

Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program First Person. Thank you for joining us today. We are in our 15th year of the First Person program. And our first person today is Mr. Freddie Traum, 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 Rubenstein Foundation. We are grateful for their support.

First Person is a series of twice-weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our First Person guests serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our 2014 program will end August 14.

The museum's website, at 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 that you'll find in your program today or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater when we close our program. In completing the form, you will also receive an electronic copy of Freddie Traum's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Freddie will share with us his first-person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have an opportunity toward the end of our program to ask Freddie a few questions, we'll try to take advantage of that for you. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Freddie is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. And we begin with this photo of Alfred or Freddie Traum. Freddie was born in March 1929 in Vienna, Austria. The arrow points to Austria on this map of Europe. And on this map of Austria, the arrow points to Vienna. Freddie had one sister. His mother and father owned a business. Pictured here is Freddie, who is on the bicycle, and his cousin, Joseph in 1938.

On March 12, 1938, German troops invaded Austria. After Freddie's parents learned about the Kindertransport, a rescue effort which brought thousands of refugee Jewish children to Great Britain between 1938 and 1940, they decided to send their two children to England. In 1939, Freddie and his sister, Ruth, went to live with a family in London. This photo was taken on the afternoon of Freddie and Ruth's departure for London. Pictured from left to right are Ruth, Freddie's grandmother, his father, Freddie, and his mother. And here, we see Freddie's passport that he used for his journey to England.

When England declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, the Traum children and thousands of others were sent to live in the English countryside. Freddie spent the next three years of his life there. Here, we see 12-year-old Freddie and his sister Ruth at an evacuation residence near Luton, England.

After the war, Freddie became a merchant seaman and eventually moved to Israel. He met his wife, Josiane on an Israeli ship, upon which they would be married. We close with this photo from Freddie and Josiane's wedding aboard the Israeli passenger liner SS Zion in 1958.

After the birth of Freddie and Josiane's first child, he gave up his career as a merchant seaman and went to work for IBM in Israel. Their daughter, Yael, was born in Israel. Upon the advice of Israeli medical experts, Freddie and Josiane relocated to the United States in 1963 to obtain medical care for their son, Michael, who is disabled. Freddie was able to transfer to IBM in New Jersey. And they began their life here. Their third son-- their third child, son Joseph-- Jonathan, excuse me, who is also disabled, was born here.

Eventually, Freddie went to work for Boeing as an engineer in telecommunications. And they moved to Silver Spring, Maryland, where Freddie and Josie live today. Freddie is retired from Boeing. Josie retired six years ago as a clinical social worker for abused children with Child Protective Services in Montgomery County, Maryland. Josie and her mother, Fanny Aizenberg, are both Holocaust survivors. And they were both First Person guests earlier this year.

Freddie chairs the local Kindertransport association, which is made up of fellow survivors of Nazi persecution. He

volunteers here at the museum on Tuesdays as a researcher with the International Tracing Service archive. He has served as a tour guide for the museum's special exhibitions, including the recent exhibition on Nazi propaganda, State of Deception-- the Power of Propaganda, and the 2000 exhibition about the 1936 Nazi Olympics.

Freddie also speaks about his experience as a survivor on behalf of the museum at various colleges and government agencies, such as the Federal Housing Authority, colleges such as King College in Tennessee, Milligan College in Virginia, Black River Technical College in Arkansas, and Flagler College in Florida. He has also spoken at such places as the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi.

Freddie is a contributor to the museum's publication, Echoes of Memory, which features writings by survivors who participate in the museum's writing class for survivors. And you can read several of Freddie's pieces on the museum's website. And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first person, Mr. Freddie Traum.

Thank you.

Freddie, thank you so much for joining us today and for your willingness to be our first person. We have so much to share with us in a single, short hour. So we'll get right to it. You told me when we first met you that you had had a happy childhood. Let's begin with telling us about your childhood and what you know about your parents life in the years before the war and the Holocaust.

Well, I think, as a little kid, I had a very happy childhood. We lived somewhat on the outskirts of Vienna. And there was a dairy near us. A guy had about a dozen cows, and a horse, and all that. And I used to go over there and help out. I thought I was helping but. That's beside the point. I used to enjoy play in the streets with the kids. And I didn't know anything different. But as far as I was concerned, it was as good as life could get.

Freddie, your father was a disabled veteran of the First World War.

Yes, that's right.

Tell us about him.

Well, he had difficulty in getting around. But when he was seated, he could do everything. He was very gifted in art, in doing anything with his hands. And he taught me a lot.

You had mentioned to me that you actually ended up spending far more time with your father, as it happens, than with your mother. Why was that?

Well, the business we had required a certain amount of time outside. And so she would take care of that. And he would be at home all the time. So when I came home from school, he was there. He would prepare my lunch. And so I spent a lot of more time with him. And I used to love to listen to his stories of what-- when he was in the army and he was wounded. And he used to tell me all the stories. And little boys like to hear those kind of things. So it was a very close relationship.

Tell us about your family's business.

This is a kind of business that doesn't exist anymore. This is the days before you had credit card. If you wanted something, you had to go and pay full price for it. And that was it. So what happened-- you had people like my father, who would purchase this thing for the buyer. And then afterwards, they would pay off on time payment. But they could get the article or whatever they wanted right away. So we had catalogs. And they used to come and choose something. And then we would get it. They would pick it up. And then afterwards, my mother would go around and collect once a month, I guess.

Your-- I'm going to-- because of time, I think I'm going to move ahead a little bit. As Hitler's influence grew, Freddie, your friends started to do things, like join the Nazi youth organizations that were being created.

Yeah, that's right. Well, everything changed after March '38. That's when the Nazis annexed Austria. At first, I was still playing with the kids in the same way. And I remember, in particular, April the 3rd-- April 20, Hitler's birthday, they had a lot of celebrations there. And I remember, army came there. And the end of the street, they had a gun, and an emplacement, and a searchlight. And the kids would be around there. And I would be with them. We'd sit on a gun, twiddle the handles, and make the thing go around, and up, and down, and all that.

As you said, the kinds of things kids would like to do, boys would like to do.

Yeah. And everything was fine. But gradually, they all were brought into the Nazi youth movements. And I guess, the poison spread with them. And first, they just distanced themselves from me. Then afterwards, it came to calling names, and pushing, and all that sort of thing-- became very nasty. And it's amazing that the same children I played with from as far back as I could remember anything could suddenly turn from what somebody tells them, the stories. But that's what happened.

You told me that, in fact, you had you'd felt abandoned by your friends.

Oh, I was. But on the other hand, other things happened. The Jewish organizations in Vienna became stronger. And so the youth movements took over. And my sister being older, she joined a youth movement. And I used to go along with her. And also, I belonged to a choir from the synagogue. So after Kristallnacht, our synagogue was burnt down with all the others.

Before you turn to Kristallnacht and what happened there, tell us a little bit about the-- being in the Jewish boys choir. That's what it was called, right, the Jewish Boys' Choir?

Well, yeah, but that was after Kristallnacht.

That was after Kristallnacht. OK.

Yeah. Most people have heard of the Vienna Boys' Choir, which is quite famous. So the Jewish community decided to form a Jewish one. And I auditioned and was accepted. And you have to go into town, center town twice a week for rehearsals, which is an interesting thing because I was only eight years old, a little eight-year-old kid. There was no danger in sending a little kid way across town by subway.

And here, you wouldn't think of sending a little eight-year-old. There are other kind of problems here. But those problems didn't seem to exist there. The only problem you had was with Nazis and if they knew that you were Jewish. And you were a target. So anyway, I used to go there. And I was very proud of that. And I think we gave some concerts and even cut a record.

Freddie, one of the incidents that you did encounter involved having a satchel snatched away from you. Will you share that with us?

Yeah. In school, we used to wear school satchels. And funny thing is that the parks in Vienna-- I don't know if it's still the same or not, but it was then-- the grass was something to admire, not to be walked on, unlike England, where everybody lays on the grass and picnics. In Vienna, you set foot on that grass and you're in trouble.

So the kids-- coming home from school, I used to cut through a park. And some kids or former friends tore the school satchel off my back and threw it on the grass. And so, of course, I got-- stepped over the railing and went to retrieve it. And no sooner had I done that, a policeman was there. He must have witnessed the whole thing. But it was time for him to have some fun. So he grabbed me. He started dressing me down. Now, Jewish kids have no respect for the beauty of the Viennese parks and all that sort of thing, took down my name and address.

A few days later, we got a note from my mother to come to school. And she came. It was a practice in Vienna and I don't think is here, when adult enters the classroom, all the kids stand up. And so when she came in, they all stood up.

And the teacher yelled at them, you don't have to stand up for her. Sit down. Sit down. That just shows you the way the constantly humiliated you. And of course, then they-- he went into a whole diatribe about the lack of respect we have for Vienna, and for parks, and its beauty.

Shortly after that, I was actually expelled from that school and went to a school which was just for Jewish kids. It was much further from my home, but it was much more pleasant, was amongst friends. And we were fortunate. We had a very good teacher, who was actually-- had been a university professor. But he lost his job because he was Jewish. And so he was relegated to teaching little kids. But their loss was our gain. It was wonderful.

Freddie, you mentioned a little while ago that Hitler and the Nazis marched into Austria in early 1938 in what's known as the Anschluss. And then you also refer to Kristallnacht, which occurred the night of November 9 through 10, 1938. Tell us about Kristallnacht and what it meant for you and your family.

Well we lived in the side streets. So there were no stores there for them to loot or do anything. But my sister's friend, they had a store, dry goods store. And that store was broken into. The father was taken to Dachau, was there for a few months.

And then when they let him out, he was and his wife were given a matter of hours. They had to leave Austria, which in a way was a ticket to life because had they not left, they would have suffered the same as all the other people who stayed behind. But they just packed the suitcase and they left. And they took the daughter. And they left it with-- her with us. So she also went on a Kindertransport.

This was Lily, I believe?

Yeah.

Their daughter-- so she started living with you after Kristallnacht.

Yeah. Freddie, you told me about a memory that you actually recently remembered, in which you drew a picture of a Nazi in a brown shirt, which was very upsetting to your parents. Tell us about that.

I must have heard the word brown pest somewhere. And I drew a picture of Nazi stormtroopers. And I wrote that down. And I was very proud of the picture. And they saw that, they were horrified. They could have been executed just for having that. So they grabbed it from me, and threw it in the fire, and told me about never doing anything like that, how dangerous that could be. And it was hard to get-- by that time, I was either eight or nine-- to make a little kid like that understand the danger of making a little drawing.

Freddie, after those events, and of course, after Kristallnacht, it wasn't long after that that your parents made the profound decision to send you and your sister away on a Kindertransport. Tell us how they reached that decision and how they arranged for you to go.

Since so many kids came between-- over a period of nine months, about 10,000 kids came to England. So it wasn't a secret. And they found out about it. They knew that they didn't have a chance to get out. First of all, my father was crippled. Secondly, he didn't have a profession that was transportable and didn't speak English. So his chances of going anywhere were pretty much zero.

And they decided to send the two of us to England. Now, on the Kindertransport, you were either two categories-- one was where you knew where to whom you were going, and the others would go there, and they'd stay in hostels until the place was found for them.

In our case, we knew the name and the person who we were going to was a family in London. And the man was Mr. Griggs. And he was an engine driver, drove those passenger trains between London and Glasgow. And as a little kid, that sounded pretty exciting. My dad used to make it appear like very much of an adventure that I was going on.

So they softened the whole departure by telling me that their son, Charlie, had a bicycle. That was a big deal for me. And then maybe, I'll be able to go and see the train come in. And so it wasn't such a sad departure as it might have been. It was somewhat of going on an adventure. And they said, we'll be together again soon. And I'm sure they said that with the best of intentions. But of course, it never happened.

But you, of course, completely believed that that was going to be the case. So you went with your sister, Ruth, as well as this-- the child of your family's friend.

Yeah. We went together. She went to a different time to Wales.

Freddie, we saw earlier in the pictures-- we saw the photograph of your family on the day of your departure for England. Will you tell us about that photograph and another one that you have?

My dad was an amateur photographer so he used to do his own developing, and printing, and all that. So on that occasion, he had a tripod set up so he could get into the picture as well. And of course, it's not a happy picture. There was nobody standing there saying cheese or anything like that. It pretty much captured the mood that we felt.

In fact, I think he made an inscription on the back of the photograph you have, if I remember correctly, about this is the day--

Yeah.

--yeah, that my children left or something like that. Freddie, tell us about going to the train station. You remember that.

Well, we went to the train station. And it was a special train for kids like me. And there wasn't anything particular about that. And we're standing there by an open window, holding hands with our mother, when all of a sudden, my school teacher was in front of me. He had his son about five years old under his arm.

And he handed him through the window. And he said, can you keep an eye on him until you get to London? So we said, sure. And so all of a sudden, I felt very grown up, having a responsibility here. And so he stayed with us until we got to London. And then somebody came and picked him up.

Were there adults that were accompanying you at all?

There were a few adults. And there were a few Nazis on the train that would walk up and down. And some of the girls had had gold locket, something like that. They might tear them off and keep them. But you know, I didn't have anything. And they pretty much left me alone.

In arranging for you to go on the Kindertransport, your family-- your parents worked with somebody in England to help arrange you. Was that person a relationship or a--

No, I think it was a work with my father. And I think-- in fact, I'm not sure about this. I think they owned-- owed my parents some money. And in lieu of payment, they arranged for my sister and I to find a home. And so when we arrived in England, they came, and picked us up, and took us to the Griggs family.

And as you mentioned, Mr. Griggs was a conductor or an engineer on a train. Tell us about what it was like for you and Ruth to go to the Griggs family in England.

Well, it was a very different household to ours at home. Things were very strict, in a way. At dinner time, we all sat around. And there was no talk. The kids didn't talk. The only thing you could say is may I leave the table, please or something like that when they were finished eating. In my home, sitting around for dinner was all-- everything-- everybody was talking at the same time. But this was very different.

But other than that, they were very nice. And the following-- we arrived, I think, on a Thursday. The following Monday,

I was enrolled in a school, in an age-appropriate class. Of course, I didn't speak a word of English. I knew yes, and no, and something like that. But aside from that, I didn't know any English. And so I'd be sitting in a class there.

Then when we had reset, we went outside. One of the kids came up to me and said something. I said, yes. I didn't know what else to say. I thought he wanted to play, but what he actually said was do you want to fight? So he responds to my yes. The next thing I knew is he was punching me.

I soon learned the language. It's amazing how quickly that came to me. Another thing that happened-- it all happened on the first day-- somebody came in and asked for me to be excused. And she took me to a storeroom, and handed me a gas mask, and started fitting me for it, and wrote my name on it. And she said, go back to your class. To me, that was a big deal because in Vienna, the only people had gas masks were the Nazis. They didn't give them to the Jews. And here, first day, I got one. So I felt very, very special with that.

Freddie, did your-- were your parents able to be in touch with you at that time?

Yeah, in the beginning, they must have written a letter almost every day. And we-- my sister was a better correspondent than me. But we used to write back. And of course, it all stopped once the war started, it stopped. And the last thing we got from them was a card from the Red Cross that we're being deported. That was the last communication.

How old was-- Ruth was older than you. How old?

Three years.

Three years older than you. You weren't with the Griggs, however, very long before you would be evacuated to the British countryside.

England was a remarkable-- see, the 1st of September, the Nazis marched into Poland. And on that same day-- was a Friday-- the kids from London were all being evacuated to the country, surrounding countryside. So I went with my class to a place just outside Luton, a little school, because our school was so small.

So they divided us. Some of the kids went in the morning. Some went in the afternoon. They extended the afternoon times. But you didn't have a full day in school. We shared it. The rest of the time, we would do gardening, or play soccer, or something like that. And this went on for until they could build.