

Wednesday, July 16, 2014

11:00 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
EMANUEL “MANNY” MANDEL

REMOTE CART

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>> Suzy Snyder: Good morning. I'm Suzy Snyder, today's host for the *First Person* program. Thank you for joining us. We're in our 15th year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Emanuel Mandel whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2014 season of *First Person* is made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship, and we are very lucky that Louis is with us today.

Can you please stand?

[Applause]

I meant Louis, but that's ok. You should stand for Louis because I tell you it's a very good program. We would not have it without the sponsorship of Louis Smith. We're very grateful for his years of service to the museum.

First Person a series of weekly conversations with survivors of Holocaust who share their accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at the museum. Our program continues through mid-August. The Museum's website, 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. I don't have one with me. If you open your program up -- Barbara, can you wave it? Thank you. Please fill out that card. In doing so, today, you'll receive an electronic copy of Manny's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Manny is going to 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 do questions and answers. In preparation for Manny, we've completed a brief slide presentation to introduce his story.

Let me see -- thank you.

This is Manny as a young boy. He was born to a religious Jewish family on May 8, 1936. Manny was just 3 when World War II started. Although he was born in Riga, Latvia, Manny's family were Hungarian Jews who moved to Latvia because of his father's work.

This is a portrait of Yehuda Mandel and Ella Mandel holding Manny.

Shortly after Manny's birth his father accepted a post as chief cantor in Budapest. Hungary is indicated on the map. The second indicates Budapest.

This photograph shows Manny and his father on the streets in Budapest.

The Hungarian government passed anti-Jewish legislation beginning in 1938. And in 1940, Hungary joined the Axis Alliance with Germany. The war and increasing restrictions made life difficult for Hungarian Jews. Manny's father was conscripted to work periodically in Hungarian labor battalions.

Here you see a picture of Manny on the first day of school outside his family's apartment in Budapest. And on the right is Manny as an adult outside the very same apartment.

German forces occupied Hungary in March 1944. Manny and his mother Ella were fortunate to be included in a program conceived by Germans where Jews would be

transported safely with Palestine in exchange for trucks. Within months they were transported by the Nazis to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany, near Hannover in preparation for their eventual departure from Europe.

Negotiations for their transport to Palestine broke down and in December 1944. About six months before the end of the war, Manny and his mother were released from Bergen-Belsen and transported safely to neutral Switzerland. There they stayed at this children's home where Ella worked as a teacher. Manny is at the bottom left of the image.

Manny, can you join me?

Please welcome him to the stage. Thank you.

[Applause]

Can everybody hear me? Ok.

Thank you so much, Manny, for joining us today. I know that you were born in '35 --

>> Manny Mandel: '36.

>> Suzy Snyder: '36. Your father traveled a lot. Where did he actually do his cantorial studies?

>> Manny Mandel: If you recall the maps, my father is from eastern Hungary that you know better as the home of Dracula, Transylvania. My mother is from southern Hungary which you know better as Yugoslavia.

It was before the First World War ended. My first started in a small community which today is called -- it's in Ukraine. He went to school there. Eventually he got to school in Vienna. Vienna had a major internationally known cantor institute. That's where he got his

training. And his first job was in Yugoslavia, where he met my mother.

>> Suzy Snyder: That was my next question. He met your mother in Yugoslavia. They married there?

>> Manny Mandel: In 1930.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did they return to Budapest? What was the chronology?

>> Manny Mandel: The chronology has to do with a bit of history. Part of the issue had to do with the fact that my father being born where he was was then a citizen of a country that was created in 1918, Czechoslovakia. As a Czech national and as a Jew, he had some difficulties getting working papers in Hungary. He could not get a job in Budapest -- could not get working papers. A job he could get. Through a various series of what they call auditions he took a well-known job in Riga. In 1936 he was able to get the papers done in Hungary. And that's when we moved there. We fought for the rest of our lives.

>> Suzy Snyder: You were born in Riga?

>> Manny Mandel: Yup. I was just weeks old when they left.

>> Suzy Snyder: I found it interesting. I read through your father's oral testimony. Maybe you have insight into some of this. But I noticed that in 1937 or 1938 your father actually was invited to London. He interviewed for a job there.

>> Manny Mandel: Actually, the timing is a bit off. This happened before he got the job in Budapest. He interviewed a number of places: Holland, London. He was offered positions, but he was holding out for a position in Budapest. He was still in Riga at the time. So it was a bit earlier. When he got the Budapest job, he says: That's it; I've arrived.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you know why?

>> Manny Mandel: He was a native Hungarian, spoke Hungarian. He was part of that whole culture. To him this was the peak of all establishments. If you want to be a quarterback in the city, you better play for the Redskins.

[Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: Ok. So he returned and took the job in Budapest. You were born in '36 in Riga. You moved to Budapest. You remember going to school in Budapest. Yes?

>> Manny Mandel: Sure. I remember something before -- [Feedback] You'll recall from the notes, my first experience of the Holocaust was not Budapest. It was no Novi Sad.

>> Suzy Snyder: Yes, I remember this.

>> Manny Mandel: Novi Sad is a city in Yugoslavia, down the Danube River. It's my mother's hometown. She was not born there but grew up there.

>> Suzy Snyder: I want to back up for a second though. Is this your first memory, period?

>> Manny Mandel: I would think so.

>> Suzy Snyder: Ok. So your first memory actually is in Novi Sad. You can go ahead and explain.

>> Manny Mandel: Memories, you know, we took vacations on the Adriatic coast. I may remember something from that. But first memory that has any significance besides playing in the sand was this experience. It was the first experience of the Holocaust. We went to Novi Sad to visit my grandparents, my mother's hometown.

>> Suzy Snyder: In 1941. Right?

>> Manny Mandel: Winter '41. Stayed with my aunt. My mother had two sisters in Novi Sad. Stayed in the home of one of them. And one morning somebody comes up and says something's going on on the street; don't know what it is. Two minutes later two policemen come upstairs, say to us, "Please dress warmly. You need to be outside. There will be a census taken."

Now, the Germans, Hungarians, all of the Nazis took censuses every 15 minutes because they thought if they could know where you are, they could control your whereabouts.

We were told to go outside, which we did. We kind of went in, turned left, and began to walk for some time. My father carried me. My mother carried me. We were comfortable. We were cold, but it was winter. We had warm coats on, some kind of big boots and things. We marched for a while. This must have been until close to maybe mid-day. Then we wound up in a place which I recognized actually. There was on our left a stockade fence. We were ambling along this fence. Nothing dangerous was happening. Nobody knew why.

The fence was the fence that separated the street area, city, from the river. In European cities it is not unusual in the summer time if you have no oceans or lakes, the rivers become the beaches of the community. And this place had a amusement park, restaurants, wake pools, cold pools, thermal pools. This was a very nice place. I remember having been there like six months before. My parents lived in the city.

We were marching along, kind of slowly. We see that the big gates to this place are open. Folks made a left turn into the gates. As we approached these gates -- I can't tell you if it's 100 yards, 50 yards. A policeman standing on the corner says to my father, "Mister, what

are you doing here?" My father says, "Visiting my in-laws." "The issue is you are not part of this community. If you and your group is in some way part of the census of this community, it will mess up the census. We cannot mess up. Stand aside." Stand aside saved our lives.

By coincidence, I'm sure, within minutes of this particular event the staff guard came down the road. These guys had a pow-wow. They got on the bullhorn and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the requirements of the census have been met. There's a school over there. Please go over there. There's coffee and hot chocolate available. Have some if you wish and go home."

If you're bewildered, so were we. What we didn't know until sometime later -- I didn't know until a bunch later. I didn't understand even much later than that. Everybody who went and turned left was marched to the Danube which had been blasted open from the ice. The people there were shot into the river. They were found the next spring if at all.

Ladies and gentlemen, I describe to you something which you might know as the term of Pogrom, a senseless, purposeless, useless, and meaningless exercise in saying I have power and you don't. That's exactly what they did.

>> Suzy Snyder: So this gendarme or this person who pulled you and your family out was knowingly saving your lives?

>> Manny Mandel: I don't know if it was knowingly. He just said it would mess up his assignment. They brought in some street policemen from Budapest. He was a street policeman in our neighborhood. Recognized my father from the street. My father lived there. Went to work, office, whatever. He saw. He recognized. He says you don't belong here.

>> Suzy Snyder: But your mother's family did not suffer during this Pogrom. They were not killed during this Pogrom. Right?

>> Manny Mandel: The aunt with whom we stayed, her in-laws were killed in her home.

>> Suzy Snyder: So some of your family was affected.

>> Manny Mandel: Not the immediate family.

>> Suzy Snyder: You returned to Budapest.

>> Manny Mandel: Immediately.

>> Suzy Snyder: What was it like in Budapest?

>> Manny Mandel: Life was much more threatened in those days by the war than by the Holocaust. As you heard of what Suzy said in the beginning, Hungary was an ally of Germany as a consequence was occupied. The Hungarian Nazi Party ruled the day. And I'm not suggesting benevolent, but we did not see SS, didn't see black uniforms. We didn't see all of that which you see in the movies and documentaries. Life was in many ways acceptable. It became restrictive. You couldn't do this, couldn't do that.

>> Suzy Snyder: For the Jews.

>> Manny Mandel: For the Jews, of course. Sorry if I didn't make that point.

My uncle was in the university. He was in the last university class where Jews were admitted. But I'm saying the restrictions happen. They did not affect me. As a child of 8, I was protected in the bubble that was created by my mother and father.

>> Suzy Snyder: Once you returned, what happened to your father?

>> Manny Mandel: From that time, even a little bit before then, what happened is that the

Hungarian male population was conscripted to the Army. They fought on the Russian front at one point. So the work that had to be done that could not be done by the Russian male population was done by a force that was organized by the Hungarians, labor force of Jews. They organized in battalions and regimens. My father would get a phone call, visit or note that says on Tuesday, be at this train station. You will be gone for a day or two or a month or an indeterminate period of time. Did this repeatedly from before '41 until '44 when we left.

>> Suzy Snyder: And he was still able to practice as a cantor.

>> Manny Mandel: He had lots of latitude in that they let him be away from work. What else could they do? His job was maintained, salary growing; yes.

>> Suzy Snyder: Slowly, though, there's still these restrictions on the Jewish population. Your father, have you heard -- did he ever say to you if God wants to punish somebody, then his capacity to see is taken away? Have you ever heard him say that?

>> Manny Mandel: I must have, but -- would not have said it in Yiddish. Yiddish was never the language of our home. I don't remember that. But I'm sure he said it.

>> Suzy Snyder: The reason I bring that up is because he said in his oral testimony that he felt that there was this -- that the people didn't really want to believe their restrictions could be turned eventually into murder.

>> Manny Mandel: Absolutely so. No question. They didn't believe it as they were leaving by train. The problem was -- I'll give you an example which is not specifically mine, but. My mother's family name in Yugoslavia was Klein, a Germanic name. Her cousins, her generation cousins, changed their names to rip-roaring Hungarian names. Not because they wanted to in

some way avoid their Jewish affiliation. They maintained that. But they felt so Hungarian that they felt they had to have Hungarian names.

>> Suzy Snyder: They were assimilated into the community.

>> Manny Mandel: Not to the loss of the Jewishness. Yeah, they all had jobs and what not and professions. They wanted to have Hungarian names. They did this. This was something that was peculiar perhaps to Hungary, to Germany. The population did not accept what was happening.

>> Suzy Snyder: So your father is coming and going between 1941, 1944, around 1944. Meanwhile, you're at home with your mother. What are you doing? Are you going to school?

>> Manny Mandel: Going to school. I went to a local parochial school, Jewish school. First grade and a piece of second grade. I'm 7 in '42 or 6 in '42 which is when school begins. School was much of my -- I remember what was then extracurricular stuff which is different than today. I learned fencing and gymnastics in addition to going to school.

>> Suzy Snyder: And you still had -- you still felt relatively fine, secure, safe, nothing was going to happen; you personally?

>> Manny Mandel: As a child, absolutely so. There was a certain element of adventure in all of this. When you went to the shelters once, twice a night, five floors down and stayed there --

>> Suzy Snyder: The bombs.

>> Manny Mandel: Because of the bombs. You saw the allied bombings from one side, the Russians from the other. There's a certain excitement about that to a child who doesn't understand the danger of it. He only understands it -- this is thrilling in its own odd way, which

it was.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you gather in retrospect when you look back at your mother had a great deal of anxiety and hid that from you?

>> Manny Mandel: No question. I would never question that.

>> Suzy Snyder: She was really successful in maintaining your childhood.

>> Manny Mandel: As I said to you, I was in a bubble created by my mother and father.

Mostly my mother who was there more than he was. As a consequence, what touched me was filtered. And I could lead the life that I thought was as normal as it could be. My community was very small. I don't know if it would have been bigger if no war took place. Somebody walked me to my friend's house unless it was in the same building. But I had friends, had these extracurricular things. I took piano lessons. Life was good as I knew it.

>> Suzy Snyder: Right. Life continued.

The Nazis come in March 1944. How did Hungary change?

>> Manny Mandel: It began to change -- Eichmann arrives March 19, 1944, as the final step in his cleaning of Europe, of making Europe totally "unden rein," clean of Jews. That was his mission. Prior to that, other things began to be things that I noticed. They didn't impact me severely, but I noticed.

An example: Guy says I must take your telephone. What did the telephone -- I don't know if he was home at the time, but somebody said, you know, this is used for their work. He says, I'm sorry, the rule says a law was passed. Bye.

All middle class people, Jews and otherwise in Europe, had some kind of maid

service; mostly live-in maids. Remember, there was no washing machines, drying machines, refrigerators, freezers, or any of that. So my mother and the maid were these machines. And we had a maid. When the maid was told she had to leave because Jews could no longer have maids, that impacted me very clearly. She was a young woman, 18, 19. I was about 7. She was the closest to me in age. She was from the farm. She was not the most sophisticated thing in the whole world, and she was kind of like my buddy of sorts. During the day, morning, whatever. Then she had to leave. All of a sudden, Margit was gone. She was gone.

>> Suzy Snyder: How did it impact your mother? At this point your mother clearly needs to do something.

>> Manny Mandel: The impact on her life, her emotions, what?

>> Suzy Snyder: Her life, trying to save the two of you.

>> Manny Mandel: Well, I don't think she had any options to do anything of her own. She's there essentially in what we now call a single mother. My father was gallivanting wherever he is, not by choice. She has all of the work to do by herself. And I'm talking about physical work.

>> Suzy Snyder: What happened with your apartment?

>> Manny Mandel: We remained. We left from that apartment when we left for the train in 1944. The apartment was there after the war. My father came back and saw the apartment. And my granddaughter, who was in Europe a year ago, even less, visited the apartment. It's there. That did not change. We had a very lovely apartment. My school -- my apartment was number 13 on the street. The school was number 44. From my parents' bedroom, around the corner of the apartment looking out, they could see the school.

One of the changes, I'm told, at times people followed me to school to make sure I get there.

Because it was not unusual to have a kid wear a yellow star, which was another change --

>> Suzy Snyder: Picked off the street.

>> Manny Mandel: Whacked on the back of the head and left there without any concern. So I never knew this.

>> Suzy Snyder: You never felt -- there was no anti-Semitism directed towards you by other kids?

>> Manny Mandel: I went to a Jewish school. In the good days of Budapest, 20% of the city was Jewish. It became even 40% a little bit later. Anti-Semitism couldn't rear its head internally. Though, my next door neighbor in the apartments were two girls, very good friends, two Catholic girls. I did not experience any anti-Semitic remarks from them or their family. I remember the father being in the house.

>> Suzy Snyder: What did your mother do -- at this point, deportations are starting. Jews are being deported.

>> Manny Mandel: Not in Budapest.

>> Suzy Snyder: But there's rumor that they're happening elsewhere.

>> Manny Mandel: Yes.

>> Suzy Snyder: And so your mother secures train passage for you and your uncle. Can you describe what happened?

>> Manny Mandel: No. No. No. It came the other way. I am sure -- Eichmann arrives in Budapest 19th of March, 1944. Within a day or two or three at the top, two men from a

so-called self-appointed rescue committee approach Eichmann.

>> Suzy Snyder: Two Jewish men?

>> Manny Mandel: Two Jewish men, Rudolf Kastner and Joel Brand -- you need to understand that Eichmann comes to town as the Caesar of the community. He is the biggest dog in town. Anything he wants, he can do. Anybody he wants to kill he can by himself or anybody else. These two guys have the guts, the gall, to demand an audience with him. Demand.

As it happened, Kastner was a lawyer who spoke German. Brand was an engineer who lived in Germany. They talked in German. That was not unusual. They began to discuss some questions about how could there be some kind of arrangements to save some members of the community. Because when Eichmann arrives, within hours literally 12,000 people are deported daily. That's when the deportation begins.

>> Suzy Snyder: To Auschwitz?

>> Manny Mandel: To places, Auschwitz, other places. Eventually Auschwitz, but sometimes not directly.

The discussions begin with the following proposition. If Eichmann will release a million Jews from the various camps, he will receive for that 10,000 trucks loaded with materiel to be used against the Eastern front.

>> Suzy Snyder: The war effort. Because at this point Germany is starting to suffer during the war effort.

>> Manny Mandel: They know that they are lost. Everybody there knew they were lost except

for Hitler himself who wouldn't believe it. But the problem is Eichmann does not have a million people under his control anymore. And secondly, these guys couldn't come up with the spare tire let alone 10,000 trucks. One of the two is sent to Egypt to talk to the British, the British allies to negotiate trucks. The chances of that happening are what we usually call a snowball in hell in that there were no trucks available. The British wouldn't give it to them. If I was the British, I wouldn't give trucks to the Germans.

And as you remember, the opportunities for Jewish populations to be saved in Europe were very low on the whole totem pole in every country. Having said that, these discussions continued and continued and continued from March until May. And then in June there was a decision made whereby there would be a test group taken of 1,700-some people for significant amounts of valuables. The European -- this is not money. Money was useless unless you had dollars or pound, sterling, British money. Nobody did. But diamonds, jewelry, small pieces of gold, nuggets, anything that could be used as a valuable.

As you remember, Eichmann is taken by the Israeli secret service in Argentina. He funded his life. So did many of the others through these kinds of -- not to say our money but through these moneys. By this time the issue goes to Himmler. They're looking to negotiate to save themselves from being war crime eligible and other things. The 1,600 people, 1,700 people are collected.

I think that my uncle was more involved in that than my mother. But my uncle who was active in certain communities in Hungary and my father who was a known human being in the city, they were able to secure these spaces.

>> Suzy Snyder: So he didn't look for the first 1,700 people. He put people's names on a list.

>> Manny Mandel: He was presented with a list.

>> Suzy Snyder: We've talked about this before. There is this question, -- Kastner happens to be a polarizing figure in the Holocaust because there are people who feel that what he did was wrong, playing God. There are people who feel that he didn't have a choice; he saved the people that he could save.

I don't have an opinion. Well, I have an opinion but it changes all the time, especially after I talk to Manny. Your feeling is more like he had a chance to save 1,700 people.

>> Manny Mandel: Period. And he did.

>> Suzy Snyder: And these people were supposed to go to Palestine. You were all supposed to go to Palestine.

>> Manny Mandel: You may be much more familiar with Wallenberg. Wallenberg issued exit visas from Hungary by the thousands, made them Swedish citizens which let them leave.

>> Suzy Snyder: [Inaudible]

>> Manny Mandel: Right. Kastner was able to do something else. Most every Jew in Hungary, to my knowledge, had some kind of interest in the so-called Palestine, in the future sometime. My father talked about becoming a farmer, growing orchards with the little horse-drawn buggy when he retires. They used these papers which were given out by the Jewish National Fund as cantors as documents of having been displaced persons because of the war.

Folks, if you believe that, I have several \$3 I'd like to give you.

>> Suzy Snyder: In this case, you and your mother, your uncle, were included on this train.

And this train did not go to Palestine.

>> Manny Mandel: We were supposed to go to a neutral port, to a place -- on ships to go to Palestine. On the way to the neutral port, maybe in Spain, which was a neutral country -- even Germany or Turkey -- we were, whatever the word is, kidnapped into a kind of camp which we were told would be a three-day R & R camp before we get on ships. The name was Bergen-Belsen.

>> Suzy Snyder: You remember being transported?

>> Manny Mandel: Absolutely.

>> Suzy Snyder: What was it like?

>> Manny Mandel: The transportation to the camp was in cattle cars. Those of you who have been through the Museum, all the way through, will see them upstairs.

>> Suzy Snyder: When you got on to cattle cars, do you think she panicked?

>> Manny Mandel: She was not the panic kind. My recollection is not -- most people didn't. Again, we had no idea -- we were supposed to go to some port to get on a ship. We realized that first class cars were not available. Now, cattle car was well below what we expected but it was a transport means.

>> Suzy Snyder: How long were you on the cattle car?

>> Manny Mandel: Nine days. This is July. Weather was warm. In the evening we could come out. They would unlock the doors. We could come out and sleep on the ground.

I don't really remember -- I remember being in the cars. But there may have been 60 people in

the car. I know there was no place to sit down all day long.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did people die en route?

>> Manny Mandel: I don't think so. I'm not aware. I'd have to research that. I don't think so. There's nothing evident.

We had some food with us. We were told to pack food. Some. For several days. We were brought food in field kitchens by the military where we stopped. This happened every night until we got to Bergen-Belsen.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you remember first arriving in Belsen?

>> Manny Mandel: It looked like a camp of which I had never been familiar. We had a long walk from the platform of the train station; 20 minutes or so. We carried the luggage. Some came by truck. These were bunk beds; three up. Again, you could see those in the museum. And there was no impression on me except wonderment as to what the devil is this. I had never seen this before.

>> Suzy Snyder: Back up for a second. You said you walked from the train station, the platform. It was just a platform, I think, to the camp. So you and I both have been back there. It's miles. It's not a block. You're -- [Inaudible]

>> Manny Mandel: It was not a three-hour trek.

>> Suzy Snyder: It wasn't a three-hour trek but you were walking passed village people, through a village. Did people see you? Did people wonder where you were coming from?

>> Manny Mandel: I got to tell you, I don't remember seeing people. What I do remember is this particular platform was at the edge of a military installation with brick buildings; in other

words, permanent buildings. And I saw that. And I saw the barbed wire. I don't know whether the villagers at that point, either from Bergen or Belsen were, in fact, lining those streets at that time. If they did, I don't remember.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you believe the postwar information that people could not have known what was going on?

>> Manny Mandel: No.

>> Suzy Snyder: You don't believe that to be true?

>> Manny Mandel: No. Because how can you not know that there is a train traffic that's enormous, not remember? Bergen-Belsen is different than others. It was not a killing camp. It was a working camp and a transit camp. People were there and then sent to various places. So the stench of the ovens at least could not be claimed as having not been noticed by the local population as in Auschwitz.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me just clarify that by saying that it was an awful place. When they liberated Belsen, people were dying in the hundreds. There was Typhus. There was dysentery, starvation. You've heard that.

>> Manny Mandel: People in Bergen-Belsen did not die in a crematorium. They died, in fact, from Typhus, from malnutrition, and from starvation, absolutely. And those bodies were there. But I guess that was not -- the community -- this was, as all camps were, they were encircled by barbed wire and other things. So the community -- the villagers didn't come. And the fact that they didn't know what was happening at all is something that I'm not willing to believe under any circumstances.

>> Suzy Snyder: You yourself, you were sick in Bergen-Belsen, were you not?

>> Manny Mandel: Yup.

>> Suzy Snyder: How long was it before you became ill?

>> Manny Mandel: We got there in July. I was probably ill for much of August and September. Maybe late in August and through September. There was a better part of six weeks. I had pneumonia. I did two things in Bergen-Belsen very well. I was sick. I did that very well. And I was bored. I did that very well as well.

The problem with the sickness was, as you may know and probably do know, that as today antibiotics take care of pneumonia. Penicillin had just been invented. I assure you the first place to be used was not in Bergen-Belsen. So all they could -- we had physicians with us. But they had no material or means of helping except old-fashioned medication.

Somehow they found some burlap material. And somehow they found some mustard. What they did is they soaked the mustard in water and soaked the burlap bag in mustard. Ok? At which point they draped it over my chest. The outcome that is it acted like Bengay or mentholated stuff which made it warm. It didn't cure a damn thing but it made it feel better.

[Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: How was your mother in the camp? Was she also ill?

>> Manny Mandel: No. It happens that the barracks arranged, the section next us was the wash room. This was a long trench of spigots and basins. The toilets were someplace else. My mother insisted every morning, as long as I could walk out, I would go there with her and get washed. If you were clean, you were healthier. I think she was right.

>> Suzy Snyder: I've heard this before. Do you feel like she sort of made you go through the motions because she felt like it was important to keep regularity in your life?

>> Manny Mandel: Oh, absolutely. But that was regularity in my life. But camp itself, and this is to me an amazing kind of thing to report, folks -- instead of asking, I'm going to tell you.

Within a week or 10 days of the camps' stagement, once the leadership was able to find out that we are here and we're not leaving in three days -- [Inaudible] that much they knew. In order to establish some sense of normalcy, some sense of normalcy, businesses opened up. I would think that you would be shocked.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me just interrupt for a second. I just wanted to clarify. All 1,700 people on this train were together?

>> Manny Mandel: We were sectioned off into a men's section, barracks, into women's barracks and family barracks.

>> Suzy Snyder: Were you intergrade with other --

>> Manny Mandel: No, no, no. We were segregated into so-called Hungarian camp. And we had one major, major advantage over all of the others. We were not turned out to work every day. Why? Because we were this bartering group. We were either the goose or egg that was laid. If they killed us, they had nothing to barter with. So our total group in this section of the Bergen-Belsen camp were there all day long. Nobody left. Nobody came.

>> Suzy Snyder: I'm sorry to interrupt. Continue.

>> Manny Mandel: What I'm saying is that businesses opened up. What were the businesses? Well, in the larger sense, in order to maintain some sense of stability and some

sense of sanity, you want to do as much of what is normal as it is you possibly can. Well, people couldn't do many things. We bought, for example -- somebody invented a system whereby you could have tin cans -- this is back in Budapest. Tin cans which you could put hot, cooked food and have it resealed that would maintain -- it wouldn't spoil, wouldn't become rancid for a period of time. Some pressure thing that took all the air out of it and sealed it. Most everybody brought some of these tin cans with them as well as other things. The tin cans were used for food in addition to what we were given. I can talk about that if you like in a minute. But the point is we were given the food. And when the tin cans were emptied, they cut them up. They made jewelry out of them, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, rings, and the guy who made that would trade for two cigarettes.

>> Suzy Snyder: Or additional food.

>> Manny Mandel: Anything you want to think of.

>> Suzy Snyder: If you had brought the food in, would you have had enough?

>> Manny Mandel: No. But you would have survived because you could survive without having enough. So what I'm saying is -- there was a whole kind of a catalog of trades of what was value to what point. Two cigarettes got you a haircut. A haircut got you fixed shoes. I don't remember all of them. My friend Ladsy Loeb who was with us and has written a book catalogues this in his book.

>> Suzy Snyder: Was this -- had the Germans known you were doing this, they would have -- it would have --

>> Manny Mandel: No. They didn't care. Inside the camp. They saw this. All they cared

about --

>> Suzy Snyder: Not unusual because in a normal camp this would not have gone on.

>> Manny Mandel: But we were not a normal group in a normal camp.

>> Suzy Snyder: You had to barter.

>> Manny Mandel: Yes. They cared about one thing. Obviously no escapes but that we were there for the census every day. When we arrived, we were told at dawn there would be a census. We would be out there at dawn. The census would come immediately in three or four or five hours.

>> Suzy Snyder: Like roll call.

>> Manny Mandel: Right. We would be out there for hours until a new commander of the census group came and says, wait a minute, this is silly. I will be here at X time, 7:00, 8:00. I forget when. Be here when I'm here. If you're not, there will be major punishment. Point remains be here. But it was easier to come out 15 minutes early than three, four hours early. It probably saved lives.

>> Suzy Snyder: You're there for six months. You do leave. But in that time, did people pass away? Did people die?

>> Manny Mandel: I'm told that several did. Not because of escapes or shootings or anything like that. They died of what you might call natural causes.

>> Suzy Snyder: In December 1944, suddenly you're transferred. Can you talk about that?

>> Manny Mandel: Sure. In August of '44, 350 members of this group were, in fact, taken out through the negotiations. I was not one of them. I stayed for the full load, until December, at

which point additional negotiations and I'm sure additional moneys and things happened. And we were taken out not by cattle car but, in fact, by German troop trains from Bergen-Belsen through Austria to the border of Switzerland where we got off the German train and got on Swiss trains which were lit and warm and clean and large and hospitable. It was like another life.

>> Suzy Snyder: Until you hit the Swiss train -- I mean, did you prepare for the worst? Was your mother's feeling that it was another train to nowhere; you had no idea where you were going?

>> Manny Mandel: I think they had a fairly good notion that they were being taken -- I mean the leadership was able to say that. How they could guarantee it, I can't tell you. But I think they had a good idea that at this time the trip will be, in fact, to Switzerland, which is where -- well, we were never designed to go to Switzerland. Designed to go to a port. At this point I think that was the case. How they would guarantee it, I don't know.

>> Suzy Snyder: What did you do once you arrived in Switzerland? What was your daily life like?

>> Manny Mandel: When we arrived, we were under the auspices and some of the control of the Red Cross. The Red Cross had taken a very beautiful hotel in the French part of Switzerland by the city, up in the mountains, and converted into a kind of a shelter for displaced persons. We were there for several weeks. We were fed a great deal of potatoes. None of us were starving to the point of counting -- though all of us lost weight. They wanted to fatten us up a little bit, potatoes and butter and things like that. They had to disperse the

people because were coming in from various places as fast as they could. The people made arrangements in Zurich, whatever the organization was, was able to take 20 children, all Hungarian-speaking kids, and take them to a children's boarding school in the German part of Switzerland, a place called Heiden. And I went there with 19 other kids.

By peculiar coincidence, again, guess who was the caretaker, teacher, and everything else? My mother. Why? My mother had been a teacher when she was a young woman. They decided they needed somebody to go with these kids who spoke Hungarian only. My mother obviously spoke Hungarian, but she also spoke very good German, had a good knowledge of French.

The kids there were German and Belgian kids. The staff were German, Belgian, French. They were able to communicate and to in some way be the interlocutor needed. Also, she ran the school. The kids were from age 6 to 14. She ran the school for each two kids I think. But that was there. So there as the teacher's kid, it's either the best of your possible life or the worst. If anything happened that shouldn't happen, I was blamed.

>> Suzy Snyder: Which was it?

>> Manny Mandel: Depending which day.

[Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: Meanwhile, the communication between your father -- you and your father, it's non-existent.

>> Manny Mandel: Correct. My father comes back to Budapest before the war ends, before the Russians liberated Budapest. He's looking around. He goes to this man, Dr. Kastner, the

lawyer, and says: Where is the group? Where is my family?

>> Suzy Snyder: Kastner did not travel with the train?

>> Manny Mandel: Did not. His family did.

>> Suzy Snyder: Remained in Budapest?

>> Manny Mandel: Everywhere else. He was in Switzerland when we got off the German train, stayed a day or two and then went on to his other assignments.

Let me digress one more moment. Kastner was a very bright, incredibly arrogant guy. There was a film made about his killing later in Israel. There was a premiere of that movie in New York. I went to the premiere. "The New York Times" correspondent, journalist, asked me about him. I said I never met the man. I was a child. He had no business with kids. But my father did. Based on that description, I think I would not have liked him as a human being. Respected what he did, but this was not a guy I wanted to have as a friend. But what he did was something that no one else did. I mean, Schindler did something similar, but this is more than Schindler. It's the only Jew that did anything. And there was nothing for him to gain out of this whole issue. That's not just an opinion; it's a fact.

>> Suzy Snyder: Ok. I just would say that during this digression, I would like to point out that what he gains is that he and his family survived.

>> Manny Mandel: Would you have an option that says -- [Inaudible]

>> Suzy Snyder: Absolutely.

>> Manny Mandel: That gain he has. But nothing personal in terms of anything.

>> Suzy Snyder: So I just wanted to say that this is why I can't have an opinion because I

don't know what I would have done. He did save your family's life.

>> Manny Mandel: I want to finish that thought by saying to you, you see what happens later on is he's accused of being a collaborator of the Germans having benefited from that collaboration. And that's what I disagree with.

>> Suzy Snyder: But he was found innocent.

>> Manny Mandel: He was never tried.

>> Suzy Snyder: There was a trial in Israel in which there was a libel suit that he brought.

>> Manny Mandel: A libel suit won.

>> Suzy Snyder: He was found that he was not libel, that it was not libel.

>> Manny Mandel: Suzy, the guy who wrote the pamphlet, the pamphlet -- writes a pamphlet saying I accuse Kastner of being a collaborator.

>> Suzy Snyder: And Kastner brings charges.

>> Manny Mandel: He's a government employee. The government has to protect his workers so they sue the pamphleteer who is found innocent. In the course of the trial there's such noise about Kastner's involvement in the war, with Eichmann, with the others, he testified on behalf of Becher in Nuremberg --

>> Suzy Snyder: Becher.

>> Manny Mandel: A German officer. The point was made that he helped the Nazis in some way. There's much to be said about that; not here because we don't have time.

>> Suzy Snyder: Right.

>> Manny Mandel: Kastner was a person who I don't think I would like as a personal friend.

But he had to be that kind of a person to do what he did. How else could you do it?

>> Suzy Snyder: Right. We're really getting into nitty-gritty that we should get away from so we can get back to your story, but -- and we can bring that up later if we have time in the questions and answers. Your father did go to his office.

>> Manny Mandel: My father went to his office, found out after some difficulties which I'm not going to elaborate on, found out where we were. And my father was able to make contact with another cantor who was a colleague of his.

In those days cell phones didn't work very well. But you could have -- telephones didn't work very well, there was a war going on. The war was over, but still.

The war was still on when this is taking place. We're in Switzerland but my father is able to be in contact with my mother through his colleague, a cantor. They correspond. When the war is over, my mother decides she wants to continue south to Palestine. My father says you can come back to Hungary, the apartment is there. I have a job. My mother says I will never step foot -- [No audio]

>> Suzy Snyder: When did you arrive in Palestine?

>> Manny Mandel: September '45.

>> Suzy Snyder: What was your impression when you first saw it? I mean, you know, it was a desert.

>> Manny Mandel: No.

>> Suzy Snyder: It was rough.

>> Manny Mandel: I lived in one of the nicest in the whole country. All I knew is my group.

Oak was the name of the group; 20 kids, boys and girls. That was the fourth grade class.

Groups were by class. And the surroundings were lovely. There were gardens. There were not forests but orchards and others. It's a farming. It also had some dairy, milk.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did you find at all it was a hard transition from Budapest having lived in Budapest, a European city?

>> Manny Mandel: Suzy, within a year or so you've gone through several languages, several countries, adjustments become much easier. I went from Budapest to Bergen-Belsen to Heiden to Palestine.

>> Suzy Snyder: How long were you in Palestine?

>> Manny Mandel: Four years.

>> Suzy Snyder: You moved again.

>> Manny Mandel: We left Budapest after a year. They chose to come to the states through various arrangements in 1949. I lived in New York for a year. I lived in Philadelphia for the rest of my days until I left Philadelphia in 1961.

>> Suzy Snyder: I know your father ended up -- he was a cantor here.

>> Manny Mandel: Absolutely.

>> Suzy Snyder: What did your mother do?

>> Manny Mandel: She was a housekeeper, a housewife. She was a non-working mother, helped my father. Raised me.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you think they liked it here and adjusted well to living in the United States?

>> Manny Mandel: I think so, very much so. Very much so. Yeah. No reason -- my father chose to stay here because he could. He had some family here. He had really very little family in Israel. Some came after we left. But I think he made his niche here and it was very comfortable.

>> Suzy Snyder: Your father sounds like a strong person, but reading the transcripts of your oral history, your father's, it sounds like your mother was extremely strong, was an amazing woman.

>> Manny Mandel: My son is here in the audience. I wish he could talk about it because he doesn't remember her. She died at the age of 59 unfortunately for unrelated issues. But he knew my father very well. But point is, my mother was a very strong woman; yes. So was my father. She had a very good life together for 37 years until she died. The only thing they ever argued about was me.

[Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: I wanted to open it up to questions. We have quite a bit of time for questions. Please wait until we have a microphone because we're recording this.

Raise your hand. Nobody has question?

Complicated story. There must be.

>> I visited the synagogue in Budapest, downtown, beautiful, giant synagogue. Is that where your father was the cantor?

>> Manny Mandel: What shape was it in?

>> This was in '98. It was in excellent condition.

>> Manny Mandel: That's the other. There are two major synagogues in Budapest. My father functioned in that synagogue as well but his major, permanent position, was two blocks away. The synagogue was not reconstructed after the war. The one that you saw was reconstructed and most recently was refurbished as well because of some construction things they had to do by the Emanuel Schwartz Foundation. Did you ever hear of it? Well, Emanuel Schwartz was a tailor in Brooklyn. He had a son who was better known, Tony Curtis. They were involved in refurbishing that. That Tony Curtis.

>> Suzy Snyder: A question up here in front. You can ask.

>> Can you clarify when you took the walk to the river? The gentleman said he recognized part of the family. You said everybody else took a left. How did your immediate family get saved?

>> Suzy Snyder: In Novi Sad -- this gentleman is asking for a clarification. In Novi Sad in 1941 when they had -- when there was a census, they had to walk along the river.

>> Manny Mandel: The Pogrom.

>> Suzy Snyder: The Pogrom. Manny's family was not part of it. They were rescued by this man. Can you clarify?

>> Manny Mandel: We were marching along, and people in front of us, I don't know, 20, 30 people, whatever, made this left turn. They were the ones never seen again. At our point in this group of probably a dozen people by this time, this policeman says you don't belong here, step aside. Coincidental to that, within minutes, by coincidence, I'm sure, the whole Pogrom was halted. The guy comes and announces -- nothing to do with us specifically -- announces

that the requirements of the census had been met, please go get coffee and go home. But everybody from us back, not only us, a little before us and back, were, in fact, no longer in danger. He recognized my father from having seen him walk on the street.

Does that clarify?

>> Yeah.

>> Suzy Snyder: Go ahead.

>> Just doing research on the Holocaust in general, "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas," they strip you down, give you these uniforms and give you the number on your wrist. Did you have to do that, anything like that?

>> Manny Mandel: Please understand, folks -- I'll speak into it.

You have to understand, please, that the issues of the Holocaust, issues of the war, the issues of different countries made this into a very, very multi-faceted story. Everybody did not get uniforms; everybody was not tattooed. Nobody in Bergen-Belsen got a uniform unless they went out to work, and we didn't. Nobody was tattooed except at Auschwitz and only if they went to work. A number across the chest. They had a number on the arm. So no survivors who were in Auschwitz who have tattoos. So there were various kinds of differences.

In our situation I tried to make the point that to our fortune we had a situation whereby we were a special group because we were the barter. We were the valuables that could not be destroyed because then the valuables could no longer be milked for the money to generate around the world. So we were worthless but our presence was important.

>> Suzy Snyder: I just want to clarify, in Bergen-Belsen people did arrive in striped uniforms

but usually from other camps. Often from other camps. They were deported usually to Auschwitz and then transported to Bergen-Belsen.

>> Manny Mandel: You know the story of Anne Frank who, in fact, was deported to -- then to Auschwitz and then to Bergen-Belsen and died there. Anne Frank came to Bergen-Belsen in August of 1944. I came in July. I left in December. She died in April, two or three weeks before the camp was liberated. In some way I have an odd kinship with her because for four months we breathed the same air. But that's how people move from place to place.

>> Suzy Snyder: Yeah?

>> [Question Inaudible]

>> Suzy Snyder: The question was -- can you talk a little bit more about the bartering, the idea of bartering people for trucks or for goods?

This was a manner in which the Jewish community -- because they had advanced notice from Jews who had escaped from Auschwitz that Jews were being killed in Auschwitz. And the Slovakian-Jewish community was informed of this. Eichmann and Kastner sat down after the fact, after this, became known. And this was part of the thing. Kastner's goal was strictly to use bartering to save lives.

>> Manny Mandel: And Eichmann's goal was to use bartering to save his life in some ways. As I say, Eichmann and Dr. Mengele and others wind up in South America which is where the philosophy was accepting of whatever they did. They were neutral. Neutral militarily, not philosophically. If you think of South America in those days, Argentina, it is a country that is fascist in its own way. They accepted these guys. They could feather their own nest. And

they could in some way make a life for themselves. By this time everybody was -- all the rats were running out of the place any which way they could. If they had an opportunity to have that funded in some way, they did it. There's nothing noble about it.

>> Suzy Snyder: Yeah.

>> [Question Inaudible]

>> Suzy Snyder: Was there actually an exchange of people for stuff for the war effort?

>> Manny Mandel: The original concept in the language they used was [Speaking language other than English]. Blood for materiel. The materiel became strictly only negotiable kinds of valuables: diamonds, gold, and so forth. No trucks. As I said, they could not raise a spare tire; not 10,000 trucks.

>> [Inaudible]

>> Suzy Snyder: Collaborators? So the second question was: Who did the killing in 1941? Were they German Nazis or collaborators?

>> Manny Mandel: They were not collaborators nor Naz -- they were Nazis, yes. They were not the SS, not the German uniformed Nazis but the local Yugoslav and Hungarian troops as well as some of the collaborating -- the Chetniks -- not -- I'm blocking on a word. The local community people who were sympathetic to the Nazi group. It was done locally. It was not the only one. There were many.

>> Suzy Snyder: And in Hungary it was the Arrow Cross.

>> Manny Mandel: The Arrow Cross is the name of the Nazi Party in Hungary.

>> Suzy Snyder: They were generally -- so in each country you have people that are sort of --

they're doing the dirty work for the Nazis, essentially.

>> [Inaudible]

>> Manny Mandel: Some of Yugoslavia is -- absolutely. Croatia is under German control.

Serbia is not all of it because southern Hungary. But they were not in Hungary. That's the

important point for us. Not only invaded, not taken over. Austria, yes. France, yes. So forth

and so on.

>> Suzy Snyder: Right. And Czechoslovakia.

>> Manny Mandel: Right.

>> Suzy Snyder: Yeah?

>> [Question Inaudible]

>> Manny Mandel: Honestly, they count enough people.

>> Suzy Snyder: Manny said the needs of the census were met. What needs were met?

>> Manny Mandel: As I said, I don't know what the needs were in the first place. They count enough people or they count enough sections of the city that produced the people to know how many men, women, children, whatever there were. Whatever they were looking for.

Remember, there was no census involved in this. This was a Pogrom collecting people. The ruse was we have to have a census so come outside. But the fact is what happened is march us to death except we didn't quite get there. Ok?

>> Suzy Snyder: One more question. Yes?

>> When your family was pulled aside, at what point -- how did that affect your life?

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me repeat. When your family was pulled aside, at that moment when did

Manny or Manny's family realize that their lives were saved, that the other people were being killed? I'm throwing that part in because I gather that -- go ahead and answer the question.

>> Manny Mandel: I had no idea whatsoever as to what was happening. 7-year-old kids were not privy to some of this stuff nor could they understand it. And I would not be surprised if my parents decided to just hold it back. They found out that night. My aunt's in-laws were killed. They found out through telephone conversations and what not what was going on, which is why my father the next morning ordered the taxi at 6:00 in the morning, which I thought was another adventure. This was a one-horse power taxi. You ever hear of one? It was winter. There was snow. The taxi was a sleigh. One horse.

>> Suzy Snyder: Was this the last time you saw your mother's family?

>> Manny Mandel: No. We saw them subsequently in Budapest. The point is it -- go ahead.

>> Suzy Snyder: No. Go ahead.

>> Manny Mandel: We were talking about when I found out. I don't know when I found out. I certainly learned about this particular Pogrom later on, year, two, or three. The understanding of its meaning, I don't know. I can't give you a time as to on Tuesday I understood what was happening. I began to understand there were people being killed in various places. And this was the first experience I had with it. Almost.

>> Suzy Snyder: It's our tradition to let Manny have the last word. I'm going to let him do that. Then what I would ask you to do is if you could, once Manny is done, if you could please just rise in your seats and stay standing so that Miriam can take a picture of Manny with you as the backdrop. Ok?

Manny?

>> Manny Mandel: I often, maybe all the time, when I make talks of this nature, here or elsewhere, I talk about a person whose name you don't remember but his words you do remember. I will leave that with you.

A man said those who do not learn the history well may be doomed to repeat it or repeat parts of it. The man's name was George Santayana, 120 years ago. Point is not so much that you need to be concerned there's going to be a Holocaust here next week. But there are other kinds of things that we do to each other. What man does to man is indescribable. Those are not my own words. They were spoken by then General Eisenhower.

The point I'm making is that I would beseech you and leave the last word with you to see to it that by being here this is not the last nor the first of your experience in learning about what man does to man: Holocaust, Second World War, why these, why those, and why not. That's the only way you're going to know what to do in that we can learn nothing from the future but we can learn from the past which you can apply in the future.

I thank you.

>> Suzy Snyder: Thank you.

[Applause]

[The First Person event ended at 12:05 p.m.]