogance, the kind of gall it took for them to do that is

almost more difficult to imagine than it is, but they felt that the only way they

could get through, and Eichmann to some degree because of some curiosity,

"Who are these idiots?" Was willing to see them. In the beginning

discussions they come up with a plan. If Eichmann releases a million Jews

from his holding, they will procure for him 10,000 trucks laden with materiel

and material to be used in the Eastern Front.

Folks, if you know what a \$3 bill is, I just described one. Again,

Eichmann did not have the people to release, even if he had the authority.

These folks didn't have a spare tire, let alone 10,000 trucks. However,

Kostner stays to negotiate with Eichmann. Brand is dispatched to speak to

the allies in Egypt, The British allies particularly, to secure 10,000 trucks.

I don't want to tell you how absurd that is, but pretty absurd.

Brand is arrested in Syria, spends the rest of the war in Egypt, in Cairo, in

jail. Survives the war.

>> Bill Benson: As a prisoner of the British?



>> Manny Mandel: As a spy. But he's not executed. The point is it was useless.

Now, you want to remember that this is taking place April of 1944. If you recall, D-Day is June of 1944. The war ends on May 5 of 1944. We'll come back to that date later.

>> Bill Benson: 1945 it ends.

>> Manny Mandel: 1945, I'm sorry. This is within a year of the end of the war. By this time the German high command all the way up to Himmler, not Hitler, Himmler, are interested in thinking about issues having to do with war crimes, postwar issues, because they realize that the possibility of the Germans winning the war is disappearing with enormous rapidity.

D-Day, June 6, 1944, was the beginning of the -- clear beginning of the end. They're willing to make arrangements, deals. But 10,000 trucks for a million Jews never happened. Couldn't happen. But out of that came a different arrangement, whereby for certain amounts of money, and not money so much because money, paper money, was useless. Yes, if you had pounds Sterling, the British currency, fine. If you had dollars, fine. Nobody had them. This became valuable items. Jewelry, gold, silver, that which is portable in suitcases.

To some degree, Eichmann and his cohorts found refuge in South America after the war, and I can assure you they were not only on welfare

but unemployment compensation. They had these moneys. Mengela, the famous doctor in Auschwitz and others, all benefited from this. The trade-off was that 1700-some people were placed on 35 cars to be taken to a neutral port and possibly even to a German port, like Hamburg, to be dispatched out of Europe, because out of Europe was a good thing in terms of getting Jews out of at least Germany.

>> Bill Benson: 1700 would be saved by this?

>> Manny Mandel: 17 and change.

>> Bill Benson: That's what --

>> Manny Mandel: We were not taken to the port.

>> Bill Benson: Before you talking about taken, a million is a huge number, 1700 is a small number. Who comprised the 1700?

>> Manny Mandel: Nobody. Every single group, every single organization, every single segment of the Jewish community in Budapest at the time made petitions, and somehow they have three of these, four of those, six, seven of those, somehow this comprised it, including, but perhaps starting with, some 25 people, thereabouts, of Kostner's only family. Not he. He stayed behind. But his wife, children, cousins. Various members of the family came and were to be given this priority arrangement. If I'm making a deal, I will certainly insist that my family be part of that deal.

Not his whole family, about 25. I don't know the exact number.

Beyond the 25, the rest of the 1700-some were from this religious organization, this sports organization, that school, various groupings, three here, four there, comprising. I don't think anybody with all of their research will ever be able to verify completely.

One of the best books on the subject is a book that Ladsy Loeb wrote available at the bookstore. He was an 11-year-old youngster with us in camp. He later became a Hungarian born, Swiss educated, German professor in England. Ladsy Loeb, I corresponded with him in the last week, lives in England, he wrote a well-researched book. His book is not totally illuminative of all of the various groupings. It's kinda, kinda, kinda, that's how the group was made up.

>> Bill Benson: Fortunately included you and your mother.

>> Manny Mandel: I don't know. There are several reasons my mother, I, my Uncle David would have been part of it, because of his connections, my father's connections, their station in the community. I don't know. One thing I'm certain of, I had nothing to do with it. Not as an 8-year-old. We're taken not to a port, but to Bergen-Belsen. Continue.

>> Bill Benson: That was the concentration camp where Anne Frank died.

>> Manny Mandel: Not a killing camp. I'll make comment on that to conclude this segment. We are taken to Bergen-Belsen on the ruse that we have three days of R and R. After that, 60 people are taken out. I'm not one.

I stay the full six months. We're taken to Switzerland in December of 1944.

Which is a lot better place to be in than in Bergen-Belsen.

>> Bill Benson: What was it like during that time in Bergen-Belsen? You were there for a substantial period of time.

>> Manny Mandel: The thing that occupied our time mostly was census, back to the census. Every morning we're told at dawn there will be a counting of the people. They didn't tell us when. We were told to be out at dawn, which we did. For some time. I can't give you specific period of time, rain, snow, whatever, out there. Until one of the officers said this is ridiculous. He said, I'm going to be here, let's say, 8:00 precisely. The precision was guaranteed. I don't care if you come out at 4:00 in the morning or 7:30, but be here at 8:00. It saved a lot of grief. It took up, in the earlier part, several hours of the day.

The other part was time spent attempting to make something of the food that was provided. Nobody starved and nobody gained weight. Because we went on this so-called trip to a port, we were told to pack some food. Miraculously, these foods lasted much longer than it would have lasted anyplace else. I assure you there was not a crumb that was not used.

So we're involved in that. Third thing that happened in camp, almost within days that we arrived, remember, this is a concentration camp, it's a labor camp, it is not a killing camp. Almost within days, certainly several

weeks, businesses open up. Ladies and gentlemen, businesses open up because businesses provide you with the opportunity to survive. There's something normal about that. You couldn't change our logic, couldn't change our this, that, and the other. But people were able to manufacture certain little items that they could trade for two cigarettes, which would be traded for a haircut, which was traded for having your shoes fixed, which was traded for something else. That's a business of sorts. It permits you to have some reason to exist in the morning. And as a consequence, the camp was evolving. We had daily inspections, we had periodic showers in warm water. No gas. Other than that, life was in a barrack, which was not heated, which was difficult, but survivable. All of us lost weight. Nobody died.

>> Bill Benson: Were you segregated from the main inmate population or were you --

>> Manny Mandel: Our 1700 were in a camp. We were segregated in that we were not turned out to labor, because we were this bartering group. I think they realized if they kill us, we're going to negotiate about it. So they kept us alive. We had two Red Cross missions that came in and did deliver packages. I was reminded the other day in talking about this that the Red Cross delivered some kind of very well-known -- you mix it with water, it became like cocoa or something. I didn't remember that. This stuff did come in with the Red Cross on at least two occasions. Life was -- well, let

me put it this way, I did two things in camp, I did them both very well. One, I was sick. I was very good at being sick. For several weeks I lay flat on my back with some kind of pneumonia.

The second thing I did very well, I was bored because there's nothing to do. I read the two books I had with me dozens of times. Two books which I still have in Hungarian are the Adventures of Robinson Crusoe. The second one, in those days and that place had no political implications but does here, namely "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Hungarian. You want an experience? Read about Uncle Tom's Cabin in Hungarian.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know if for your mother and your uncle David and the other of those in that 1700 group, did they at some point begin to feel that they would get out or was it this was just a big trick or trap and we're stuck here in a concentration camp?

>> Manny Mandel: I can't answer that. I only have kind of anecdotal vignettes of information. We didn't know where we were for the first several weeks, because nobody knew the location of this place. If you know the topography of northern Germany, the geography of lower Saxony, the state this is, south is Hamburg, next is Sele, next is Bergen-Belsen. It was between the villages of Bergen, Belsen. It was a village nowhere. I don't think anybody knew. The only thing we had a sense of, some people have knowledge of these things from education, we knew where north and south

was by the sun. Every day, particularly towards the end, we saw the sky blackened with American and British and Allied bombers. We had big four-engine things that were going to bomb Hamburg, because Hamburg was a major fort, and Hannover. We saw that all the time. I don't think we had any real understanding of -- D-Day we knew about, because that happened before we left. Other than that, I'm sure we didn't know anything about the Battle of the Bulge, unless we got out. We didn't have any real understanding. We didn't have a clear enough understanding of is this a death camp or not. When people want to not die, they don't plan on dying. It keeps them going.

>> Bill Benson: You were able to get out, so you ended up, the group --

>> Manny Mandel: In two sections, 350, then the balance into Switzerland.

For me, the war ends when I was in Switzerland. It didn't end for the rest of the world. Can I tell them when the war ended for the rest of the world? You need to remember that the war ends on May 8, 1945, which is a very important date in history. You already know, if you forgot, I'll remind you, it is also my birthday, May 8. It is also the birthday of the President of the United States. Not Roosevelt. Roosevelt died April, I think 17, 1945. Two, three weeks before the war ended, the President is Harry Truman. The end of the war, Harry Truman and I share a birthday.

>> Bill Benson: When you got to Switzerland, you're still a young child, do you know from later discussions with your mother and others, do you know if there was truly a sense that they were now safe? I know it was a neutral country, but war is still going on and will continue for almost six months.

Then once you were in Switzerland, what did you do?

>> Manny Mandel: Well, I think everybody felt safe because first of all, there are no uniforms. Secondly, no bombings. No planes. It is a safe environment and when the environment is safe, you feel safe.

I was sent, we all had to go somewhere. We arrived in Switzerland in the German section of Switzerland, transported to the French section to a very beautiful hotel where we spent several weeks eating potatoes. Although we were not starved, a couple of pounds wouldn't hurt.

My friend Ladislav, Professor Loeb, you remember the Hungarian-Swiss-German Englishman, stays with his father and stayed there well after the war.

I had nobody with me, in a sense, except my mother. I and 19 other kids were sent to Heiden, a children's camp, a children's home, a boarding school if you will. My mother was sent along to be interpreter, teacher, caretaker. That's where we spent the rest of the time from January until September. My mother decided since the original ruse for the Germans, the \$3 bill I talked about was to be taken to Palestine, that's where she decided



to go. I mean Palestine in that sense, in a different sense than it would be today. I became a Palestinian. So did she. My father joined us there in 1946.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us, before we close, Manny, about your father. He stayed behind in Budapest where you went. How did you reconnect with him? Did he know what had happened to you? Did he know where you were? Did he know you were at Bergen-Belsen? Did he know that you got to Switzerland?

>> Manny Mandel: My father was in labor camp, I described before. The labor camp experience he had throughout all of the 2 1/2, 3 years was in Hungary itself. We knew where he was when we left. He knew we were leaving. He didn't know what would happen to us, we didn't know what would happen to him.

Shortly after we left, this is towards the end of 1944, he was taken out of territorial Hungary with his group and began to do similar work, fortifications, whatnot, in the Ukraine.

As the Russians were approaching, he and a couple dozen of his colleagues in this battalion decided to take the risk of just walking away. They walked back into Hungary, back into Hungary, back into Budapest, before the war ended. They were liberated by the Russians.

In the meantime, he comes back there, the war ended, we're in

Switzerland, he's able to go to the offices of this lawyer, Kostner, who is still in Hungary. He was able to demand information about where the group was, because the group was identified as a special trade group. He knew we were in Bergen-Belsen, then he knew we were out of Bergen-Belsen. When that happened, we were able to use the -- not the offices as much as the services of one of his colleagues. My mother spoke to the man, my father was able to communicate with him by letter. No telephones, no cell phones. The man was able to connect my parents by mail.

My father wanted my mother to come back to Hungary. My mother said I will never set foot in Hungary again, and she didn't. She said I'm going south. You follow. He did.

>> Bill Benson: And he did.

>> Manny Mandel: He always had the last word. "Yes, dear." Story of my life.

>> Bill Benson: Maybe we should close there.

[Laughter]

>> Manny Mandel: Did she say it's OK?

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: I'm not interpreting here. I'm going to turn back to Manny to close our program in just a couple of moments. Of course, we could spend another hour hearing about what happened then. Now the war is over,

where'd they go? They go to Israel, end up in the United States, there's many, many stories and incidents and many trials during all of that process that brings us to this date, today. We'll save that for another time.

I want to thank you for being with us. We hope that you can come back and join us at a future *First Person* program. We'll have them each Wednesday and Thursday until August 15, then we'll resume again next March. The museum's website will have information about our program next year.

It's our tradition here at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. On that note, I turn it over to Manny to close today's program.

>> Manny Mandel: First, I want to say thank you, Bill. I've known this -- I think this is the fifth time I've done it. The first was with Bill, then with other various moderators at the museum. It's time to me to get back to home base and that's Bill. I thank you for having done what you do and having done this for 13 years?

>> Bill Benson: 14.

>> Manny Mandel: 14 years. I've only done it five. I'm younger than Bill.

The museum is a very important place and you're visiting it with a very important activity. Ladies and gentlemen, we can learn in many ways, but one of the places from which we cannot learn is the future. But we can learn from the past. So my admonition to you is to remember the words of a man

whose name you don't remember, perhaps, but you do remember his words. How many recall George Santayana? He said those of us who do not learn our history well may live to repeat parts of it. I'm not suggesting that this is an announcement of the forthcoming of another Holocaust, but many elements of history are there and our task is to learn it well. It can help us in the present. It can help us in the future. And I pose that as a challenge to you. Thanks a lot.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Manny, you can stay behind for a few minutes. If anybody would like to talk with Manny. He went too long to have a question period. If you would like to ask a question, he will be on the side. Ask away. If you want a picture taken too, that's all right too, right? OK. Thank you.

[Ended at 2:05 p.m.]