Thursday, August 8, 2013

1:00 p.m. - 2:01 p.m.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: FRANK LIEBERMANN

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
info@hometeamcaptions.com

>> Bill Benson: Good afternoon, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial >> 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, and our *First Person* today is Mr. Frank Liebermann, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2013 season of *First Person* has been made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring *First Person*. And I'm pleased to let you know that Mr. Louis Smith is here with us today.

[Applause]

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. We will close our 2013 season of *First Person* after our program on Thursday, August 15. The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests, and will provide information about our 2014 *First Person* program when it becomes available.

Frank Liebermann 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 of our program, there will be an opportunity for you to ask Frank a few questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Frank 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 Frank Liebermann. He was born in Gleiwitz, Germany, which is now part of Poland, in 1929.

He was the only child of Hans and Lotte Liebermann. On the left we see Hans Liebermann and on the right we see Lotte with her first granddaughter, Joanie.

Both of Frank's parents' families had lived in this part of Germany, again now Poland, for several generations. Frank is pictured here with his paternal grandparents, Bernard and Jenny Liebermann.

Hitler came to power in 1933, and when Frank began school in 1935 Jewish students were separated from the non-Jewish students and fear of anti-Semitic attacks became frequent. Pictured here is Frank's first grade class on the first day of school. The cones they are holding contain sweets to make school sweet. Frank is in the second row, the fourth from the right.

In 1936 Frank's father was no longer able to practice medicine as a result of anti-Jewish laws. In 1938 the family tried to obtain visas to come to the United States. Hans traveled first and Frank and his mother followed a few months later in October of 1938. Here we see Frank's mother's ticket for the ship they took to the United States.

The Liebermann family settled in Ohio and Frank went on to graduate from Western Reserve, now Case Western Reserve University, in 1950 with a degree in chemistry.

Frank graduated in 1950 and started a long and successful career in the textile industry in New York City. In that same year, he married Marianne, his wife of nearly 63 years. Frank worked in textile manufacturing until 1992, when he and Marianne moved to the Washington,

DC area to be closer to their children. Frank would last three months in retirement before going into the travel business which he continues today, specializing in Europe and US travel, including Alaska.

Frank and Marianne have three children, two daughters and a son. Their daughters, Nancy and Joan, live in this area and their son Jerry is in Seattle. They have five grandchildren with the youngest about to turn 22. As Frank notes, four of them are now gainfully employed. The fifth recently graduated from Tufts University with a double major in Hebrew and Arabic and public health degree and is looking for a position. She is also fluent in Hebrew.

Marianne, their daughter Joan and grandson Aaron are here with us today . If you wouldn't mind raising your hands so people know you're down here. Thanks for being here. [Applause]

Aaron, who is a teaching assistant at Mastrick University in the Netherlands, recently completed his master's degree in Modern European History and is prepared for his PhD. Frank notes that Aaron is motivated by the family's history.

Frank, Aaron and his sister Ellisa just returned from a trip to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other parts of Eastern Europe. They stopped in Gleiwitz, where Frank was born, now part of Poland as I mentioned a couple times.

Frank volunteers at the museum's Visitor Services where you will find him Thursday mornings. I think they let him off this morning to join us. As part of his responsibilities, he speaks with various groups visiting the museum. He has also spoken to wounded veterans at

the recently closed Walter Reed Army Hospital.

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

[Applause]

Frank, thank you so much for joining us, being willing to be our *First Person* today. Thank you for that.

>> Frank Liebermann: My pleasure.

>> Bill Benson: Let's start, we have just an hour, much for you to share with us. You told me that your earliest memories start in 1934 when you were 5. You also said at that time that, all in all, it was good, a good time for your parents. Tell us, to your best knowledge, why that was so and what you can about your family and their life and yours in Gleiwitz in those early years of your life.

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, my father was a surgeon and he practiced in Gleiwitz. We were about within an hour's drive of both of my grandparents, who we frequently visited on weekends. In our recently acquired small convertible, which I loved. Normally, it wasn't necessary, because my father's office was on the Main Street, with the streetcar that went to the hospital and it was easy transportation for most of his patients. So the car was a luxury, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, your family had been in the Gleiwitz area for a very long time, hadn't it?

>> Frank Liebermann: My mother's parents had a family business of leather wholesale, leather wholesalers and had a tannery, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1933. When

the Nazis came to power and my grandfather was convinced that this will blow over, they survived the starvation of World War I and they didn't want to move.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, tell us about your extended family. How large was your extended family?

>> Frank Liebermann: My mother had three brothers, and obviously I had a number of cousins, an aunt and uncle who my father's brother was an economist for the government and was fired in 1933, and unfortunately immigrated to Austria. My mother's brothers were in the family business, the older ones, but her younger brother was like my older brother. He was 11 years old and was still in school.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned that you had a convertible. Having a car wasn't typical in those days. Some of your mother's brothers drove motorcycles as I remember.

>> Frank Liebermann: My grandmother slept from that time on.

[Laughter]

Especially when one of them took me on the backseat, because I loved to take a ride as a little guy.

>> Bill Benson: Your family was fond of hunting mushrooms. I remember you telling me this. Tell us a little about that.

>> Frank Liebermann: One of the main excursions of my mother's side was they would, in season, go into the forest and there are many more mushrooms than what you get in the grocery store. They were pretty savvy in what to pick and what not to pick. But at the end, they always had a meeting, and all the mushrooms were put on a table, and anyone that didn't

look good and might be poisonous, anyone could object to it and it would be thrown out. In other words, the majority did not rule.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Everybody had veto power.

>> Frank Liebermann: We never got sick from them. They're delicious in cooking, especially with meats.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, you started school in 1935, attending a public school. You said to me that recess was the most dangerous time for you. Will you say a little bit about that?

>> Frank Liebermann: We had to leave the building, and at that time the playground was separated between boys and girls. We were basically guarded by teachers along in between, because otherwise the danger of being attacked was substantial. We were always glad when it was over.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember the stress of that, as a youngster?

>> Frank Liebermann: We basically knew -- we got reflexes on how to deal with it, and we made our decisions accordingly. While we did get out five minutes early from school, so that we could safely run home before the rest of the school got out.

>> Bill Benson: So it gave you like a five-minute head start?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: That was 1935. The next year, 1936, circumstances for your parents turned more ominous and became more difficult, if not dangerous. What changed in 1936, and what did that mean for your family and you?

>> Frank Liebermann: After the Crimean War, which happened after World War II -- after World War I, when Poland was created, minorities were protected on both sides of the border of Poland. We lived about five miles, well, less than five miles from the Polish border. So that the Germans had reason not to put some of their laws in place in order to also protect the Nationals on the Polish side. So that treaty gave protection for 15 years, from 1921.

So 1936, in July, the treaty was over, and then Der Sturmer, the very anti-Semitic caricature magazine, was at every street corner, behind glass so everybody could read it. We weren't able to use public facilities, like parks and swimming pools. My father's office had an SA, Hitler Brown Shirt guard, and he lost his hospital privileges. That's how we got early warning that things were going to be more serious than my grandfather had anticipated.

>> Bill Benson: So, in effect, with this law expiring, it became, in a sense, open season on minority populations, because these had the protection of the law that just expired?

>> Frank Liebermann: Correct. The first thing Hitler did in 1936 was to eliminate civil rights. That went to the area that I came from in 1936. We had a three-year reprieve.

>> Bill Benson: Also in 1936, your mother made a trip to Israel that had a very specific purpose. Tell us about her trip.

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, when my father realized that his practice was going to go, was going rapidly downhill, we started looking for places to go, and my mother investigated Israel and came back with a very negative report that at that time there was one doctor for every 100 people. That basically, doctors were becoming -- go to kibbutz to be chicken farmers and any other labor, that it would be almost impossible to practice medicine.

>> Bill Benson: In a sense, closing that avenue, as a practical matter for your father?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: You just mentioned the downhill slide of the business. Your grandparents, I think the leather business that they had you've actually seen the evidence of the downhill slide financially. Share that with us.

>> Frank Liebermann: After -- my grandparents had an accountant, who saved the records. He was not Jewish. After the war he sent my mother -- my mother contacted him, he sent my parents the records.

Of course, there were no reparations because Gleiwitz, where they were, became Polish. So land and property had no value, but they kept those records, and that in terms of volume of business, the Holocaust Museum has the records. They went down from about 100,000 marks to 20 by 1938, because of boycotts.

On Kristallnacht, that was the night after we left, the business was confiscated, was taken over.

>> Bill Benson: Your father, of course, lost his ability to continue practicing medicine, being a surgeon. What happened to his practice, his office?

>> Frank Liebermann: It went, period.

>> Bill Benson: At that time, with your parents thinking that they've got to get out of Germany, start to make plans, one of the things that they said is you needed to learn to swim. Tell us about that.

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, this was in, I think, January 1936. My parents said, look, you've got to take swimming lessons, because we may take an ocean voyage and the swimming pool is going to be closed as of July. And I remember, I don't know exactly when, my grandfather, after I had learned enough, took me to the swimming pool, said, "I'm not going home until you pass a test of swimming 20 minutes without stopping, which makes you a swimmer."

>> Bill Benson: On an ocean liner later?

>> Frank Liebermann: Exactly. I still like to swim.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, your family didn't keep a kosher kitchen. Yet, you only bought kosher meat in Gleiwitz at that time. Why was that?

>> Frank Liebermann: Gleiwitz had a population of about 1,000 Jews, and the one temple accommodated both liberal and very ritualistic families under one rabbi, and everybody was accommodated to participate as much as they needed to. There were daily services, and everybody could participate. But in order to have a kosher butcher, he had to have enough clientele in order to make a living. So it was requested that everybody buys from the kosher butcher so he can stay in business. In other words, the community pulled together.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, during that time with your father having lost his livelihood, he's no longer able to practice, how did the family make ends meet at that time?

>> Frank Liebermann: Basically, from whatever savings we had. We were looking elsewhere anyway, and we lived very frugally. But we survived to the extent that when we left, my grandfather, my father's father, didn't want to be a burden, so he signed himself into an assisted living place. Whatever was left went to support him.

>> Bill Benson: And also, living frugally, I think the family rented a garden space. Tell us a little bit about that.

>> Frank Liebermann: I'm sorry, I have to correct something.

>> Bill Benson: OK.

>> Frank Liebermann: In 1936 when we couldn't use playgrounds, our family, about 10 families who knew each other, rented what was known as a garden that is a space at the edge of town where you could rent plots of land to plant. We used that as a playground. We also had a cherry tree, a pear tree, and used that as a place to go to.

>> Bill Benson: Because you couldn't go to the public parks, this became your playground?

>> Frank Liebermann: Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, in January 1938 your father made a trip to the United States that made it possible for him later that year, in June, to leave for the US. Tell us about his trip in January, and then the events that led up to his departure in June of 1938.

>> Frank Liebermann: My grandfather found that there was my great-grandfather's daughter-in-law, had a daughter -- no, the great-great grandfather's son-in-law came to the grandfather and said, "I'm in a jam. I need $3,000, which was a huge amount of money for the week, and please help me out."

>> Bill Benson: He needs it for a week?

>> Frank Liebermann: It turned out that he used that to go to the United States. It brought the business close to bankruptcy, but they made it. But they survived, and nobody talked about it, but my grandfather told my father that if he looks him up, if he needs an affidavit to guarantee

the United States -- an affidavit was a guarantee that whoever comes or immigrates to the United States will not be unwealthy for a year.

The United States was in depression, in a depression in 1938. That was a second dip of the Great Depression. So he visited him, this man had to show his income tax. He was a vice president of Bendix Aviation with a salary of $38,000 a year in 1938, which was enormous. He did get the affidavit, and we immediately applied for immigration to the United States, and we were given a number when he came back.

>> Bill Benson: The number was part of a quota, to be able to get to the United States?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. It was a quota, I believe, of 25,000. Now, it's -- the quota laws for the United States at that time were a proportion of the population from every country which occupied, so that it was reasonable for Germany. It did not exist for Poland nor a lot of the other countries, which were also in peril.

>> Bill Benson: During that time your father now has to wait for his number to come up.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: As part of that you told me about an incident, as you know I'm going to ask about, with the --

>> Frank Liebermann: I know you're going to ask about it. Corruption was rampant. In other words, visas were being sold by consuls without authorization. People were then deprived of entry, like the famous, or infamous, St. Louis in Cuba, which had I think 900 refugees without authorization. The ship was off the Florida coast for about 10 days. It finally went back to Europe, where it landed in Holland, and redeposited the people in Europe.

In our case, when nothing happened my father called the friend in Berlin and said, "Nothing is happening. I'm really getting anxious."

"Well, the consul has a secretary, Fraulein Schmidt. Why don't you get a nice big box of candy?"

So my father, being very prompt, went to Berlin and bought Fraulein Schmidt a nice big box of fancy candy. A month later still nothing had happened, so he called the friend again, asked him, and he said, "Well, didn't you put 100 marks inside?"

He promptly did that, and the next week we got request to have a physical in Berlin, and that led to our visa. This was not an isolated case.

>> Bill Benson: Right. Had he not done that, who knows what would have happened?

>> Frank Liebermann: Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: After your father got the visas, everything is set, he canceled the lease on his office, and that triggered, I think if I remember correctly, a visit from the Gestapo.

>> Frank Liebermann: There was -- a lease in Germany was generally done by the tenant giving the landlord a mortgage. That was a big loan. In order to compensate him. When you broke the lease, you got the mortgage back. So when he was ready to leave, he canceled his lease and had the money turned over from the landlord's bank to his bank, and I have to mention that all bank accounts were frozen in 1936.

>> Bill Benson: All Jewish bank accounts?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes, all Jewish bank accounts. So that you couldn't take out any more than living expenses. Also, you couldn't take any money out of Germany. The limit was $2.50

per person when leaving. And when the mortgage was transferred, somebody from the landlord's bank called the Gestapo and said a large deposit went out from Dr. Liebermann. So they basically came in and said, "You're under arrest. You just withdrew a large amount of money, and that's forbidden." He said, "Excuse me, it was transferred to my bank, to the frozen account."

He called the bank president, who was nice enough to answer the phone, and confirmed that the money was redeposited and that it was in his possession, his bank's possession. So they left.

>> Bill Benson: And Frank, with the bank accounts frozen and the inability to take cash out, as you said limited to $2.50 per person, when your father -- it was time to leave for the US in June of 1938, how was he able to do that financially as well as for you and your mother to have money to live until you were able to go?

>> Frank Liebermann: We were pretty close to the Czech border, and took frequent trips to the giant mountains, the Sudaten Mountains, which you may have heard at the time of Munich. Those were the Czech mountains which were in the underbelly of Germany, which Chamberlain and Daladier gave away to the Germans in Munich in 1938.

They sewed small amounts of bills each time into their coats and various pockets, and gradually built up a small bank account in Czechoslovakia.

Also, if you took a German boat to the United States, you got a fairly general spending allowance. If you took first class. So in each case, my father, then later my mother, booked the cheapest first class cabin, way in the bow, which meant that you went up and down during

the storm, which we had later. But we lived under -- you could withdraw the spending allowance, and we lived on that for about half a year.

>> Bill Benson: That also supported your father, potentially, when he came to the US?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yeah. He had a room, he lived in a furnished room for $5 a day, while he was studying for state boards.

>> Bill Benson: In Cleveland, right?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. But times -- inflation has gone up.

[Laughter]

Since those times.

>> Bill Benson: In June 1938 your father was able to leave?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: He came to the United States. You and your mother would leave in October. So four months, nearly four months later. Once your father left for Cleveland and he wanted to get there to start studying for the boards to resume a practice --

>> Frank Liebermann: We were allowed to save money.

>> Bill Benson: You stayed behind. What was it like now for you and your mother to remain in Gleiwitz under those circumstances? What did you do during that time to prepare for your departure?

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, my mother was basically closing the household. At that time, you could still take property out if you paid 100% tax. She bought a sewing machine so that she could sew clothes if necessary, and anything that would be -- she packed up office equipment.

Again, money had no value, so the export tax made sense because before my father could pass the state boards we had no way of making a living.

Fortunately, that happened that December.

>> Bill Benson: So for everything that you purchased it was 100% tax on that?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. That you owned.

>> Bill Benson: So whatever you had?

>> Frank Liebermann: Whatever you had, you had it appraised, paid it, then you packed it in what was called the lift, which was a big container like a shipping, cargo ship.

>> Bill Benson: During that time, while you're waiting, you unfortunately broke your arm. Tell us about that incident.

>> Frank Liebermann: This gives a hint on how -- I was 9 years old, but we developed certain instincts. I had fallen and broke my arm. I knew it hurt. I proceeded to take my bicycle, hold my arm, ride home with one hand, rather than to call anybody, because that wasn't a good idea. I would not have called 911. I did manage to get home. My mother immediately called an orthopedist from Gleiwitz, who told her he's sorry, he can't handle it, because he doesn't treat Jews.

>> Bill Benson: This was probably somebody your father knew from his practice?

>> Frank Liebermann: Oh, they had had dinners with the equivalent of medical society with them. There's an exhibit in the museum now "And they were your neighbors." This was -- I can add that to that experience.

My mother started calling various hospitals and finally found somebody in Boyton, which

was my father's hometown, who instructed her to take a taxi to the Catholic orphanage and go in the back door, and that he would make it his business to be there and set my arm and give instructions to our pediatrician, who would take care of it from then on.

So he put the cast on, and my pediatrician did the rest of it, and did such a good job that my left arm extends further than my right arm.

[Laughter]

It was the left one that was broken.

>> Bill Benson: All of that was done surreptitiously?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Why did it take four months for you and your mother to follow your father?

>> Frank Liebermann: The visa at that time was 120 days. So it was prudent to save money in the United States. That's why my father was studying, but he doesn't have any additional expenses. We went in October. In fact, we arrived on October 20, 1938, and were met by my father and immediately taken to Cleveland, where he was studying at the time.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to arriving in the US, Frank, when your mother made the preparations, she arranged for the trip on a ship, when you got to the port in Bremerhaven, you had a scary incident there.

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, I mentioned Munich, which in order to underline the threat of war from Hitler he called back all German ships at sea. So the Europa on which we were booked was called back. By the way, my future wife was on that ship.

>> Bill Benson: On that ship?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. They were called back to Bremen and lost three days in the harbor. Obviously, it was running behind schedule. When we got to Bremerhaven there was no ship, and propaganda was so complete, the censorship was so complete you couldn't listen to foreign radio, all press was nationalized, and in fact listening to a foreign station was cause for imprisonment or concentration camps.

So that when Munich was happening, my father sent cables, "Get an earlier ship. Get an earlier ship."

>> Bill Benson: Munich was a conference?

>> Frank Liebermann: The Munich Conference, where Czechoslovakia was sold down the river. For peace in our time, that's a famous quotation of Neville Chamberlain, the prime minister of England. That lasted exactly a year.

So anyway, we were told that the ship would be coming in the next day, and we did the final -- we made up the final time, because it could make it in six days on the passage, well, a week, seven days, it was always supposed to leave on the same day.

>> Bill Benson: And your father had frantically been telling you to come earlier.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. But we didn't know why. We didn't find out until we were on the ship.

>> Bill Benson: By the time you left, your visa was beginning to run out. You were up against the clock, if I remember right.

>> Frank Liebermann: We had a week.

>> Bill Benson: A week left to go. Close.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: What do you remember about your trip to the US?

>> Frank Liebermann: It was extremely -- hurricane season in October, and I was fascinated by the fact that when I looked at -- we were in first class, not because of luxury, I said we had a cabin right in front of the boat, so that you felt like going in an elevator. It was sudden ups and downs. But I spent my time watching the bow go dive into the wave, and then when the wave finally came off it went up with a jerk. It was fascinating. One time I was one of six people in the first class dining room.

>> Bill Benson: Because everybody else was sick?

>> Frank Liebermann: Everybody else was sick. Except for me, everybody sat on the captain's table, but since I was Jewish I didn't know why.

>> Bill Benson: Had a table to yourself?

>> Frank Liebermann: A table for myself.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, what was it like to reunite with your father? Do you remember that?

>> Frank Liebermann: Oh, it was great. The first thing I was introduced to was a Coke, which is a national drink. Then we took the 5th Avenue bus for five cents and got a beautiful tour of New York, Central Park and back.

I had my sightseeing tour and we bought a big crystal ashtray to the cousin who gave us the visa.

>> Bill Benson: The cousin who is a descendent of the fellow who had gone to Germany?

>> Frank Liebermann: The descendent of one who absconded with the $3,000. He accepted it graciously and took us to the top of the RCA Building, where I got a view of New York.

After that, we were off to Ohio.

>> Bill Benson: You go to Cleveland, your father is preparing for his medical boards there, and you unpack. One of the things that you unpack is your bicycle.

>> Frank Liebermann: No, that didn't come until Dayton.

>> Bill Benson: I'm jumping ahead a little bit. But let's go there. Eventually, you move to Dayton.

>> Frank Liebermann: My mother was closing up the household. We took anything that was practical, including my bicycle, which was my way of transportation. Friends of theirs, in fact, my mother's obstetrician -- no, somebody else. Friends of theirs had a bicycle and motorcycle store, and they offered to pack up my bicycle in one of those boxes so it doesn't take much room. You know, you turn it in a bicycle box, and my mother graciously accepted. The bicycle, by the way, was packed into the lift, which it was called, with the furniture and everything, with the customs inspector to see that everything had been properly paid for the second time.

Everything was sealed and went out.

>> Bill Benson: The customs official first would unpack everything?

>> Frank Liebermann: Checked everything.

>> Bill Benson: Checked everything, repacked it.

>> Frank Liebermann: They checked everything, and checked it off. It was sent off and stored in Cleveland because we didn't know where we would go from there. So that goes -- I'll skip ahead. My father passed the exams and opened an office in Dayton on Valentine's Day. February 14, 1939.

We had gotten a one-bedroom apartment, and unpacked the lift. When we got to Dayton we got a letter from the bicycle store, said they should be very careful opening up my bike. In the frame, covered by black cloth, are some valuable gold coins which were prohibited ownership. In other words, nobody was allowed to own any gold. And they should keep them for them for later delivery.

My father turned red, blue and orange. That anybody would endanger our lives for a few lousy gold coins, which by now are owned by my children. In other words, everyone got one, and also Marianne. After the war they requested the refrigerator, he should sell them and get them a refrigerator.

>> Bill Benson: In return for their gold coins?

>> Frank Liebermann: In return for the gold coins, which he gladly sent off and never wanted to hear from them again.

>> Bill Benson: Now let's go back, Frank, you're in Cleveland. In November, November 9-10, the infamous Night of Broken Glass, or Kristallnacht in Germany and Austria. You're in Cleveland, but the family is still in Germany. Tell us about that.

>> Frank Liebermann: It was a Wednesday where they had a special, I think, 10 cent movie, because nobody wanted to go to a movie on Wednesday. That was the first time my parents

went out.

They asked a neighbor to look in, this was an apartment house, to look in on me occasionally. And all of a sudden, about 9:00, the phone rings for a person-to-person call from my grandparents. This was 3:00 in the morning German time.

I knew something wasn't right, but that was the longest hour I can remember until my parents came back. They answered the phone and advised that my mother's brothers were arrested, that the store had been confiscated, what can we do to help?

So my father's next step, even though it was before the state boards, was to take a greyhound bus to New York to see the cousin. Who --

>> Bill Benson: The same one who had given you the affidavit?

>> Frank Liebermann: Same one who gave us the affidavit. We never used a penny of it. We told him what happened. He said, "I'm sorry. I can't take that much responsibility. It isn't a year yet for you, so I can't help you."

In other words, the family got too close to that event, and that was it.

Now it's eventually -- they were never able to get out, because we had no way of giving an affidavit to guarantee that they wouldn't need help.

By the way, I like to add, I'm considered a survivor. I really consider myself a witness. My instincts were honed, but I wasn't affected the way some of my colleagues here at the museum are. But I feel the story is close enough, and the museum considers me a survivor. I'm one of the fortunate ones.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, if you don't mind, there's a couple things I want to ask you about before we close.

>> Frank Liebermann: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: When your father passed his boards, was able to practice medicine in the United States, you moved to Dayton, but your father had some obstacles to get into practice. If you don't mind sharing that with us, I wish you would.

>> Frank Liebermann: All right. I mentioned that he chose Dayton because there was no Jewish ear, nose, throat, ENT specialist in Dayton. As soon as he got settled he applied for AMA membership, which was a license to legitimacy at that time, because if you belonged to the AMA you had to show that you went to an accredited medical school, that you had a good reputation, that you got the proper background, and it was a requirement for getting hospital privileges.

So right after he applied the AMA held an emergency meeting on a Friday night --

>> Bill Benson: In Dayton, the Dayton chapter?

>> Frank Liebermann: On chabas night, and passed an ex post facto law by citizenship for membership, by a vote of 52-50. Somehow, one of the people at the meeting called the paper about it, because the next morning a reporter from the Dayton Herald called my father's office said can he come in for about 15 minutes?

He saw the reporter, who asked for his credentials, and looked at them, thanked him and went away.

The next morning there was an editorial in the Dayton Herald Sunday paper, "Freedom

of Opportunity in the United States," describing what had happened.

The following Monday he had 11 new patients. So one of my favorite sayings is, "If you get a lemon, try to make lemonade." You never know what happens.

>> Bill Benson: Your father, when you told us that he immediately left for New York after the night of Kristallnacht to see what he could do, and was not able to do very much, he would dedicate himself to helping refugees come from Europe. Will you say a little bit about that?

>> Frank Liebermann: He gave I think 107 affidavits for various refugees in order to get resettled. And this was after the war, because he felt he wanted to help other people. He was the recipient of the highest, the international highest award, together with President Truman, by the way. That was a special honor. For rehabilitation work of refugees after World War II. The HIAS is an organization which I don't know the exact name. You might.

>> Bill Benson: Hebrew Immigration and Aid Society? HIAS.

>> Frank Liebermann: Exactly. He was the proud presentation of that.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, tell us about some of your family members that remained in Germany. What happened to them?

>> Frank Liebermann: Unfortunately, my father's -- my grandmother died. My father's mother died in 1935 of high blood pressure.

My father's father, whose picture you saw and who went to an assisted living place, my father was able to get him, since he was single, visa to get out. On the way to Spain, this was already during -- this was in 1940, during World War II had already started, but there were ways of getting out, he got sick and rather than to be taken to a hospital he was sent to

Theresienstadt, where he perished.

My mother's brothers, the two older ones, twins, and wife and daughter, were on the way to Shanghai, one of two countries which took refugees. Shanghai and the Japanese occupation. And the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean. They were on an Italian boat on the day that Italy declared war on France and England when Hitler broke through the Maginot Line, or went around it and headed for Paris. So the ship could never get through the Suez Canal and was sent back to Genoa. We never heard from them again.

My grandparents were in Theresienstadt until about the end of 1943 and then sent to Auschwitz, and my mother's little brother -- I have documentation, he also perished in Auschwitz. I don't know when.

We had had some contact with -- my mother had some contact with her parents where the Red Cross occasionally went in and said everything was fine, because they weren't looking behind the walls.

>> Bill Benson: Did any of your family members that were in Germany survive?

>> Frank Liebermann: A distant cousin, who somehow got to Panama in 1939, and whose daughter is our closest relative in Virginia.

>> Bill Benson: She eventually came from Panama to the United States?

>> Frank Liebermann: They came to the United States.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, for you, probably the last question I'll be able to ask, you came here in 1938, Kristallnacht occurred in November of 1938. Germany went to war attacking Poland in

September 1939. Then the war was on. The United States getting into the war after Pearl Harbor in December 1941. What were those war years like for you and your family?

>> Frank Liebermann: For my mother it was horrendous, because it was a combination of hope and fear, but you have to go on and she was a trouper. She helped my dad in his office, because doctors and nurses were in very short supply. My father was rejected from the army. He volunteered.

>> Bill Benson: He volunteered.

>> Frank Liebermann: But he was over 40. They wanted young doctors, and Dayton was -- grew from 200,000 to 300,000 and had a terrific shortage of physicians during that time, because Dayton was General Motors, National Cash Register, all war industries. But he volunteered, every Thursday was giving medical exams of draftees.

>> Bill Benson: Your mom wrote a book, right?

>> Frank Liebermann: She wrote an autobiography of her two lives, which my children really pushed for. I want to give special thanks to my daughter-in-law in Seattle, who is a computer wiz early on, who was the chief editor and printer.

>> Bill Benson: Last question for you, Frank. When you had to start school, of course, when you were here, and you were put at a very early grade than you were prepared for, but moved quickly. Tell us about your first school experience here.

>> Frank Liebermann: I was put back about a year. That was the way it was done. There were no tests for teachers, which my wife was for many years. I skipped -- actually, I was a

little ahead of myself when I was finished. That was no problem.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: I would think not. I'm going to turn back to Frank in a couple moments to close our program. We didn't have an opportunity for you to ask questions, but when we finish Frank will step down off the stage and so if anybody would like to come ask him a question, that works for you, right, Frank?

>> Frank Liebermann: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: If you want to say hi, get your photograph taken together, please do so. I want to thank all of you for being here, remind you that we will have two more *First Person* programs this year, next Wednesday and Thursday, then we'll resume again in 2014.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. And so on that note, I'll turn it back to Frank to close the program before he steps over to the side here if anybody wants to talk to him.

>> Frank Liebermann: I just came back from a trip, which was wonderful, with my grandson Aaron and his sister, to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and southern Poland. Among other things, we went back to the town where I was from, which is now in Poland. Whenever I think of that or hear of it, I kind of pinch my cheek to think that I could have possibly lived there, because with all of the things which we discussed about the Holocaust, was given the chance to live the American dream, which I would have never done elsewhere. I'm grateful for that.

I go one further. I've made peace. When I volunteer here at the museum, I have a big button that says, "I speak German." I feel it's three generations. The Germans have probably

owned up to what they did better than any other country in Europe, and hate gets you nowhere. The other person doesn't even feel it. So I feel very good about volunteering here, and basically in my mind this museum's job is to prevent genocide or prejudice of any kind, because it is bad for everybody.

End of story.

[Applause]

[Presentation ended at 2:01 p.m.]