Wednesday, March 18, 2015

11:00 a.m. – 12:01 p.m.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
***FIRST PERSON* SERIES**
DAVID BAYER

REMOTE CART

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>> Bill Benson: Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today for the start of our 16th year of the *First Person* program. And our first *First Person* of 2015 is Mr. David Bayer whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2015 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship. *First Person* is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust.

Each of our *First Person* guests serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our program will continue 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 or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater. In doing so, you will also receive an electronic copy of David Bayer's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

David will share with us his *First Person* account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 50 minutes. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from David 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 1945 portrait of David Bayer taken in his hometown after liberation.

On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Poland where David was born September 27, 1922. He will be 93 in September.

On this map of Poland, the arrow points to the approximate location of Kozienice, David's hometown. This is a contemporary photograph of David's home in Kozienice. David's brother Joshua is in this 1938 photo of a Zionist youth group. You'll see him in the third row, third from the left.

In 1939, German troops invaded Poland starting the Second World War. The next year, the Bayers were forced to move into the Kozienice ghetto. Here we see a view through the barbed wire fence that enclosed it.

In September 1942, the ghetto was liquidated and its inhabitants, including members of David's family, were deported to the Treblinka killing center. The arrow here points to the location of Treblinka. David was taken to Pionki, an industrial complex that produced munitions. In 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz. The second arrow on the map points to Auschwitz. And this photo shows a fence around the barracks in the main camp, Auschwitz 1.

As a Soviet Army neared, David and the other prisoners were sent on a Death March. However, David managed to escape into the forest and was found by the Soviets. He spent two years in the Foehrenwald Displaced Persons Camp in Germany. Here we have a map of the major camps for Jewish displaced persons with the arrow pointing to the Foehrenwald Displaced Persons Camp. In this photo, David and friends pose at an airport near the Displaced Persons Camp in 1946. David is in the first row. He is the third from the left.

Here we see David with a friend at the Foehrenwald Displaced Persons Camp in 1947. Later that year David moved to Panama. First, here is a photo of David close to the gate. And next standing by his employer's horse in Panama city.

After a remarkable year in Panama, David went to Israel as a soldier in Israel's War

for Independence. He saw a great deal of combat as the state of Israel was created. Eventually David returned to Panama before coming to the United States to start a new life and a new family.

Today David and his wife Adele live just outside of Washington, D.C. They have two children, Sandra and Mark, two grandchildren, and now a great grandson who was born in 2014. Their grandson, Josh, who served in the Israeli Army is a civil engineer in Virginia. Their granddaughter, Jennifer, the mother of their great grandson, is a recent graduate of the University of Kansas and is now teaching on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

David volunteers his time in the museum's Registry on Wednesdays and often on other days. As part of the Registry, David researches and compiles lists of those who survived the Holocaust as well as those who perished. Among other purposes, the Registry helps make it possible for survivors, family members, and others to find those who may have survived.

In addition to our *First Person* program, David speaks frequently about his Holocaust experience such as to a group of more than 50 Navy personnel who are assigned to the White House. He also speaks to groups of visitors at the museum, especially those who are Spanish-speaking as David is fluent in Spanish, among other languages.

With that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our first *First Person* of 2015, Mr. David Bayer.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: David, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be -- I believe it's on for you. Being not only willing to be our *First Person* but our first of the year. So thank you for that.

>> David Bayer: [Inaudible]

>> Bill Benson: We will find that out.

>> David Bayer: [Inaudible]

>> Bill Benson: David, it was less than a month before your 17th birthday when the Nazis invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Before you tell us about your life during the Holocaust, why don't you tell us first a little bit about your family, your community, and yourself in the years before the war living in Kozienice.

>> David Bayer: Ok. I was born in Poland in a town called Kozienice, which in English means nothing happened to the goat.

>> [Laughter]

>> David Bayer: That's the name of it. My father had a shoe factory. We sold them in Germany before the war. We had about 25 people working with us. We lived in a nice neighborhood across from a big church. My mother and my father were only 41. I had a sister older than me and a brother 12 years old and a little sister 8 years old. We had a maid there, a nice living. We had a garden, a backyard.

The Germans spoiled everything. The Germans came in. We didn't have no food. We couldn't get out. The German soldiers came in, in our house and plundered, took everything they could; took my mother's dishes, bedspreads, table cloths, everything they wanted to take. A lot of shoes they took away, leather. We couldn't get out to get food.

>> Bill Benson: For a short period of time, your family fled out of town. Tell us about that.

>> David Bayer: We went away because of the bombardment. They bombarded every town. We were hiding in the forest. After they occupied the area, we had to get out of the house.

>> Bill Benson: They even took -- destroyed your mother's Passover dishes, didn't they?

>> David Bayer: Well, if I had to talk about everything they did, it would take an hour.

>> Bill Benson: The reason I mention is because they had been in the family for hundreds of years. Right?
>> David Bayer: Yeah. We had dishes which every Passover, Jewish people would take special dishes for the holiday and every year, take out the dishes and use it. But the Germans took everything. The dishes were on a shelf in the warehouse. They knocked it down and broke practically everything. Whatever was not broken, they took it. Silver, they took away. Everything that was silver they took away.

Then the Germans took me, took me out to work for them. And they made me take out -- I was only 16 1/2 years old. I didn't know how to take a battery out of a truck. We didn't have many trucks in our town. It was cold. There was still snow on the ground. They gave me a pair of pliers. I didn't know how to take this battery from underneath out and put in a new one. I was bleeding. The acid burned my clothing. They were laughing, the Germans were standing there with their cameras and taking pictures and laughing. I was crying. They were laughing. Finally I took the battery out but I burned my clothing from the acid. They didn't let me go home to change my clothes. I didn't live far away, maybe two blocks away. My mother was home crying. Finally I came home in the evening. They didn't give me no food, no nothing.

Another day they came in, they took my father. They made him work in ditches. And my mother was crying. Tried to help him. So I tried to exchange myself for my father. But the Germans, they would take me, too, if I approached them. So I motioned to my father he should sneak away and I took his place. My mother was happy that he came home.

We had to stand in line, in a bakery waiting for food. I stood there for a while. The Germans came in and took everybody away from the line and locked us up. They locked us up in the church across from my house. Hundreds and hundreds of people were locked up in the church. My mother didn't know what happened to me. My brother, little brother, came out from our house. I tried to motion, from the garden, from the church that I am here. So this way my mother find out I was locked up in the church. Then they took me away to another town. Locked us up in a camp, a military camp. There were soldiers. This were all kinds of people locked up, Polish, soldiers, civilians.

My sister, when she was 19, she went to Radom, to that town, and bribed the guard with money and got me out. I came home in a horse and buggy. The Germans were laughing because in the buggy there was about 10, 15 people and one horse. The Germans were working on the highway and they were laughing and taking pictures of the Jews in a wagon with one horse and 10 people. They felt sorry for the horse but not for us.
>> Bill Benson: At what point did you get forced to move into a ghetto?
>> David Bayer: They lived in our house maybe a few months. I don't remember how many months. Put the Star of David on our door. The neighborhood we lived was a Christian area; across from a church, in a nice neighborhood. So we had to move out from our house, a big house we had.

We got one room in the neighborhood where all Jewish people were concentrated and made a ghetto. They locked it up with barbed wire. We couldn't take no furniture, merchandise, nothing. We hid in the garden, in the ground, in the basement, we hid a few things. Some leather we hid, some shoes from my father's factory, some silverware that we had, but not much. The rest we left and gave it to the people who worked for my father, Christian people. One special man, a Polish man. I took a sled and a lot -- things I could leave in his house.

Then we moved into one room in the ghetto and that's it. I had to sleep on the floor because there wasn't much space for beds, only one bed. We were hungry all the time. There was a ration. But the ration was not enough for the whole family. And also my grandfather and grandmother, my uncle and his wife, there was no space.

I used to sneak out from the ghetto under the barbed wire and risk my life. Went to get food. A lot of times I had to escape and hide. One day I sneaked out from under the barbed wire and then I went to get food. She made a pumpkin soup, from pumpkin. She had a bucket for me. I was taking the pumpkin soup home. On the way back I see two little girls, maybe 6, 5 years old, twin sisters, two little girls came out of the same hole I sneaked out, no shoes, cold, hungry, walking over to the dump. Everybody put trash in it because we couldn't tie it away. A German, I knew him. He went over to them and shot both kids in the head with that pistol, shot them. I saw that and I started running with the pumpkin soup because it was like gold. And I sneaked back to the ghetto.

>> Bill Benson: At some point, of course, the Germans came in and they liquidated the ghetto and sent most of the people there, including your family, to their deaths. How did you survive that?

>> David Bayer: Everybody in the ghetto had to work. Every able-body had to work for the Germans. So before the war, there was a project not far from my hometown. There was a river that always overflows. The Polish government were irrigating the area. So the Germans continued to do that same job but with slave labor, Jews. 400, about 500 Jewish young men, and older men, too, older men in their 40s had to dig the canal and work. I went to work there. They gave me ration, bread.

In the beginning we went to work in the morning, came back in the evening. The Germans were evicting the ghetto, so they left us near the canal and had us working near the canal digging the ditches with a shovel. No machine, nothing. Digging the canal. In the meantime, the Germans were liquidating the ghetto and taking everybody. They were sending people to Treblinka.

When I was working on the canal, I would sneak away practically every day from the canal and went to the village and begged for food from the farmers. Sometimes I was stealing in the field the potatoes. One day when I was coming back to the canal, there was nobody there left in the canal, only the wheel barrels and the shovels. I didn't know what happened to everybody working there. The Germans came with trucks and took everybody away. A farmer told me they took them away. So I was left alone. I didn't know where to go.

I was going to a man's house in the village. Told the whole story what happened. Thought if they don't find me, they won't kill me. He hid me in the barn for a while. And then he decided -- he told me there's people in town, left some people in town. So he took me to town, to my hometown. There was about 40, 50 people left. The German left them to clean up the city, the possessions out of the homes from the Jewish people had. The farmer took me. I jumped in under the barbed wire.

They took me in. I was working with them together to clean up the houses. Not for a long time. Just maybe a week or two. Then the Germans took us away to a city called Radom. And Radom, there was a ghetto there and a horrible place. There was no food at all, nothing. Everybody was starving.

Hundreds of people volunteered to go to work for the Germans. Didn't want to because the people didn't have possessions. If you have nothing, the Germans didn't want to take you. Why? Because they took it away from us. If I have nothing, you don't need me.

Finally, they transfer me to another town -- I forgot the name of it. The Germans announced any Jew who escaped or hiding to come out, all the people would be sending over. They were lying. They just wanted everybody to get out. So I went.

I was volunteering for the Germans to go to work in the factory called Pionki. They didn't want to take me neither because I had no luggage. There were a couple of my parents' friends, old people, they gave me two bundles to take. They told me, “Here, take this and they will take you.” So sure enough, I got two bundles. I never knew what was inside. The Germans took me to work in Pionki. They took away the bundles but I worked in the factory. They taught me how to make powder for bullets.

Two years I was working in that factory. I became an expert making munition. This was a terrible ordeal. There were about 2,000 prisoners. Some of them, the people from the irrigation canal, the Germans took to Pionki. My friends who were working with me, we were together.

In Pionki, there was sabotage. The Germans taught us to make sabotage because we didn't actually know about sabotage. They accused us of sabotage. So a lot of times I did sabotage. A lot of times I put in a rock or stone in the pump and everything stopped. If they caught me, they would have hanged me. They hanged a lot of other people, too.

>> Bill Benson: Since you're talking about that, there was an incident you told me about in which the conveyor belt burned and you were blamed for that.

>> David Bayer: One night -- we worked night shift, there were four guys on our department. I worked in the centrifuges, mixing the chemicals -- powder for the bullets. The Germans made imitation cotton from paper. It was exactly like cotton. I mixed that with all kinds of chemicals. They taught me how to put the bullet. There was a young man there from my hometown. He was a nervous person. Always wanted to smoke, like a junky. This was the night shift. He was the one who was putting the cotton on the conveyor which comes to my department. He worked 12 hours, 24 hours. He worked for the Russians, never went home, never went to the barracks. He smoked the cigarettes at night, which was forbidden. The conveyor was ignited and there was a fire. My department stopped. They took us out. They beat us the whole night. I was beaten, blood come out of my back, to tell them what happened. Nobody talked. They announced that they were going to execute us, all of us.

In the morning, the supervisors, two German doctors -- two Germans we called them doctor, Dr. Gonszer and Dr. Vitter, I never forget their name. One was German-born and Poland. He spoke Polish and German. He had the Gestapo not to kill us because we were experts, we have to teach other people how to do that. And luckily they didn't shot us. We went back to work right away.

>> Bill Benson: And David, there's so much for you to tell us just about Pionki but a couple more questions. There was a fire there in which you got burned, pretty severely.

>> David Bayer: There was a supervisor, a Polish supervisor. He worked in the munition factory before the war. The Germans paid him. He was a nice guy. He had to have a gas mask. Everybody was dying over there. I begged him a lot of times to get me another job. Finally he got me out of there, put somebody else in. I worked -- processed cotton, to the department to -- it was a new job. I worked with the other Polish supervisor. I was out from the ghettos.

But what happened, the locomotive was going back and forth, back and forth. The spare cotton would fall out. And it burned my arm and my face and my hands completely, like swollen up, blisters. And this was the time when the Russian armies were winning the war

against the Germans and were pushing the Germans back from Russia. This was 1944. The Germans saw the Russians coming so they tried to liquidate the factory, dismantle the machinery, and ship everything to Germany. Stopped working in the factory. We only dismantled the machinery.

Then I have to stop here and tell you something about an incident, what happened in our compound where we lived, the barracks, our camp. The Germans came in to our barracks where we lived and asked people to volunteer. We were scared to go. We didn't have no food, nothing to eat, didn't give us no bread, there was no water anymore. The Russian Army airplanes bombarded all the power stations. There was no electricity no more.

We were hiding. And when the Germans came in, we tried to run away, not to go with them. But, there was one German who came into the gates. We saw him coming. And he was a good German. What I mean by a good German? The reason I mention that because I want to get it in. I went to a school in Virginia and was speaking to kids. The boy asked me if I ever encountered a good German. So I was thinking about this German. So I was repeating that. This good German came in. So everybody put their hand up, take me. Everybody wants to go with him to work. He was good. He was polite. He never beat us. He would say good morning, goodbye, thank you. He was a nice person. Engineer. But this good German pulled a pistol and shot in the crowd and killed a man. Because everyone was running. He got excited. He was scared. He didn't know what happened. He shot a person. Well finding out it wasn't a good German.

I repeat that because this happened at the same time the Germans came in and took us away to Auschwitz, took all the machinery, took all the workers. They figured we would build factories somewhere else. But we wind up in Auschwitz. And I got a burn here, a burn here on my face. It was a crust already. When I got off the train in Auschwitz, the Nazis standing there, there's dogs, helpers, they saw me. There was a young man, a prisoner. He said to me, “Tell them that you are chemist, that you make powder, explosives.” Sure enough, a German officer came over and asked me what happened to me. I said I was working in a munition factory and he put me aside.

So about 30, 40, 50 people were standing aside there. He picked up -- they took us to a gypsy camp where all the gypsies were living. 40,000 gypsies in Auschwitz; women, children, old people. They put us in the barracks in the same gypsy camp, a huge place. The gypsies were selected, older men, healthy men, shipped to Germany. They told the women and children and old people that they were going to build housing for them in Germany. It was a lie. They took all gypsy the same night and killed them all. Happy-go-lucky people. They were cooking, playing accordions. They were good people. Every life taken. A few days later they come to me and everybody else from my barrack. Where did I go? To a coal mine.

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about the coal mine, if you don't mind, you were forced to have surgery while you were in Auschwitz.

>> David Bayer: This happened when I worked in the coal mine.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> David Bayer: I worked in the coal mine. No food. Terrible conditions. The shovel -- it was too heavy to pick up, a hard, big shovel. I was skinny like a spindle. With soup and a piece of bread every day, work in the coal mine. I even picked up the coal, put it in my hand. I couldn't lift the shovel. And they gave us a quota of wagons a day. Impossible to do. Sometimes they didn't let us out. We had to stay over on the other shift.

There was a Nazi, a supervisor, a German; walked around with a walking stick, a copper handle, like a pick handle. He was the one who checked where to drill, where not to drill. He was a murderer. He walked around; if somebody didn't work fast or didn't move, smacked them on the head with the pick handle. Killed a lot of people.

And then a lot of people pretended -- we were starving. We had nothing to eat. A lot of them died. Then they send in a young man from Auschwitz to place this guy, Ruben. Should I talk about Ruben?

>> Bill Benson: Yes.

>> David Bayer: A religious young boy, 16 years old, skinny. He was praying day and night. When you looked at him, he was reciting a psalm. In English, psalm with a p, silent p, psalm. In Yiddish, daven. Tefilah, Hebrew. Well, all the time you look at him he was praying in Hebrew. We called him crazy, mashugana, crazy.

One day, the one who was drilling and putting dynamite was a Pol, a regular guy who worked in a coal mine, a miner. He told us one day -- he said, “When I say move away from the area, don't repeat nothing, just move.” When this German supervisor came in to check the walls, the ceiling and he already had a drill, put the dynamite in. He ignited it and blow up and killed the German. Ruben came over to every one of us and whispered in our ear. “Didn't God help us?” We didn't call him crazy no more.

>> [Laughter]

>> David Bayer: The reason I keep mentioning that, a lot of questions I get from people about God. People want to know my relation with God. Every time I mention about God, I brought up Ruben. Let him have the credit. He believed God helped out because he was praying. He survived the war and lives now in Jerusalem. He's an old man, like I am. He's a little bit younger than me. He was 11 children. I met him about 10 years ago.

>> Bill Benson: Keep going. I'm sorry.

>> David Bayer: That's all right. That's what happened. And then the Russian --

>> Bill Benson: Before you talk about leaving Auschwitz, tell us about the surgery that you were forced to undergo.

>> David Bayer: Every morning when we go to work in our camp to the coal mine, sometimes we had to walk, sometimes they would take us on the train. There was a roll call. Everybody had to call up. We had no name. We had numbers. I had a number. B74 was my number, a tattoo. B74 here. Everybody call. Officer walks around and checks everyone. I was in the front line. Comes in, a German with the stick checking me out. I had an infection and my glands swelled up from the coal, from the dust, from everything else. The minute he saw my glands swollen, took me out and sent me to the clinic. They put me on a table. He cut me to pieces. No anesthetic, no injection, nothing. I was tied up to the table.

Here, here is a document which I will probably give to you. The German doctor who made the operation. They found this in Germany. My name, his name, the whole thing. It is a report. But everybody who was experimented didn't get out alive. The Germans sent them to the gas chamber. How did I survive? Again, lucky.

There was a Polish man who was in the camp with us. He was a political prisoner. He was in the Polish underground. The Germans caught him and sent him to Auschwitz. He was my neighbor from my hometown. I knew him. We played soccer. He was older than I was. His mother worked in the post office, a nice family. He saw me. He yelled out, “Duvtche, Duvtche, they're going to kill you.” In Polish, my name David is Duvtche. So I said, “What do I do?” So he made a pass that I should go back to work. I got out one, two, three. Tied up my

neck and went to the coal mine.
>> Bill Benson: In January 1945, you were brought up out of the coal mines early and forced to go on what's known as a Death March. Tell us what happened when they brought you out of the coal mine.
>> David Bayer: We came back from the mine. We were back to our camp where we lived. They told us to hook up, take whatever you can and march out. We had to march in the snow to Germany. The march was like you see sometimes in the forest, ants and people step on them. That's what the Germans did. Pound, pound, pound. Every five minutes shot because you cannot walk no more. The snow was so high, no food, no nothing. We cannot walk. Frozen to death. Anybody who fall down got killed. And a lot of them couldn't walk no more. They knew they were going to be shot and they fell down purposely. Killed thousands and thousands of people without mercy, without anything.

I went over to a dead body after they got shot. I took his jacket. I asked for forgiveness 10,000 times from him. But he saved my life. He was dead. Somebody had to take his jacket, his clothes. Somebody took his shoes.

It was so cold. The Germans went in the houses to warm up and told us to lie down in the snow. There was one guy who walked with me the whole time, holding my hand, my arm. He went over to a German who was at the car with the hood up. He said, “I'm a mechanic. I will fix your car.” He wasn't a mechanic. He just wanted to go over there to warm up under the hood. He didn't do nothing. The German shot him. He fell right on top -- the German left the car and him and everything else.

Not even in the movies you could see that. Not a cloud of humanity. We didn't go to the main highways because the German Nazis were retrieving with their tanks and trucks and everything else because the Russians were coming. We had to walk in fields, country roads until we reached a place called Blechhammer in Germany, at the German-Polish border. There was a camp there. Russian soldiers, prisoners, all prisoners.

We went into the warehouses. We tried to get food. I went to the warehouse and there was only margarine, stacks and stacks of margarine, tons of margarine. So I took margarine and put it in my shoes, my pants, boxes of margarine. I couldn't even walk. Previous guys took bread and marmalade and everything else.

Then the barbed wire, there was no more electricity. You could easily get out. So Russian prisoners were there, cut the barbed wire and we went and I went with them. I went out. Me, Ruben, and two Russian prisoners went out through the same hole. We fall down -- I don't know how they call it, a hole --
>> Bill Benson: A ditch?
>> David Bayer: Down. The wire. You get out of the wire, you fall down --
>> Bill Benson: A ravine.
>> David Bayer: A ravine. I fall on top of somebody else. We went through the forest. Ruben couldn't walk anymore, was bleeding. He said, "I can't walk." We took him and put him in the barn, a barn on a farm. Me and two Russians went deep into the forest and stayed there for six days and six nights. What did we eat? The margarine. Melted, dirty from my coal dust and everything else. I never took a shower.
>> Bill Benson: It was melted all over your body and your clothes.
>> David Bayer: We were cold like hell. The snow helped a lot. It was snowing all the time. Finally, we didn't know if the Germans were still there or the Russians were there. We came out by the Russians. And the Russian soldiers saw me, picked me up, carried me like I carry

this glass, like a package. I didn't weigh nothing.
>> Bill Benson: You had lost half your body weight.
>> David Bayer: I was 60, maybe 70 kilos. He took me in to a German woman's house and told the German woman to take care of me. The German woman -- there was no man. She was scared to death. She was happy that I was there because she was scared of the Russian soldiers. They were raping women like crazy. The daughter, a daughter but looks dirty and everything else, pretending to be like this. She was bathing me, cooking some soup. I don't remember what it was. She didn't have much anyway. She was crying all the time. She had a husband. He must have got killed or didn't come home or something from the war.

And then I was very anxious to leave. I didn't want to stay there for long. I recuperated for a while. I asked her to show me the way to the main highway. I went back walking to Poland, took trains, trucks. I went back to my hometown which I didn't find nobody. I didn't like to stay in Poland.
>> Bill Benson: When you went back, David, you tried to see if you could recover any of your family's belongings.
>> David Bayer: That's right. Well, I finally reached my hometown. I went to the cemetery. The cemetery was before you reached my hometown, on the same highway. I walked over there and looked for my grandmother's grave. She died in the ghetto. I cried.

There was a farmer that passed by in a wagon. He stopped. He came up a hill and went into the cemetery. There was no gate. He took me and helped me. He took me to his house. He gave me some food. I told him I wanted to go to the person who I left the possessions, some of them.

I went in. They didn't expect me to be alive. So they were very surprised that I am alive. I had nowhere else to go. I stayed there maybe a day or two. Other people came. They started drinking. I didn't like it. I didn't realize, I shouldn't, I took off. I run away and never came back.

But one day I went back there to ask them to give me some of the possessions. He gave me a table, a big -- in Poland -- here they have moving out, moving in tables, nice and small. In Poland -- we had one like this. So this table was sensational. So I sold it and got a few dollars. That's all he gave me.

Then some other survivors came back in an abandoned house. I stayed maybe a month, maybe two. I don't know exactly. To go back to Germany.
>> Bill Benson: You went back to Germany?
>> David Bayer: In Germany, we went to this displaced persons camp. The United Nations opened up this displaced persons camp, tent for people who have nowhere to go. That's where I stayed for a while. It's not far from Munich. Some friends of mine who came back in different directions. I looked for everybody, for family. Nobody. My father had four brothers. My mother had three brothers and she was the only girl. And they were living in different towns. I looked everywhere. I went to Poland, everywhere looking for people. I couldn't find nobody.

Maybe I have some relatives in the United States. My name is Bayer, but in Polish b-a-j-e-r; in English, it would be Bajer. So I put out to keep the same sound. I looked but I couldn't find nobody. So I went to Panama.
>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about Panama, you were two years there. What was life like in the displaced persons camp.
>> David Bayer: Well, there used to be a big military camp the Germans had called

Foehrenwald. Nearby was an air base. They kicked the Germans out. And all the Jewish moved in. Maybe 2,000, maybe 4,000. I don't know how. It was a big city. The U.N. and the United States provided us with milk and honey, so to speak. I was naked. I had the clothes on me, nothing. No documentation. Only my number. The Americans were there. They gave us cigarettes, chocolate. The cigarettes I sold to Germans. I made money from the rations the Germans gave me -- the Americans gave me. I had to get a base of something to exist, not to be a -- I had nothing. I didn't like to carry packages anyway. I wanted to be free.

So after the Americans came in, they gave us everything. You stay here. They gave us medical things. Everything we need, food, housing, clothing. Two years. Two years you take young Jewish men like me who cannot sit still, do nothing. So we did business. We did all kinds of business. We buy a cow from a German and sell it. The Germans didn't receive rations and things like this. Cigarettes, I sold them. I don't smoke. I made money. I made about $10,000 in two years. And this was a lot of money in 1945, 1946, plenty of money. Where did I spend it? In Paris I spent all the money.

>> [Laughter]

>> David Bayer: $10,000.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: So in 1947, you chose to go to Panama. Why Panama?

>> David Bayer: I didn't have no relatives. I had nowhere to go. I could have come to the United States as a refugee but I had time. I said, we'll see; I'm looking for family.

All of a sudden I got a letter from an American Ambassador in Munich that somebody is looking for me. David Bayer, somebody looking for me in Panama. A family who went away to Panama before the war, one of the sons went to school in the defense. Tried to do something to help somebody. Saw me on the list, survivors' list. From Kozienice, named David Bayer. He sent a letter did I want to come. Why not? Where else?

A Russian soldier asked me to go to Moscow. I went to Moscow. I don't like it. I come back. I went all over Europe. Every country in Europe I was. So I went to Panama. I went to Paris, stayed for a while. Then went to Holland. Took a ship from there. I went straight to Aruba, Venezuela, and then Colombia and then Panama.

>> Bill Benson: You told me Panama was the best year of your life.

>> David Bayer: Exactly. I came to Panama city. It was maybe 1,000 Jews. Some Jews from Turkey from Romania. They were all busy making money. You have the climate. Here comes a schlepper like me, a survivor, wants to talk, tell what happened. Later. Later. I went to the Jewish clubs, Jewish places over there. "Tell me later." Want to play cards all the time. Working all day, come to the evening. Play cards. I was bored.

So there was a son of the family, which had a daughter wanted to be married. I didn't want to get married. So I said, "Let's go to Concepcion," a place on the border of Panama, Costa Rica. "What's there?" "There's nothing. We go and make leather over there." "Ok." Good. I go. I have nothing to lose.

I went to the place. On the border, a place called Concepcion. Nice people, primitive Indians. I was making -- with the son, Max, making leather from iguanas, alligators, making moccasin and all kinds of shoes. I was in paradise. I slept in a shack, bathed in the river. The people were so humble and good. I thought this is the best place in the world. They were humble, good people. They were helping me. They were loving me. And I didn't see that. So I said I stay here.

One day the Indians go into town, the capital of the Province. The capital is called

David. Look at the map. Panama, Costa Rica, there's Province and the capital is David. The us Navy had an air base during the war over there. I go there with the shoes and everything else selling this stuff. There was a heavy-set Jew, big guy with a big belly. It was hot like hell over there. He called, “Oh my God, what are you doing here with the Indians? Look at me.” I said, “What? I'm all right.” He said, “Look at me, I am a married, children. This is what is going to happen to you.” I said, “No.” He said, “Why don't you go to Palestine, Israel, become independent?” This was 1948. I said, “No, I'm happy here.” The second time he told me the same thing. I said ok. I go out to Israel. He said there was a ship coming to Panama canal, join the ship; they will give you an assignment. Go to Palestine.

That's what I did. I joined the Israeli Army. I stayed a year and a half in the Israeli Army during the war. Back to Panama. Why did I go back to Panama? There were millions of people coming to Palestine from everywhere else. There was nowhere to sleep. There was no jobs. I slept on a bench in a park after I was discharged from the Army. So the Console says go back; you have a passport, you can go. So I went back. Stayed there until 1955.

>> Bill Benson: And in 1955 is when you came here. What prompted you then to come to the United States?

>> David Bayer: Well, my mother, my father were religious Jews. My mother, when she was shipped away to Treblinka, I was near the canal and I escaped from the canal and was going to join the train. The supervisor pulled me back. He said don't go; they will kill you, this and that. Well, he saved me, actually. If I would go to the train, I would have gone with my family and would never have come back. They would have killed me.

So what happened? After the war when I came back, the first thing I did, I went to the station. I talked to the man in charge at the station which I knew. Then I talked to the people who were selling coal, a friend of mine who went to school with me. I asked him what happened with the people taken on the train. Did you see my father? Did see my mother? He told me. The guy who went to school with me, Philip, good friend of mine. He told me he saw my mother. My mother told him if I'm alive to see me, told me, don't forget you're a Jew, never anything else but Jewish. Children Jewish, in spite of the Germans. If something happened to them, didn't know they would be killed. She yelled out, “Naqam! Naqam!” Yelled out the word for vengeance, which I didn't take vengeance. The vengeance is I have a family, my wife is Jewish. She's an American girl. I have grandchildren, great grandchild, build up a family. I had a good life. I have money. I have everything. And I'm still alive at 92. And if I live maybe to 100, or maybe more, maybe less, I don't know, if I go upstairs, I talk to him. Maybe it will help.

>> Bill Benson: David, I'm going to turn back to David in a few minutes for the last word for today.

>> David Bayer: One more thing. If I would have to tell you every little detail, would never get out of here. Because every day of my life a story.

Before I went to the ghetto, I went to a place where the Germans were having a field kitchen, eating their meal. I took a bucket from the house. My mother didn't know it. I come back, waiting for me. I went there to get leftover from the Germans who didn't like their food. They give us -- a lot of people were waiting, Polish people, women, children. I was the only Jew over there. I was sitting there waiting for the Germans. When I came home, my mother didn't want to eat it. She said it's not kosher.

I went to my grandfather, who was a religious man. He said to my mother, went over, “Take the pork out and eat it.” Because to survive, to live, you eat anything. It's in the

Bible. Don't worry about the things you're supposed to eat. Eat anything you can. Life is more important than the rules.

So many other things that happened. Remember to remind me a few things.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: I have many more to remind you but, in fact, I want to say that David covered the fact that he fought in Israel in about one minute. I can tell you that we could keep you here for two days with David telling about that unbelievable experience of just getting there. That maybe is for some other opportunity.

I want to thank all of you for being here for our first *First Person* program 2015. We will have programs every Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So that means we have a program again tomorrow. Hope you can come back and join us at some future time.

I'm going to turn back to David for his -- it's our tradition that our *First Person* gets the last word. So I'm going to turn back to David for him to have the last word. But I'd like to say two things first. One is when David is done, he's going to stay here because there are so many things he didn't get to tell you. If you want to come up and chat with him, come up to the stage, he'll stay in his seat, chat with him, say hi, take a photograph, that will be fine, too. And before we do that, I would like to, when David is done, Joel will come up on the stage. He's our photographer. He did those amazing photographs at the beginning of the slide presentation. He's going to take a picture of David facing that way so that you're the backdrop. It just is a really nice, nice thing to do. So when David's finished, Joel will come up, take the picture. Then you're invited to come and say hi if you would like to do that.

It's all yours, David.

>> David Bayer: Well, what can I say? Last word? I never have the last word.

>> [Laughter]

>> David Bayer: If I say the last word, I go.

>> Bill Benson: Don't do that. [Laughter]

>> David Bayer: This is my last word.

>> Bill Benson: Ok. Come on, Joel.

[Applause]

[The presentation ended at 12:01 p.m.]