UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON MARTIN WEISS
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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. We are in our 16th year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mr. Marty Weiss, 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. I am pleased to let you know that Mr. Louis Smith is with us today.

[Applause]

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

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

We are excited that today's *First Person* program will be testing live-streaming from the Museum's Twitter page via Periscope. Kai Sabo is in the front row filming our program for this purpose.

Marty 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 him some questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Marty is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

This photograph of Martin Weiss was taken in 1946, the year after his liberation.

Marty was born in the country of Czechoslovakia in a town called Polana in 1929. Czechoslovakia is highlighted on this map of Europe.

In 1939, Germany occupied one half of Czechoslovakia and Hungary the other half. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, conditions in Polana worsened. By April 1944, Martin's family was transported to the Munkacs ghetto. The arrow on this map of Czechoslovakia points to Munkacs.

In May, they were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center where Marty and other family members were chosen for slave labor. The arrow points to the location of Auschwitz. Later Marty and his father were sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. The second arrow points to Mauthausen.

This is a photograph of rocks that were taken out of the quarry by slaves.

Here we see a document that was uncovered only recently in our archives and which was new to Marty even though the document describes him as a prisoner. This document is a Prisoner Registration Card which documents Marty's transfer from Auschwitz on May 21, 1944, to the Mauthausen camp. His prisoner number appears in the upper right-hand corner, where that red circle has appeared, along with the abbreviation Ung-Jude, which is the abbreviation for Hungarian Jew. His name is in the upper left-hand corner, if you can see it, along with his birthday.

After the war Marty moved to the United States. He served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War followed by a successful career in the grocery business. He retired 18 years ago. Marty's wife Joan passed away in 2013. Marty and Joan have two children and four grandchildren. One of their grandchildren just completed law school.

Marty has been a volunteer here in the Museum for the past 16 years. In addition to leading groups of students and FBI agents through the museum, Marty is active with the Speakers Bureau. He has spoken to diverse audiences including at U.S. military bases; such as Fort Buchanan in Puerto Rico and Ft. Sill in Oklahoma, as well as at a prison and colleges such as King's College in Tennessee, as well as at the National Labor Relations Board and the National Security Agency.

In the past two years Marty has traveled at the invitation of the Austrian government to the former Mauthausen concentration camp which is now a Memorial serving as an institute for learning about the Holocaust. Marty was also a contributor to "Echoes of memory," a collection of writings from the survivors writing workshop. After our program Marty will be available to sign copies of "Echoes of memory."

With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Marty Weiss.

[Applause]

Marty, thank you so much for joining us today and for being willing to be our First Person. You have so much to share with us today so we're going to go ahead and get started. You've told me in the past, Marty, about your life in Czechoslovakia as a child before the war. So why don't we start first with you telling us a little bit about your family, your community, and your life before the war began.
>> Martin Weiss: Ok. I came from a small town. Actually, it was a village more than a small town. Let me explain because some of you may not realize Czechoslovakia existed when I was a kid, ok? From World War I -- since World War I, then today, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and our part was the more eastward. The reason I'm explaining is because today that part is Ukraine.

When I was growing up, we considered ourselves very, very fortunate. Why? Because Czechoslovakia was a democracy. I had older brothers and sisters. by the way, I came from a family of nine children. So I had older brothers and sisters. I was number seven, so I had something to look up to.

They were all very, very happy to be living, very conscious of the democracy. I remember when I was in third grade, I already had the grasp of it. We had Czech schools, so we were going to Czech schools. However, the population in our area was mostly Russ. Didn't call them Russian, necessarily but called them Russ. They were a European Russian. They were a little different than the Russians from Russian, let's say. However, the language is still Russian but a different level.

Consequently, when I was very young, I learned to speak Russian immediately because all the kids in the neighborhood were Russian. Like I say, I went to Czech school. I remember our life was pretty good. Don't get me wrong. We worked hard.

By the way, my father had a business and he also had our own farm. So we grew our own food, literally. We were self-sustaining.

So this is basically what my background is. Things were improving. We were looking forward like -- we tried to be more modern. So already we got -- one of my older sisters -- most people didn't go

to high school. We didn't have a high school in town. But there was a big town 10 kilometers away. So my older sisters were already going to high school over there.

And by the way, you have to live with somebody or take a bus every day and so on. So it wasn't that easy. But the point is we were improving from where we were. Ok? Things were just European, old-fashioned.

I had older brothers. When they got older, they didn't want to stay home anymore and work for my father for free so they went to the city to look for a job. So they left. In the meantime, one of my older sisters went to college already in the city, in Munkac, actually. And that was a big deal. Even if I have to say so, she was the only one from the whole town. But because she was older, she was my sister -- she had for me as I was growing up. The reason being, I realized how important education is.

I could go on and on but I'll shift to something else. So this is basically -- like I say, our life was good. We lived well. We didn't go to country clubs or anything like this but we lived well. We had everything we needed and so on.

>> Bill Benson: I was struck when you were saying that you knew what democracy was. You told me not only did you know what democracy was but you had even in grade school a sense of rights. You had rights.

>> Martin Weiss: Right.

>> Bill Benson: The other thing I was going to ask you about is your father had a business, as you said. He had been a veteran of the First World War. Isn't that right?

>> Martin Weiss: Right. Served in the Hungarian Empire, in that Army.

>> Bill Benson: And your family lived in this area for a very, very long time.

>> Martin Weiss: A long time. I don't know how long but a long time.

>> Bill Benson: I think at least several hundred years.

>> Martin Weiss: Probably. I have no way of knowing. In those days you didn't look for -- so far back. All I knew is my grandfather was there, then his children were there. My grandfather died before I was born actually so I didn't know him. But we belonged there. This was our home.

>> Bill Benson: Your home. And, of course, Marty, all of that changed dramatically for you and your family once the Hungarians occupied your part of Czechoslovakia in 1939. Tell us what happened when the Hungarians took over your part of Czechoslovakia.

>> Martin Weiss: Well, when the Hungarians occupied our area, like I mentioned before -- like you mentioned before, Germany took the Czech part and the Hungarians took our part. That was their payment because they joined the Nazis. As soon as they came in, we were concerned because here we knew what we had. And we already knew that they are not like that. Hungary was next door, however they didn't have the democracy. They still had the ancient -- I mean, the old system of aristocracy and so on.

You have to remember, I was 10 years old. And I remember hearing that. I immediately didn't like them. Ok? By us, nobody ruled over you. And I heard that the overlords, or the landlords were big land owners and village people would work for them at their mercy and they paid them whatever they wanted to. And they decided if their kids should go to school or not. When I heard that, I said: Who in the heck are they? You know? I remember really feeling that. So immediately I found reasons not to like them.

Like I say, when they came in the beginning, my father said, well, I guess they're not so bad. I know the Hungarians. They're ok. But then as time went on, like a year or so until they started showing their true colors and all of a sudden we found out that everything was changing. Changed entirely, our whole life changed.

First they closed our schools. Which, by the way, we had to go to Russian schools. Again, I'm rambling too much, but they closed our schools. We have to go to Russian schools, which was fine but -- if they spoke Russian but we can't know the alphabet. So here I was going into fourth grade and I didn't even know the alphabet. Unlike the Czech schools, they were sort of modern already. They were liberated, if you will. They had a system where the teachers were nasty, old-fashioned. They constantly went around hitting everybody. Really. It was like an awakening. They wouldn't even give

us a chance to learn the alphabet. They expected us to learn how to write in Russian. We didn't know how to write in Russian. We knew how to speak it but that was it. So this is at 10, 11 years old. That's a big thing in your life. But this was just the beginning.

So from there on things just got worse. The Hungarians were there for like a year or so. Then the first thing they did, they took away the Jewish businesses and gave it to somebody that was a Nazi corroborator or a Nazi himself. So all the businesses were taken away. They just kept on moving -- every time you turned around, they came up with a new edict.

In the meantime, by 1941 or so, they drafted all the Jewish men of military age into the service. But not into the Army. You have to remember, the Jews were undesirable. We were politically undesirable. We were like just -- like the Nazis, we were not people, we were just Jews. Not only that, but they had a slogan. They never called you the Jew. They called you a "Stinkin' Jew." That was like bacon and eggs. I remember. You were resentful, of course. So that was to start with. In the meantime, we were proud people. My father was a proud man. He didn't take it too well. But you learned to live with whatever you have.

In the meantime, like I said, they inducted all the men, including my two older brothers. Somehow my one older brother, he was actually of age but somehow they missed him so he stays home. They put them into what you call -- now they coined a word for it, labor battalions. What it was, it was slave labor on the Army jurisdiction but they wore civilian clothes. They weren't allowed to touch a weapon or anything like this. They used them for like on the Russian front. My two older brothers ended up -- they used them for burying the dead, digging minefields, those kinds of work.

Another thing they did, they used them from our area all the way to Russia. The Ukraine and Poland. If you look on the map, Ukraine and Poland, all of those areas is all mountains and forests. They had them cut the forest down all the way to Poland and to the Ukraine. Ukraine is a vast country. So they used thousands of these men through this.

Now, why did they want to cut out the trees? Because the partisans could hide in the forest. The trees not existing, they couldn't hide so well. So that's why. So they had this program. That's what they used them for.

Consequently, they were abused. They were not treated very well. But they ended up on the eastern front, on the frontlines. So this just gives you an example.

I'm going to stop there with that line. I'll get back to it later. But I told you that for a reason so you understand a little bit.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, you told me when I first met you -- I was struck by your phrase that you did everything you could to survive but most of it was at night. That things took place in the dark.

>> Martin Weiss: Oh, yeah. At home yet. Yeah. My father was in business, in the meat business. Ok? They took all the licenses from all the Jewish people and gave it to somebody else. Ours they didn't. They left my father with his license. It sounds funny. He was the only one. But what happened, they had a quota how many steers or calfs you were allowed to slaughter. But they wouldn't give us any allotment because we were Jewish. Ok?

However, it sounds funny, but we stayed in business. We were doing business. And even the police -- by the way, they didn't have a policeman like here. The police there were gendarmes and they were not allowed to be married. So they had a cook and a kitchen -- you know, like in their quarters. They were also very nasty. They were like -- a little like state troopers but they were Hungarian.

>> [Laughter]

>> Martin Weiss: I didn't mean --

>> [Laughter]

>> Martin Weiss: I take it back. I didn't mean to compare the state troopers. God forbid.

>> [Laughter]

>> Martin Weiss: No. Some maybe but most were just normal people.

The reason I used state troopers as an example is because they were very, very structured. You know, under strict, strict rules. By the way, they were not allowed to be married, either. So frankly, they were nasty. And they were all Nazis or Nazi sympathizers. But some were not. The reason I'm

telling that -- I find it very comical. We were selling them meat for their kitchen. And we were not allowed to do it.

Since we didn't have any phones in those days, they would send detectives to snoop on us. They wanted to catch us at something. So they used to come around, come in disguise or whatever. So this cook, even though it was quite a distance from us, she would literally run to our house, warn us to be careful. She was sympathetic to us. So just a little nonsense, but, you know.

Anyway, the reason Bill mentioned it, so we had to slaughter our animals the night. When I say at night -- we didn't have electricity, remember. So we had to use candles, most of the time we did. But we had kerosene lamps, like lanterns. I was like 11, 12. My older brother was a very strong, capable guy. And he was able to take literally throw down the steer and tie him up.

By the way, we were kosher. In case you don't know what kosher means, that means -- it's a ritual killing. That means we have a trained person, trained man, that knows how to do it. And the whole idea of kosher killing or slaughtering is that the animal is not supposed to feel the pain. Ok? Now, how could you kill something without pain? It doesn't work. But nevertheless, the knife, they had a special, special knife. When I tell you special, it was so sharp -- it was long -- that if you cut yourself, you wouldn't even feel it. That's how sharp it was.

So I had to hold the candles. And this is by candle light or lantern. He would have to make the incision in a certain spot. God forbid he made a mistake and it wasn't kosher anymore. This is what the rules are, Jewish rules are.

Anyways so after we did all of that, then we have to sell the stuff. Able to sell it in the store, one animal or something. So if you killed two or three, it was ok. Somehow they didn't catch us.

The point of this was -- after we did the killing, we have to get rid of all the evidence. Oh, yeah. So you have to get rid of all the evidence that we slaughtered anything. So between -- by the way, everything had to be done 1:00, 2:00 in the morning. That was the only time our neighbors were asleep. You didn't know whom you could trust. People, even though they were good neighbors, but in a situation like this, you really don't know who for a couple of dollars will go to the police and report you or something. So we really didn't know how to trust people. If you lived among -- if you lived together, we got along. But in the wartime, believe it or not, you can't trust anybody. It's just the way it works. So we had to do this. And by 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, there was no trace left. We made sure everything was gone and hidden.

This is the kind of life we lived. But we were very industrious. My father wouldn't just give up so he did this throughout. So this is how hard life was, actually.

Then they came out with an edict, all the Jews have to wear the yellow star. Ok? By that time everybody got cocky and nastier because they already had a license -- they didn't have to treat you nice anymore.

This went on and on. As things went on, it was worse. But in the meantime, by now, by `42, `41, `42, late `41, `42, they kept on hearing atrocities in the eastern part of Europe. Like in the Ukraine, Poland. Then we heard of the Polish ghetto.

By the way we lived not far from Poland. So we heard everything -- there were no newspapers or radios. This is by grapevine. Just came through from people escaping or whatever. So that's when we first heard of the atrocities, something like this. We kept hearing about atrocities. More and more, and more vivid.

In fact, one I remember like in the Warsaw Ghetto -- the Warsaw Ghetto was big. They had a lot of people there. Poland had like 3.5 million Jews so they had a lot of people to put in the ghetto. Then they would put people on a truck and pipe in exhaust to the back of the truck and ride around until they died.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, you and your family remained in these circumstances you've described and much else that you have not been able to describe until 1944. You told me that by 1944 that you knew that, quote, sooner or later you would be arrested.

>> Martin Weiss: Oh, yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother wanted to be prepared for that. Tell us what you did or what your mother did to try to prepare for that possibility.
>> Martin Weiss: Actually as early as 1943 already. They actually took some people from our area and they did pick them up and shipped them out to the Ukraine rather earlier, about the beginning of `43, I believe. So we figured our number is going to come up sooner or later. But for the time being we were left alone. But there were always rumors they were going to arrest us.

So one time, the rumors were very, very strong rumors. So we were preparing. We had a big family. I had two younger sisters. I had two older sisters. So we prepared food that would withstand, have something to take with us.

One of the things I remember she made is honey cookies. They were like oatmeal cookies but made with honey. You ask yourself why honey. Well, the reason she used honey instead of sugar is if you use honey in the cookies, they could last for a long time. They don't spoil. So we had a lot of cookies. A lot of cookies! [Laughter]

It turned out it was a hoax. We were not arrested. So we had to laugh about it. Here we were sure they were going pick us up. And here it was sort of like, gee, we did this for nothing. But nevertheless -- it's funny.
>> Bill Benson: Marty, did your family consider at any point trying to go into hiding?
>> Martin Weiss: Yes. We did a lot because my father wasn't the kind just to give up. But there was no place to hide. We were not on a position -- nobody had enough money to do anything, God knows what. Plus we lived in a police state.

So in a police state, you may not realize -- we should today, about the government listening to the phones and all of that stuff. Well, in a police state you can't go from here to there without getting stopped for papers or whatever. Everything you do somebody's watching you. You didn't even have to be guilty. They would just taking now questioning and beat the daylight, give you the third degree. This was the norm. Ok?

So it was -- thought about going into hiding. For a while my father would say my brother and I and he should go into hiding. But then we realized to leave my mother with my younger sisters and so on, so we decided not to. But we were tempted to do it. But it was not like in the states where you could go from one state to another. We didn't live in that kind. First of all, we didn't have mobility. We didn't have enough money and so on. So who do you separate? Whom do you sacrifice?
So we decided not to go.

Although -- actually, we were really serious about going into the forest. Again, even the forest we wouldn't be safe because the peasants would see us. By the way, the peasants were Russian. They didn't like the Hungarians any more than we did because the Hungarians looked down at them as inferior. They didn't like us because we were Jews but they didn't like them because they thought they were stupid, actually. Just like the Germans. They felt they were upper class, upper people, upper human beings and the others were just plain inferior people. They had no problem doing anything they wanted to them. So they were not treated very well either but they were not discriminated against them because there were too many. There was a whole area.

So but in the same time, in spite of that, we could never know whom we could trust. You just couldn't trust them. It's just that simple. Because like I say, for a dollar they would give away their mother probably or something. So we really didn't know. So we stayed at home.
>> Bill Benson: You stayed together.
>> Martin Weiss: Together, right.
>> Bill Benson: In 1944, Marty, your family was then forced into a ghetto. You weren't there very long. Tell us what happened from there.
>> Martin Weiss: Well, we were forced into a ghetto. Actually, it was a brick factory. They had two, three of them in the city. Each one of them was filled up immediately. They took us to the ghetto, in the brick factory, like I say. They put us like a barn, where they kept the bricks. You could see daylight through the boards. The ground was dirt. So it was raining, spring of the year. So we laid in the mud.

We got up in the morning, in the wet. We had no place to change. We took along clothes, dishes, family needs and so on.

But you know, when you see your parents, your mother in particular -- excuse me. It's hurtful. But more than that, over there, in the ghetto, I don't even remember how we survived there. I don't remember getting food or anything like this. Somehow we did. We were only there a short time. I think if I remember about five weeks, which is -- all ghettos existed for a long time, like in Poland and Lithuania.

After about five weeks, they brought in boxcars, railroad tracks, and they put us on a train. At that time -- like in our car there was 125 people in the boxcar. You have to remember there were a lot of old people, a lot of young people in our society. In our society -- like I told you, I came from a family of nine. Some people had 12 children. Some had six or three. But everybody had small children. Everybody had. They packed us into the boxcar. That was our trip to Auschwitz.

Now, until then it was all done by the Hungarians. Now the Hungarians, when they put us in the boxcar, they turned us over to the SS. Now, to show you -- what I'm going to try to impress upon you one thing that always impressed me then and still does. People were mean. You could never believe that human beings could be so mean and nasty to other human beings.

I'll give one demonstration. There was one SS man, an officer, walking through a ghetto. For something to do, there was this young fellow there. He must have been 19, 20 years old. He was sort of like retarded. He was also spectically blind. He had glasses with grooves in it. He was slow mentally. He saw him. He just took out his pistol and started shooting around, wanting him to dance. I remember, I saw that and it made such an impression on me.

>> Bill Benson: And you're like 14, 15 years of age.

>> Martin Weiss: Yeah, by that time 14, 15. yeah. I don't know how human beings should do this. He was doing his job. He was an officer. He was Gestapo, whatever. But why would you do that? This is the kind of humility you were up against.

So they put us in a boxcar. And the way, the Hungarians, not the Germans, picked up 450,000 people at that particular time. There were more before and more after but not in a mass like this. Two months, they shipped out 450,000 people to Auschwitz. The Hungarians did that. The reason I give them a lot of credit what they did is because you look at the history books today, there's not one mention, not one mention in there, a history in Hungary or history of the world that the Hungarians ever did anything. They were victims. They were victims of Nazis, victims of Russia. If you read the Hungarian history, that's how their history reads.

In fact, I'll give you another little thing that nobody talks about. I told you we came from Czechoslovakia. Slovakia was just another state. We were a first state. Right? Slovakia had 73,000 Jewish population, 73,000. The Slovaks, instead of being occupied by the Nazis like the Czech was, the Slovaks declared their own independence and they joined the Nazis. Ok?

By this time the Germans were already into Ukraine and Russia, which is next door. They asked -- I found out just recently, by the way. I didn't know that before. They asked the Germans to take the Jews. And they were the first ones out of our area that were actually arrested and shipped out. 73,000 people, I found out just lately, actually, the numbers, 3,000 people survived. Ok?

>> Bill Benson: So, Marty, you were telling us that you were put in a boxcar and you went with your family to Auschwitz.

>> Martin Weiss: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Can you tell us a little about what that was like when you got there?

>> Martin Weiss: First of all, in the boxcar itself -- you have to remember, 125 people in the boxcar with bundles, old people. No food. No water. The only thing -- we were traveling to Poland. We didn't know, by the way, where we were going. We knew we were in big trouble. We heard of the atrocities in Poland and Ukraine by now. We heard all kinds of stories.

So we came to Poland. The train stopped at the stations because the trains in those days needed to get water for the locomotives or something, for the steam. Anyway, so we saw we were in Poland because we saw through the opening of the door the signs. I remember I saw a Polish city and

so on. We wanted water. We were screaming for water. Nobody would give you a drop of water. We heard people go by and talk but nobody would even make an attempt.

Finally, we came to Auschwitz. It just happened in our case we came during the night. You have to remember, we never heard of Auschwitz, we never heard of gas killings. We heard of mass killings and shootings and stuff which was bad enough. But we came to Auschwitz. We came during the night. I think it was around midnight. The train stopped. As soon as they opened up the doors, they started screaming. There were these people in uniforms -- striped uniforms, which were prisoners which we didn't know because they acted nasty. And the reason they acted nasty, that was their job. If they didn't do it, they would shoot them or whatever. But they would have to act like that. But we didn't know that.

The boxcars are pretty high for a civilian or for children, old people, to jump down. They're really high even for a grown-up. They screamed get out, fast, fast. And finally we were off the train. The first thing -- the perimeter was surround with flood lights because it was during the night. And not only were we surrounded by flood lights but all of a sudden there were guards. Every four, five feet there were guards with a rifle and their finger literally on the trigger. For the life of me I didn't know why they needed it. I found out later we were in the camp, inside Birkenau, actually, which was part of Auschwitz. The fences were electrified. But the fact that we were faced with that would give you even more fear. Plus everybody was screaming.

In the meantime, everybody was holding their children, to each other, not to be separated. On top of it, they have dogs, nasty, nasty, killer dogs. They were -- you just look at their teeth growling. They were ready to tear anybody apart. There were several dogs around the perimeter. That was our welcome to Auschwitz.

Let me put it this way. Essentially if there is hell or bedlam, I don't think you could ever -- I don't think you could ever picture a scene that I'm talking about.

Now, no sooner we were down on the ground they separated the men from the women. There was an officer standing in polished boots, very sharp. A real sharp-looking uniform, tailor-made and so on. You would have to go through the line.

Now, what do you call it, the men, like I say, were separated from the women. The women and the children and all were to a different line. The older people also, all of them went to one side. Now, we knew -- on the train we were talking that they expect everybody to work. However, women and children can't work or the old people can't work. So we realized -- the rumor -- again, there was rumor. Nobody told us. The people that work, labor, would be able to feed their families that would be a tradeoff. So we were a little comforted by the rumor. And it was just a rumor by the way.

Before we got off the train -- I was not a big kid. I was about 14, 15, actually. 14, 15. I put on a couple of extra jackets before I got off the train. So my father went through, my brother. And I passed. I didn't know I was so lucky until a couple of days -- actually, until the following morning I found out that almost all the kids I went to school were did not. Actually, in terms of my date of birth, I was the only one born on my year from the boys that came back from my town.

>> Bill Benson: You had put on the extra clothes to look bigger and older.

>> Martin Weiss: To look bigger. And it worked. That's the only reason. I could never understand. Some of the other kids were as big as I was. Ok? But evidently they didn't do that. So I attribute it to that.

Anyway, we went through the selection. They did the same thing with the women. Like I say, the women, the children and so on, they were to the other side.

In the meantime, we went through showers, real showers. We had to shed our clothes, leave them behind. We came out on the other side and they gave us those striped uniforms that you see in the pictures. They gave us a shirt, a pair of shorts, and those clothes. The problem with that was in Eastern Europe, even though it was the spring, they marched us off to the barracks and we had wooden shoes. They took away our shoes, too.

They came up to the barrack and by this time it was dawn. Must have been like 4:00 in the morning or so. We came up to the barracks, which was a few hundred yards away -- yeah, someplace

in the area not too far. Again, they wouldn't let us into the barrack right away. It looked like we were -- a dreary, dreary scene. It was misty, rainy -- not quite rain but sort of like a mist with a fine rain. Most of all, we saw the big chimneys from the crematoriums. Before that we never heard of crematoriums where we came from. We just didn't know it existed. And here are these big chimneys all the way into the sky with black smoke coming out. But more than that, you smelled flesh burning, literally like a barbecue. We couldn't make out what was going on.

So in the meantime, it was very cold, really freezingly cold. It was the spring. The reason I'm telling you this because later I'll come back to it. And you could see like instead of snow you had soot from the chimneys, like black flakes coming down. This was our experience the first morning there in Auschwitz.

Meanwhile, not far from us, a few hundred yards away from us, we saw this huge fire. It was like the length of a football field. It was under the pine trees. The flames was going high, almost to the top to the trees. That's how high the flames were. One of the kapos came around and he told us -- we asked him what this fire was. He says: See this fire? Those are your families already being burned. Now, why did they do it? The crematoriums, they had about five or six cream forums. I don't remember if it was final or six but definitely five. They were so overtaxed they couldn't handle the volume that they used the fires to get rid of the rest of the people. Again, I didn't know that then.

So in the meantime, once we found that out, you can just imagine how we felt. I don't remember -- I was young. I don't remember even crying. It was just stunned. We realized we were in a different world. You know, like all of a sudden you just sense it. Again, I didn't know that before but I know it now because the Museum does research. But we came to Auschwitz because they had so many people coming, so many trains coming every day, they couldn't handle volumes. But the killing rate was 10,000 to 12,000 people a day. This was round-the-clock, 10,000 to 12,000 people. Ok?

To show you the ghoulishness -- again, I knew this from the Museum. I didn't know that before. They burned the people in this ditch. They figured out mathematically -- they were German. They were very civilized, very learned. Ok? They figured out that by using a certain amount of flammable fluids -- like I say, I know that now because -- I hope you don't think I was that smart to figure it out. They figured out by using a certain amount of flammable fluids and the body fat from the people, they could literally eliminate so many people a day. When I heard that, I don't know what to say after that.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, when did you realize that you had lost your mother and your sisters?

>> Martin Weiss: The next morning. Yeah. My two younger sisters and my mother, immediately. Like I say -- my father -- my brother and me survived. We were in this group. He was immediately separated. He was taken someplace else. So we never saw him again.

He, by the way, never showed up after the war. I understand -- he was a very strong guy, very capable. He lived right to the very end. He was liberated. He disappeared. Just something happened to him.

In the meantime -- what was I going to say? I just lost my train of thought.

We were put into the barracks. Again, we had to stand outside in the cold. It was so cold and miserable. We were shivering. So 15, 20 of us would have to get together just to keep our bodies warm. They wouldn't let us stay in the barracks at all. It had to be empty in the morning. Go in at night.

They had all kinds of things to do, anything to make you miserable. This is something I will never get over it. People could do their job or whatever but -- that's another thing that bothers me all the time. It still does. They enjoyed it. Ok? This is something as a human being, I'm sorry, I still can't help it.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, you, your father, two of your sisters and your brother were selected for slave labor. You weren't in Auschwitz for long. You were --

>> Martin Weiss: No. I was in Auschwitz a very short time.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit.

>> Martin Weiss: I was in Auschwitz a very short time. They shipped us out right away. They put us on a train. To show you the difference, this time they put 50 people in a boxcar not 125. We didn't have bundles. We had nothing. We had to sit cross-legged. We were not allowed to move. We were not allowed to whisper to each other. There were two guards in each boxcar. Again, I don't know why because the boxcars were locked. All they left was a little bit for the air.

By the way, once we went through this experience, every place we went, we moved, we were told the next place they were going to killing us. We were just resigned that they were going to kill us. Then we started to reason, well, if they wanted to kill us, they could have gone here. Why would they take us there? It's funny how your brain works. At the time it's very serious. Let's put it this way. Now it sounds almost funny but it wasn't.

So we came -- we were going westward this time. The reason we knew we were going westward is because we came to Austria. And the train stopped right on the Danube. Then we said to each other: A-ha, they are going to throw us into the Danube. Why? Because in Hungary, believe it or not, the Hungarian police were throwing women and children into the river. And we also heard they were doing it in the Ukraine. Ok? It wasn't the Germans doing it in Hungary. The Hungarian police and the Army were throwing in women and children on a daily basis, in `44 and `45, the beginning of `45, until the Russians came.

You look, again, nobody ever blamed the Hungarians for anything. And I'll even go something outside a little bit. All the countries that were corroborators with the Nazis, in Europe, today guess what party is getting stronger and stronger. All of those countries, not one of them admitted they ever did anything. And the so-called Nazi Party -- they call them something else now -- are gaining more ground now than they ever did before. Hatred of different people. It doesn't have to be Jews. There are not too many Jews left there. It's right back where it started. Ok? Today. They belong to NATO. The E.U., all of that stuff.

>> Bill Benson: You were sent to Mauthausen first. What was it like in Mauthausen?

>> Martin Weiss: By the way, terrified as we came to Mauthausen. Again, we came alongside -- the train stopped alongside this huge mountain. It turned out later we found out it was a stone quarry. They marched us up to the top of the mountain. Here is this big, big gate, like a fortress. They had rocks. They mined the rocks. So the whole camp was built from that. So the front of Mauthausen, walls literally from like the ancient -- like in English literature, you know, the castles, some of the big gates. Just literally made the same, like ancient.

We walked in -- we were marched into Mauthausen. By the way, instead of being cold and miserable, it was very sunny and hot on top of the mountain. Again, we have to stand outside all day.

Here we finally realized where the concentration camp was. We were processed. Again, we didn't stay in Mauthausen too long. They processed us and shipped out very shortly to another camp called Melk.

Now, Mauthausen was a very huge camp. By the way, it's still there. Now it's a memorial. Mauthausen had lots of subcamps. They all had a different amount of people. Where I was, it was about 13,000 population. Some places were maybe 300. Some places were 4,000 depending on what kind of work you were doing, what you were assigned to. That's why they had so many.

Now, I was told after the war there was like 40 of the subcamps. Again, they do research. The Museum is up to about 90 that they had. We didn't know about it. Some of them probably were small.

Mauthausen, the people that were stationed in Mauthausen, the death rate was constant. Why? They work them in what do you call it, cutting out the rock. But not with machines or equipment. They had literally manual labor, picks and shovels.

Mauthausen was also -- so far talking about the Jews. People who were gassed were Jews. Nobody else. Although wait a minute. I'll clarify that. Roma gypsies also. But not all of them. The sick ones, so on, the ones that looked already like they were going to die. They would take them in. But primarily they were also starved to death most of the time.

The people that were in Mauthausen, Mauthausen was a camp of equal opportunity, if you will. They had lots of Pols, Ukrainians, Russians, Russian POWs. They had Greeks, Italians. You name it. They were represented. Anyplace the Germans had occupation they were there. We all were treated the same. Everybody was just another prisoner. Ok? There was no distinction.

So this was like a new awakening. Now, when we were shipped out to Melk and Melk was a camp -- our job was to dig under the big mountain. That was hard labor. But the people in Mauthausen -- by the way, political prisoners. Actually, we were all considered politicals. We all had markings why you were there. However, in Mauthausen and in Melk, a lot of people were -- yeah, they were Germans, too. Some were political. But there was a lot of Germans that were not political but were in for civil crimes like murder, rape, robbery, embezzlement, whatever. So they were there for different reasons. And usually the Germans, because they spoke the language, they became the kapos. So some of them obviously were very nasty, very bad. But we had one guy, he was in this for murder, and he turned out, in hindsight, I don't think he was that bad.

As soon as I came, I learned the mechanism -- how can I put it? How to -- I decided off hand -- he introduced himself to us. I'm never going to be standing at the end of the line or the front of the line. I'll be someplace in the back. Nobody should notice me. Then I went into the line, I made sure I was always someplace where I was not very exposed. Because then they would single you out for something.

>> Bill Benson: Our time is growing short now. Tell us -- you mentioned that you were forced to tunnel -- build tunnels at Melk. There was extremely hard, dangerous work. Say a little bit about what you were forced to do.

>> Martin Weiss: Needless to say, again, it was all manual labor. We were digging tunnels. Working hard would be putting it mildly. We had to do everything manually. That means we had to dig with picks and shovels into the mountain, into the limestone, whatever it was. We did have, though, air hammers that were able to dig deeper. So we used air hammers. And then we also used dynamite, like a long drill. You had to push in the dynamite. Some blown up. I didn't do that but I was there. This is the kind of work you did.

Then to mix the cement, literally we had to carry the cement bags, which, by the way, were heavy, especially at my age. I was not that big. Plus -- oh one thing I will say. The food. We were always starving, always hungry. Very hard work when you're always starving and hungry. I'm not talking hungry. I'm talking starving.

But to mix the cement we had to, what do you call it, use actually underground, take a shovel with gravel and sand and mix it. Then somebody would pick up the pale of -- you see the dumbbells in the gym; you think they're heavy. Forget it. That's heavy. They had like little boards set up like platforms. You had to hand it to the next guy up, on top, until somebody pours it into the wall.

Believe it or not, in a year, less than a year, actually, we built seven tunnels, 13,000 population. So the work was very hard. Like I say, we were starving all the time. Consequently, we had a death rate, especially in the quota, rather -- the 13,000, every single month because so many Hungarian new arrivals, they were able to ask -- they had to keep the workforce up to a certain level. So they brought in 3,000 people to replace the people that perished. Not because somebody gassed them or -- they just -- if they were sick, they went to a infirmary and never came out. No matter what it was, once you went into the infirmary, you were finished. So nobody wanted to go to the infirmary, obviously.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, you would continue there until almost the end of the war when I think then you were sent to yet another camp, Gunskirchen.

>> Martin Weiss: Right. Back to Mauthausen. Because the Russians were coming in from the east and so on. We came back to Mauthausen. The first thing they did is they separated out the Jewish population from the rest. Then I said to myself: Ah!, Ok, now they're going to kill us. Why would they separate us?

Before they were treating us alike. So they took us out of the main camp and put us alongside of the mountain. This mountain had all thorn bushes, very neglected area. It was like something for

goats but not for people. You couldn't even lay down. And by now we were not getting any food. But what we did get -- if you were strong enough to stand in line. That time people looked more like zombies than people.

By the way, the bread was made mostly from sawdust. Then they tried to cut it. The whole thing literally crumbled like bread crumbs, like you buy a box of bread crumbs in the supermarket. You had to hold out your palm of your hand. The guy would take a ladle and put some of the stuff in your hand. I still remember you looked at it, it had piece of mildew like the size of a green pea, green, blue, white, literally piece of mildew. And guess what. You ate it.

Lo and behold, we figured they aren't going to shoot us now. Why? Again. Back to the same thing. Why would they have separated us? One day, lo and behold, they tell us we are going on a march. Again, rumor. That they're going to take us to the Swiss border, and the allies are going to give them trucks in exchange for us. Now, that stupid I was not. I said: Uh-huh, somebody will ask for a basket case. Who in the heck is going to give a truck for us, especially for your enemy?

So we were on a march. Somehow or other I felt a little better that we were on a march. I don't know why. I had a certain lift. By that time I was separated. Before I was with a cousin. By the way, my father died in Melk from exhaustion, pneumonia, I think. So I was alone. We marched.

The problem with the march was everybody was in very poor shape. So when we came, what do you call it -- a person fell down. The guard would just shoot them right there on the spot.

Now, just incident about the inhumanity of man. We were on a country road. There was a potato on the ground, one single potato. One of the fellows saw it so he jumped for it. Another fellow saw the same potato and jumped as well. So they started fighting over the potato. And do you know something? As we saw the fighting, the guard just picked up his rifle and shot one right in the face. Just like that. Over the potato. It's something that you can't imagine that other people could do this.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, 70 years ago, just a few weeks ago, you were liberated in May 1945. Tell us about your liberation.

>> Martin Weiss: Ok, liberation. Liberation in Gunskirchen -- again, we expected to be killed. We knew the war was over for all purposes. Again, the rumor that they were going to exchange us.

Anyway, Gunskirchen turned out to be worst than we ever had before. I don't know how but that's what happened. It was like people were just walking out like literally the walking dead. But there were also a lot of people there from the Hungarian labor battalions. Now, how did they get there? Well, the Hungarians were retreating. Instead of leaving you in Hungary, figured the war is over, let them go home or you go home, the Hungarians brought them into Gunskirchen.

So when I came there, there were a lot of people from Hungary. Some of them from our area. Most of them actually were from our area. And guess who I ran into as soon as I got there? Talk about God guiding you. My cousin. I was with his brother in Melk. We got separated when we were evacuated. Here I run into his brother. He came from Hungary. He had a couple of buddies. They were in pretty good shape compared to us. But they only had a few barracks there. At night -- all day we stand outside. At night we go in. 5,000 men in a barrack. Now, think, 5,000 men in a barrack. When you walked in, they locked the door. You could not move. You were standing. That's just how you spent your night.

In the morning you had to go outside. Here things are so bad already that people were literally falling down. I could give you more and more but it would just be one quick incident. There was puddles. It was spring of the year. There were some inadvertently walked into a puddle of water. It wasn't deep by any means but they would fall down in the middle of the puddle. We would walk by and they would go like this, reach out. By the way, their eyes were not even open anymore because they were in such bad shape. They would reach for help. Guess what. Didn't help them.

Why do you think we did that? Because at that stage we figured it was better off to leave them a little while, 10, 20 minutes, and he'll be finished. He wouldn't have to go on. We knew he was not going to make it anyway. So we figured we would shorten -- do them a favor to leave them alone.

From there, one day we find out there were guards taking off. Somebody said the Americans were there but we didn't see any Americans. So we were careful. We didn't want to walk out. We

thought it was a trick; we would go out the gate and machine guns waiting for us. We were so resigned that they would kill us. Ok? So we stayed an extra night believe it or not. I'm with my cousins and friends. I'm looking for food.

I'll jump because of the time. We came into this field. We saw this Army truck in a ditch. We investigated. We saw this tub of lard on the front street of the truck. We got very excited. It had something to do with food. What are we going to do with lard I don't know. But one of the guys, they were in fairly good shape yet. The one from Hungary, he took his fist and right through. The glass fell into the lard.

So meantime, we took the lard on the grass, scooped out the -- you know, cleaned it up and saved the lard. Then we looked in the back of the truck and found leather hide. They were refined already, ready for use. We got really excited why? Didn't have shoes, nothing. We knew there wouldn't be any shoes because after the war there wouldn't be anything. So we were excited. Going to go to a shoemaker and he'll make us shoes.

Now, in Europe, the shoemakers know how to make shoes from scratch. When I was a kid, we used to have our boots made like that. So we got excited. We have rolled up whatever we could carry, which wasn't that many. I was very weak.

We saw a farmhouse not far away. We marched up to the farmhouse. Before we get to the farmhouse -- I'll tell you this. I'll speak for myself. I was so hateful, angry, full of vengeance. I really if somebody gave me a pistol to see if the guy was German, I don't care who he was, I would shoot him or I think I could.

However, we got to the farmhouse. This still bothers me in a way. We came to the farmhouse. Mind you, we had every right to be angry. They were not quite as angry as I was because their experience was not quite the same as mine was. They still didn't know what we went through. They didn't experience that. We knocked on the door. We didn't barge in. And the lady came to the door. She was home alone. She came to the door. And she just opened the door a little bit. And all I could see -- I was short so I could see just her face. She asked the fellows what did we want. So he asked for some legs, flour and water. She went to the back of the kitchen, came back to the door and gave it to us. She had a barn in the backyard. Went to the backyard. There was one of those iron kettles that they used to heat water for the cows. Made a fire under it. We heated up the water. One of the guys mixed up the mixture. And we used the lard for that, too. We had dumplings. That was our first meal.

Let me tell you something, luckily I ate only a certain amount. You have to remember, when you're hungry, you don't ask. If there's a horse in front of you, you eat the whole horse not half. That's how you feel at the time. But I had a certain sort of sense or something that told me not to overdo it. I was fine. One of the guys met an uncle of his and he was older, about 50. He was considered old. He ate too much and a day or two later he died. Then I found out thousands of people died when the Americans and British started feeding the people before they found out what killed them, they found out because they were suffering from malnutrition and they couldn't hold the food.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, I was glad that you mentioned the rage that you had because you didn't act on it. And that was something you shared with me. Once you were liberated --

>> Martin Weiss: The one thing I want to point out. The rage, the reason I mentioned rage. After we finished eating, you know what happened? One of the fellows suggested each one take some of the hides and give it to the lady. Not one of us objected. We just did exactly that. We went back to the door, gave it to the lady and thanked her. Never entered the house.

You know something? I was speaking for the Museum for several years before I remembered this. Now I always like to include it. And I'll tell you something. To this day I cannot understand that we acted the way we did. Really, the reason I explain to you how full of rage I was that in spite of that, our upbringing clicked in. And the only reason I'm proud we acted that way; I didn't feel human but I still acted like a human being. Stuff like that.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, I think our audience -- you know we just got from Marty just a glimpse, just a glimpse. He covered years and things unimaginable in a short time. So I wish we had more time to

hear more from Marty. And also about what happened next. Came to the United States in 1946 and built a new life, a family. I wish we could spend time with you today on that and we can't.

I want to thank all of you for being here. I'm going to do a couple of things before we end. One is I'll thank all of you and remind you that we have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So I hope you might have the opportunity to return.

Marty, as I mentioned earlier, contributes to the museum's writing project for survivors. So he will leave the stage when we're done and he will go -- I'd like to get him up the aisle here. He'll be available to sign copies of "Echoes of memory." We didn't have a chance for questions and answers of Marty, so that's an opportunity also to chat with Marty once he's up there, if you wouldn't mind that.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our first person gets the last word. So I'm going to turn back to Marty to close our program. But first I want to say that our photographer, Joel, is going to -- when Marty's done, he's going to come up on the stage. I'm going to ask you all to stand because he's going to take a photograph of Marty with you as the background. It's just a terrific photograph of Marty and you. So we'll ask him to do that once Marty's done.

I thank you all for being here.

Marty?

>> Martin Weiss: Thank you. Thank you, Bill.

I have the last word. I would like to say just a couple of things -- a couple of lines.

In closing, I would like to call attention to the massacre of those nine people in South Carolina. The killer of those nine innocent people, just because of hate. He had to learn that somewhere, either from his family or his culture, in the neighborhood. And that saddens me. At the same time, I would like to call your attention to the students I speak to about prejudice and hate and the Holocaust all over the country and find them compassionate and caring. Therefore I see the good side of our young people and have much hope that the majority of our citizens will persevere against the hatred and prejudice of the past.

Thank you very much for coming.

[Applause]