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11:00 a.m. – 12:02 p.m.

**UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM**  
***FIRST PERSON SERIES***  
**Speaker: MICHEL MARGOSIS**

REMOTE CART

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**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. This is our 15th year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Mr. Michel Margosis, 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 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 serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website at [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org) provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in their program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater. In doing so, you will also receive an electronic copy of Michel Margosis' biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

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

**ROUGH DRAFT TRANSCRIPT  
NOT A VERBATIM RECORD**

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Michel 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 Michel Margosis. Michel's parents were Russian-born Jews. His father had been a policeman who had been deported to Siberia. After escaping, Michel's parents made their way to Belgium. This photo is of Michel's parents on their wedding day.

On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Belgium. And on the map of Belgium, the arrow points to Brussels.

Michel Margosis was born September 2, 1928 in Brussels. This photograph taken in 1938 shows Michel's brother, his mother, his sister, and Michel who is on the right.

In Brussels, Michel's father owned and edited two newspapers, one French and one Yiddish. First we see his Yiddish newspaper. And the front photo is of Michel's father's press card.

In 1940 when the Germans invaded Belgium, Michel and his family fled to the south of France and ended up in Marseille. The arrows show their route from Belgium to Southern France.

Here we see 14-year-old Michel walking down a street in Marseille. The Margosis family hoped to sail for the United States. However, they did not succeed in obtaining visas so they escaped over the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain. The arrow on this map shows their

escape route.

Arrangements were made for Michel to come to the United States. This photograph is of Michel saying goodbye to his father in Portugal before he leaves for the U.S.

In 1943, Michel immigrated with other children to the U.S. on the Serpa Pinto, shown on the postcard on the right. On the left we see a newspaper article about their departure. The arrow points to Michel.

Following his service in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, Michel pursued his chemical education in graduate school. Today, he resides in the Washington, D.C. area following a 26-year career with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as an international expert in the chemical analysis of antibiotics.

Michel's wife, Barbara, passed away 14 years ago from Parkinson's disease. Michel strongly promotes Stem Cell research into Parkinson's and other neurological diseases. Michel is very active in his community. He leads a French Conversation group that meets twice monthly, co-leads the Spanish group and participates in the Italian group. For nearly 10 years Michel has been serving as a Commissioner of Human Rights in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Michel's son Aaron and his daughter Leah both reside in this area. He has two grandsons, ages 13 and 11, and a 17-year old granddaughter. Michel and his son attended a "Hidden Children" conference in Amsterdam in 2005. As part of that trip, he went to Brussels where the Belgium government arranged a "token" settlement for Michel for his losses due to the Holocaust.

Michel speaks frequently about his experience during the Holocaust. He has spoken at such places as Ft. Belvoir, where he received his 50-year Anniversary pin for his service during the Korean War, as well as the Marines at Quantico, the Veterans Administration Hospital in DC and to other veterans and military groups as well as to a number of schools including the one his granddaughter attends.

Michel is especially proud that Virginia now has an annual "Day of Remembrance" thanks to his work with his representative in the Virginia Legislature. And he proudly notes that by persevering, Fairfax County, Virginia, has also now established an annual "Day of Remembrance."

His volunteer work at the museum has included working for Visitor Services as well as translating "Deportation Lists" from Belgium, Luxembourg and from Marseille. This work has also provided Michel with new information related to his own experience in Belgium and Marseille that we will hear more about later.

With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Michel Margosis.

[Applause]

Michel, thank you so much for joining us today and your willingness to be our *First Person*.

>> Michel Margosis: I have nothing else to do.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: We're glad we caught you on a day when you weren't ultra busy as you usually are.

You have so much to tell us in a short period of time. We'll start. You were just turning 11 when the Nazis overran Poland in September 1939. The war came to you and your family in Belgium less than a year later in the spring of 1940. Before you tell us about your journey out of Europe and to the United States for safety, please tell us first a bit about your family, your community, and yourself in the years before the war began.

>> Michel Margosis: I don't know exactly where to start. My father was exiled to Siberia and he escaped. He found his way to Palestine, but my sister contracted Polio and they could not take care of her there. So to find a cure, whatever, Berlin, then Belgium, and then after that he tried to get back to Palestine and they would not let him in.

He tried and tried. Finally we settled in Belgium. Had we not settled there, I would not be a survivor today. I figured at that time the British mandate in Palestine did not allow me to use that system, I guess. And the Jewish agency wanted people to -- rather than intellectuals. My father became a newspaperman at the time. The last time he tried to communicate with them, the refugees from Germany and Austria tried to go to Palestine, too. So he was competing there.

So we stayed in Belgium. That's where I had my education. Even though my first language was Russian -- well, as you know, we had a very diverse family with my parents being born in the Ukraine and my siblings in Persia and I was born in Belgium. My parents spoke Yiddish to each other. They spoke Russian to us. And we kids spoke French. So we had what's called diversity today.

>> Bill Benson: And today you co-lead the Spanish group and you're in the Italian group.

>> Michel Margosis: I picked up Spanish on my way here so, you know. I picked up English when I was here.

>> Michel Margosis: You mentioned Persia. That's going to come up a little bit later. Explain the Persian connection in your family.

>> Michel Margosis: Well, my father was active. He was in the police force. But he was an active Zionist. He had a well-known teacher who indoctrinated him, I guess. He escaped from the concentration camp in Siberia. I think it was Kazakhstan. He made his way back all the way to Palestine. On the way, he went to Persia.

>> Bill Benson: What we call Iran today. Right?

>> Michel Margosis: Yes. Many people don't know that.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Michel Margosis: He had a colleague, a Persian colleague, who helped him to become a citizen.

>> Bill Benson: Of Persia.

>> Michel Margosis: Of Persia. So now we have Persian passports, and he was able to get back and forth and able to travel. When I came here, I was a Persian citizen. I do not know a single word of Persian. I've never been there. I never want to go there.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Ok. Tell us about your mother.

>> Michel Margosis: She was a heroine.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to learn a lot about her.

>> Michel Margosis: She had a brother and sister. Brother became a Communist. Never heard from him. Sister stayed there. We don't know much about it. Although about 20 years ago -- I remember a picture that was sent of her citizen. I couldn't believe it. Looked just like my mother; same way of walk and everything. And two of the kids, I guess my cousins, came to the states as refugeniks back when they were seeking refuge. It was a problem. But then started to do things that we didn't care, so we have not been in touch.

So when my parents left Russia, they left it forever. My mother wanted to visit one time. We didn't let her. We were afraid of the Communist --

>> Bill Benson: Not letting her out.

>> Michel Margosis: So we never saw family, never saw any relatives. Never knew any grandparents, uncles, aunts, no cousins, until finally about three years ago, one or two of them were able to come here.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned a few moments ago that your sister had contracted Polio. You had two other siblings. Tell us about your siblings.

>> Michel Margosis: Well, my sister, the oldest. My sister and I are the only survivors now. She just celebrated her 90th birthday. She was in a community like mine, in Jersey. And my daughter surprised her by driving me over there for her 90th. She was pretty happy. My favorite sister. What can I say?

[Laughter]

I also have a favorite son and a favorite daughter.

[Laughter]



It turned out pretty well. She was very happy. She seems to be content. She doesn't have to cook. Well, a retirement community.

>> Bill Benson: And you had two brothers as well.

>> Michel Margosis: One brother.

>> Bill Benson: One brother. Willy?

>> Michel Margosis: Willy.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to hear more about Willy, too.

>> Michel Margosis: When I came here -- I went to Palestine. That's later on.

>> Bill Benson: Your 11th birthday, just about the time of your 11th birthday, 1939, on September 1, of course, Germany attacks Poland. You remember your birthday quite vividly from that year.

>> Michel Margosis: September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland. September 2 was my birthday. That was the day that England and France gave an ultimatum to Germany which Germany ignored. And on September 3, England and France declared war on Germany. That was a funny birthday present. About six months later Germany attacked Belgium and Holland and Luxembourg. I think 18 days later Belgium surrendered.

We tried to take -- we tried to go to the coast to get to England. We missed the train, luckily for us. The ship that we wanted to take was sunk before it even left.

The next available train -- the railroad station was packed. Outside were hundreds of people. The next train was supposed to go to a small town about a half-hour away from Brussels. We got that. The city was completely flattened out, bombed.

>> Bill Benson: Before you go on, tell us how you got to the train station.

>> Michel Margosis: We walked; packed whatever we could within a few days after Brussels was bombed.

>> Bill Benson: Were you surrounded by thousands of others fleeing Brussels?

>> Michel Margosis: Well, by the time we got to the station the station was full. I slept on my suitcase until the next morning when we were finally able to get aboard a train.

The train -- stopped. The train, decided to go on for seven days and seven nights to Southern France. It was bombed on occasion, strafed on occasion. And most people that I speak to don't know what strafing means. Airplanes, machine guns. The train stopped a couple of times. A few people got down. My father did not let us off the train. He hid us under the seats where the bullets might ricochet. Some people did not make it back on the train, but the train kept going. And finally we got down to Southern France.

>> Bill Benson: So stop and starting seven days it took to make that trip.

>> Michel Margosis: We were fed through the window, people throwing food at us, throwing whatever. And that was pretty good. French bread is good.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Tell us -- I think it was during this time when you were aware of two German spies being caught, I think. Tell us about that.

>> Michel Margosis: The first stop, a half-hour from Brussels, the train was delayed because they stopped two nuns. And the nuns, it was revealed, were German spies.

>> Bill Benson: Dressed as nuns.

>> Michel Margosis: Dressed as nuns. So that delayed it a little bit. I don't know. It was funny at the time, but I didn't know that the church was -- I don't know much about it. It was an interesting incident.

>> Bill Benson: And there you are as an 11-year-old, you saw some of this.

>> Michel Margosis: Oh, yeah. And I remember it.

>> Bill Benson: So after the seven-day journey, you end up in a small town.

>> Michel Margosis: A small town on the Garonne River, a big river. We stayed there for a while. It was early spring. I remember the fields looking out once we stepped out of the town which was only about 10 minutes from the house in any direction, practically. You saw nothing but grape, grape vines. I learned how to appreciate grapes because I was there day in and day out eating grapes.

>> Bill Benson: Because I think already food was beginning to get scarce otherwise.

>> Michel Margosis: It started to get scarce, yeah. We still had food.

A few days later, about two weeks later, France gave up and the Vichy government took over. [Inaudible] was a big hero in World War I. The rations started to come in. My parents decided that we should get away from there. I had a friend who had a farm not too far from there. So we were invited to join them at the farm and stayed there for a while. My father received his visa to Portugal. He had his papers. He had a valid passport. My mother's passport had expired, so we couldn't leave.

>> Bill Benson: So just your father gets the visa.

>> Michel Margosis: He went to Vichy, tried to get tickets for us and couldn't make it. He

decided that because of his writings against fascism and Hitler -- he kept warning the people about Hitler.

>> Bill Benson: He was a journalist.

>> Michel Margosis: Since 1933 he kept up with it. He felt he had a price on his head, and he went to Portugal.

>> Bill Benson: Why Portugal?

>> Michel Margosis: It was the only country open. Switzerland was not allowing anybody anymore.

>> Bill Benson: And Portugal was neutral at the time?

>> Michel Margosis: Portugal was sort of neutral. Like Franco.

>> Bill Benson: Franco neutral.

>> Michel Margosis: Franco became Franco the head of Spain because the German and Italians helped him. They provided weapons. Basically Franco was a fascist.

Until we got there, they were sending refugees back to France. By the time we got there, they relented. Well, that came later, but the ally troops invaded North Africa. I think Franco saw the writing on the wall and started allowing refugees. And Balthazar in Portugal was another fascist.

>> Bill Benson: So your father left.

>> Michel Margosis: He stayed there. He was stranded there because he couldn't go anyplace. Finally placed him in a small town in Portugal where refugees were placed.

>> Bill Benson: So your mom and your sister and your brother and you --

>> Michel Margosis: We were on the farm for a while. I learned things that farmers do; you know, taking care of chickens, feeding horses and cattle, chopping wood. I learned how to drive a team of horses. It was fun. I learned how to milk a cow; not even pasteurized, just drink it directly from the cow. It was fun. You know.

[Laughter]

But I was young.

>> Bill Benson: 12 years old at this time roughly.

>> Michel Margosis: It was an adventure. It was great.

Then my mother decided there's no point to staying there. She thought perhaps the Persians in Marseille might help.

>> Bill Benson: The Persian ligation because you have Persian citizenship.

>> Michel Margosis: Right. So we decided to go to Marseille. To go to Marseille we had to stop in Toulouse first to make the train connection. And we were told there was a reception center for refugees, so we signed in. We were given food. We were given a bunk.

In the middle of the night my mother didn't feel right about it. She decided to leave. The barracks were basically scrap tents, bottom wood and then tarps around it. We lifted the tarp and just sneaked out.

Through the Museum many years later I found out that that reception camp was operated by the militia, French militia, and the people were arrested and shipped to Auschwitz.

>> Bill Benson: So your mother just had this sense that this was not the place to stay.

>> Michel Margosis: Just had a feeling.

>> Bill Benson: As we will hear later, your mother's instincts were pretty powerful.

>> Michel Margosis: As we got to Marseille, the best place we could find was just down from the railroad station into the slums. The slums of Marseille was about the safest place to go, safest from the troops, from the police. We found a nice little place, one big room inhabited by other living things: bed bugs and a few other things. But it was safe. It was very diverse.

>> Bill Benson: What made it safe?

>> Michel Margosis: The cops were not there coming because -- the cops would not feel safe in that neighborhood.

>> Bill Benson: It was so rough.

>> Michel Margosis: It was rough. The Corsicans, Italians, Arabs, open, smoking Chinese next door. And I could communicate.

>> Bill Benson: And this is a port city. Right?

>> Michel Margosis: Marseille is the second largest city in France, the largest commercial ports. It's about as diverse as it can be. I learned to do a lot of things there.

>> Bill Benson: As you said, your time in Marseille was a time of growing up very quickly as a 12-year-old when you were there.

>> Michel Margosis: Then I made friends with a few locals. But my best friend was somebody who called himself Cafe Ole if anybody knows what that means. His father was from Cameroon, Central Africa. That was German and liberated and became a protector of England and France. So it was middle Africa. And his mother was Danish. So he was Cafe Ole. And we did everything together. We taught me how to swim. Basically it was the most

important thing I learned. We did everything together. We went skating. We went boating. We went fishing. We went stealing. Well, food was getting to be difficult to get. Rations, 250 grams of bread, half a pound of bread, a day for a Frenchman who's starving. Starvation diet didn't go much. The bread started to get darker and darker. Rutabaga was plentiful. I never look at it anymore.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: While you're doing your part to try to get food -- but you're also having in some ways a good time because you're still a kid. But your mother, of course, has the responsibility for caring for three children and make ends meet.

>> Michel Margosis: We registered to come in. I still have the paper that says -- that had to be extended every year. But we didn't do it. I was a kid. I was having fun. So we were hiding. Didn't have coupons. So in order to get food she started black marketing. In France at that time, it was death if you were caught. But she made a good business.

>> Bill Benson: What kinds of things did she blackmarket?

>> Michel Margosis: Tobacco, cigarettes; one of the main things. If anybody knows about French cigarettes -- I still don't like them. I started to smoke when I was about that age. And when cigarettes became in demand, I started smoking other things. I don't remember the names of some of them, different kinds of herbs. And candy was a premium. Profit was magnificent. Anything that could be bought on the lower price and sold at a higher price she dealt with. I remember cigarettes under the bed. You could sell them one at a time; not a pack, a cigarette for, I don't know, \$2 or whatever. I don't remember the prices. It was

lucrative but dangerous. But that provided us with survival.

>> Bill Benson: Explain to us -- you're in Vichy, France. So ostensibly it's free France but they're very much in collaboration with the Germans. Was there a German Army presence at all? No?

>> Michel Margosis: We didn't see the Germans there. My friend, Rafael, his father was black, from Cameroon. Cameroon was German before World War I. And we suspected that he worked with them. He spoke English at home. His father spoke German. And he was French. We did a little looking around, especially since I had the little kayak. I could go around watching the coast, which I don't talk much about. But we did swim there. The other activities I don't talk about.

>> Bill Benson: And why don't you talk about them?

>> Michel Margosis: It's personal.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Michel Margosis: Too personal.

>> Bill Benson: And as you said in the past, nefarious activities.

>> Michel Margosis: Nefarious activities.

>> Bill Benson: As you said, the slums were relatively safe because they were so dangerous for the French gendarmeries and the militia to come in there. You were telling me about what I think you call raffles. Tell us about the raffles.

>> Michel Margosis: One of the techniques for the people, well, on my birthday after I left Belgium, the neighborhood was swept of the Jews. And then on my birthday after I left



Marseille, the same thing happened. My neighborhood was cleaned. But one way of cleaning is to get the troops on one end of the street and see them at the other end of the street and picking up everybody that's in between. And if you don't have any documents to justify your existence, you're out of luck. That's what's called a raffle. It's basically a roundup.

>> Bill Benson: A people trap, I think you referred to it.

>> Michel Margosis: People trap. And I was able to escape a couple of them.

>> Bill Benson: How did you do that?

>> Michel Margosis: Somehow houses are connected. And I was able to transfer from one house connecting to the outside to the other. Leon is a better city for that than Marseille.

Marseille, the neighborhood that was particularly trapped, I knew pretty well. My friend, Rafael, he lived in a section called the basket. It was blown up about three months after we left. The whole neighborhood was just blown up, picked up everybody. I don't have a number of how many Jews were picked up in there. And the French were relocated.

>> Bill Benson: Wasn't -- was your brother Willy picked up in one of the raffles?

>> Michel Margosis: My brother Willy was picked up early on. That was pretty early after we got to Marseille. He was picked up. He was parading with the people supporting General Degrelle. He was picked up and released the next day. Apparently the look on him, they would have noticed that he was Jewish. I won't discuss how.

>> Bill Benson: So he was able to get away because of that.

>> Michel Margosis: He was able to get away. And I hardly ever saw my sister or brother there.

>> Bill Benson: They were doing what you were doing?

>> Michel Margosis: They were doing their thing. I was doing my thing. My brother was three years older. My sister was four years older. So we are different crowds.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know if there were other Jews from Brussels that were also in Marseille at the same time who had escaped there like you had?

>> Michel Margosis: No. I don't know anybody from Brussels, but my mother had a friend. We had good friends who had a candy shop. We were friends with them. My brother was in touch with them, with one of the boys. Then we heard that one of the boys escaped and the family was picked up by the Germans or the French militia.

>> Bill Benson: So, Michel, at some point, though, your mother decides it's time to get out of Marseille and she wants to go to Spain.

>> Michel Margosis: Oh, that was when the allies invaded North Africa. The Americans ended up in North Africa. The German troops came down.

>> Bill Benson: So now the Germans are present.

>> Michel Margosis: Actually German troops. I'm sure they had a lot of German civilians working there, but the German troops. The picture you showed walking down the main street. The Germans were marching on the same street, the main street. And the sound of those boots, I can still hear.

>> Bill Benson: So so-called free France no longer exists. The Germans have now occupied it all.

>> Michel Margosis: I never called it free France. I called it unoccupied France. The troops

were there. Within hours I think my mother bought with money that she was able to make, bought false papers. And back in those days to travel from one town to another, you need a special pass to take a bus or take a train. You needed special documents. She was able to get it. Same for my sister because of her Polio had to go to the mountains because the mountain air was so much fresher. So we got to the border.

>> Bill Benson: So the papers were to go to the mountains for her fresh air because of her Polio. That was the explanation.

>> Michel Margosis: Right.

>> Bill Benson: As you said, your mother paid for it with money that she had earned from the black market. Tell our audience how much money it cost to get those papers.

>> Michel Margosis: For the papers, I don't know how much it costs but when we went to the border and we hired -- well, we were accosted after dinner in a restaurant at the border. We were accosted by two French gendarmes, the national police, uniformed. They asked us whether we wanted to go over to Spain. And my mother, through my sister because she couldn't speak French -- oh, I forgot to mention. The train we took from Marseille to the border, Toulouse and the border, we had German troops in our cabins. And my mother couldn't speak French. She spoke Yiddish and Russian. So she started signing.

>> Bill Benson: Pretending.

>> Michel Margosis: Pretending to sign. The Germans never caught on. We caught on. And we spoke French with a Southern French accent, very easily. And then we responded. That was a marvelous trick. That was really wonderful.

>> Bill Benson: And on the spur of the moment.

>> Michel Margosis: That was my mother.

>> Bill Benson: That was your mother.

>> Michel Margosis: We got to the border without any incidents with the troops there, but then we were accosted by those two French gendarmes if we wanted to go. My sister said, "We're French. Why do we want to go to Spain?" Eventually we relented because we didn't have any choice anymore. They were willing to take us over for \$10,000 each, \$40,000 in 1942. My mother did not deal so much with French currency but with green backs. That was valuable. \$40,000 in 1942 I believe today is about \$500,000.

>> Bill Benson: She had amassed that through her black market activities.

>> Michel Margosis: She was able to do that. So we packed whatever we could, again. I carried a French dictionary. I don't know why. When I was in Marseille, I used to go to the old port where my friend was. He lived there. There was a book shop. I used to go there all the time. I never bought anything, but I read. I read things like "The Last of the Mohicans," "American Detectives," "Buffalo Bill." But I also read "Don Quixote," and the "Les Miserables." But "Don Quixote" in French and Spanish. I came here and I read it in English. It sounds like three different stories.

>> Bill Benson: So a giant dictionary.

>> Michel Margosis: [Inaudible]

>> Bill Benson: You can climb over the mountains and haul a dictionary.

>> Michel Margosis: Not to the top. The top was about 7,000 feet. But the cops, the guides

took us through. It was still pretty high. And in November it gets pretty cold.

>> Bill Benson: How -- when your mom had to trust -- they call them passures. They offered to take you over for \$40,000. How did you know they weren't going to turn you in?

>> Michel Margosis: We didn't. I found out much later, again through my museum here, that many of those people collected the money and then turned us over to the authorities. We heard dogs. We heard noises.

>> Bill Benson: As you were making your way over.

>> Michel Margosis: As we made our way over through the woods and the snow. They knew their business. We paid for it.

>> Bill Benson: You made it to Spain.

>> Michel Margosis: Made it to Spain. We got into a small town, village. The inn was closed. Tables and chairs were stacked. We were placed behind the counter and we slept there until mid-afternoon. Then we were introduced to two Spanish guys. For another sum of money -- I don't know how much that was -- they were willing to take us to the big city of Barcelona. They didn't go through the woods. They followed the railroad tracks. That was the easiest way to go into town. And within an hour or so we were picked up by the Spanish police. Italians call them carabinieri.

>> Bill Benson: Guardian civil?

>> Michel Margosis: Guardian civil. Had looked like typewriters as far as I can tell.

>> Bill Benson: This is a government that's very pro German.

>> Michel Margosis: I was told, again through here, that before the invasion of North Africa by

the allies, many of the Spanish sent refugees back to France. I understand that my brother-in-law came through Spain also around the same time but didn't have a guide. They were young. Brother-in-law escaped -- he was in the French Underground. He escaped from the French Underground. He was detected. His group was detected. Many of them were shot. Didn't have the luck we did.

>> Bill Benson: But still you were apprehended. What happened then?

>> Michel Margosis: We were taken to a small town where we were fed. Good Spanish food. And that was shortly -- that was just a few years after the Civil War. So the food was still in short -- I don't remember if we had paella. It was good. After the diet that we had in France -- although it did help, the diet in France, because I went fishing. But that Spanish food was very good. Each one of us -- my mother and sister was placed in the women's jail. My brother in the men's jail. And I was under 16 so they put me in an orphanage. From jail my brother was sent to a concentration camp that was set up for the Spanish Civil War. And the orphanage, of course it was a Catholic orphanage, so we went to mass every morning at 6:00. Of course, I didn't notice anything about it. We stayed there for a while.

>> Bill Benson: Each in your different locations.

>> Michel Margosis: Each in a different location. I don't remember just how long, maybe a month. Then we were placed, the whole family reassembled and sent to another city, town, called -- used to be a Roman water city with spas and all of that. Set up several hotels for refugees sponsored by the American legencies.

>> Bill Benson: Willy was with you, too?

>> Michel Margosis: No.

>> Bill Benson: He was still in the camp.

>> Michel Margosis: He was already in camp.

From there, after a few months there, a couple of months, we were sent to a big city of Barcelona. My brother was released. We were able to get together. We were subsidized to live with a family. From there my mother found out about an organization sending children to America, children under 16 and born outside of Germany. My mother signed me up. We said goodbye. And I came.

>> Bill Benson: Before we go to that, you told me about an image you remember -- of course, when you were there in Barcelona, your mother still wanted to get to the Persian ligation because of the citizenship but the American and German Embassies were side-by-side.

>> Michel Margosis: We went -- the one that I went to was the British Consulate in Barcelona. And that's where I found out about the war. I did not know America got into the war. And then I went to the American Embassy because it was pretty far away from there. But I noticed on the square, the American Embassy and the German Embassy -- Consulate. The German Consulate, practically next to each other. And watching those two flags flying.

>> Bill Benson: The swastika side-by-side.

>> Michel Margosis: Just couldn't believe it. But I never entered that building, neither one. But -- because Persia was protective of England we felt we were better served by the British. Though they never did anything for us.

>> Bill Benson: So your mother was able to arrange for just you to go to the United States.

She says goodbye to you from Spain.

>> Michel Margosis: Right.

>> Bill Benson: And you -- tell us about your trip.

>> Michel Margosis: We boarded the train in Barcelona, picked up a few kids in Madrid, and then went to Portugal. And I understand that there were about 1,400 kids that came to this country by themselves from 1933 to 1945. I'll never get over it. The British were able to get 15,000 --

>> Bill Benson: 10,000.

>> Michel Margosis: 10,000 --

>> Bill Benson: Kindertransport.

>> Michel Margosis: Kindertransport in a year and a half to England. And America could only afford to bring over about 1,400 to this country in 12 years.

>> Bill Benson: And you were one of those.

>> Michel Margosis: I was one of those lucky ones, again.

>> Bill Benson: Before you got here, in Portugal you were reunited with your father.

>> Michel Margosis: I hadn't seen my father in three years.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember that reunification?

>> Michel Margosis: Yes. First thing he did is opened cigarettes and offered me a cigarette.

He said, "You're a man now. You can smoke." So I smoked.

>> Bill Benson: Had your mother and father been able to communicate much at all during that time?



>> Michel Margosis: Some. I remember that eventually in Spain much of the writing was blackened out so we couldn't see --

>> Bill Benson: Censored letters going back and forth. Ok.

>> Michel Margosis: I remember my mother before I left, she baked. I mentioned if I had one of those cookies, I would break it. But they were still very good. And when I gave it to my father -- this is before eating it. So that was quite a reunion. I stayed with him for about three, four days. He even took me to a movie.

>> Bill Benson: So he had been safe that whole time.

>> Michel Margosis: He was safe in Portugal. I found out much later through a group here that he was acting rabbi where he was.

>> Bill Benson: So you go to the United States with a bunch of other kids, Serpa Pinto.

>> Michel Margosis: Serpa Pinto, a Portuguese ship. We stopped in Oporto for a load of cork, which now we don't use. We use plastics or screws, screw tops. Then we went to Azores. People were throwing corns and whatever. And I bought two pineapples. A couple of days later when I got to them, so delicious, they were fermented. And that was a wonderful experience.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: A not so wonderful experience, I think, on your crossing. You had a U-boat incident. Didn't you?

>> Michel Margosis: That's a little vague. We were stopped by a U-boat. Someone was asking, was it ally or Germans? Well, U-boat was only Germans. A German submarine

stopped the ship. Everybody was awake. I didn't want to go up there. Then we heard a splash. And that was it. They let us go. Then we found out that one of the cooks was missing. But continued on. Nothing happened.

>> Bill Benson: Why would the U-boat -- because it's a Portuguese ship? That's why they wouldn't have attacked it?

>> Michel Margosis: Right.

>> Bill Benson: But they boarded it.

>> Michel Margosis: They boarded it.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember being frightened by that?

>> Michel Margosis: No. It was a neutral ship.

>> Bill Benson: Didn't have to worry. Ok. So you make it to the United States.

>> Michel Margosis: We land in Philadelphia. Sky was full of balloons, nets, whatever. I thought it was a reception for us.

[Laughter]

But they were protecting against airplanes, I guess. As soon as we landed, we had a pilot who came onboard to guide the ship in. Went through customs. I took my stamp collection that I had. I had a big stamp collection, which I thought was important. My brother-in-law says it wasn't worth anything so I gave it to him.

>> Bill Benson: Why did he take your stamp collection?

>> Michel Margosis: They were probably looking for something there.

>> Bill Benson: Of value.

>> Michel Margosis: Possibly other things. Many spies used stamps, under the glue.

[Inaudible] I noticed it was gone. I think my brother took it.

>> Bill Benson: Where did you go to live -- you're here in Philadelphia, by yourself, you're 16. Under 16.

>> Michel Margosis: Yeah. We immediately took a train to New York. We were placed in a home in the Bronx. Then I think the following day I had a cousin my sister's age who came. She was taller. She had a big sun hat and a French dictionary under her arm. She decided to take me to Radio City, show me the big city, Radio City Music Hall. I was not too impressed, but I had to show some appreciation. And she tried to talk French to me, high school French, which is a word from a dictionary. She finally says, "Do you speak Yiddish?" I said, "No, but I remember some because my parents spoke and I heard it long enough." So finally we were able to communicate. A few days later I went to live with them. And I stayed with them for a while until they couldn't take me anymore because he had lost everything during the depression. And I did not know I was under the protection of the Justice Department. And that put me in a foster home after that. And I stayed in that foster home until May 1946 when my parents came here.

Soon after I left Spain, my brother and sister went to Palestine because my sister had fallen in love with a Palestinian who went to study in France. And he went back to Palestine. And she wanted to go because she was in love with him. She also saw -- that was in Marseille but also in Barcelona. And my parents suggested that my brother be along as a chaperone.

>> Bill Benson: With your sister.

>> Michel Margosis: Yeah. So my sister ended up in Tel Aviv. My brother was outside of Jerusalem. He became a truck driver; commuting to Tel Aviv. My sister had taken a course in Marseille, sewing, mending, whatever. She made things like wedding dresses and things.

>> Bill Benson: So just your parents came to the United States.

>> Michel Margosis: Then my mother hired another guy to take her to Portugal from Spain. Illegally. I do have documents. I have documents that showed that we were legal residents in Belgium. That was important. So I came here. I went to live with my cousins. And that was in Brooklyn. And I became a Brooklyn Dodger fan. And I gave up baseball 1957 when I moved to California.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: So your mom and dad did get here together in 1946. What was that like for you with all the upheaval you had been through?

>> Michel Margosis: I came into Philadelphia. I went to Philadelphia to greet them. The boat had not landed yet, so I went to a movie. The movie was "Anna and the King of Siam" with Rex Harrison. I remember. And then I finally went to the boat. It was a marvelous meeting. My father brought all kinds of goodies from Portugal, pottery mainly and ancient Bibles. The ancient bibles he gave me before from Portugal thinking that it might provide some funds for me. We went immediately to New York. We were held by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS. Set them up and we lived together.

>> Bill Benson: What about your schooling which had been disrupted much earlier?

>> Michel Margosis: I landed here June 22, 1943. I just celebrated my 71st Anniversary here. That was June 22. June 21 was another special anniversary, too. That's when I got married. So I celebrate all of these things at the same time, basically.

That summer, it was the beginning of the summer. Came here June 22. I got acquainted with Coney Island. My cousin took me to the roller coaster there, Luna Park. Got acquainted with Nathan's.

[Laughter]

And then I tried doing it myself one time and I got lost. I took the wrong trolley. But I found my way back.

And then September they enrolled me in school. My first words that I learned here was from a neighbor. The neighborhood was also diverse. I had Greek friends next door, Italians across the street, and Jewish friend who taught me English. But the English that he taught me was Italian.

[Laughter]

And my cousin told me never to repeat those words again.

[Laughter]

They enrolled me in school, first semester. The teacher that took me in was the French teacher, so I was able to communicate. It was not easy the first year. I did not know a word of English except maybe "I love you." You pick up things in the movies.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: And other things you will not share with us. That's right.

>> Michel Margosis: That put me in French V. Then I took civics, English, math. English, I got 59. That passed me. Passing grade is 65. That passed me. That passed me civics, which I never understood a word of.

The following year I was taking "Midsummer Night's Dream," Shakespeare. I made it in three and a half years. I became an honor student. I took science, physics I didn't like. Then my last year I took chemistry and that changed my life. It opened up a new world. I fell in love with it. I decided to go into chemistry against my father's wishes. Because initially wanted to be a journalist like him. I took a course in English, started writing. The teachers liked what I was writing. So then the chemistry really talked to me. And I became a chemist.

>> Bill Benson: A research scientist chemist.

>> Michel Margosis: I finally managed to do my own research for the Food and Drug. I suggested things to my boss and he said that sounds good. So I became an expert.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to ask you one more question before we begin to close up because of our time. I just want -- for the record I want to note that Michel is writing his autobiography. You really are a very good writer. So your father would be very proud of the journalist in you. You're a good writer, too, on top of being a good scientist, great scientist.

Several years ago you were here on a *First Person* program and there was a local poet in the audience just happened to be here. After she left she wrote a poem.

>> Michel Margosis: She asked my permission to write about my mother. She was writing a book about the women of resistance. And she wrote a lovely poem that encapsulates everything I've been saying in one page.

>> Bill Benson: Lukshen. Is that the name of it?

>> Michel Margosis: The name is called "lukshen" in Yiddish means noodles. And that was our code word for black market dollars in France. So we didn't say 500 lukshen -- \$500. We would say 500 lukshen.

>> Bill Benson: Would you mind if I read a little bit?

>> Michel Margosis: Go ahead.

>> Bill Benson: Very end. "Schendel Margosis, three children, two strangers, never looking down, scraping their way over. Lucky children, her lukshen, buying them a soft pink Spanish dawn."

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* gets the last word. I'm going to turn back to Michel to close our program in a moment. We didn't have a chance for question and answers with you but after the program Michel will step down off the stage over here. So, please, if you have a question you would like to ask him, please feel free to do that or just say hi to him or get your picture taken with him, whatever you want to do. He will be available for that.

I'm also going to ask you, at the end of the program when Michel is done, to stand because our photographer, Miriam, is going to come up on stage and get a photo of Michel facing this direction but with you all as the backdrop. It's just a really wonderful way to memorialize his visit here with us at *First Person*.

So, Michel?

>> Michel Margosis: Well, I didn't memorize it because at my age we don't memorize

anymore.

[Laughter]

I am here relating some brief memories of my contribution to history, my escape from Europe and my arrival as a refugee alone in this country 71 years ago while war was raging and now I'm a Holocaust survivor. I recall my father's illusions to Pogroms and his resistance to the revolution and his own escape from Siberia. It does seem as long ago as the crusades or the inquisition.

I'm immensely grateful to have found refuge and become a citizen of this great nation where I've had the freedom to plan my own future, to worship or not as a Jew, to acquire an education and to become a successful research chemist with the FDA, to serve my country in the Army and Civil Service, to marry and to have a loving family to be immensely proud of.

The talk reaffirms the legacy of my heritage with memories from those dreadful days as well as those happily derived afterwards. As I am more than willing to bear witness to the Holocaust, I must leave it to this great museum and to you, you all, to ensure that it will be remembered. The foremost lesson here is that heinous genocides must be held in check for this earth to survive.

To the young people here, I would simply but strongly admonish you to study and learn with purpose as much and as far as you possibly can so that you may be as fortunate as I have been in truly enjoying years of freedom and employment. This nation became the world's [Inaudible] because of its innovative experiment of democracy that we just celebrated



last week. This was followed by great advances in science and technology as we are also the most successful nation living with diversity. Learn all you can about your country and the issues troubling it. Know your rights and use them. And most importantly, vote. But vote for the right people, of course.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

[The *First Person* event ended at 12:02 p.m.]