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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
***FIRST PERSON* SERIES**
Speaker: GIDEON FRIEDER

REMOTE CART

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>> Bill Benson: Good afternoon and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson and I am the host of the Museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 15th year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Mr. Gideon Frieder 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. I'm pleased to let you know that Mr. Louis Smith is here with us today.

[Applause]

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand experiences associated with the Holocaust. Each guest serves as a volunteer here at the Museum. Our program will continue until mid-August. The museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about our upcoming *First Person* guests and will provide information about our program 2015. Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card that you'll find in your program today or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater when we close the program today. In doing so you will receive an electronic copy of Gideon's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Gideon Frieder will share his *First Person* account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, there will be an opportunity for you to ask Gideon some questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about

to hear from Gideon is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

We begin with this childhood photograph of Gideon Frieder who was born September 30, 1937. Gideon was born in Zvolen, Slovakia. On this map of Europe the arrow points to Slovakia.

Here we see Gideon's father, Abraham Frieder. Gideon's father, a rabbi, was part of the underground working group of the Slovak Jewry and was responsible for communications with the Slovak authorities.

The photo on the left is of Gideon and his sister Gita. The photo on the right is of Gideon's parents, Ruzena and Abraham, taken before the war.

In 1944, during the Slovak uprising against the Nazis, Gideon, his mother, and his sister fled from Nove Mesto where they had been living since the beginning of the war. In October they made their way northeast, the center of the uprising. Because of his connections to the working group, Gideon's father fled separately.

On this map of Slovakia, the arrow points to the location. As the Nazis were nearing Banska Bystrica, the family were caught in the mountains, caught in a massacre at Stare Hory. Gideon ways taken to the village of Bully where he was placed in the home of Paulina and Joseph Strycharszyk. This is a contemporary photograph of the home where Gideon was hidden. He was later found by his father who survived the war.

Gideon lives in the Washington, D.C. area with his wife, Dalia, are having emigrated from Israel to Buffalo, New York, in 1975 and then moving here to the Washington, D.C. area

in 1992. They have three children, a son Ophir, and two daughters, Tally and Gony, and four grandchildren, including twins who are 4 years old. Their granddaughter, Gita, is named for Gideon's sister, whom we shall hear about in a short while.

Gideon is a physicist and computer scientist. He earned his doctorate in Quantum Physics in Israel. Upon his retirement in 2010 as the A. James Clark Professor at the School of Engineering and Applied Science at George Washington University, he was named the A. James Clark Professor Emeritus of Engineering and Applied Science, the first time in the history of the George Washington University that the Board of Trustees kept an endowed chair title for an Emeritus Professor. He also previously served as the school's dean.

Gideon has also taught and held dean and chairman positions at Syracuse University, the University of Michigan, and the State University of New York at Buffalo. He served in the Israeli Ministry of Defense in Research and Development and also served in the Israeli Air Force. In addition to teaching, he has been a consultant with government agencies and private companies, served as an expert witness in patent and copyright litigation and he holds several patents.

Gideon's son Ophir holds the title of Inaugural Robert L. McDewitt and Catherine H. McDewitt Professorship, which is the highest endowed chair position in Georgetown University. Ophir formerly served as the Chair of the Computer Sciences Department at Georgetown University and is also a professor in the School of Medicine at Georgetown.

Gideon and his son, who also volunteers his time and expertise to the museum, are collaborating on several computer projects concerning images. One of these projects is to aid

in the recognition of faded documents that was started four years ago in cooperation with a German team from the University of Bremen. Their recent work in the German laboratory had led to a breakthrough in the processing of faded documents which is now the subject of three U.S. patents and one international patent. They hope to use this technology to improve the usability of faded documents in this museum.

With that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Gideon Frieder.

[Applause]

Gideon, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. We have just an hour and you have so much to share with us so we'll jump right in.

Although Germany overran Poland in September 1939 and soon dominated Europe, your home country of Slovakia was allied with the Germans and, therefore, it was not occupied by them until much later. Before we talk about the start of the war and the events that led up to and following the German occupation of Slovakia start, first, by telling us a little bit about your family and your community and your life in the pre-war years.

>> Gideon Frieder: There was not much in the pre-war. The war started in 1939. I was 2 years old. So I don't recall very much. The pre-war years that I recall were in Nove Mesto where my father was a rabbi. He served for a while as a chief rabbi of part of the communities in Slovakia.

I led a regular life. The only thing which was different is the fact that I knew that

certain streets I could not walk through because the children would throw rocks at me and call me names, which I didn't understand really at the time. I do understand them today. Just a regular childhood.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us -- your father was a remarkable man. Tell us more about him.

>> Gideon Frieder: I'm a bit biased about my father.

>> Bill Benson: Just a little bit but well-founded.

>> Gideon Frieder: I'll try to stick to things which can be documented.

My father was a very unusual man in the sense that prior to his education in what we call Yeshiva, college, he finished a secular degree in a secular university. So he got a degree in German literature and philosophy parallel to being ordained as a rabbi. He spoke multiple languages. He wrote a diary, which was the reason I started to work on the documents. He wrote a diary. The diary is written in six different languages. He died when he was 36 years old. So he was really quite accomplished.

During the war, the Slovak Jewry did something which was not typical. They get various factions together and they created a working group; which was headed by a woman, by the way. And that working group was the underground government of the Slovak Jewry. And he's credited in saving thousands of life.

In my home, you would see one of the documents which was created by donations when my father's remains were moved from Slovakia to Israel. 1,010 trees were planted by those survivors which he saved.

>> Bill Benson: That he had saved.

>> Gideon Frieder: The second time it has happened. About 1,000 trees were planted by the survivors when he died in 1946.

So he was a remarkable man. His diary was used as a major documentary evidence in the trials of Eichmann, who was the German responsible for murdering thousands if not tens of thousands of Jews. It's still a unique historical document. Among other things, one of the first testimonies of what happened in Auschwitz. It's documented in those diaries. Some people fled and he had the opportunity to talk to them.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, you were, of course, very young when your mother was murdered. We'll hear more about that in a little bit. Do you know much about your mother that you can share with us about her?

>> Gideon Frieder: Not really very much. I was 7 years old when she died.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Gideon Frieder: Many of the things I know came to my attention by reading the diaries. I'm comfortable in four of the languages of the diaries.

>> Bill Benson: Four of the six.

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. So I had no difficulty reading the diary. So part of the information is from there. Part of the information is stories that I heard from others.

One story -- let me tell you something about myself. I'm the only scientist in the world which has an article in a cookbook.

[Laughter]

Really. True story. There's a cookbook. I think you may even get it in the bookstore. The

cookbook called "Holocaust Survivor Cookbook." Many Holocaust survivor contributed recipes. I love to cook. I think it's very creative. So I contributed the recipe. And when you contributed a recipe, a story had to be added. And one of the stories, the story on my page, is about my father, my mother, which was offered by her Christian neighbors, to get the chicken for her children. During the war it was an unusual thing. She refused as the chicken was not kosher. So if I go theoretically by Jewish law she could have done it. She didn't because she was that religious.

So I have another story like that, but for everything else she was just my mother. There's a story about her. Well, I can tell stories all the time. Why don't you ask questions.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us, of course, the war really did not come to Slovakia until 1944 and it began elsewhere in Europe in September 1939. During that lengthy period of almost five years, tell us what you can about what life was like for your father and your community during that period when the full brunt of the war is happening elsewhere.

>> Gideon Frieder: It's true that the war proper didn't come to Slovakia until 1944 triggered by the uprising against the fascist government of Slovakia. But it doesn't mean that the Jews were not discriminated. As a matter of fact, in 1942 there was a huge wave of deportation of Slovak Jews. They were one of the first to be deported to Auschwitz. And Auschwitz was one of the first death camps. It was both a labor camp and a death camp. The Slovakian-Hungarian Jewry were the first to be deported there after the enactment of anti-Jewish legislation by the Slovaks.

We associate the Holocaust with the Germans. The Slovak anti-Jewish legislation

was harsher than the German Nuremberg Laws. And that was enacted before 1942. In 1942 there was a census of the Jews specifically created to get enough information to be able to deport the Jews.

That story is really something that is not very well-known and should be told. The Slovak government paid, the Slovak government paid, to the Germans for every Jew they took and killed. So the Slovak government paid for another country to kill its own citizens just because they were Jewish.

>> Bill Benson: If I remember correctly from what you told me, the money that they paid Germany had been taken from Jews.

>> Gideon Frieder: Right. There was something called Aryanization. That was the confiscation of the Jewish property.

The reason I know about it, by the way -- it's an interesting story. I didn't know about it. So one day a German economist comes to the museum here, a young man who was interested in the economy of the funding of the Second World War by Germany. He was interested how come a relatively small country could fight the whole world and fund it. And he was interested in the economics of it. And he came to the archives and said: There is knowledge that the Slovaks paid the Germans; that was part of the funding to kill the Jews and I want to find the document and you have the document somewhere because the Museum got from the Slovak government, from the Czech-Slovak government, copies of all the archives of the fascist government, archives relating to the Jewish question, quote/unquote.

Let’s not be overwhelmed by the generosity. The Museum paid $1 for every page

they provided so it's not done from pure Christian love. Or Jewish love, for that matter.

[Laughter]

I'm part of the Georgetown University now. The credo that we subscribed to the Judeo-Christian values. So I mixed the two.

So he told me there has to be a document somewhere that I can use in my research to substantiate it. Now, the documents which we have are one after another. They are not organized. They were given to us out of boxes. They're not organized by subject. And they're microfilmed; so I painfully went over the microfilms. He had an idea what period it may be. And I actually found the document. And the document is very, very formal that according to the government, the agreement between Germany and Slovakia, paragraph so-and-so, we ask you transfer so much money funded by this particular budgetary item. So we followed the budgetary item to find what it is. And it's the confiscation of the Jewish property.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned, Gideon, the census that was taken. Tell us what was significant about that census of Jews that was taken.

>> Gideon Frieder: In 1942, the Slovak government did a census of the Jews, divided into groups by age, by profession, by gender. And it was a very, very detailed description of the Jewry. When we got these documents, I was asked by the Museum to find the census, to go over it.

You see, I had a unique position in the volunteer group of the museum. I was absolutely the best Slovak speaker in the museum for the simple reason I was the only one.

[Laughter]

So I went over it. I found among other things that -- the page describing myself, describing my family. And in the collection, it was done by cities, by small cities. In some cases there were no Jews in the small city. And in some cases there was a document. “In some cases”? Many cases. There was a document saying, "We are proud to tell you that there are no Jews in this municipality and we intend to keep it that way."

So it was a sobering experience to go over the census. It was very well done. It was used to identify the Jews for the deportation.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to the uprising and then all the terror that happened after that for you, your father, as you said, was very engaged in rescue efforts. Working under a very anti-Semitic government with those very harsh laws, as you mentioned, you told me that you were somewhat protected from the full brunt of that by your father.

>> Gideon Frieder: We were essentially very protected. He was a protected person. He was kind of the Secretary of State of that group. He spoke fluently German, Slovak, and Hungarian, so he could deal with the Germans, deal with the Slovaks. He spoke Latin. He could deal with the upper clergy. Slovakia is mostly Catholic country. Even today 85% are Catholic. He had a very good relationship with the Catholic clergy, which was kind of interesting because the priests -- the president of the country who enacted all of these laws was a Catholic priest.

By the way, after the Second World War, he was tried and executed as a war criminal, one of the very few men of cloth which was prosecuted and found guilty.

So we were very much protected from it. And that protection prevailed essentially

until 1944. It did not prevent, by the way, the Germans to deport his parents, my father's parents, my grandparents. They were taken to Auschwitz and killed immediately because they were old. They were of no use for them as workers. Did not protect the family at all.

>> Bill Benson: I was going to ask you next that very question. Did you lose family members during that period? And obviously you did.

>> Gideon Frieder: I lost almost all my family during that period.

>> Bill Benson: You had told me an anecdote or a story that there was one prominent official in the Slovak government that really was in your father's debt which may have helped to protect him a little bit.

>> Gideon Frieder: Right. So, part of the protection of my father -- part of the reason he was so protected, not only because he was a functionary representing the Jewry and could talk to them, but there was a particular member of the Slovak government which wanted to be known for his scholarly achievements. So my father wrote for him a Doctoral dissertation. And the guy got a Doctorate on my father's dissertation. And there's a certain psychological tie between your advisor and yourself. It doesn't matter how you may hate him or not.

So each time there was a need for some consultation on, quote, academic affairs, my father was summoned. And it's often this guy who was responsible for the Jews was summoned from his room while my father was there and used the time to kind of rummage through the documents and find out what is really happening. So that helped a lot.

The details, you see, I didn't know from my own knowledge. It's all part of the diaries. They are well documented. The diaries -- there was a book written by my uncle based

on the diaries. It was written in Hebrew, eventually translated to English. It was available. It's now out of print. But if any of you want a copy of it, just send me an e-mail. I'll send you an electronic copy. That's written in English. Half of it is based on the diaries, very abbreviated, obviously, and half of it is based on what my uncle did after my father died. He took his position as the head of Jewry and was in the position until he emigrated to Israel.

>> Bill Benson: You are going to get an e-mail from me about that.

>> Gideon Frieder: I have to tell you, I check my e-mail once a year.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Which begins tomorrow, I hope. The Slovak National Uprising occurred in August 1944, and it had an immediate effect on you and your family.

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what the uprising was and then what its effect was on you in the days and weeks that followed.

>> Gideon Frieder: Well, you know, when there is a war, the bad thing is to be on the side of the losers. The Slovaks decided to be on the side of the non-losers. There was an opposition to the fascist government, a unique one because it was one of the unique times in history that Western support partisans by the Western ally and Communist support partisans by the Soviet Union cooperated, essentially cooperated and created an uprising against the fascist government.

As you look at the map of Slovakia, if Slovakia is taken away from the German self-influence, it shuts the capability from the south to get into Germany. So anybody who

looks at the map and has any military understanding would understand the Germans had to cross that uprising. And they invaded. They invaded. The force was mainly Waffen SS, which was the fighting unit of the SS. And they had both German and Ukrainian part of the German Army, of the Waffen SS. Ukrainian SS members. And they invaded. Obviously it was very clear that this is the end of any protection, end of everything. The Germans are here. And the Ukrainians are here, which were far more cruel than the Germans ever were, at least from my perspective as a child. I'm not a historian. These are my perspectives.

>> Bill Benson: So the Germans invade.

>> Gideon Frieder: The Germans invaded. It was very clear that we are done.

My father was very well-known. It was clear that the Germans really didn't know what the Miranda rights are. They would see him, shoot him, and that's it. So he decided that he cannot stay with us because if he is found, by association he will be killed. So he sent us, us meaning my mother, my sister and me, from the city. But the city was already under siege. Nove Mesto was the city. So he puts us in an ambulance and sent the ambulance toward the German lines. Nobody would suspect an ambulance towards the German lines would have any Jews in it. Once the ambulance was out of the city, obviously we turned around. We fled. The ambulance broke down. A long story. Eventually we had to move on foot. We move on foot for a period that's unknown to me. I don't know if it was days or weeks. More than days. I know we slept on the way in various huts, shepherd huts in the mountains.

For me as a child, it was a great adventure.

>> Bill Benson: You're 7 years old.

>> Gideon Frieder: I'm 7 years old. I walk in the mountains. I eat the various berries. I see sheep and communicate with shepherds. It was great fun. Not for my mother, I assume. Eventually we got to Banska Bystrica.

By the way, it's “Bystrica,” not “Bystrica.” [pronunciation distinction]

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Gideon Frieder: That's ok.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to work on that.

>> Gideon Frieder: That's what you told me previously.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: It's a work in progress.

[Laughter]

>> Gideon Frieder: Why should he work on that? If I can speak English with my accent, you can speak Slovak in your accent.

>> Bill Benson: Good point. Good point.

[Laughter]

>> Gideon Frieder: Oh. So I don't have an accent, by the way. We were on vacation in Virginia Beach once, in the summer. And this young woman, high school kid, listened to my wife and myself speaking English. When we are in company, we speak English because impolite to speak any other language. And the young woman, high school kid, waitress, listens to us and says, "What a wonderful Yankee accent you have."

[Laughter]

So I have a Yankee accent.

>> Bill Benson: So I will call it Banska.

>> Gideon Frieder: Bystrica.

>> Bill Benson: Why was that your destination?

>> Gideon Frieder: That was the center of the uprising. The whole area was under total control of the partisans, the Russian supporters.

>> Bill Benson: Working together.

>> Gideon Frieder: Working together as a group. There was a large contingency of Jewish partisans. That was the place to go. That was a safe haven. And we congregated there; lots of people congregated, Jews and non-Jews, everybody fleeing from the Germans who were coming from the south.

The southern part of Slovakia is a plain. And that's where most of the agriculture was. That was the breadbasket of Slovakia. The northern parts is mountainous. The partisans congregated in the mountains. Banska Bystrica is on the foot of the mountains. So we went there. My mother was identified as the wife of Rabbi Frieder. She was very well accepted by the community, taken care of. And we stayed there until the German armored force, the Waffen SS in the armor brigades, came to about 15 kilometers south of Banska Bystrica. It was a question of a day or two, 15 kilometers.

>> Bill Benson: Which was before the Germans arrived just outside of the city. Was there a period where it was really felt that that was a safe haven?

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. Yes. Remember, this was 1944, October. The war was over in

some sense. It was after the invasion of Normandy. It was under the big offensive of the Soviet Union. The Soviets were now in Poland, on the northern border of Slovakia. They were behind the mountains. They could have gotten in and supported the partisans within a couple of days. The Soviets, for their own reason, let the Slovaks bleed to death.

>> Bill Benson: So they could have come in.

>> Gideon Frieder: They could have saved Slovakia. They did not. They were sitting behind the mountains waiting for the Slovaks to take the brunt. It's a very disputed point of history. As I told you, I'm not a historian but these are the facts. The fact is they could have come. They didn't. And the Slovak partisans, especially the Russian-supported ones, 100% sure, I assume that here they are behind the mountains; what's the big deal?

>> Bill Benson: Our benefactors, our friends are going to come in.

>> Gideon Frieder: Over there, they just defeated -- there was this huge defeat of the German armies of the Eastern front. What's the problem?

So everybody felt that's it. Anyway, they would not come to the mountains. They now have their safe passage to Germany, through the Slovakia plains and through Moravia. But it didn't happen. They wanted to crush the rebellion. And they started to come -- there was a big panic, a big panic to the point that I as a child seen that everybody was running around.

>> Bill Benson: You felt the panic yourself.

>> Gideon Frieder: Everybody. It was visible. People were running. People were shouting.

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about that, did your mother know where your father was at

that point?

>> Gideon Frieder: No. No. No.

>> Bill Benson: He put you in the ambulance. As far as you knew, he was gone.

>> Gideon Frieder: He was gone. Nobody knew. Nobody knew where he is. You know, it was a war. So when we were there, my mother befriended this guy, Henry Herzog. His Hebrew name was Adam.

My grandson is called Adam after Henry who passed away several years ago, well before Adam was born.

So she befriended him. Then there was in this panic. Everybody wanted to leave. Adam is a partisan, his unit together were to leave and go to the mountains to keep on fighting. She asked him to take us with him, which he refused. He was part of the fighting unit. But eventually she prevailed. He did take us with them. We went on foot to the north through this mountain passage from Banska Bystrica to the mountains.

>> Bill Benson: So in Banska Bystrica, you have a combination of fighters, the partisans but also civilians, women and children.

>> Gideon Frieder: Many civilians, women and children; most of them non-Jewish, obviously. The Slovaks, which were not associated with the fascist, fled. In a war situation, if you are Jewish or not, if you are caught, you are killed.

>> Bill Benson: So the partisans, of course, as fighting units for the most part aren't taking the women and children with them but your mother --

>> Gideon Frieder: They were not taking women and children. The women and children were

fleeing. There were caravans of people fleeing in cars, with the horse-drawn carriages. Cars were breaking down and running out of fuel. And we were attacked in Stare Hory with a clearly highly trained Army, the Germans. And they did what every highly trained Army would do. They bombed the exit. They bombed the entrance. They caught us in the middle.

>> Bill Benson: A mountain pass.

>> Gideon Frieder: It's a gorge more than a valley. I would say about 200 meters wide there. There was a road. That was it. There was mountains on one side. There was a dirt road.

>> Bill Benson: And you were caught.

>> Gideon Frieder: We were caught with all of these slow-moving people in the mountain passage.

>> Bill Benson: You were attacked by planes?

>> Gideon Frieder: We were attacked by planes. There was an actual massacre. There was no place to flee. We fled running up the mountains. And on the edge of the forest we were hit. My mother and sister were killed immediately. I was wounded by two bullets in my leg.

I was very lucky. In Europe, at the time, children, boys, didn't wear long pants. That was a sign of maturity. You got long pants when you were immature. When you were young, you wear shorts. But it was very cold. So children in Europe at the time, boys and girls, wore thick woolen stockings held by garters. Boys and girls. Doesn't matter. And I wore these thick woolen stockings. And when I was hit exactly here, when I was hit, I was lucky: no major artery was severed; no bone shattered; no major nerve severed. But the blood gushed and it saturated the woolen stockings. It was very cold. And the blood coagulated and created

a pressure bandage and that saved my life. So, you know, a couple of centimeters lower, my knee would be shattered and I would be dead, disabled, left to die.

Henry was fleeing as well. His story is amazing in itself. His story is chronicled in a book which I have to publish about his life. The name of the book, which I selected, was "Heaven Did Not Cry."

>> Bill Benson: "Heaven Did Not Cry."

>> Gideon Frieder: It came from -- I worked with him on his memoirs. I accepted the part where he met my wife -- my mother until my mother died. I took that part and published it -- not published it. I gave it the name "Heaven Didn't Cry When Their Mother Died." And when his book was published, it took the "Heaven Didn't Cry" name of the book. So I know about it from the book. He was fleeing together with another partisan. And the other partisan was hit by several bullets and fell on him. He tumbled into the ground under the body of this partisan who was riddled with bullets but he was not touched because the other guy saved his life.

>> Bill Benson: And then he saved your life.

>> Gideon Frieder: And then he found me standing next to my mother. I was crying. I couldn't get her to get up.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember that specifically?

>> Gideon Frieder: Boy, do I remember it. She was lying on her back with her eyes open. I did not understand why she was not getting up. My sister was on her stomach. I didn't see her face.

>> Bill Benson: She was 3 years old.

>> Gideon Frieder: 3 years old. She was 3 years old.

>> Bill Benson: What did Henry --

>> Gideon Frieder: Henry took me and said, "I'll bring your mother later." And here was an amazing thing happened in substance. His book chronicled the time I was with them with the partisans in the mountains. In his book it is very clear that I was in the mountain with them for seven days. And so he carried me on his back. I don't remember that time. It didn't exist. In my mind I was taken from the massacre and put in this village of Bully. I have no recollection whatsoever of those seven days. The only reason I know is the book. I met him after the war. He told me about it. It just doesn't exist.

So he took me -- the partisans decided that the 7-year-old boy -- they didn't know that I am wounded, by the way. Everybody was covered with blood. The showers were not existing, obviously, not in the mountains. Everybody was covered in blood. This bandage --

>> Bill Benson: Had really sealed the wound.

>> Gideon Frieder: Had really sealed the wound. There was no further bleeding. I was carried on the back not because of the wound but because --

>> Bill Benson: Keep up with the partisans.

>> Gideon Frieder: Keep up. I'm not sure that he was the only one who carried me.

>> Bill Benson: So he can't continue --

>> Gideon Frieder: So he can't continue to keep me. So they come to a very small village. I would not even say it was a village. It was a small hamlet, 40, 50 little hutches next to a dirt road. They watched it. They seen there was no German or Ukrainian garrisons. And they

brought me to the first building.

>> Bill Benson: Not because they knew somebody. That was the first place to go.

>> Gideon Frieder: They didn't know anybody. It was the first building. I was there -- not after the war. I was there the first time in 1990-something. I couldn't go before. He brought me there. And here a story divulges as well.

Learning from his book, what he writes in the book, these partisans were not clean shaven. They lived in the mountains. They had these German-acquired weaponry, hand grenades hanging over them. They had to be a very fearsome looking set of individuals. They come to the building. They tell the people -- this is Henry's story.

>> Bill Benson: The one he tells in his book.

>> Gideon Frieder: The one he tells in his book, not my recollection. He tells the people that I'm a Jewish boy, that I'm a son of a very prominent person, and that they put me in their care and if they don't want to take me in their care they will kill them. Not very much choice, is there? That's his story. Makes sense.

From my point of view -- I was outside when they talked. From my point of view, they brought me in. And all I recollect is total love, warm care. Incredible, the difference between my recollection and what he said. Maybe they were threatened, but they didn't do it because they were threatened. I have proof to these things. This is not the time to discuss it, but I have proof that they really did it from what they considered Christian love. Very, very, very devout Catholics.

>> Bill Benson: And very poor. Right?

>> Gideon Frieder: Very poor. Dirt poor. All the village was poor. The hut was a typical mountain hut: huge central stove. On one side of the stove one room. On the other side of the stove another room. The stove protruding into both rooms for heat. Myself and the brother of the woman lived in one room. The husband and wife lived in the other. And all I remember is care. They shaved food from their own mouth to feed me. I was always hungry. Because everybody was. But I was never starved. And there's a difference. Because they fed me. They didn't have an abundance of food. And they cared for me. They discovered I am wounded. They found -- that little hamlet of 40, 50 houses saved 10 Jews. One of them was an ophthalmologist. And he was summoned by them to care for my wounds. You know, close to doctor as it is.

>> Bill Benson: So in a little hamlet like this with just, as you said, maybe 40, 50 houses, obviously to the community the fact that you were there or others couldn't have been a secret.

>> Gideon Frieder: Couldn't have been a secret. So my cover story was that I was the son of the brother of the woman. And the brother of the woman was killed by the partisans. Why? Because it would give me a certain credentials. If my father was killed by the partisans, obviously I am not on the partisan side and clearly I cannot be Jewish. And they gave me a Slovak name. I was not called Gideon Frieder. They gave me the name Jan Suche. Looking back it's very interesting. Jan is the Slovak version of John, a very Christian name. And Suche in Slovak means dry.

>> Bill Benson: Dry.

>> Gideon Frieder: Dry. Not wet, dry. Just the opposite what I was. When I was brought

there, I was wet, hungry. I was a mess. But Suche is a very typical Slovak name. It's not like Smith, not like Brown.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: And that became for those roughly six months --

>> Gideon Frieder: Jan Suche. But they knew that the others are Jews.

>> Bill Benson: Right, within that community.

>> Gideon Frieder: Within the community. Think about it. 10 different people. And it was dangerous. In the hut next to the hut I lived the Germans once came and found a partisan in the hut. They locked the hut and burned the hut with the people, with the partisan, next to my house.

>> Bill Benson: And the people lived in the hut.

>> Gideon Frieder: Well, they were dead after they were burned.

>> Bill Benson: That's what I mean. But --

>> Gideon Frieder: They lived in the hut. Yes. And that -- by the way, that building is still there. The remnants, the burned remnants of the building, is still there to this day with a plaque commemorating.

>> Bill Benson: So the incredible danger to the family.

>> Gideon Frieder: Incredible danger. It was a danger of life. It was not something that they would be slapped on the hand. They would be executed.

>> Bill Benson: You said to me once that the Germans ruled by day, the partisans by night.

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. It was a small hamlet. It was the end of the war. There was not very

large German presence. After the SS conquered all of it, the Waffen SS, they were not replaced but they were supplemented by a German garrison of old men because all the young were killed. And that hamlet was not big enough or not strategically important enough to have a garrison there. It was in the middle of the way from nowhere to nowhere. So they would patrol during the day just to see that everything's available. And during the night, its partisans would come down from the mountains to be in a warm hut. They would go and sleep in the attic or sleep on the floor. The poor villagers by the day were dominated by the Germans, by the night were robbed by the partisans. They had to do it. They didn't have an easy life. But they survived somehow.

>> Bill Benson: And that continued for you until May 1945 when the war ended.

>> Gideon Frieder: Continued until April 1945 because the -- a Romanian contingent fighting as part of the Soviet Red Army liberated that part. For many Slovaks the word "liberated" is very much in dispute. For many Slovaks they replaced the German occupation with a Russian occupation. But it's something to discuss in a very different context. But for everybody, the Germans were gone. The western part of Czechoslovakia was liberated by American Army led by General Patton. The eastern part was liberated by the Soviet, by the Red Army. And they came in April.

>> Bill Benson: So you're under the Soviet now.

>> Gideon Frieder: I didn't know that, obviously.

>> Bill Benson: Right. Right. Right.

>> Gideon Frieder: And they wore different uniforms. Suddenly people are smiling. Nobody's

robbing. The Slovaks were robbed by the Soviets. There are even songs that children like me sang about the difference. A song which says, “The Germans are away. The Russian came and they took our watches.” Children's song. That's another part of the story.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about -- in the time we have left, tell us about reunification with your father, how you were able to do that.

>> Gideon Frieder: What happened is Adam, Henry Herzog, when he met any Jewish partisan or any Jew anyplace, told them that you should know that the wife of Rabbi Frieder was killed, her daughter was killed, but her son survived and he is in the village of Bully. The name of the village, Bully. And he spread the rumor.

My father, who had a flowing beard, as you had seen in the picture, shaved his beard when the Germans occupied. So he was not recognized. And at one point in time he was put in jail by the Slovaks but not recognized as who he is. And in the jail there was another guy and he told him, "Did you hear what happened?"

>> Bill Benson: Said this to your father.

>> Gideon Frieder: To my father. So he heard about it without identifying himself at all, even before the end of the war. Toward the end of the war, he fled from the jail aided by a sympathetic guard. And he found refuge in a Franciscan monastery. The Franciscan knew about him, recognized him, and gave him shelter. That was already 1945. It was clear who was winning. They gave him shelter and he stayed there knowing well where I am. After the war he sent emissaries to pick me up. And in this April they came and took me back. So I reunited with him in April 1945. He died in June 1946.

>> Bill Benson: Just a year later.

>> Gideon Frieder: Just a year later.

>> Bill Benson: And you were at that point 9 I think.

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: That had to be just unbelievably crushing to you after all you had been through.

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. What can I say? How crushing it is is very difficult to explain. But let me tell you one thing. I don't think I shared it with you.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Gideon Frieder: After the war there was an epidemic of marriages not only in Europe, the baby boom in this country. People tried to recoup, tried to get back to life. My father was settled with a young child, myself. He was, again, very active. He was the head of the Slovak Jewry. The part of the Slovak Jewry which was -- was Orthodox but not very Orthodox. It was most of the community. It was very busy. He was dealing with recreating Jewish life, recreating people. He brought me times to get moneys for all of these people who are coming, Jews and non-Jews, who were coming from concentration camps. So he needed somebody. He re-married a woman which lost her husband. Before he died, he swore her to take me out of the bloody continent, quote, and take me to Israel. And that's what she did. I was then 10 years old.

>> Bill Benson: When you moved to Israel.

>> Gideon Frieder: Straight to another war.

>> Bill Benson: Straight to another war.

>> Gideon Frieder: So that was 10 years. Till I was 16, I cried every night. Not only after I came to Israel. I cried every night until I was 16. And if you ask me why, I couldn't tell you. And I -- my mother -- my step-mother asked me why. I couldn't tell her. There were no nightmares. There were no dreams. I just got up crying. That's what crushing means.

>> Bill Benson: Do you mind if I read just a tiny little excerpt from your father's diary?

>> Gideon Frieder: This is a free country.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Ok. In the book that was based on your father's diary, he wrote about you. Quote, He told stories of partisans who roamed the mountains and of Jews and the Russian and Romanian armies. He talked about Russian and German soldiers who fell prisoners. Gideon also talked about his mother and sister without fully comprehending the meaning of their death. Such expressions as killing and death had become commonplace concepts for him and he used them with great naturalness, bitter experience hardened him.

>> Gideon Frieder: Well, it's correct. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: How did your father's diary survive?

>> Gideon Frieder: Part of it was written after the war. The part which was written -- the framework was written after the work. The diaries themself were saved -- not only the diaries, the whole huge library that we had in Nove Mesto were taken by the Franciscan monks and transported from our house into the monastery and kept by them the whole war, including the diaries, including every scrap of paper. They kept it. And after the war they returned it. And

part of the diary -- part of the library we took when we moved to Israel and sold it to be able to survive. Most of the books. Some of the books I have, including a book in 1736.

>> Bill Benson: That was part of his collection.

>> Gideon Frieder: That was part of his collection, including the Bible. He noted my birth and the birth of my sister. Some of the documents I recovered only two months ago.

>> Bill Benson: Two months ago?

>> Gideon Frieder: Two months ago. My uncle died several years ago, many years ago, in Israel. He left a house. My cousins eventually decided -- one of my cousins occupied the house. My cousins eventually decided to sell the house so that a high-rise could be built there. And in doing so they had to go over all the possessions in the house. And they found original documents from my father, from the '20s and '30s of the previous century. I'm going to donate them to the museum here. The diaries themselves are in Jerusalem. These documents I cannot just move there. I would like to move them there so everything in one place. Cannot be done. So I just talked here a couple of months ago. And today -- we are going to bring them here and preserve them. So there will be an historical record kept. These are valuable documents.

>> Bill Benson: Just came to your attention --

>> Gideon Frieder: Just came to my attention a couple of months ago.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to close the program in just a moment. Obviously you didn't get a chance to ask Gideon questions and there's much more that we weren't able to hear about. We could have used the rest of the afternoon and tomorrow. But we want to express our

gratitude for you being here with us for this one hour. Thank you for being a good audience. I hope that you'll come back to a *First Person* program another time. The Museum's website will have information about *First Person* for 2015. So if you're back in Washington, D.C. or if you live locally, please join us again.

I'm going to turn back to Gideon to close our program in a moment. It's our tradition at *First Person* that our *First Person* has the last word. So he will have the last word but before he does, just a couple of things. Because we didn't have a chance for you to ask him questions -- Gideon, you're willing to stay behind for a little while?

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. I have a commitment tomorrow at 11:00.

[Laughter]

So till then. I can stay.

>> Bill Benson: There you have it. When Gideon's finished, he'll step down off the stage over here to our right. So, please, absolutely feel free to just come up and say hi, ask a question, have your picture taken with him, whatever you want to do. Please feel free to do that.

When Gideon's done, I'm going to also, at the end, ask you all to stand. And our photographer, Joel, will come up on the stage and take a photo of Gideon with you as the backdrop. It just makes a tremendous portrait.

As I said, it's our tradition our *First Person* has the last word. On that note, I'd like to turn to Gideon to close today's program.

>> Gideon Frieder: This is not what I usually say at the end of *First Person*. It will not be something to you that you will like to hear, but I have you as a captive audience.

Synagogues were burned. Jews were beaten on the street, their businesses burned. And, no, I'm not talking about the Holocaust. I am talking about something which happened two years -- two days ago in Paris. If you ask if there will be another Holocaust, you don't have to go farther except the Holocaust of the 21st Century, which already started, will make the Holocaust of the previous century as a little flame relative to a bomb fire. Think about it when you leave here. It may not affect me. I will be dead. It may not affect you. But it will affect your children and grandchildren. We are today in the same place that the world was in 1932. When businesses are burned and people are beaten, the world is silent. The world doesn't do anything. Oh, maybe they say something, but they don't do anything. Exactly what happened in the 30s of the previous century which brought in the Holocaust of the 20th Century.

When one of our most beloved presidents, President Kennedy, was quoted to say the hottest places in hell are reserved for those which in time of need kept their quiet, don't you reserve your places there. Act, be cognizant so that the fate -- so that the fate that befelled me will not happen to your children.

Thank you.

[Applause]

[The *First Person* event ended at 12:04 p.m.]