Thursday, June 3, 2014

11:00 a.m. – 12:03 p.m.

**UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM**
***FIRST PERSON* SERIES**
**Speaker: HENRY KAHN**

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>> Bill Benson: Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I'm 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. Henry Kahn whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2014 season of *First Person* is made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship. I'd like 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 of our *First Person* guests serve as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue twice weekly through mid-August.

The Museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests. Anyone interested in staying in touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card that was in your program today or you can speak with a museum representative at the back of the room when we're finished in completing the card you will receive an electronic copy of Henry Kahn's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Henry will share with us his *First Person* account as a survivor of the Holocaust with us for about 45 minutes. If we have time at the end of the program, we will have an

opportunity for you to ask Henry a few questions. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Henry is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

Henry Kahn was born Heinz Kahn on January 18, 1923, in Boblingen, Germany. This photo shows Henry in 1946 prior to his induction in the United States Army. The arrow on this map points to the town of Boblingen where Henry was born.

Here we see Henry's mother Hedwig and his father Adolph who was a merchant and fought for Germany in World War I. Later Henry's father became president of a Cattle Dealers' Association.

November 9 through 10, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of violent attacks on Jewish-owned businesses and synagogues throughout Germany known as Kristallnacht or the Night of Broken Glass. Henry's father was arrested and sent to Dachau concentration camp. This photo shows a Jewish-owned business destroyed during Kristallnacht. Henry's father returned home a month later. Shortly after this, Henry left Germany through a Kindertransport, a rescue effort that brought thousands of Jewish children to Great Britain from Nazi Germany between 1938 and 1939. Henry arrived in England in February 1939.

When World War II began September 1, 1939, British authorities required Henry to register as an enemy alien. He was sent by ship to Australia which is highlighted in red on this map of the world. After just one night in an internment camp there, Henry and 12 other men were selected to return to England only to end up in Bombay, India. The arrow on this map points to Bombay.

In 1946, Henry moved to the United States. After the war Henry learned that Nazi authorities deported his parents to the Lodz ghetto in 1941. They were later murdered. We close with this photograph of Henry and Doreen Raymond on their wedding day in 1948. Henry met Doreen in Bombay in 1943.

Just a few months after Henry's arrival in New York in 1946 he was drafted into the U.S. Army. With the end of the draft he was honorably discharged in the spring of 1947. Henry's sweetheart from Bombay, Doreen Raymond, arrived in the U.S. June 9, 1948. They were married 18 days later, June 27, 1948.

After working in the export/import business Henry went into the scrap metal business. While working full-time and raising a family he enrolled at the City University of New York as an evening student in 1956. He earned his degree in industrial management in 1966. Doreen attended Queens College getting a degree as a paralegal and worked as a paralegal in the Empire State Building. Henry remained in the scrap metal business until his 65th birthday in 1988. He then became a real estate agent. Following a diagnosis of lung cancer in 1992, Henry retired from his real estate work.

Henry and Doreen raised two sons, Ralph born in 1952, and Roy David born July 1, 1954, 60 years ago this week. Their sons gave them two grandsons and a granddaughter. And Henry's son Roy is here with Henry today.

There you are right there, Roy.

To be closer to their family, Henry and Doreen moved to Bethesda, Maryland in 2000. Doreen passed away in 2012. Henry said to me, "We were very much in love right up to the

end."

Henry continues to volunteer at the Montgomery County Thrift Shop where Doreen and he contributed their time together. Following the loss of Doreen, Henry became involved with this museum as a volunteer. You will typically find Henry here on Sundays where he has spent time at the Visitors Desk and is now being interviewed by museum visitors. He also speaks about his Holocaust experience at local high school and colleges. Henry is fluent in English and German, walks regularly, spends time in a woodworking shop, tends to his indoor garden of exotic plants, reads a lot, and spends time with family and friends.

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

[Applause]

>> Henry Kahn: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Henry.

Henry, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. You have so much to share with us in less than an hour, so we'll start. You were just 10 when Hitler and the Nazis came to power. Before we turn to those years and the war and the Holocaust, tell us a little about your family and you before the Nazis were in control of Germany.

>> Henry Kahn: Well, as you heard, I was born in Boblingen, which was about eight miles southwest of Stuttgart. We lived there, my parents lived there. I was the first son. We were very friendly with a lot of people and specifically a Mr. Kindler and Mrs. Kindler. They had two daughters which were my age as well as my brother's age. We played together. The parents,

they went out. They went skiing and played tennis. And also one day I understand, I know, they went to a masked ball. My father was a Spaniard. My mother was a pompadour. So we had quite very good relations with everybody.

In 1930, we moved to Stuttgart. I was 7 years old by then. I went to school. The school I went to was the Waldorf School. The school was a private school, not a public school. The philosophy was very modern and very democratic. Boys and girls were in the first grade together, mixed. The boys learned how to knit. The boys and girls learned how to do woodwork in the third grade. I was very friendly with my classmates. We went out together. And even when Hitler came, the school didn't -- nobody was different after Hitler came, not in the school. But you have to remember, it was a private school. So that's already preselected.

>> Bill Benson: Henry, you were at the Waldorf School, I think, one day you were roughed up by some kids and your parents reported it to your teacher. Tell us about that.

>> Henry Kahn: Well, you know, kidding around. We were knocking around. My clothes were disheveled, as they say. And my parents complained to Mr. Hager. He was my class teacher. I like you to remember the name because he comes up later on again. For two hours he lectured the kids to conduct themselves properly. And if anything further should happen to me, I should report it immediately to him, which I never -- I had no intentions of ever doing that.

[Laughter]

Which I didn't. But there was no need for it because nothing happened anymore after that.

>> Bill Benson: Will you tell us a little bit about your father? As we mentioned earlier, he served in the First World War. Do you know much about his service?

>> Henry Kahn: Well, he was -- excuse me. He got a draft notice, I believe when he was 19 years old. He lived in a small village with his mother. His father had passed away. And he had to go to the board. However, his mother hoped he wouldn't be sent too far away. So they had actually assigned him to the cavalry which would have been in another town. So the mother -- you know what the officer did? He assigned him to the Navy, which was not only three years but four years' service. In the meantime -- that's the attitude. In the meantime, the war broke out. So he literally -- he was there until the very end. So the war was four years. My father was in service for seven years. He got a decoration for his services. But that didn't help in the end.

>> Bill Benson: But he won the Iron Cross. He was a decorated soldier in the German --

>> Henry Kahn: Absolutely. That's what I said basically. Got the Iron Cross, whatever.

>> Bill Benson: Henry, your family suffered a terrible tragedy in 1932 when your brother died of an infection.

>> Henry Kahn: That's right. He had mastoid infection of the ear. He died of it. Incidentally, Penicillin had been invented -- or discovered, I should say, in 1927. However, the news didn't get around fast enough. So my brother couldn't be saved. So that was it.

Now, we were in Stuttgart. My father was the President of a Cattle Dealers' Association for a few countries. Germany -- like the United States, Germany was split up in different countries. There was Wuertemberg, Hohenzollern, etc., etc. You go to a geography lesson and you learn more about it.

[Laughter]

So he was President of that organization. Then ‘33 came. And the Nazis came into power. There was an envious member of the association. He, in uniform with some other guys, walked into my father's office and told him to get out. He threw the keys on the floor and walked out.

Of course, now he was without a job. You couldn't do anything about it because the Nazis were in power. However, my father was under the impression that since he had the Iron Cross and all of that and had served Germany before that nothing much more could happen to him. Well, unfortunately he was dead wrong; dead wrong.

My father went to Palestine at that time, after a couple of months, to find out whether it's possible to live there. When he came back, he said, well, if you live there the way we have to live over there, we'll last a long time. Here, too, he was wrong.

My mother wanted to emigrate almost immediately. In order to do that, she prepared, learning how to sew ties, make candies and shirts. All of that she learned in order to be able to do something. We all had planned to come to the United States.

So after my father had returned he had to do something. In the meantime, I went to school, of course. In 1935 we moved to Cologne. The reason we moved there is because my father was able to take over a plywood company. My mother was very much opposed, but the attitude at that time was, between husband and wife, that the husband does and you have to do whatever he does.

[Laughter]

It wasn't women's lib at that time.

Unfortunately I wish she would have succeeded. Well, that was ‘35. In ‘35, the Nuremberg Laws came into effect. The Nuremberg Laws, they forbade Jews to mix with non-Jews so much so that if a person -- we had a woman who worked in our home. And if a person was below -- a Christian person, if he was below the age of 40, was by law ordered to leave. Below 40 and over 40, I guess people know what I'm talking about. So we weren't allowed to go to the swimming pool, to movies. It was rather restricted. And gradually the pain of fear started to permeate me and other people, too. Well, that was ‘35.

I went to a Jewish school. In 1938, Jewish children in Germany, at that time, had to leave all public schools. They couldn't go there anymore.

>> Bill Benson: Before you turn to more about ‘38, you had mentioned your mother made all kinds of preparations.

>> Henry Kahn: I mentioned that.

>> Bill Benson: I was going to add one other one. One of the things in preparing, she wanted you learn how to blow glass.

>> Henry Kahn: Oh, yes. Where we lived in Cologne, a superintendent taught me how to blow glass. That, too, came in very handy in later years. I'll come to that.

The next thing, November, ‘39 -- the 9th of November, 9 to 10 of November ‘39, Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht was the legal riots in Germany where the Nazis went wild. It was terrible. That's all I can say.

However, on the morning of the 10th, a friend of mine came. In our street, I couldn't see anything. But the friend came and told me, "Don't go to school today because there's too

much trouble over there." Our synagogue was not burned because it was adjacent to other buildings. So what they did, they ransacked it. The school was next door to it also. So consequently I didn't go to school either.

The next day my father was arrested and taken to the police station. Two people in civilian clothes came and picked him up. On the way to the police station my father asked what would he have done if he hadn't been home. They said, “Well, we would have gone to your neighbor who's also Jewish in order to fulfill our quota.” So, in other words, there was no reason to arrest anybody in particular for any specific reason as long as they were Jewish; they had to fill their quota.

My mother went to the Gestapo, the secret state police. [Speaking in German] They told -- she asked my father to be released. They told her that he'll come home. However, he didn't come home. So she had to go there again. As it turned out, there was another man there of the name of my father. They had mixed them up. Evidently something like this happened to me, too, later on.

After he came home, shortly thereafter, we received a surprise telegram from my cousin in England saying dates. The reason was in order to see whether I'm qualified to get on the Kindertransport. The British government had passed a law which would allow up to 10,000 children unaccompanied, below the age of 17, to come to England provided they had sponsors. Well, my cousin was able to get a sponsor for me. He was friendly with a girl whose father was part owner of a clothing factory and they were willing to take me.

On the 2nd of February 1939, my parents and I went to the railroad station.

>> Bill Benson: Henry, may I stop for a minute? Before you tell us about going to England, tell us about your father being released from Dachau. He eventually came home from Dachau, right?

>> Henry Kahn: I mentioned it, I think.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what he said when he came home. He came home after about a month.

>> Henry Kahn: He said, “If I ever I get into the concentration camp, I will not come out alive.” He was correct.

So now on the 2nd of February 1939, my parents took me to the railroad station. I said goodbye to them through the window. And I knew within me positively I'm going to meet them again. I was so sure. My parents left the platform. Four or five minutes later they came back because they had found out that the train had been delayed. The moment I saw them it hit me like this. This is the one which I was sure I was going to see again but I never saw them again.

The train -- I mentioned before the fear which constantly stayed in us, probably a lot of people. Cologne is pretty close to the Dutch border. Once we crossed the Dutch border there was a little girl in the compartment, in the railroad car. She had an illustrated paper with her. There was a picture of Hitler. She made sure that the Dutch people were coming in and we were not in Germany anymore. She took this picture of Hitler and tore it into a thousand pieces. So you can imagine how relieved we all were that we were out of Germany by then.

Well, we crossed the Channel. We got into Liverpool Station in London. I knew a

little -- you see, in the Waldorf School, not only did you know how to knit and sew, we also had English and German in the first grade. So not that we learned a lot, but we got the sound of it. And that was excellent. So I had a little knowledge of English. And, of course, in Cologne, I went to a Jewish school, as I mentioned before, and there we, too, had English and French. We were in this big room. Everybody had a tag for identification. I thought I was going to help somebody. There was a lady coming, after quite a while a lady coming in a nice leopard coat. I decided I'll ask her I could help her. So I walked up to her and I said, "May I help you?" And she said -- she took out a piece of paper and wrote “Heinz Kahn.” That was --

>> Bill Benson: That was you.

>> Henry Kahn: That was my sponsor. Well, my cousin came pretty shortly thereafter. He drove the car. I got promptly lost in the London fog. It was very foggy that day. Eventually we arrived in the house. We had a good dinner. And the first thing I had to learn was how to eat the English way. Now what is the English way? Peas, the green little peas. You can't eat them like this. You can't take a spoon. You have to take a fork, turn it upside down, and plant it. Well, it's kind of difficult. You get two, three, four and you ate it. That I had to learn first.

[Laughter]

Well, she was very particular about that. We lived in a very beautiful home, one-family home in Hampstead Garden Suburb. The first thing Mr. London asked me was do you want to go to school or do you want to work. Well, I gave it some consideration. However, I decided I would like to go to work. There were two reasons for that: number one, I had no money whatsoever; and, number two, I wanted to get to the United States. And in order to get there I

would have had to have some sort of a trade. I knew nothing. I went to school, sure. So I decided I'd like to go to work.

So Mr. London was the part owner of a clothing factory, as I mentioned before. He got me a working permit. I guess you needed that, which was for an apprentice. Now, in England, at that time, things were very strict. Everything had to be just so. Apprentices got one pound a week, period. So I was getting a pound a week. I told Mr. London, “Look, I live with you. You don't have to give me that much money.” "Oh, that's ok." All right.

The first thing I did is learn how to make knots in the packing room and how to put on tags on pants, what they are, the names, brand names, whatever. Well, I did this for a while, but I didn't really learn anything. Making knots, you can't get anything with that. So I asked let me go into the sewing room. Well, it wasn't appropriate, I guess, for somebody who lives with the boss to work with these common people who work in the sewing room. Well, there was nothing. I couldn't do a thing.

So I lived there for a while. They were very nice. He told me to work. And he drove me home. At lunchtime I had lunch with them. At dinnertime, I had dinner with the family. As wonderful as it was, it was basically a glorified prison because I couldn't do anything. I had no money to go anyplace. And even if I did, I wouldn't know how to go about it. There was no public transportation or anything like this in that area.

>> Bill Benson: Henry, tell us about changing your name, why you changed your name.

>> Henry Kahn: Oh, yes. [Laughter] Mrs. London said, well, you can't be called Heinz. Choose a name. So I figured I don't want to have a name with an H because all criminals

change their name. So I didn't want that. Then I wanted to have a name which was English as well as German. So consequently I chose Peter. At that time I was called Peter then by the Londons. But my mother -- when I wrote to my mother about it, she was quite upset because she didn't like me calling myself Peter but if Mrs. London liked it that way, that's ok.

>> Bill Benson: As you just said, you were at this time still able to communicate with your parents.

>> Henry Kahn: Yes. There was no war yet. We wrote to each other, of course.

Well, time went on. There was '39. It didn't take very long. In September, September 1, 1939, in spite of the fact that Hitler had made a promise to Mr. Chamberlain that he had no further ambitions to expand Germany, he broke that word. Of course he broke more words. He broke the word when he marched into Russia also.

Anyway, since England had a pact with Poland -- on the 3rd of September 1939 Mr. Chamberlain declared war on Germany. Of course, then all communication was shut off. Almost immediately the alarms went off. But it was a false alarm but it gave you a nice shock listening after the war had been declared, I can assure you.

By the way, when I went on the train, I was two weeks after my 16th birthday. If anybody here is 15 or 16 years old -- nobody? Oh, yeah, there are some. Ok. Well, you can feel -- you can think about it and think leaving your parents and not seeing them again how that feels or the parents that you're going to lose your child forever. This is a very, very sad experience.

>> Bill Benson: Somewhat along those lines, Henry, after war broke out, soon after that

Mr. London told you that you were going to have to go out on your own.

>> Henry Kahn: I was coming to that.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Henry Kahn: I was coming to that. After the war broke out, Mr. London told me, well, they're going to be evacuating. We meaning Mrs. London, their daughter, and himself. They're going to evacuate. And I have to look for a place to stay. Well, in a way I was glad about this because I was out of the glorified prison.

Well, I looked around and I found a place in Finsbury Park. There's one also in Leisure World, a place called Finsbury Park Lane. Anyway. Then I asked Mr. London to give me more money. But he said, “No, I can't. You get one pound.” Well, with one pound you can't do very much. I had to pay for my lodging and I had to take care of myself. So that I didn't like very much. But now I asked him again to let me work on the machine or let me learn how to sew. And this time he couldn't refuse me because I was on my own. And soon after I did that, I was good enough to go into piece work. And piece work allowed me to make more than one pound.

In addition which they asked -- you see, at that time it was difficult to get ahold of sewing needles. And some of those women, they liked the idea of breaking a needle and asking for another one. And some of them didn't break the needle and ask for another one. So I was asked to take charge of the sewing needles. And I said, now, look, it's my time. I'm working on piece work. So I got another Sixpence which is half a shilling a day. So it came out to 30 shillings, which is 50% more than what I had before which was good. And I saved as

much as I could because I certainly wanted to get to the United States.

I got along fine with everybody. Not much happened till the first few months. On a holiday in England, it's also in the United States but very few people are aware of it, we had a three-day weekend. I decided to go for a bicycle ride to Oxford. Well, the Oxford excursion -- a friend of mine was supposed to come with me, but just before that time Germany invaded Holland, Belgium, and eventually France. And things got pretty critical over there, but I decided to go anyway.

So I drove to Oxford. And in Oxford, everything was dead. There was nothing, which was rather disappointing. I found a place to stay. It was a private home. And in the morning I overheard the radio say all foreigners should report to the police station immediately. Well, I said to the landlady, “Where's the police station?” She said, “Why do you want to know that?” And I said, well, I thought -- they said, “I thought you were Irish.” But I wasn't. I was from Germany originally. So I went to the police station. They told me go back and stay there. That's all. Leave things alone. Take it easy.

Well, I drove back. And then, of course, the British Expeditionary Force, which had been sent to France, had become surrounded in Dunkirk, which is to the south -- the north of France, near the English Channel. They were surrounded. They had to be evacuated. And many, many private boats, they went across the channel to take the British soldiers, as well as French soldiers, back to England. They saved about 300,000 people that they wouldn't be taken prisoners by the Germans.

Well, England became panicky now, literally panicky. They decided to intern

everybody who came from Germany originally. The fact that I was a refugee from Nazi oppression had no baring whatsoever anymore.

>> Bill Benson: In fact, you had a certificate that said you were exempted from internment and it didn't matter.

>> Henry Kahn: No, no. That's not correct.

>> Bill Benson: Ok. All right. So you were considered a refugee from Nazi oppression.

>> Henry Kahn: That was my designation. Correct.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Henry Kahn: Gradually -- this was June. Gradually I noticed that some of my acquaintances were interned. Realizing that, I decided I would ask for a certificate from the company, from London Brothers, where I worked, and also took all my money which I had saved to the Bloomsbury House. The Bloomsbury House was that organization which was responsible for the kids who came on the Kindertransport. And when I got to that office, this lady, I told her, look -- when I get interned, get me out as fast as possible. And after that get me a chance to get to the United States. Well, she said the money isn't quite enough but we'll make up the difference. Fine.

Excuse me.

I hadn't gotten my certificate yet, but I insisted on it. I said, “No, I want it today.” Sure enough when I got home the lady told me tomorrow report to the police station, take all of your stuff along. Ok. I did. I was properly interned. That was July 3.

>> Bill Benson: 1940.

>> Henry Kahn: 1940. So it's an important day for me. I was interned then.

>> Bill Benson: 74 years ago today.

>> Henry Kahn: 74 years ago today. We were taken to a race course where we stayed for the night. Then we were given a big piece of cheese, put on a train, and taken to Liverpool. Liverpool is a port city on the west coast of England. It was raining cats and dogs. The tents, they were partially collapsed because they hadn't been put up properly. And from the air it looked like an Army tent, of course. Of course there was barbed wire around it to make sure we knew where we are.

Then we were told that Liverpool had been bombed the week before and a ship which had taken prisoners of war and internees to Canada had been torpedoed and sunk and many, many lives were lost. Well, now we were asked who wants to be interned in an overseas dominion. Dominion? What is a dominion? Well, I found out in due course.

The question was -- do I answer yes or no? Do I want to be interned? Do I not want to be interned? I mean sent overseas. I decided to take a chance and be torpedoed rather than take a chance and stay in England and God knows what's going to happen. First of all, they may strafe us as an Army camp. And then the Nazis would, God forbid, come and take over.

Seven days after I was interned we were taken aboard a ship, the HMT Dunera, which was 73,000 pounds -- 73,000 tons, big enough for 1,500 people. However, we were 2,500 taken aboard this ship. All our luggage was put on a big pile in the middle of the deck. I was assigned to the low deck in the front of the ship. It was pretty crowded. I saw hooks on the

ceiling. I realized that's for hammocks. So that was my -- I was looking forward -- the first night we slept any which way.

>> Bill Benson: In addition to fellow internees, others that were in the same boat as you, so to speak, there were also prisoners of war.

>> Henry Kahn: I mentioned that, didn't I?

>> Bill Benson: I don't know if you did. Can you say it again?

>> Henry Kahn: Prisoners of war which were kept separate by a stupid little tent.

>> Bill Benson: So just on the other side of this fence from you.

>> Henry Kahn: Sure.

So the very same night, the 10th of July, the ship pitched and rolled like crazy. I couldn't see anything outside, but I was surprised because there was no storm. However, it pitched and rolled because it zigzagged like crazy. And sure enough a torpedo was shot at us, hit the ship but did not explode. It made a dent in the ship, though.

We drove north, rode north, and went west towards Canada. Of course, the prisoners of war were mostly Navy people. They knew all about it. Through the grape vines we got to know what was going on. They said, well, we're going to Canada. And then said no, we're going south. Went south all the way down, around the Cape of Good Hope, and then east all the way to Australia. It took two months to get there.

>> Bill Benson: I want you to tell us something else before you talk about getting to Australia. Tell us what the crew or the guards were like on the ship and what happened to the luggage and why that was significant.

>> Henry Kahn: All right. Well, as I mentioned before, the luggage which we had was put on a big pile and a canvas was put over it. Every day when the weather was all right, we were told to run around the deck. There was a machine gun on one side and on the other side so that we wouldn't do any harm. And there we saw that the canvas had been taken off and the luggage was being opened. The crew which came along to guard us of course was not the cream of the crop from the British Army. They were really the scum of it. Some of them had glass eyes. There were drunkards in one instance. One of those guys was so drunk that he had to be taken to the infirmary. And one of the internees picked up his gun and carried it for him. So you can imagine what the situation was.

Incidentally, the officer in charge eventually became court martialed. But that was way after the war.

>> Bill Benson: And as they rifled through the belongings --

>> Henry Kahn: I know, I know. I'm coming to it.

>> Bill Benson: I'm worried about running out of time. I know you want to tell us this.

>> Henry Kahn: I know. I will.

They went through that stuff. I didn't see where we were running around. But I did -- the stink was getting pretty awful in the deck; in all the decks, by the way. So I got a couple of guys together, the youngsters. We had buckets of water and mops. And we chased after the people on one side. We cleaned the deck. And then we cleaned the rest of the deck. That was considerably better then after that.

So to give us a deal, we were allowed to come on deck when other people were not

allowed to come on deck and stay out there. And while we were out there, we noticed that the soldiers were throwing things overboard like crazy. I mean left and right. They opened up the suitcases. If you had a name on one of your clothes, then you got something back which we got eventually. Taking them from one deck to the other, all the items that were left over. But how can you identify bed sheets or cans of soup or anything like that? You can't. So they threw it all overboard. Maybe some bologna.

However, as bad as that conduct was, and it was criminal, believe it or not it probably saved our lives. And the way that happened, because there was another U-Boat which came later. The captain was curious what they were throwing overboard. There were German-written letters. And I found that out many years later when I was in Stuttgart.

>> Bill Benson: And possibly among those letters that were thrown overboard was the letters from your parents that you lost. Right?

>> Henry Kahn: Well, everything got lost. That's all right. How quirky things were sometimes, I can tell you. So there were two instances where we were lucky.

>> Bill Benson: You eventually did make it to Australia.

>> Henry Kahn: Well, the ship made it to Australia, yeah.

[Laughter]

In Sydney we didn't have much to eat. And the tea was terrible. As it turned out, they put some stuff in the tea to reduce our -- how shall I say -- our drives.

[Laughter]

Yeah. That's a fact.

All right. So we were in it Australia. The Australian soldiers, they were a different breed altogether. They were wonderful. We got sandwiches. We were taken off the ship. We were taken aboard a train. We rode 18 hours into the interior. I watched from the window how a kangaroo was jumping along trying to race the train, but, of course, there was no contest. We arrived in the camp which was brand new. It was beautiful. It was very windy. And the sand was blasting against our legs. I felt like being sandblasted, believe it or not. The camp was there. I guess we had something to eat. I don't remember now. We went to sleep.

The next morning, 13 names were called out and mine was first one on the list. Come back to the orderly room. Well, we went there. We were told get your stuff. One of them overheard one of the soldiers say, "These chaps are going back to England." Well, I wasn't asked. I was told to go back, get my luggage what little I had. I had nothing anymore. I had a sugar bag I put some stuff in which I got and some stuff which I got -- I got toothbrush and toothpaste in Sydney. They gave it to us.

So we went back to the train station, were taken back to Sydney, back on the ship, put in the bunker, locked up. Well, I got scared stiff there. That's the first time I really got scared. I mean physically scared. We got something to eat. Then we were taken out and taken to the prison to a prison in Sydney. This was a compound of five different buildings. And one of them was designated an internment camp.

There we met an Italian who was interned from Australia. He got newspapers. We saw in the newspaper that London was in flames, especially the lower east end where I used to work. It wasn't very appetizing to think we were going back there.

>> Bill Benson: Henry, tell us, if you can, why you 13 fellows were selected to return to England.

>> Henry Kahn: Well, you remember I said I was going to the Bloomsbury House and gave them my papers. It so happened -- and I found out much, much later -- that my release came through the day I went aboard the ship, on the 10th. It was only seven days between the day I was interned and the day we went aboard the ship. So then you didn't have e-mails or anything like that. It took longer to get the message through. So consequently I was released. I guess the others, I don't know. It must be similar.

>> Bill Benson: So from Australia you eventually end back up on the ship and you set sail for England.

>> Henry Kahn: No.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Henry Kahn: I said we were told. We were told that these chaps are going back to England.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Henry Kahn: Ok. So now we were in that prison. We found out that London was in flames. After having been in Australia for 10 days, again 10 days, we went back to the ship which was now ready to sail again. Back to the Dunera. We landed in Perth, the west coast of Australia. We helped them load pigs, half pigs, cut in half, frozen, of course, which was provisioned for people. And then we went east for another two weeks. The ship docked. We were taken off the ship. And I saw that the people around were dark skinned. There was lots of red dots on

the street. And we were taken to the police station. The police, they interviewed each one of us. The one who interviewed me asked me all sorts of silly questions. Then he said, “Where do live?” I said, “I don't even know where I am and you ask me where you live?” So it turned out to be the Jewish Relief Association. Of course they got papers, British government, whoever. I don't know. I didn't pay for it.

>> Bill Benson: This is now Bombay, India. Right?

>> Henry Kahn: Well, I was coming up --

>> Bill Benson: Ok. You're in Bombay, India now. Ok.

>> Henry Kahn: So, that was Bombay, India, right. You're stealing the thunder from me, you know.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: So now you're in Bombay.

>> Henry Kahn: Right. Now I'm in Bombay. The Jewish Relief Association was an association. And the home was sponsored by them. On the board there was a gentleman. He invited the 13 of us, first six and then seven, to come to dinner because he wanted to -- I mean, big piles of rice and all sorts of stuff. He was very nice. He selected the youngsters whom he liked. And he invited them more often. And I asked him, “Eventually, I'd like to learn something. Maybe you know someplace.” So he said, yes, you can go to a dental lab. He arranged for me to have a job as a dental lab. And while I was there, I used the skill which I had learned blowing glass by making -- these are the teeth you put into your mouth and

select -- eject the saliva while the dentist is drilling your teeth. Well, I made those. But there was no market for it earlier. Sold a few, but it really wasn't worth it.

So after a while I only got very little money. Not even enough to pay for the fair going and coming to work. So consequently I told the boss, “Look, I can't afford to work for you any longer. Sorry.” So the next thing I got was a job -- while I was -- I forgot that. While I was living in Finsbury Park, at night I went to school, learned bookkeeping. In this class there were all sorts of youngsters from offices. I was working in a factory. So they knew terms which I had no idea what they were. So I had to learn a lot. However, I did learn some bookkeeping. That helped.

So now I was back in India. And the next job I got was a bookkeeper in a company. There I kept the books. Before I did this, I went to a bookstore, bought myself a book on bookkeeping and started it quickly. I went over it. And I did the job, believe it or not.

Next thing, after a while, I got more money than I had first but I didn't have enough to get out of the home, which I wanted. I eventually got a job with the Indian Tool Company as a night shift supervisor. Supervisor, mind you, 17-year-old -- 18-year-old supervisor.

[Laughter]

There were lots of -- about 10, 12 people were working night shift. At that time, national spirit went very high. You saw signs all over the place, "Quit India," "Quit India." One of the days a guy said, “You know, we had a lot of fun at the railroad station on the way up there -- he said to me, “We had a lot of fun. We burned ties and topies.” The hats. And the ties, a symbol of the British. He burned them on the station. So I got scared wondering when

am I going to be the fun. So I decided I would get myself a piece of rubber, piece of lead at the bottom, tie it up, and put it into my pocket. So I felt a little safer.

>> Bill Benson: Our time is running short.

>> Henry Kahn: Yeah, I know.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind, there's a couple of things I would like you to share with us before we do that. Tell us about meeting your future wife. And then tell us about how you came to the United States.

>> Henry Kahn: Yes, yes, yes. Well, first, I was [inaudible] for 3/4 of the year, then I came back. A friend of mine told me to go to the Maccabi Sports Club. There we played ping-pong. There was a young girl who played very well; in fact, so well she beat me almost all the time. So consequently I took revenge, eventually married her. But that was much later.

[Laughter]

The trouble was, though, we fell in love, believe it or not. She wanted to leave India, too, as I did. In 1946, before we left, we made a conditional engagement if and when we meet again and feel the same way about each other as we do now, we'll get married.

The only trouble was I went to the United States then. It's a big story, but I got in the Army. I got out of the Army. That was the draft law at that time. She was born in India. But there was no quota for people who were born in India, so I had to try and get her over somehow. While I was in uniform, I went to the State Department. And the State Department I spoke to somebody. I wasn't married. I had nothing. I wasn't even married to her. So I said to them -- well, in the Army, you do things. If you can't do them officially, you can do them

anyway.

[Laughter]

So I asked over there maybe something can be done to get her over.

So one day my future wife at the time worked across the street from the American Consulate. She got a call one day can you come over, come during lunchtime. She went over. She was asked, “Do you want to still go to the United States?” She said yes. Ok. So the next day they called again, “When do you want to go?” So she had to give notice first and all of that. So finally, on June 9, 1948, she came. And on the 27th we got married.

>> Bill Benson: Before we close and before you close I want to ask you one other question. But before I do, I think, if I'm correct, you and your wife, before you were married, before she came to the United States, exchanged 117 letters. Right?

>> Henry Kahn: We exchanged 117 letters. She wrote 117. And I did.

>> Bill Benson: Because in your memoir, number 117 is the last one she wrote from India before she came.

>> Henry Kahn: That's right.

>> Bill Benson: One last question before you finish. Tell us, when did you learn what happened to your parents?

>> Henry Kahn: Well, I learned it after I was in the United States, after the war. I don't know. It must have gotten through. I don't remember where I got it from. But my parents were killed. They were sent to Lodz, a concentration camp of some kind. My father died in the hospital there. He probably was neglected. And my mother was probably killed, murdered, shot on the

way back when the Germans had to withdraw when the Russians came.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Henry in just a moment to close our program. I want to thank all of you for being here very much, remind that you we'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So I hope you can return and join us another time. And if not, look to the website for information about our program in 2015.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* gets the last word. So Henry is going to close up the program in just a moment. Two comments. Because we didn't have a chance for questions and answers with you, the audience, Henry, will you stay afterwards a few minutes if anybody wants to ask you a question?

>> Henry Kahn: I'll stay as long as you ask questions.

>> Bill Benson: If you want to just shake his hand, Henry will step off the stage over here. Absolutely feel free to do that. And when Henry's done, Joel, our photographer, will come up on the stage. I'm going to ask you all to stand. He's going to take a photograph of Henry with you in the background. It just makes for a lovely photograph. So we'll do in a moment.

Henry?

>> Henry Kahn: Ok. First of all, I mentioned Mr. Hager, my classroom teacher. In 1962 I met him again in New York, not accidentally but I met him there. He told me in '38 they had to -- they dismissed all the students in the Waldorf School, all the teachers in the Waldorf School. And he told me he worked in a torpedo factory and once in a while he put sand into the mechanism. And I asked him why did take such a chance. And his answer was, "I wanted to play a trick on the Nazis." So all you know, I'm here because of him.

If you know someone whom you dislike, in fact really, deeply hate for good reasons, try hard not to generalize. Do not assume that all members of his or her ethnic or national background are the same or have the same tendencies. Please remember a baby knows love but to hate has to be learned or taught. Don't let unjustified hate blind you to reality.

After 64 years of married life, Doreen passed away. The funeral director showed us a sample of the plaque which you put on the graves. And my son -- we saw samples of items depicting the passing of the particular person, like an airplane or a boat. And my son suggested that a piano -- since my wife liked music very much, that a piano would be appropriate. So we decided to put a piano on her side of the plaque. Now, I am a jack of all trades but a master of none. I had to wonder what can I do. Well, then it occurred to me that I was very fortunate. And the first time I went for a walk with my future wife, at that time girlfriend, we were on the beach. And suddenly she saw a shooting star. She got all excited about it. That's when I gave her my first kiss. So then it occurred to me, since I was very lucky, I'm going to take a shooting star and have this as a symbol on my plaque. That's what's happening.

That's the end.

[Applause]

[The First Person event ended at 12:03 p.m.]