Wednesday, July 9, 2014

11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: AL MUNZER

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

Remote CART

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings. This transcript is being provided in rough-draft format.

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

HOME TEAM CAPTIONS

ROUGH DRAFT TRANSCRIPT
NOT A VERBATIM RECORD

>> Bill Benson: Good morning, 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 Dr. Alfred Munzer, 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. I am 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 of our *First Person* guests serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our program will continue twice weekly through the middle of August. The museum's website, at 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 you will find in your program today or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater when we end our program today. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Al Munzer's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Al 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 at the end of our program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Al a few questions.

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

We begin with this portrait of Alfred Munzer dressed in a Jewish National Fund costume for the Purim holiday, taken after the war, probably 1948. Al was born in November, 1941 in The Hague, Netherlands. Al's parents, Simcha and Giselle, were married in 1932 in The Hague. Here we see their wedding portrait. Al had two older sisters, Eva and Leana. Eva is on the left, Leana is on the right, with Al between them.

The German Army invaded the Netherlands in May 1940 before Al was born. Immediately, life became very difficult for Dutch Jews. After the invasion, the Munzers remained in their home and endured the repressive measures taken against Jews. On this map we see the German invasion routes of Western Europe in 1940.

In 1942 Al's sisters went into hiding with the friend of a neighbor. Al went into hiding with the ex-husband of a neighbor, an Indonesian immigrant named Tole Madna. Here we see a photo of Tole Madna.

Al spent the rest of the war in Tole Madna's house, where he was cared for by Tole's Indonesian nanny, Mima Saina. This photo was taken while Al was in hiding in Tole's home. Mima Saina is pictured on the left, and Tole Madna is in the middle holding Al.

Al came to the United States with his mother in 1958. He obtained his undergraduate degree from Brooklyn College in Brooklyn, New York, and his medical degree from the State University of New York, Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn. He completed postgraduate medical studies at the

University of Rochester School of Medicine and at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland.

Al is an internist and pulmonologist specializing in the diseases of lung, and just yesterday Al retired as director of the Pulmonary Medicine Department at Washington Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park, Maryland.

[Applause]

Al has been a frequent spokesman for the American Lung Association since 1974 and served as President from 1993-94. He is deeply involved in anti-smoking efforts internationally. Al currently chairs the Board of Trustees of Action on Smoking and Health and remains involved in the global implementation of the first treaty developed under the World Health Organization. He is currently very active in negotiating with individual countries the implementation of an international treaty on the control of tobacco, referred to as the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

In 2000, Al was awarded the Will Ross Medal, the highest honor given by the American Lung Association for volunteer service at the national level. He is also active as a volunteer here at this museum where he has translated Holocaust-related diaries from Dutch into English as part of the Jewish Response to Persecution Project. They are being published as part of a five-volume set by the museum, with volumes 4 and 5 about to be released. Al also leads tours of the museum's Permanent Exhibition. And occasionally, Al finds time to engage in his hobby of writing plays.

With that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Dr. Alfred Munzer.

[Applause]

Al, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. We have so much to share with us in a short hour. We'll just jump in and get started right away.

Over the past few years, you've learned more about the roots of your family. Let's begin, before we turn to the actual Holocaust and the war, with you telling us a little about your family and their lives prior to the rise of nazism and its impact on your family and your community.

>> Well, my parents were born in Eastern Europe, in a parts of the world that at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My father in a small town, Kanczuga, and my mother in Rymanow. Things in the town were fairly comfortable for Jews --

[Momentary disruption for audio correction]

>> Bill Benson: There we go.

>> Al Munzer: I'll start over, in case you didn't hear.

[Applause]

My parents were born in Eastern Europe in a part of the world which at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My father in a small town called Kanczuga, my mother in Rymanow. Conditions in those towns, for Jews, were fairly good, until the end of the First World War. At that time, those little towns became part of Poland and things became more difficult for Jews. More persecutions, pogroms, so there was a lot of pressure for Jews to leave those little towns. And my father left Holland, left his little hometown for the Netherlands, for The Hague where he started a men's clothing business.

My mother left her hometown, Rymanow, for Berlin, which was the big center that attracted a

lot of Jews after the First World War. There she joined two older siblings, and who had already established a business there.

>> Bill Benson: Why did your mother go to Berlin, as things were so difficult in Berlin in 1930s?

>> Al Munzer: Well, she arrived there really before the rise of the Nazis. She arrived in Berlin actually just before Hitler's book "Mein Kampf," my struggle. She had no concern about Nazis, so the attraction was moving to the big city, being liberated from the mentality of living in a small town.

>> Bill Benson: A very cosmopolitan center.

>> Al Munzer: Actually, the most cosmopolitan at the time.

>> Bill Benson: You said your father opened a clothing business. You had written in a memoir that "all of my ancestors were tailors."

>> Al Munzer: Tailoring seems to have been part of my family's story for many, many generations. There's a famous story about a Jewish sage in my mother's hometown, in Rymanow, who made the aphorism, which really showed his background as a tailor. He said, Always mend what is old, and never spoil what is new. And that sort of became his very famous saying. It reflected the fact that, as a young man, he had been apprenticed to a tailor.

These little towns often are really caricatured in plays like "Fiddler on the Roof" but in actual fact, some very important people who contributed greatly to science and medicine came from those little towns. Two of the people who came from my parents' hometown were a man named Isidor Rabi, the discoverer of electromagnetism, for which he was given the Nobel Prize in physics, and a man named Abraham Brill came from my father's hometown and brought the works of Sigmund Freud

for the first time to the United States. So some people very important in science and medicine coming from these tiny towns.

>> Bill Benson: Including descendents of folks, like yourself.

>> Al Munzer: Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: You also wrote your grandparents kept few of their possessions in cash, furniture or homes. Why was that?

>> Al Munzer: Well, after the First World War, after the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when Jews were somewhat protected, there was always the fear of pogroms, of persecution, and of the possibility that they would have to leave their homes in a hurry. That's why they really did not invest in things like real estate, but really kept their possessions in things that were tangible and that they could carry with them, like jewelry.

>> Bill Benson: If and when they needed it.

>> Al Munzer: In case they had to leave in a hurry.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother leaves Berlin, goes to Holland, meets your father, they marry. What was Holland like for Jews at that time?

>> Al Munzer: Well, Jews had lived in Holland for hundreds of years, and Jews were fully integrated and accepted in Dutch society. But my parents, my mother arrived in Holland, interestingly enough, and married my father virtually on the same day that Adolf Hitler was administered the oath of office making him chancellor of Germany, sort of starting really the Nazi era in neighboring Germany, just a few hundred miles away. But that's when my parents were married in Holland.

Fortunately, they felt very safe at the time. They became very close friends with their

non-Jewish, with their Christian neighbors, and really enjoyed being away from the constraints of living in a very restricted atmosphere in Eastern Europe.

>> Bill Benson: Your parents would have three children, and you were the youngest. When were your sisters born, Eva and Leana?

>> Al Munzer: My sister Eva, the oldest, was born July 1936. And this was obviously a major celebration, a major moment of joy for my parents. Interestingly enough, it is also the exact same time that the infamous Berlin Olympics were held, which Adolf Hitler turned into an instrument of Nazi propaganda. So again, the juxtaposition of the very happy event with something of the rise of Nazis in neighboring Germany.

>> Bill Benson: While your parents are living, in their minds, the good life at that time.

>> Al Munzer: Exactly. Even at that time, it was very difficult, if not impossible really, for my mother's relatives, my father's relatives who lived in Berlin to gain an exit visa to come visit my parents and be part of the celebration.

My sister Lea was born 1938, November 12, 1938.

>> Bill Benson: Another very auspicious day.

>> Al Munzer: Exactly. November 9-10, 1938 was the night when the full fury of anti-Semitism was unleashed in Germany. That's when hundreds of synagogues were destroyed and thousands of Jewish businesses were plundered and many Jews were sent to concentration camps, another major turning point in the persecution of Jews under the Nazi era.

>> Bill Benson: What we refer to as the Night of Broken Glass, or Kristallnacht. War began September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland starting the war. The following May, May 1940,

Holland as well as Belgium and Luxembourg, the so-called low countries, were attacked by Germany. Tell us what you can about what that meant for your family and other Jews in Holland, both immediately after the Nazi occupation and in the months that followed. Of course, you were not yet born, right?

>> Al Munzer: No, but I had many conversations with my mother. This was obviously an event very much imprinted on her mind. She shared many details with me. She told me that on the night of May 9, my parents had been asked to provide shelter to a man who was part of the Dutch resistance, and he carried plans in his briefcase to preemptively destroy the major railroad center in the city of Utrecht. It was felt by destroying that railroad center, any German invasion could be slowed.

As they listened to the radio May 10, 1940, early in the morning, as they were having breakfast with their guest, my parents heard that the city of Rotterdam, the port city of Rotterdam had been bombed and destroyed. A few minutes later, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands came on the radio and announced that the Netherlands surrendered and that her government was going into exile in England.

It was my parents' guest, this man from the Dutch resistance, who was the first to speak up. He said in Dutch, "God zij dank is voorbij," thank God it's over. Because for him, this was just -- he had done all he possibly could, and now it was a question of accommodating to living under the occupation. But my parents were aware of all the terrible things that had happened to Jews in Germany, and in their hometowns --

>> Bill Benson: Because you had relatives there.

>> Al Munzer: Exactly, relatives, brothers and sisters. And they looked at each other and looked at their children, and they realized that they were all alone and would be facing some major, major difficulties.

>> Bill Benson: The Nazis began imposing restrictions on Jews almost immediately, and you wrote that on March 12, 1941, all Jewish property is Aryanized. Tell us a little more about that.

>> Al Munzer: It really meant that all Jewish property had to be registered. You know, the regulations that were put in place by the German occupation started with something fairly simple, and that was something that may seem simple, the banning of killing animals for kosher meat, and the ritual slaughter of animals, if you will.

But then it progressed very quickly to other things, and one of them is registering Jews. Just as it happened in Germany, Jewish men having to take a new middle name, Jewish women having to take a new middle name so they could easily and always be identified as Jews. Eventually, it progressed to having to register all property, which then somewhat later led to having to surrender the property.

One episode --

>> Bill Benson: Go ahead, please.

>> Al Munzer: One episode that my mother told me about during that period was that Jews were banned from going to the public parks. Like many regulations that really don't make too much sense, my mother disobeyed the regulation. She took my sister Lea to the park. A German woman approached the baby carriage. My mother's heart almost died. Then the woman looked at the baby, looked at my sister, saw blonde curls, blue eyes, she said, Ah, you can tell this is good Aryan blood.

My mother had a sigh of relief, and she thanked the woman. Of course, after that, she never went back to the park. This was just one of the many kinds of oppressive measures, a fairly minor one there, that was being taken.

>> Bill Benson: In 1941, I believe your parents enrolled one of your sisters in a Catholic school, or started to. Why was that?

>> Al Munzer: Well, they felt that by enrolling my sisters Eva and Lea in a Catholic school, they could really begin to hide their Jewish identity. This is also how they formed a relationship with the family that eventually was to hide my sisters.

>> Bill Benson: Then, of course, November 23, 1941, almost 19 months after the invasion of Holland by the Germans, you were born. Your parents' joy of having the birth of a son in the midst of these circumstances that you've described must have been accompanied by profound fears on their part. Can you give us any more insight into that?

>> Al Munzer: Well, those fears really began when my mother first learned that she was pregnant. She made an appointment with her obstetrician, and he told her that she ought to have an abortion. He told her that in no uncertain terms. He told her it was immoral to bring another Jewish life into the world.

My mother wasn't particularly religious at the time, but she did turn to the Bible for advice. While reading the Bible, she read the story of Hannah. Hannah, you might recall, was a woman who was desperate to have a child, and she would go to the temple every year in Jerusalem and pray that she might conceive.

It was in reading of Hannah's agonizing desire to have a child, and of Hannah's pledge, "If the

almighty will give me a child, I will give that child to the service of God all the days of his or her life," it was in reading that my mother decided she could not possibly have an abortion.

So she was fired by the obstetrician, and nine months later is when she gave birth to me, with the help of a nurse. That, of course, brought about another dilemma, because Jewish male children are traditionally circumcised at 8 days of age. My parents' friends advised very strongly against having me circumcised because that would label me as being Jewish.

This time the answer to my parents' dilemma came in the form of a pediatrician, who had a worried look on his face. My father asked, Is there anything wrong with the baby? The pediatrician said, No, it's just that your son will need a minor operation we call a circumcision.

My father told him about our Jewish tradition, and eight days later friends of the family, neighbors, everyone gathered in our home in The Hague for this, for a celebration of this milestone in a Jewish life.

Some pictures were taken of that event. Very small pictures. They're actually about only 1 by 1 1/2 inch in size. And what makes those two pictures so remarkable was that my mother was to carry them on her body through her subsequent stay in 12 concentration camps. She developed this feeling, a superstition, that if she ever lost those photographs it would mean that I had been killed.

Fortunately, my mother survived. The photographs survived. And I survived. Those photographs now are part of the collection of this museum.

>> Bill Benson: It's astonishing to think that she was able, somehow, to keep them with her through that extraordinary ordeal.

>> Al Munzer: Absolutely.

>> Bill Benson: Over the next 10 months after your birth, Al, leading up until September 1942, conditions just became so much worse. Every day got worse. So much so that by September 1942, your parent decided it was time to go into hiding. Tell us what they did.

>> Al Munzer: Well, this was obviously a decision that was faced by many Jews in Holland at the time. Men were being called up to go to labor camps, which was really more of a euphemism for concentration camps. Many of them knew that that meant ultimately being sent to a camp in Poland, which did not have a very good reputation, even then.

So Jews went into hiding, made plans to go into hiding. Now, some families, like the famous story of Anne Frank, Anne Frank's family went into hiding as one family unit in an attic, some were like her family.

>> Bill Benson: To stay together.

>> Al Munzer: To stay together. My family decided, as a form of insurance, so that in case one member was discovered, one member of the family was discovered, at least the others would have a chance to survive, they decided we ought to split up.

So the first ones to be placed were my two sisters. They were placed with a very devout Catholic family. The wife in that family had a vision of the virgin telling her to take Jewish children into hiding. So my two sisters were entrusted to that woman and her husband.

My father pretended to commit an act of suicide, and that gained him admission to a psychiatric hospital, as a patient, pretending to be a patient, which was to be his hiding place.

>> Bill Benson: Then what happened with your mother?

>> Al Munzer: Well, my mother, of course, was left alone in the house with one last child to place, and that was me. Male Jewish children, because they were circumcised, were more difficult to place. But eventually a neighbor of my parents, Annie Madna, agreed to take me in, with the plan that I would eventually be placed somewhere in the countryside.

She transferred me to her sister, a woman by the name of Tina Polok. The sister found out she had a neighbor who was a member of the Dutch Nazi party. She got scared, passed me back to Annie Madna. At that point, Annie Madna decided to pass me on to her ex-husband. She was divorced, and she passed me to her ex-husband who happened to be an Indonesian man, an immigrant from Indonesia, by the name of Tole Madna. He also had custody of their three children, Willy, Dewie and Robbie. I joined those three children as the fourth member of the family.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to come back to that in a minute.

>> Al Munzer: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: Here's your mother now. Your mother is alone, you're with the Madna family, your two sisters are with the Catholic family. Your father has been admitted because of his staged suicide. What does your mother do now?

>> Al Munzer: Well, she closed the house that we lived in all these years for the very last time, then joined my father in the same psychiatric hospital, pretending to be not a patient, but as a nurse. So that was really, for her, the end of the story of the family.

>> Bill Benson: She's pretending to be a nurse in the same psychiatric facility, but if I remember correctly they did not act as though they knew each other at all.

>> Al Munzer: No. There was only one other time when they came together and were actually reunited with my sisters. That was December 25, 1942. Christmas Day, as a special gift my two sisters were brought to the psychiatric hospital, very stealthily. For one last time, that part of the Munzer family was reunited. That was the last time that my parents saw my sisters.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother later talked to you about the experience of being in that psychiatric facility, with your father there as a patient and her as an employee. What did she tell you about that?

>> Al Munzer: My mother described what it was like to be in a facility with patients who had grave mental illnesses. This was before the advent of any kind of psychotherapeutic agents, any drugs, and she watched people who had been there confined in that hospital for many years. She saw people who were wearing clothes that were way out of fashion, that they had worn when they'd come to the hospital.

But the one thought that went through her mind was that when she looked at the patients and she thought about the world outside, she said, You know, it's the world outside that is much more disturbed and has much more of a mental illness than the people in the hospital.

>> Bill Benson: Crazy outside world.

>> Al Munzer: Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: Al, did anybody in the hospital know that your father had feigned his suicide and that was the reason he was in there? Do you know?

>> Al Munzer: I'm not sure of that. I don't know. There were many Jews in hiding in that psychiatric hospital. That's what led to the psychiatric hospital, of course, eventually being emptied of all patients and all Jews, not just Jews but all patients and all staff working there. They were all deported. My

parents were first taken to a prison. Ironically, housed in the old home of the Dutch Jewish philosopher Spinoza. Then they were sent on to a concentration camp.

>> Bill Benson: They were taken, I think, am I correct, the day after Christmas. Christmas Day --

>> Al Munzer: Actually, New Year's Day 1943. Right after.

>> Bill Benson: After they'd seen your sisters.

>> Al Munzer: Really, a day when many other psychiatric hospitals in Holland that had Jewish patients were emptied.

>> Bill Benson: New Year's Day?

>> Al Munzer: Exactly. That's when all of those patients in all of those hospitals, including one where I've been translating diaries, were sent to Westerbork, to this concentration camp on Dutch soil.

>> Bill Benson: What kind of place was that, Westerbork?

>> Al Munzer: Westerbork had been built originally as a receiving center for refugees, Jewish refugees streaming from Germany across the border into the Netherlands. So it really was not an unattractive facility, at least according to my mother. She said there were geraniums planted everywhere, curtains on the windows. To her it was not a terrible place.

Subsequently, of course, it became very, very overcrowded and became, really, a hellhole, like any of the other transit and concentration camps that were put together by the Nazis.

>> Bill Benson: As you noted earlier, your mother would end up going to 12 different camps. At one of the camps she convinced the German authorities that she was experienced at assembling radio tubes. Will you say a little about that?

>> Al Munzer: Sure. My parents remained in Westerbork for a few months, then they were sent on to another concentration camp on Dutch soil called Vught, in the southern part of Holland. That's where my parents were assigned to do slave labor in the Phillips electronic factory. My mother, through the grapevine, learned that one of the tasks that was essential to the German war effort was assembling radio tubes. So she started doing that. That's what really kept her alive.

My parents remained in Vught about six months. While there, my mother describes a visit by a major Nazi official, Heinrich Himmler, and she describes how there was a lineup in the morning at 5:00 a.m., and Himmler addressed all the inmates. He assured the inmates that if they continued working for the success of the Reich, nothing bad would happen to them.

My mother tells me that during that speech she saw the spire of a little Dutch church way off in the distance. She said to herself it would be so wonderful if peace were to break out at that moment and she could run to that church, fall on her knees and thank God for her liberation. But that, of course, wasn't to happen, because from there my parents were taken via Westerbork to Auschwitz, where they were separated and my mother was sent on to another camp where electronics were being assembled. The Telefunken Company was housed in Reichenbach. That's where my mother continued doing the same kind of work.

>> Bill Benson: She also engaged in resistance. She engaged in sabotage, didn't she?

>> Al Munzer: Well, one of the joys, if you want to call it a joy, of being at that factory, but what gave my mother some hope, let's put it that way, was that she worked alongside many German soldiers who had been repatriated from the Eastern Front. These were people who had severe injuries, who were minus an arm or leg. They did all they could -- they hated Adolf Hitler and did all they could to

sabotage the war effort. They just would throw their tools and everything else over their shoulders and say, Here's one for Himmler. Here's one for Hitler.

My mother and some of the Jewish prisoners were more subtle with sabotage. My mother spent a whole day assembling one radio tube, then when the siren was sounded at the end of the day, indicating the end, she would just disassemble the radio tube and put it back in the drawer, then the following day start the whole process over again.

>> Bill Benson: She's a very brave lady.

You began to tell us now, of course, about yourself before your mother went to the psychiatric hospital. She placed you with the Madna family, and because the reason you described about the neighbor who was a Nazi, you ended up living with Tole Madna and his family, his three children and Mima. Tell us about life as you know it during that time with the Madna family.

>> Al Munzer: Sure. Well, the person who really took care of me during that period was the nanny, who had taken care of the Madna children previously. Her name was Mima Saina. Mima was born in Indonesia. She had come to Holland in the early 1900s, first to work in a restaurant, where Papa Madna happened to be the manager. When his children were born, he induced her to become a nanny for his children, and she moved into the Madna household.

Mima spoke no Dutch; she was illiterate, could not read or write. But this woman had a heart of gold. And she now really adopted me as her own, as her child. She became my mother.

Because I was, of course, illegally in the house, the family could not obtain ration cards, which were required to buy any kind of necessities. So they had to share whatever little they had in terms of food with me, and Mima would literally have to walk miles every day just to get some milk for me, for

the baby.

I slept in Mima's bed, I'm told, and she kept a knife under her pillow vowing to kill any Nazi who might try to come and get me. And telling people she would even kill me, if necessary, rather than have me fall in the hands of the Nazis.

There were times when the house where I was hidden with the Madna family was searched. I was not allowed out of the house at all for the entire time that I was there. The only view of the outside world I had was looking through a mail slot.

Periodically, the house would be searched, and --

>> Bill Benson: You were with them almost three years.

>> Al Munzer: That's right, three years. And what I remember is having to go into a little cellar underneath the stairs. Homes in Holland do not have basements as such, so it was just a little cellar. And that's where the family kept all their Christmas decorations. And one of the memories I have is playing with those Christmas decorations, not knowing, of course, that that was a moment of grave danger for me.

At other times, Papa Madna invented some crazy stories. He told some Germans that I was the illegitimate child of his ex-wife, and that she now had a new boyfriend who did not want me around. So that was another way of really sort of shielding me.

>> Bill Benson: To think about that, here the Nazis are hunting every Jew they can find. There you are, a Caucasian infant in an Indonesian family's home.

>> Al Munzer: Dead giveaway.

>> Bill Benson: How to explain that? Very inventive with his stories.

>> Al Munzer: Interestingly enough, from my own memories, even later on, I was never aware of actually being different. I felt very much a part of the Madna family, and Willy, Dewie and Robbie were my brother and sisters. It's something that really even continues today. We now Skype each other as surviving children and their grandchildren. I've always felt part of the family. Never felt any difference.

>> Bill Benson: As you explained a moment ago, you had to stay in that home all the time. So very few, as I recall very few of the Dutch neighbors, the non-Indonesian folks, knew you were there, but among their own community you were known as being in the Madna house. How was that possible?

>> Al Munzer: Well, there were some people who were aware, very few people were aware that I was in the house. The Indonesian community was very close, and many years later when I went to visit Papa Madna and we went to an Indonesian grocery store, a man looked at Papa Madna, looked at me, and there I was a grown man, 30 years old, and he said, "Bobby."

I should explain children placed in hiding were given a new name. I was given the name Bobby. For many years, by the way, I thought I was given the name Bobby after the dog, so if the dog was being called, if people heard Bobby being called, they would think it was the dog being called. But then I was set straight and told that, no, the dog's name was really Teddy.

[Laughter]

In any event, the Indonesian family, so when I went to this grocery store, this man immediately recognized me as being Bobby. Because, he had been aware of my presence in the home.

Another woman who was aware, who I met many, many years later, approached me, she said, You know, you used to drink my milk. I said, What do you mean? She said, Well, every day,

schoolchildren in Holland during the war years were given a little bottle of milk, and her mother told her to save half the bottle for the baby next door. And I was the baby next door.

So there you have it, a young child participating in saving a human life during the Holocaust.

>> Bill Benson: Al, of course, as you said that, they could not get a ration for you. As the war ground on, by the winter of 1944-45, which was an exceptionally bitter winter, that's one of the memories you do have of that winter and the deprivation that was all around. Will you say a little more about that?

>> Al Munzer: Well, that was a time of terrible hunger in Holland. There was really no food available, and people say that even dogs and cats had disappeared. The only thing that was left to eat at the time was tulip bulbs, which Holland, of course, has many of. So tulip bulbs would be ground up, and that's what we would have as food. That's what we would have to subsist on.

I remember one night waking up very hungry and seeing a table set for breakfast the following morning. So I got out of bed, and sat down in my chair and waited to be fed. And of course, I fell asleep with my head falling in the plate, and that's how members of the family found me the following morning.

>> Bill Benson: You donated several really precious items that you kept all these years, you donated to the museum just last year. One of them was your teething ring. Will you say a little bit about that?

>> Al Munzer: Sure. A teething ring is actually currently on exhibit. If you make it to the Permanent Exhibition today, if you look at the second floor where there is an exhibit on hidden children, you will see my teething ring, which accompanied me as a 9-month-old when I was left with the Madna family. There are also two beautiful photographs, one with my sisters and one with Tole Madna in that same little exhibit on hidden children.

The other thing, the other object that I donated to the museum is one that I used to bring to these whenever we had a *First Person* interview, but now has gotten very fragile. It was a barrel. I remembered that the barrel was actually a liquor cabinet, and I remembered as a child seeing this very big barrel in the house. And then some years ago, about 10 years ago when I visited the Madna family, and I told them the story about the barrel, they pointed to this little barrel sitting there.

[Laughter]

They said, That's the barrel. Of course, that's the difference, when you are a 3-year-old, 2-year-old, 3-year-old, now with 40, 50-year-old looking at the same object. A few months later, I had a visit from the Madna children to the children -- grandchildren, actually, they carried this very heavy duffle bag with them. I wondered what are they -- what the heck do they have in that duffle bag? I opened it up, there was the barrel, with a bottle of Dutch gin inside.

[Laughter]

For many years I had the barrel in the house, but with the climate in Washington it began to deteriorate, so I finally donated it also to the museum, and it's now also part of the collection of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

>> Bill Benson: Which is fabulous.

Your two sisters, Al, Eva and Leana, as you explained, were hidden with this Catholic woman who had a vision. Tragically, 16 months after their placement with her, they were taken by the SS. Will you tell us about that?

>> Al Munzer: Sadly, and tragically, the husband and wife of the family where my sisters were placed had a fight, and the husband denounced his wife to the Germans as hiding two Jewish children.

>> Bill Benson: In a fit of rage.

>> Al Munzer: In a fit of rage. And the Germans took his wife and my two sisters. His wife eventually was freed. She was imprisoned for a while but was then freed. But my two sisters were immediately taken to the same camp that had housed my parents, Westerbork, and then two days later were taken from Westerbork, in February 1944, exactly 70 years ago this year, to Auschwitz, where they were immediately sent to the gas chamber and killed. And they were only 6 and 8 years old at the time.

>> Bill Benson: When did your mom learn about what happened to her two daughters, your two sisters?

>> Al Munzer: I'm not entirely sure. You know, my mother was liberated in April 1945 through the intervention of the head of the Swedish Red Cross, Count Folke Bernadotte, who interviewed on behalf of several thousand women and negotiated their freedom with Himmler.

She was taken, she was liberated at the Danish border after going from one camp to another as the German Army retreated. Horrible, horrible thing referred to as the death march. People had very, very little to eat, no clothing, and just going across all these camps, until she was finally liberated at the Danish border, and greeted by Count Folke Bernadotte and taken to Sweden, where she was left to recuperate.

I don't know whether it was while in Sweden that she learned of the fate of my two sisters or whether it was later, when she returned to the Netherlands, to Holland in August 1945.

My mother told me that the shock was so severe, and of course, you know, any thought brought tears to her eyes, and she had real difficulty coping with that kind of loss. But she also

realized that people did not want to see tears. Some people sort of told her to be quiet, and so she would squeeze her hands whenever she felt tears coming or welling in her eyes, so severely that she actually developed an infection in her hands. That was my mother trying to cope with the news of the loss.

>> Bill Benson: So when she is finally liberated, 12 camps, hard labor, a death march, she finally is liberated, she comes back after the war in May of 1945. Tell us what happened there. There you are, part of the Madna family as far as you knew.

>> Al Munzer: That's one of the first very clear memories that I have. It's of the day my mother came back. That's the term we all use. Not "survive," but "came back."

>> Bill Benson: And you remember that day?

>> Al Munzer: I remember that day very well. I had been asleep in the back room where I usually slept, and someone in the family, one of my foster sisters, came over to get me and wake me up. Like any other child that's being awakened, I started to cry and was cranky.

I was taken to the living room, where the entire family was sitting in a circle. In a very typical way, something that you do with a crying child, I was passed from lap to lap, and there was one lap I wouldn't sit in, and that was my mother's lap. She was a complete stranger to me. My own mother was a stranger, because I already had a mother, and that was Mima, Mima Saina. That's when I finally sat in Mima's lap and I quited down.

>> Bill Benson: What did your mom do then with you at that point?

>> Al Munzer: Well, my mother realized that it would be very, very difficult to separate me.

>> Bill Benson: Abruptly.

>> Al Munzer: Abruptly from Mima. She really appreciated how Mima had taken care of me, and so she invited Mima to become part of our household and to continue to care for me while my mother went looking for work.

She already, at that time I think, had learned that my father probably had died. She did not have any definitive news. So she knew she would have to go out to work. And so arrangements were made for Mima to stay with us.

Now, just to get used to being alone with me, my mother sent Mima to a movie. She gave her tickets to see a movie, which was really still a novelty immediately after the war. And Mima left the house, and then five minutes later she came back in the house, and she wagged her finger at my mother, she said, Don't hit him. That's how protective Mima was of me. She did not even trust my own mother to care for me.

Then, sadly, two months later, Mima suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and passed away. Some people said that she really died of a broken heart, because her baby was being taken away from her.

>> Bill Benson: After Mima had passed, what do you know about your adjustment back, both your adjustment back with your mother and your mother's adjustment, and whether or not you had connections to the Madna family still after that? I know you have them now, but during that time.

>> Al Munzer: Well, my mother had to go find work, as I said, and initially she tried to sell some of the materials that had been left over from my father's business. But then she realized that would mean having to leave me alone with caregivers, and she didn't want that. So she was able to purchase a cosmetics business, and so that's how we lived the first few years after the war, until we then, much later, moved.

>> Bill Benson: Just the two of you.

>> Al Munzer: Just the two of us.

>> Bill Benson: As you told us earlier, your father and mother were separated at Auschwitz. What happened to your father?

>> Al Munzer: Well, my father stayed in Auschwitz for about six months, and he was assigned also to do slave labor, probably for the IG Fargen Company.

A few days ago, when in the research section here at the museum, I found a little slip of paper that sort of relates to his work, and it has just his number as a prisoner, no name, then below that Premium Employee and a signature. I asked a researcher here what that meant. They said that the factories had to pay a salary to the SS for all of the Jewish slave labor that they employed, and this was an indication of my father was considered a premium employee, and that the factory would have to pay a higher wage, a premium wage to the SS.

>> Bill Benson: A bonus to the SS?

>> Al Munzer: A bonus to the SS for providing him. A totally incredible thing, to see this after all these years. Anyway, after --

>> Bill Benson: That was just in the last few months?

>> Al Munzer: That's right.

>> Bill Benson: Wow.

>> Al Munzer: Then from Auschwitz, my father was taken to Mauthausen in Austria. This was probably around the time when the Russian Army was beginning to approach and was liberating some camps. So my father was then taken from Auschwitz in the east, further west to Mauthausen in

Austria.

Austria was a hellhole. That's where Jews were forced to -- Jews and other prisoners were forced to carry these boulders, 46 pounds, up a ramp in a quarry, and very often were tripped so they would fall back into the quarry. And hundreds of men died in Mauthausen.

My father remained in Mauthausen for a few months, then was taken to three more camps, Gerzen, Steier, and a camp high in the Alps, Ebensee, probably one of the most beautiful spots on earth. That's where the story of "The Sound of Music" takes place. There was a concentration camp where the prisoners were forced to assemble V-2 rockets under horrendous conditions in abandoned salt mines.

That's where my father was until the day of liberation of that camp by the US Army, May 5, 1945. But my father was so -- had been so weakened, was so ill from his maltreatment, that while he saw liberation and was able to taste liberation, he did not survive, and he died, he passed away just a few months later, July 25, 1945.

A few years ago, I met a woman, Dorothy Pecoraa, a nurse with the 80th US Army, one of two nurses who volunteered to enter Ebensee concentration camp, and she may have well been one of the nurses taking care of my father. I spent a whole day with her, looking at her photographs. I didn't see any picture of my father, or that I could recognize as my father. But just knowing that this American nurse, this nurse who was barely -- way under five foot tall had accompanied the US Army across Normandy, now had ended up in Ebensee, that she had taken care of my father and provided some comfort, that at least gave me some comfort that he might have died in peace.

>> Bill Benson: You had the opportunity to visit his gravesite, haven't you?

>> Al Munzer: Yes. The only time that I really fully came to grips with the loss of my father was when I visited the concentration camp, when I visited Ebensee and stood at his gravesite. I burst out in tears. That had never happened before. And it happened twice. That first time, when my mother took me there in 1958, just before we emigrated to the United States. She felt we ought to say goodbye, if you will, to my father's grave. Then when I returned in 1995, the same thing happened. I visited his grave, and again I burst out in tears. Because, the reality of the loss of my father and what might have been just hit me very hard.

The same as this is really the first year, because of the anniversary, because of the 70 years after my sisters were killed, that I have felt the full impact of their death. I've wondered very often what might have been, you know, the holidays we might have celebrated together, the fun we might have had, the conversations, even the arguments we might have had. All of those things that I missed out on, because of this terrible horror.

>> Bill Benson: Al, in addition to your own nuclear family, your sisters and your father, you lost other relatives from an extended family as well.

>> Al Munzer: Yes. The only person from my mother's family to survive was a brother, who managed to escape from Germany, from Berlin, one of the very last to escape to Bolivia. To this day, I still have some relatives living in Bolivia and in Chile. So that's about the extent of my immediate family. Although, you know, periodically I learn about other people, more distant relatives.

I was just at an exhibit about the hiding place that had been provided by the Chinese in Shanghai, and some of my distant relatives managed to escape from Berlin to Shanghai, then go on

to Australia from there. I was just at the convention center here in Washington, saw the exhibit, and there was a photograph of one of the relatives. So --

>> Bill Benson: From Shanghai?

>> Al Munzer: From Shanghai. A beautiful exhibit. One of the few places that had opened its doors to Jewish refugees, a thing that obviously did not occur in the United States or in most other countries.

>> Bill Benson: Right. Al, in the little time we have left, I would like you to share with us two other things, if you don't mind. One is, the first would be, you've been able to get the Madna family recognized for what they did for you, in Israel. If you will tell us about that.

Then, if you would, extraordinary recent developments in your life. I mean, extraordinary. You have a guest here with you in the front row, Racelle, who I will introduce. After you spoke to a group of Indonesian students at Temple University in Philadelphia last year.

If you don't mind, maybe telling us about those two.

>> Al Munzer: I remained in very close contact with the Madna family, still very much a part of the Madna family. For example, 9/11, the first telephone call I received was from Dewie Madna, my foster sister, wanting to be sure I was OK. That continues until the present time.

The Madna family was singled out for an honor in Israel, in Jerusalem, at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial. They were recognized as righteous among the nations. They are the only two that have the name Indonesia, Mima Saina and Tole Madna that have the name Indonesia after their name.

So a little over a year ago, a professor in Indonesia got wind of this story. He was trying to

honor an Indonesian family that had done something wonderful, and he said, Well, let me honor someone from the Indonesian diaspora who lived in Holland, and came on Papa Madna's story. That story, in turn, was shared very quickly with Racelle Weiman, sitting here with me. Racelle, at that time, had a contract with the US State Department, still does, to bring Indonesian students and other foreign students to the US to teach them about religious pluralism. She invited me to speak to her class. We didn't tell the class anything about me beforehand.

Then, when I showed them the first photograph, which was of Mima Saina holding me, I asked them, What do you see? They said, well, obviously, an Indonesian woman. When I told them I was the baby she was holding, there was a gasp in the room. After that, I had their undivided attention.

At the very, very end, I told them, you know, Mima used to sing a lullaby to me, and it was called Nina Bobo. All 25 students started singing the lullaby in perfect unison. An incredible, incredible, moving moment.

Well, that moment was shared with the Indonesian ambassador to the United States, and he invited me to tell that story at the Indonesian Embassy, invited 200 people to hear the story. Then invited me to come to Indonesia, urged me to come to Indonesia, really, to share the story there. Racelle and I have made one visit together to Indonesia.

>> Bill Benson: A few months ago.

>> Al Munzer: Few months ago. Very moving experience where I spoke to 400 students. I had the same wonderful experience, this time 400 students singing the same lullaby. Now we're planning to create a documentary bringing the story of my survival, the story of the heroism of the Madna family back to the Indonesian people, because we feel very strongly that it is a story that belongs there. It's

a story that the Indonesians deserve to be proud of. So we have begun to make plans for the documentary, and, God willing, we'll return to Indonesia later this year to actually begin to film that documentary.

>> Bill Benson: That's outstanding. We're going to close the program in just a moment. I'm going to turn back to Al to close our program. Before I do that, I want to thank all of you for being here with us for *First Person*. We didn't have time for question and answer. We could have spent a lot longer this afternoon with Al. But Al, you can stay behind for a little while?

>> Al Munzer: Absolutely.

>> Bill Benson: If anybody would like to ask a question, please feel free to come talk to him afterwards, or just say hi, whatever you want to do. Please take advantage of that when we're done.

When Al is done, I'm also going to ask if all of you would stand, because our photographer, Joel, is going to come up on stage and get a photograph of Al facing him, but with you as the backdrop. It makes a really nice picture of Al being here at *First Person*.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person gets the last word. So on that note, I'm going to turn it back to Al to close our program. I know, if you're like me, you've got many other things you would like to have heard about. We'll find another opportunity.

>> Al Munzer: Well, as you go through the Permanent Exhibition you will learn about the horrors, the evil of the Holocaust. That is, unfortunately, most of the story of the Holocaust. But to me, the amazing thing, really, is that in that sea of evil it was possible for a few people, like the Madna family, to stand up and to do what is right, to make that choice. It's because, of course, of those people that I am alive, and other survivors that are here doing volunteer work at the Holocaust Museum. If only there had been a thousand of those for every one who did stand up, there would have been no Holocaust.

I think the Holocaust is the result of incredible hatred, and I think the one lesson that I hope people will take away as they visit the museum, as they listen to my story, is to where hatred can lead, that hatred can really lead eventually to people being killed, to murder. So the most important lesson for each and every one of us is to really banish hatred from our hearts.

[Applause]

[Ended at 12:00 p.m.]