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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: LEON JULIUS MENN

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

(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 today. We are in our 15th year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Mr. Julius Menn, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2014 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship. *First Person* is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid August, each Wednesday and Thursday. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card that you will find in today's program. Or you can speak with a representative of the museum at the back of the auditorium when this program is over today. In doing so, in completing the card, you will also receive an electronic copy of Julius Menn's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Julius will share with us his *First Person* account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If towards the end of the program we have an opportunity for some time for questions, then we'll have an opportunity for you to ask him a few questions.

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

help with his introduction. We begin with this photo of Julius Menn as a young boy. He was born in 1929 in the free city of Danzig now Gdansk, Poland.

In 1935, Julius, his parents and younger sister Bella legally emigrated to Palestine. In the summer of 1938, the family traveled back to Poland to visit relatives over the summer holiday. At the end of the summer the family did not return to Palestine. Pictured here are Julius, his sister Bella and their German governess in Warsaw, Poland in 1938.

Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Shortly after the invasion, the Menn family fled eastward. On this map of Poland the arrow shows the route the Menn family took. Beginning in Bialystok they wandered along with other refugees for two weeks in the forests and fields of eastern Poland, eventually making it to Molodeczno, a major railroad junction. The arrow ends at the approximate location of Molodeczno.

From there, a young Soviet officer helped the Menn family get a train to Vilnius, where they lived in the ghetto for a year. In the fall of 1940, David managed to get four of a total of 300 transit visas that had been issued by the Soviet Union. The Menn family traveled to Odessa and from there took a ship to Turkey and eventually back to Palestine. They arrived in Tel Aviv in October 1940. The Menn family is pictured here in Tel Aviv in 1945. Julius is on the right.

Julius served in the Haganah, the Jewish Defense Force in Palestine, as a teenager, and later as a junior officer. In 1947, Julius moved to the United States to attend university but he returned to Israel in 1948 to serve in the army in the War of Independence. Here we see Julius as an officer in the Israeli Army.

We close with this photo of the dedication of Julius' father's Shimshon cement factory in Har-Tuv. At

the table speaking is Julius' Uncle Nachum Menn. Standing next to the table on your right on the screen is Julius' father David. Seated at the table is Golda Meir, former prime minister of Israel. In 1950, Julius emigrated to the United States and continued his education.

Julius and his wife Dianne Sagner live in Hadley, Massachusetts having moved there from suburban Maryland in late 2011. He earned his PhD from the University of California at Berkeley and had a long career as a toxicologist specializing in a number of areas including crop protection and pesticides. After spending 27 years in private industry he became associate director of the Plant Sciences Institute at the United States Department of Agriculture's Research Service in Beltsville, Maryland. He published over 125 scientific papers throughout his career, and has traveled internationally extensively including making 30 trips to the Soviet Union as a member of the USA-USSR Research Team on Pesticides and Environment.

While Julius retired from the USDA in the mid 1990s he continued work in his field for 10 years as an international consultant including with the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service. In this capacity, he spent considerable time in Hanoi, Vietnam and Turkmenistan.

Together, Julius and Dianne have four children and nine grandchildren. Julius volunteers with the museum's archives, translating from Hebrew handwritten newspapers from Eritrea where the British imprisoned Jewish Freedom Fighters. He helped to compile the now-completed massive "Encyclopedia of the Holocaust" and also translated and edited "Memorial Books," which remember and honor Jewish residents of towns and cities who were martyred during the Holocaust. He did this for over 120 towns and villages. Most of his translation is from Hebrew, but he also translates Polish and Yiddish.

Julius also speaks frequently about his Holocaust experience in various locations, such as schools and synagogues. Now that he is in Massachusetts, he is part of the Speakers Bureau of the Boston branch of this museum. He has lectured at the University of Massachusetts. In the Pioneer Valley area, where he lives, he is leading seminars in philosophy. He is also auditing courses at Amherst College.

Julius has published his memoir, titled "Waves, A Memoir," which chronicles his first 21 years, from 1929 to 1950. After today's program, he will be available to sign copies of his book, which is also available in the museum's bookstore and through Amazon and other book outlets. With that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Mr. Julius Menn.

[Applause]

Thank you. You are one busy man.

>> Julius Menn: Welcome. I'm very pleased to be here again. I want to thank Bill Benson for this very detailed and very honorable introduction. And I want to welcome you here. I think it's -- on my part it is, as we say in Yiddish or Hebrew, it's a mitzvah to keep the Holocaust memory alive, and I will contribute in a small way, I hope, through my story to that, which is an eye witness experience.

>> Bill Benson: Julius, thank you so much for that introduction to our program, and for being willing to travel from Massachusetts to join us today. Let's get started. Julius, you've described to me that your early years were a "wonderful life." Tell us about your early years before you moved to Palestine, what your life and your family, your community were like in those early years.

>> Julius Menn: OK. My father was a soldier in the army in World War I. He fought against the Austrians, and he lost his toes on one foot because of bad uniforms. Also, the Russians lost that war,

you know.

But he was an ardent Zionist. Basically, he didn't go to high school. He went to a Jewish, what's called a hadar, a religious education, and although he was not very religious.

In 1919, in the Ukraine, there were big pogroms against Jews, as Ukrainians at that time tried to get independence when the Bolsheviks came in, the Soviets.

So he escaped to Poland, in 1920 I guess. He got a fake birth certificate that made him 10 years older, so he didn't have to serve in the Polish army again, because the Polish army was fighting the Russians at the time. There was another war. And so he settled in Danzig. Why Danzig? Danzig was a small republic established by The League of Nations as part of the victory of the Western Allies and World War I, and it had a very, very democratic constitution.

So many Jews from Russia settled in Danzig, and my father settled there too. But his ultimate aim was to emigrate to Palestine, because as a Zionist he saw this as the home for the Jewish people.

>> Bill Benson: Of course, while he was in Poland, he became a very successful businessman. Tell us about that.

>> Julius Menn: Well, when we lived in Danzig he also -- there was a port city close-by. He became a lumber merchant and would import lumber from Sweden for paper mills. In that process, he met my late grandfather from Bialystok who had big ports in eastern Poland and a match factory in Bialystok. Because of the business they became friends. It so happens that my grandfather had an available daughter to get married, and they got married in 1927. We lived in -- Danzig had several villages

around it, so we lived, I guess it was, a very royal life. My father became quite wealthy, but he planned to go to Israel, to Palestine.

>> Bill Benson: You did eventually do that when you were 6, in 1935.

>> Julius Menn: In 1935, we went to Palestine. I remember the apartment house where we lived, the last apartment house it belonged to a German lady, Mrs. Schultz, and of course she told me, Well, a shark or a whale fish will eat you on the way to Palestine. I'm sure she was joking.

>> Bill Benson: But at least you weren't eaten, so you made it.

>> Julius Menn: It's interesting that in Danzig, for example, most of the population was German. Those of you who have read maybe Gunter Grass' "The Tin Drum," there was a Polish population and a Kashubian population, people who spoke a mixture of Polish and German.

I used to ride on Friday mornings to the marketplace, There was a famous long market in Danzig, to buy live fish for the Friday dinner. I would ride in the car of the landlady's son, who had a big swastika on his arm. But in those days it was not so much directed against Jews as it was more of a fascist political movement.

Anyhow, we went to Palestine and we settled in the relatively new city of Tel Aviv, which was basically founded in 1920. It was right on the sea, and it was a wonderful life. There were about a quarter million people living there. It was such a safe place, where we didn't have to lock the houses because there was no burglary, there was no crime. Even when I was in first grade, I would walk after school to the beach, the Mediterranean, and take a swim in the ocean, then go home. There was no problem. You didn't have to guard little children, because it was very safe.

>> Bill Benson: What was your schooling like in Tel Aviv?

>> Julius Menn: Well, I had to -- I attended a Hebrew school, because that was the language of the Hebrew community, and Hebrew was revived, basically, from obscurity. It was the same Hebrew spoken 2,000 years ago in Palestine, in Israel.

I only knew German. I remember I had this teacher in the first grade, she would read to the class "Robinson Crusoe" in Hebrew. At recess I would say to her, she knew German, I said, "Tell me quickly, in German, what did you tell them?" So she did, and within three months -- children learn languages very, very fast. I wish that in our country that they taught children from first grade languages, because you can pick up a language in a few months.

>> Bill Benson: You had, in Poland, you had a German governess or nanny. She came with you to Palestine.

>> Julius Menn: Yeah, that was amazing. I had a Catholic German nanny, who came with us to Palestine, because she loved my sister, she loved me. My parents traveled a lot. And she was Catholic, and I remember in the evenings she taught me Catholic catechisms. I had to say prayers so this devil won't catch me.

[Laughter]

Well, I guess he didn't catch me. So life was really wonderful. I belonged to sports organizations, and -- shall I start now with --

>> Bill Benson: Tell us now, in the summer of 1938, you go back for a visit to Poland.

>> Julius Menn: My mother's family all lived in Poland at that time. My father had a business in Poland that he wanted to sell to the government, because it involved a railroad junction and so on. I was heartbroken. I was 9 years old, and I believe my friends -- imagine a 9-year-old moving,

imagine yourself moving to a country of a different religion, of a different language, a different culture, being forced to go there. Well, as a 9-year-old I suffered terrible headaches, but we went to Poland.

This was almost suicidal, because in '38 everybody knew that the war is coming.

So anyhow, we arrived in Poland, and I spent the summer of 1939 -- of '38 it was, at my grandmother's summer estate, and I learned how to pick with her mushrooms and berries, and it was a wonderful summer. There are beautiful woods in Poland, and I would run around, I remember, in a bathing suit with a knife, and I pretended that I'm Tarzan. But that summer I thought that after the summer we would go back. Well, we didn't go back, and I had to go to a Polish school.

>> Bill Benson: You moved to Warsaw?

>> Julius Menn: Yes, we moved to Warsaw and lived in the -- it was a small hotel, and I had to attend a public Polish school. Well, I didn't know any Polish, but I had to learn it. This was the first time that I encountered discrimination. I'll just briefly explain it to you.

Poland did not have, like we do, separation of church and state. The state and the church were intertwined, because Poland was a Catholic country, and it's a very, very strict Catholic country. Even though the Jews were about 10% of the population.

So the first hour in the school was Catholic catechism. So in the class of 30 students, let's say, there may have been three Jewish students, so we were excused and we had to walk out into the hallway.

Believe me, for a 9-year-old to be excluded like this, it's very difficult. You feel discriminated against.

Anyhow, that year passed, and it was summer 1939 --

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to that, Julius, your German nanny, who had gone with you to Palestine, she went back to Poland?

>> Julius Menn: She went back to Poland, but she went back to Berlin where her family was, and we learned after the war that she was killed in the bombing. I loved her very much. I know when she left she really was like my real mother.

>> Bill Benson: I think you told me before that when she went back to Berlin in 1938, she wrote a letter to your father.

>> Julius Menn: Yeah, she wrote a letter to my father, and she said, Mr. Menn, I'm writing to you at great danger to myself, because of the censors, the German censors. I may end up in a concentration camp. She said, Go back, because the war is coming and it is very close.

Well, they didn't listen. In the summer of '39 my father was either in Warsaw or Danzig attending to his business. We were in a resort near the East Prussian border. Unfortunately, we don't have the map up.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to jump in for one more minute. You had gone to Poland for the summer of 1938. Why did you end up -- why do you think your parents ended up staying until the war began?

>> Julius Menn: Well, my mother found it very comfortable to be with her family. Her mother, her sisters, two brothers. You must remember that when we went to Palestine in 1935 she was only 31 years old, and to go to Palestine from a country where you had servants and so on, where you had to do your own laundry, your own cooking, it was a permitted country. You didn't have gas ranges -- it was a primitive country. You didn't have gas ranges or electric ranges. You cooked on petrol, on little machines, and you had to do the laundry on the roof of the apartment house, and do it by hand, you know, one of those. There were no washing machines.

For her, it was very difficult. But as a 9-year-old, as a younger child, you have no conception how

your parents may suffer. She suffered sociologically you would call it, cultural shock. She never really fully adjusted, till many, many years later, to live in Palestine.

>> Bill Benson: Here you find yourself in Poland, September 1, 1939.

>> Julius Menn: Yes. We were in this beautiful resort. Then came September 1, 1939, when the Germans invaded Poland. We were only like 50 miles from the East Prussian border, so we had to -- friends of my parents let us pile into their car, and we drove to Bialystok. We came to Bialystok and the German stuka bombers were bombing the city. I remember I came to my grandmother's house. I had to help dig ditches, so we had to run in the ditches when they were machine-gunning the population. We taped the windows, because people thought that there's going to be a gas warfare, like in World War I.

My father was in Warsaw, and historically, it's interesting, Warsaw stood up against the Germans for about two weeks before it became completely surrounded. My mother went from Bialystok to Warsaw the second day we came back to Bialystok, and she found my father. They came back on one of the last trains from Warsaw.

Well, with the Germans advancing my father realized that we could not stay there in Bialystok, because the Germans would probably occupy it very soon. So he found my grandfather's old coachman, and this coachman came, maybe September 3 or September 4 in the morning, he came with a cart. Imagine the pioneers moving west. He came in a cart. It was filled with straw and covered with a canvas cover.

My mother, my little sister and I, my father, we piled into it. And my grandmother, it's interesting, she would not leave the house because, she said, In World War I we were occupied by the Russians,

then the Germans came, and the Germans were much more civilized than the Russians. So why should I go away? Let the Germans come.

Nobody visualized the Holocaust at that time. So we decided, I guess my father decided, we tried to go east toward Vilna. Vilna was at that time still a Polish city, and it's on the border of Lithuania. So we went through the towns that Bill described, and it's very interesting, you may ask what did we eat. Well, after the sandwiches that they fixed at my grandmother's house were gone, we ate apples. Because it was September, Poland has a lot of apple orchards, there was nobody to pick them, because the farmers were in the army. So we ate apples. There's only one consequence if you eat apples several days without anything else. You suffer terrible diarrhea.

The second week my father found a chicken farmer and we got lots of eggs, but we ate raw eggs for about a week.

Then we came to this railroad junction town of Molodeczno, which is now in Belarus, and the coachman said, I have to leave you here. I'm going back to Bialystok. I remember he did it because, to honor my late grandfather, he didn't want any money. Quite amazing.

>> Bill Benson: He had been with you several weeks transporting you?

>> Julius Menn: About 10 days, yeah. He left us on the railroad track, on the platform, and we heard this rumble that became louder and louder. Pretty soon we saw hundreds of tanks coming. We were convinced that they were German, but they were Soviet. It had the red star.

While we were standing on the platform looking at the tanks this young Russian lieutenant came on the platform. He started talking with my father. He gave my little sister chocolate bar. And he asked my father, he said, Are you Jewish? My father says, Yes. The officer said, I'm Jewish also. So how

can I help you?

So my father said, Well, we want to go to Vilna. So the lieutenant said, I'll put you on this military train. He put us on the military train, and we arrived in Vilna.

My grandmother had a second house there, but the house was locked. There was nobody there. So from there we went -- she had a farm in a village not far from there. So we went to the farm, and we stayed there for about two weeks. Actually, it was -- what I learned on that farm was I learned how to ride a cow without a saddle. And I must tell you that's very, very difficult.

[Laughter]

Well, then, the politics here are very, very abstruse and complicated. Lithuania took over Vilna, which is now the capital of Lithuania. It was still an independent state before the Russian occupation.

So we went to Vilna, and my father got a fake Lithuanian passport. But we had no money, so we lived in the old -- Vilna had a great Jewish tradition. Many of the great artists, musicians came from Vilna, and like Lipschwitz, the great sculptor, Arthur Rubinstein, the pianist. We had no money, so we lived for, I don't know, two, three months in the all-Jewish ghetto. We lived in a one-room dilapidated old house, I remember, and at night the rats and mice would come through the rafters and the floor. The Russians occupied Vilna and Lithuania. They had a curfew at 10:00 at night. Anybody seen on the street would be shot. My parents used to visit with other refugee friends of theirs. I had to take care of my little sister, who was five years younger than I. I was 10. It was pretty scary. I was afraid of the rats. I was afraid my parents would be shot.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about Dr. Raczkowski, was it?

>> Julius Menn: Yes. My mother had a cousin in Lithuania, first cousin, who was a physician. He had a gynecological clinic. This was not far from Vilna. He would come periodically and bring us like half of a smoked sheep, which is actually quite tasty, and other items of food.

When the Germans came he was shot. The German officer who shot him said, Because you are a physician, rather than gassing you, we will give you the honor of being shot.

This a little digression, but it's quite interesting. He had two daughters. One daughter -- the wife, his wife, was Catholic and from a very prominent German family. So she and the two daughters were taken to Germany after the father was shot, and after the war one daughter, who was about 18, who was fluent in English, became an interpreter for the American forces in Mainz, Germany, which is near Frankfurt. There she met her husband-to-be, a German submarine officer who was a prisoner of war in Canada. In Canada there were many German prisoners of war. They got married.

It's interesting, like the old Byron poem about the two brothers who fought against each other when Greece got its independence. Anyhow, this is a side story, but an interesting one. It shows you not all people are good, not all people are bad.

When we were in Vilna, and it became Lithuania, I had to attend school, sixth grade. So because in Poland there was, before the war, so many Jewish people, 3 million, they established a network of Hebrew schools called Tarbut, which in Hebrew means culture.

So I was enrolled in that school, and all subjects were taught in Hebrew, except part of the regulation was you had to study Lithuanian language and Lithuanian history. So I learned a little Lithuanian history. I cannot remember except a few words in Lithuanian, because it's an extremely difficult language. Small country, but complicated language.

Vilna is further north, I live in Massachusetts now, than Massachusetts. It's like Maine. So the winters are extremely cold, and I didn't have any warm clothes, and I had to walk to school. It took about half an hour of walking. So my mother would rub my legs with animal fat so I won't freeze. It's interesting, there is a movie that is available about the rebellion of the Vilna ghetto. This was after we left. But I'll tell you something how we left. We didn't have any money. My father found in the old capital of Lithuania an old friend of his, Mr. Tarshez, who gave my father probably, this was 1940, the equivalent of \$5,000. My father was able, I don't know how, to get a transit visa for us to the Soviet Union. But everything had to be prepaid up front. Well, with that money he was able to do it. What I remember is we spent one night on the train in Kiev. This was October 1940; it was winter. My father had several brothers and sisters in Kiev, but he was afraid to contact them because they would be arrested in the Stalin days as befriending westerners.

From Kiev we went to Moscow. I remember we stayed probably a couple days. This is like a Kafka story. We stayed in this hotel called Savoy. It was probably a very fancy place, but this was like in the dining room there were chandeliers covered with cobwebs. Satin curtains were falling apart. We were the only people in this dining room, and there was this big menu like a book. When the waiter came, he said, Forget the menu. There's nothing here except Russian stew.

>> Bill Benson: He had given you the menu anyways?

>> Julius Menn: Yes.

[Laughter]

On the second day, we were ready to leave, the waiter told my father, On the train there will be nothing to eat. We were going to Odessa on the Black Sea to catch a Soviet ship to go to Turkey.

He said, There will be nothing to eat. So my father bartered with them. We got a cooked goose and my father gave him two silk ties.

So we traveled to Odessa, and the Soviet, I remember this customs, they confiscated everything. My sister had a little gold ring. They ripped it off her finger. My mother had a fur coat. They took it.

They gave receipts. They said, Oh, you will get it all back. How? Nobody knew.

[Laughter]

We went on the Russian ship, which was rather nice. It's one-day travel to Turkey. We stayed overnight in Istanbul. Then third class for two days through the length of Turkey in a cold train covered with bedbugs.

Then we went by bus through Syria, and we came back to Palestine. My father's brother gave up on us. We had several relatives there. They thought we were already dead, in the concentration camps. I remember we came to Tel Aviv, and the first thing they gave me was -- we stayed with my aunt and uncle. I had to take a bath, because I was covered with bedbugs. You read a lot about bedbugs now in hotels, but it's really a big problem.

Now, remember, the World War II is on. So we came to Tel Aviv and almost every night we lived in this tiny apartment. Either Italian or German bombers would bomb. Why would they bomb Tel Aviv, which had no important installations? They came to bomb the oil refineries in Haifa, which is north. But if for some reason they missed or they had a load of bombs, they would fly south and drop them on Tel Aviv.

I remember a little boy across the street from us was decapitated. It was pretty bad. You know, here we escaped from the Germans, and here we encountered them again.

>> Bill Benson: In Tel Aviv there was a very active and complicated resistance. That became important to you.

>> Julius Menn: Yes. Remember, the Germans under Rommel already were in Egypt, and the Israeli underground at that time, the Haganah, prepared the Jews of the country, there were about 600,000, to escape to the mountains if the Germans came.

Well, the Germans came, and you know what happened afterwards. When I was in school, and I was about 15, I joined the underground. I would say most of the kids my age belonged. There were two undergrounds. One was very right wing; one was left wing. I was in the left wing, which was the Haganah, which means in Hebrew "defense."

When I was 17, I was chosen to go to officers training, in '47 in the Haganah. I appeared before this group of officers, I said, I'm very shy. I cannot give orders to anybody. Why do you want me? The senior officer said, You have your reasons, we have ours.

I was an officer in the underground. As I said before, we lived in a very small apartment; because we didn't have any money, my father had to re-establish some sort of a business before because the cement factory was -- there was no cement factory anymore.

So I felt that I'm choking. I was not a particularly good student in high school. I read a lot of books. I really attribute my liberal education to my years in high school reading books. And as you know, Jewish people are called the people of the book. So all important books were translated into Hebrew, and so I read all those books in translation. So the opportunity came. I skipped my senior year in high school and took the London matriculation examination, which is a three-day exam, like senior exams.

>> Bill Benson: The war had ended by this time?

>> Julius Menn: The war ended at the time. Of course, with this, passing this exam, it means you can attend any university in England. But I wanted to go to Berkeley, because Berkeley had the reputation of several generations of students from Palestine. They told me the climate is good, cost of living those days was cheap. I remember when I went to the University of California a semester you paid \$60 and you could take as many units as you wanted.

Now, remember, this was like 1947, '48. But the War of Independence broke out and I felt morally that I have to go back.

>> Bill Benson: You made the decision, a hard decision, but you went to New York. Tell us about your --

>> Julius Menn: Yeah, on the way back from Berkeley, I went by bus to New York. Came to New York, and I stayed with this family in the Bronx someplace. They arranged for the night before I left a party. So all these veterans came, and they brought me all kinds of guns, submachine guns to take with me. Of course, I couldn't. But it was interesting. When I was in the army we had such lousy uniforms, I had a hat that was a gift from the American Amalgamated Clothing Workers. The uniform, every soldier had a different uniform.

Also, you must remember, I must tell you this, I am a peacenik. Even though I was in the army, I'm a strong believer that only salvation for that area is peace between the Israelis and the Arabs. You must remember that Israel was founded by the Labor Party. Ben Gurion was a socialist. What you have now is a very right wing government -- I will not go into it. But I think it's very important to tell you what my beliefs are.

>> Bill Benson: I was going to ask you to go back a little bit, actually. The war has ended in Europe in April 1945, and I think at that point you were working on a kibbutz. You told me about being out in the field when you heard the news about the bombing of Hiroshima.

>> Julius Menn: Yes. The custom was in those days, in the 1940s, even during the war, you were in school, a student, in the summer you would go work in a kibbutz, the communal settlement to help with the farming.

So I went three summers to kibbutz. In 1945 I was in a kibbutz in the north. I remember it was about 10:00 in the morning. We were in the field, clearing a field of rocks to plant tomatoes, and somebody came, he said, They dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. We had no idea what an atomic bomb was, but you know the consequences.

>> Bill Benson: What it meant, you had no clue at that time?

>> Julius Menn: We had no clue. We didn't know what an atomic bomb was. I was more interested in the Carmel Man, up north, where they found this Neanderthal skeleton, more exciting.

>> Bill Benson: When the war ended you were in Palestine, to become Israel. What was the end of the war like? Refugees who survived the Holocaust began coming into Palestine. What was that time like for you?

>> Julius Menn: When I was in the Haganah, one of our jobs was -- at night there were a lot of boats, ships bringing in refugees from Europe to the coast, they're to break the British blockade. We would stand on the beach, help unload these refugees; then behind us would be another group of mostly people from the kibbutz, from the communal settlements, and they would absorb them, and these people went to the communal settlements.

It was a period where people really felt very close to each other. There was no -- it was something very -- a special feeling that just doesn't exist anymore. I don't have any tattoos from concentration camps. I consider myself the accidental survivor. We were very close. What I didn't tell you was that as we escaped in the forests of Poland during those 10 days of migration, the Germans bombed us every day. The roads were covered with refugees, cars, carts, people walking. When we saw those stuka divers come, we would almost automatically jump out of the cart and run into the wheat field. Why the wheat fields? The wheat should have been harvested. This was winter wheat. But there was nobody to harvest it, and it was very tall. So you could lie and hide in the wheat fields. Then 15 minutes later, we would run back to the cart. Fortunately, the cart was not bombed. But I still remember these awful pictures in my mind of pieces of human flesh all over the road, blood, dead cows, broken cars, smoking -- smoke, fire everywhere. For a 10-year-old it's an experience that's hard to forget. And yet, I'm here. I'm 85 years old.

>> Bill Benson: Julius, before we close, we have a little time left, tell us, when you left UC-Berkeley, returned to fight in the War of Independence, tell us about that time for you, when you got back and joined the Israeli Army and fought in the War of Independence.

>> Julius Menn: Well, it was a very difficult time. The fact that Israel survived seven armies of Arabs is a miracle. We had those World War I British rifles, Enfields, that are so heavy. They had a small Air Force, and my mother's cousin was one of the commanders of this Air Force. They were Piper Cubs and would drop bombs by hand. And yet, it was a very inspiring time.

I spent part time in the infantry, then I was part time in the medical corps. When I was in the medical corps I assisted for a time in the operating room. What was interesting to me, there was a whole

group of South African physicians, surgeons, who volunteered their time and they came to do plastic surgery. Plastic surgery was a new field, but of course many of the wounded soldiers suffered injuries that required plastic surgery.

It was days of optimism, of sacrifice, of courage that I don't think will ever be duplicated.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about your friend Gideon Bachrach.

>> Julius Menn: Yes, I had a friend in high school who taught me how to play chess. He was from Czechoslovakia, very nice boy, only son. He was killed in the War of Independence. I think about it sometimes.

>> Bill Benson: Your memoir, which of course you're going to be available to sign afterwards, tell us -- and it covers your first 21 years.

>> Julius Menn: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what motivated you to write your memoir and why you stopped at age 21 when so much more happened to you after that.

>> Julius Menn: Well, first of all, to write this little book was at the urging of my granddaughter. She always wanted me to give what happened. So I thought to myself, I never liked to do things halfway, or half-assed, so to speak, so I wrote this little book. I write quite well. I write without drafts. I organize in my head and I write. Why I stopped there, I lost two children in a car accident later, and I was divorced, and I just didn't feel like writing about it.

I was a scientist, as Bill said. I published a lot. I was very involved in that. Now I'm trying, in my old age, to be a historian and philosopher.

>> Bill Benson: Well, let's turn to our audience. We have time for several questions. If you have a question for Julius, make it as brief as you can. We have microphones coming down the side. Amy and Harold have microphones. If you wait until you get the microphone, make it as brief as you can. If I need to repeat it, to make sure everybody, including Julius, hears it, I will do that. Right in the front row. Here comes Harold.

>> What did you know about the United States, growing up, and how did you find out about it?

>> Bill Benson: The question, for everybody in the back, was what did you know about the United States, growing up, then what brought you here?

>> Julius Menn: Even as a small child, we all heard about Franklin Roosevelt, that somehow he was like a shining example. So as a child, I thought about it, and many others, that America was some sort of a dreamland. All the good things happen in America. They did.

>> Bill Benson: And in fact, once Israel got its independence, you came right back, didn't you?

>> Julius Menn: Yes. Well, I came back, as I said, because I was suffocating, and I felt that I -- at that time, I thought I'm escaping from my mother. But I changed my mind. In the book, the last chapter deals with this subject. And of course, this country gave me the opportunity to get a good education and a good job, and I had a good life, I have a good life.

>> Bill Benson: We have another question? Right here, a young person there.

>> What happened to your sister?

>> Bill Benson: The question is what happened to your sister?

>> Julius Menn: My sister is, fortunately, far away from me. We don't get along too well.

[Laughter]

She lives in San Diego. And she has two very successful children, a physician and a chemist. So I talk to her about once a month on the phone.

>> Bill Benson: We have one more? Several here. Let's get this gentleman, then down here. Then we'll be finished.

>> Julius Menn: This girl has a question.

>> Bill Benson: Her next. We'll get to her.

>> You said that a Soviet officer helped you get back to Vilna, I believe, but he also said that he was Jewish. Was he both?

>> Bill Benson: The question is, you said that a Jewish officer, you also said he was a Soviet, helped you get back to Vilna. You were really listening, which is wonderful. How was he able to be both, is the question .

>> Julius Menn: Well, there were many, many several -- many Jews were Russian Jews. In the United States about 6 million American Jews. In Russia there were probably the same number. So many of them served in the army. So that was not a surprise.

>> Bill Benson: All right. I think we're getting to one here.

>> What happened to your grandmother that stayed behind?

>> Julius Menn: Well, that's very interesting. When the Germans and the Soviets divided Poland by that secret treaty in 1939, Bialystok reverted to the Soviets, and she as a capitalist was exiled to the gulag, together with my aunt and my uncle; it was her son. The uncle and the aunt ended up in different places.

After the war, she came back, but she died of cancer in Germany. But what was interesting, that my

aunt, who was a schoolteacher in Poland, she was exiled to the Kazakhstan, to a gulag where there was nothing except Kazakh shepherders. When you have a lot of sheep, there's also a disease of the sheep called scabies. The only cure at that time -- it's caused by a little mite that destroys the wool. My aunt was a very intelligent, well-read young woman. She remembered that a cure for the scabies is sulfur. But where do you get sulfur? So she told the Kazakh shepherders, Bring me your match heads, because the matches in those days were sulfur. And bring me animal fat. And she made an ointment. She became famous. So those Kazakhs during the war would bring her food, and Soviet commissar came, wanted to send her to medical school.

So it shows you, human invention is really so important. I had to bring this in because this is a marvelous story. She eventually emigrated to Israel and became a fine arts teacher.

>> Bill Benson: We have time for one more question. We have so many hands. You've been very patient here. I'm going to do you. How's that? For the others, thank you for being willing to ask a question. Come back; we'll get you next time.

>> Did you make any friends?

>> Bill Benson: Did you make any friends? When he was living -- when he was young?

>> Julius Menn: OK, that's a very good question. Yes, I had many friends in Tel Aviv, and that was one of the problems why when we went to Poland in 1938 it was difficult. Also, I want to tell you when I was -- we were in the Vilna ghetto, we were poor. In school I befriended this boy whose father was an attorney, and after school often I would go to his house and have a good meal. His mother would feed me. Also they had a shortwave radio, so we could listen to the BBC in Polish. So I had to listen to the news every night, and then translate it for my father in Hebrew.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to close our program in just a moment. Again, thank you. The ones who still had questions to ask, you will have a chance to ask Julius your questions afterwards, if you want to do that. When we finish the program up here, I'm going to turn to Julius in a moment, he will depart the stage and he will go up and be available to chat with you and sign copies, if you want, of his memoir, which is also available in the bookstore.

I'm also going to ask at the end of the program, when Julius is finished, if you will all stand, because our photographer, Joel, is going to come up on the stage and take a photograph of Julius with you as the background. It just has a great effect. So if you don't mind, we'd like you to be part of his portrait, if you will.

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

>> Julius Menn: Thank you, Bill.

I want to tell you two things. I lectured in many schools, also seventh grade. One seventh grader asked me, I think a very important question, that I feel is part of my closing. He asked me can I describe the events in Poland, the bombing of the Germans, he said are you sorry to be Jewish? I told him, I said, You know, this is a very, very profound question, and it is. I said, I can only answer it in part, and I would say I'm very proud of my history and the tradition of the Jewish people. And I can elaborate more, but I think this may surprise. On this score, I will tell you there was a great Jewish sage named Rabbi Hillel who lived about 1500 years ago, and this man came to him and said, If you can teach me what is Judaism while I stand on one leg, and this has to be very short, can you do that?

Rabbi Hillel said, Yes. And he said, Love thy neighbor as you love thy self. This saying, regardless what religion you are, embodies everything good in life. Love thy neighbor as you love yourself.

The other thing I want to tell you is I'm talking here on behalf of the Holocaust Museum. I consider that my speaking to you as a survivor is a, as we say in Hebrew, a mitzvah, which means doing a good deed, and I hope since you came you took the trouble to come, that you will remember that such an awful thing happened. Six million people were destroyed. It's not only the Holocaust that occurred. We also had it in Africa a couple times. We have to guard that this will never happen again.

Thank you.

[Applause]

[Ended at 12:04 p.m.]