

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON MANNY MANDEL

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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. Manny Mandel, 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 Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation and the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

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

Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater when we finish our program. In doing so you will also receive an electronic copy of Manny Mandel's biography so you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Manny will share with us his First Person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows at the end of our program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Manny a few questions.

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

Manny was born to a religious Jewish family on May 8, 1936 in Riga, Latvia. Manny was just 3 when World War II started. Although he was born in Riga, Latvia, Manny's family were Hungarian. They had moved briefly to Latvia because of his father's work.

Here we see a portrait of Yehuda and Ella Mandel holding their infant son, Manny.

Shortly after Manny's birth, his father accepted a post as a chief cantor in Budapest, and the family returned to Hungary, where they had lived before 1933. Hungary is highlighted on this map of Europe. Budapest is highlighted on this map of Hungary.

Manny's father was based at the renowned Rombach Synagogue. In this picture we see Manny and his father on a street in Budapest.

The Hungarian government passed anti-Jewish laws beginning in 1938. In 1940 Hungary joined the Axis Alliance and in 1941 Hungarian troops participated alongside German troops in the

invasion of the Soviet Union. The war and restrictions made life for Jews in Hungary increasingly difficult.

The photo on the left shows Manny outside his apartment on his first day of school in 1942 in Budapest. On the right we see a contemporary photo of Manny standing outside the same apartment.

German forces occupied Hungary in March of 1944 and Manny and his mother were fortunate to be in a program in which Jews were transported to Palestine in exchange for trucks. Within months they were transported by the Nazis to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Hannover, Germany, in preparation for the departure from Europe. This is an historical photo of Bergen-Belsen.

Negotiations for the transport broke down and about six months before the end of the war Manny and his mother were released from Bergen-Belsen and transported to safety in neutral Switzerland. There they stayed at the Heiden Children's Home, pictured here, where Ella worked as a teacher. Manny is lying down in the front, on your left, and his mother Ella is standing in the back in the middle.

After the war Manny and his mother reunited with his father in Israel. They subsequently emigrated to the United States and lived in Philadelphia. Manny is a graduate of Temple University and did his graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a clinical social worker. He met his future wife Adrienne in Philadelphia and they were married in 1958. They have been married 57 years.

After working for the B'Nai B'Rith youth organization, Manny and Adrienne moved to Washington, D.C., where Manny became the National Program Director for the B'Nai B'Rith youth organization. He would later go to work for the Peace Corps before beginning his own psychotherapy practice in 1980. Manny retired from his practice this past November.

Adrienne's many accomplishments include having served in the Maryland legislature as an elected member of the House of Delegates. She is Chair of the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, the nation's eighth largest water and waste water utility.

Manny and Adrienne live in Silver Spring, Maryland. They have two children and three grandchildren. Their daughter Lisa has a 26-year-old son Zachary who graduated from the University of Maryland and a 23-year-old daughter Gabrielle who graduated from the University of Michigan and is a graduate student at John Jay, university in New York. Manny and Adrienne's son David has a soon-to-be 18-year-old daughter Alexandra who has been at the summer Bolshoi Ballet Program. She will attend George Washington University this fall.

I'm pleased to say Manny's daughter Lisa, granddaughter Alexandra and her mother Judy, cousins Alex and Chana from Israel, along with a long-time colleague, Shane McCarthy, are here today with Manny and are all seated here in the front row.

[Applause]

Manny speaks regularly about his Holocaust experience in various settings such as schools and synagogues. He volunteers at the museum and leads tours about genocide in the Learning Center where you will find him most weeks.

Manny celebrated his 79th birthday May 8. He may say a bit about the significance of that date a little bit later.

With that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person Mr. Manny Mandel.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Manny, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be with us as our First Person today. Those two lights will remain but we'll try not to look at those. I'm glad you have family members and friends here with you today.

Manny, you were born in Riga, Latvia, in 1936 but your family stayed there and certainly yours was a short one before you moved to Budapest, Hungary. War began in Europe when Germany invaded Poland when you were 3 years old. Before we turn to the war years, let's start with you telling us about your family, why your parents were in Budapest in the years leading up to the start of World War II and the Holocaust.

>> Manny Mandel: Well, my parents are both ethnically Hungarian. My father from eastern Hungary which you might know particularly as the home base of one Count Dracula, namely Transylvania. My

mother is from southern Hungary which then later became that which we used to know as the former Yugoslavia. It is all formers because countries have changed. The ethnicity was Hungarian.

My father wanted a job in Budapest. Because of certain conditions and some of the, what was called, Numerus Clausus, the Hungarian Nazi laws, he had a difficult time getting working papers in Hungary because he had served in the Czech Army. Now, understand he's born in a village in Hungary. It becomes Czechoslovakia after the First World War. Through no fault of his own it is now the Ukraine. So as a Czech citizen, because he was in the Army, he couldn't get papers. He found a position that he wanted to have in Riga. And you have to be born where your mother is so I was born in Riga.

As a consequence, as soon as he was able to get papers to, in fact, be in Hungary, we moved. And that happened months after I was born. He received those papers sometime in early 1936. I know that I was told -- obviously I don't remember -- that my mother -- he moved to Hungary in perhaps July and then two, three months later I moved when I was old enough to travel by train. My two uncles, my mother's brother and her brother-in-law, came to Riga to help her move me in a basket on a train to Hungary where I lived until I was deported in 1944.

>> Bill Benson: Manny, I think your grandfather, who was a rabbi, stepped down from the pulpit because of changes in the prevailing language due to political leadership changes. Can you share a little bit with us about that?

>> Manny Mandel: As I said, the former Yugoslavia, which was part of Hungary at one time, my grandfather was the rabbi of a community in Yugoslavia called Novi Sad. Cities had multiple names because it was multiple cultures and multiple governors or governments.

My grandfather, in 1918, at the end of the First World War, when Yugoslavia was created, the language of the country went from Hungarian to Serbo-Croatian. My grandfather decided -- this was part of his strangeness, I suppose but he decided that he could certainly deliver sermons in Hungarian, Yiddish, German, perhaps in Hebrew, I'm not sure, but he did not speak the Croatian well enough to satisfy himself so he said if I can't deliver a sermon as I think I should, I will step off the pulpit, which he did. He became the administrator of the local community and lived there until deported to Auschwitz in 1944.

>> Bill Benson: Before that, your father -- I'm sorry. Your father had been an important cantor in Budapest. How did he get to that position? It was a significant position.

>> Manny Mandel: Well, he was a significant -- cantor of significant rank, if you will. He trained in Vienna at the then well-known cantorian school that folks know nothing about and I only know from stories. The job he had in Riga was an important job also because of whom he succeeded, a man who had been the cantor of Riga for 35 years. And those were his competition.

In Riga, my father received the -- got the job. He competed with two other gentlemen. One of the gentlemen was a native of the city of Riga and had just come back from the United States where he was a leading tenor at The Metropolitan opera. He was also a cantor. The other was a well-known cantor in the city of Hannover who later had a long career in South Africa, Johannesburg. So this is very high-level stuff that goes on that today does not exist.

So my father, when he found out there was a job open, one of four chief cantors in Budapest, he applied for it and he was selected.

>> Bill Benson: If I understood correctly, once he accepted that very prominent position, he felt, in your words, he had hit the big-time. But he had been offered cantor positions in other cities, I believe, prior to that.

>> Manny Mandel: In his search to get to Budapest, he had had these auditions, they were called, in Holland, in London, in a number of places. He was very well received but his own notion was that what he was waiting for is, in fact, Budapest, which he received. Thought he had achieved the pinnacle of his success, a lifetime position. And except for the mustache he would have been [Inaudible].

>> Bill Benson: The full force of the war and the Holocaust would not hit your community, in Hungary, until 1944. There were many difficulties once war was underway in Europe in the fall of 1939. Tell us about the circumstances for your family and for you in those earlier years of the war.

>> Manny Mandel: I don't have first person recollection of 1939 and 1940. I can tell you anecdotally. For those of you who have either been through the Museum here, the permanent exhibit, or are going through, towards the end there is a section which has to do with resistance. In that section there is a series of photographs of a woman called Hannah Szenes, a Hungarian woman who with two others parachuted into Hungary in order to try to help promote the cause of the allies. Their particular qualifications was not as spies but they spoke Hungarian which is not an easy language to speak. They were all captured and shot.

The reason I mentioned this is Hannah Szenes wanted to learn Hebrew before she, in fact, went to Palestine. Her teacher was my uncle, my father's youngest brother, who lived with us as a student at the University of Budapest. And in 1939 or so she would come to the house for lessons. And she would say hello, nice little boy, tap me on the head. So she knew me. I did not know her. I know this whole thing only because I've been told. I don't remember her, not from the age of 3. A little later on I will probably get to that, the Pogrom in Novi Sad happens when I'm 5 1/2.

Life in Budapest is reasonably ok because -- you folks need to know that Hungary is an ally of the Nazis. As a consequence, we did not see a Nazi or a German soldier on Budapest territory until 1944. Therefore, 1939, '40, '41, '42 are reasonably ok from day-to-day, particularly for a little guy like me at the time who was protected and kind of sheltered in a bubble of sorts by his parents.

>> Bill Benson: As you just said, you didn't see German troops there until 1944. Tell us who the Arrow Cross were.

>> Manny Mandel: As you know, the Nazis were a political party, the national socialists and so forth. Hungary had its own version. Their sign or call sign was not the swastika that you're familiar with but crossed arrows from the Hungary word nyil having to do with arrows. They were probably as vicious as the Nazis but had less power.

>> Bill Benson: As you mentioned, earlier, the Hungary passed their own version in the '20s. What were some of the restrictions imposed once the war began?

>> Manny Mandel: Employment, where you could work, how you could work, who would go to school. The Numerus Clausus by translation really means a numerical quota system in they restricted what you could and could not do depending on who you were. That would not affect a 4-year-old.

>> Bill Benson: In 1942, you were forced to wear yellow stars. What do you remember about that?

>> Manny Mandel: The rule was that we had to put on yellow stars. Everybody did it. If you were caught without a star and you should have had one, you were shot on the spot most of the time. I thought the yellow stars were terrific. But here I was a little guy, 6 years old, less than 6 yet and was just like all the adults. They had yellow stars and so did I. Woopy-doo for my side.

The point is, I did not understand this was a mark of distinction but a target. And let me illustrate that in a different way. Some time when I was 7 or 7 1/2 or something like that, I said to my father: I wonder if it's time for you to buy me a bicycle. I had kind of a large tricycle but I was big enough to ride a bike. Not a full-sized one but maybe an 18-incher. I said, "Would you do that?" He said to me: Of course I would except for two reasons. One is a minor reason but the other is a major reason.

What are the reasons? Number one reason is you saw in the pictures before, we lived on the fifth floor of the apartment building. We had an elevator but the building was 50 years at the time, 100, 120, so was the elevator. And parts broke. And the factories that made the replacement parts for elevators were manufacturing military hardware. So the elevator parts became very much low on the priority pole of when the elevator would be fixed. It would work for a week, out for a month, work for a month, out for a week.

So he said to me I would have to truck the bicycle down for you five flights and up again because I was not big enough to do that. He would do that. My father was a very powerful, young man in his 30s. That was not a problem. But there's a different problem. And this is through the yellow stars. He said, well, we ride the bicycle in the park. And in Europe that's what you do. And if you're riding in the park and I'm running behind you and you're out of my sight for 12 seconds, somebody could whack you on the head not because they want to take the bike but because the yellow star's the

target that says it's open season to whack the kid in the head. And that's the a risk I'm not going to take. Therefore no bicycle.

I began to understand that maybe this yellow star was not a mark of distinction but a target which wasn't -- I was not accosted but many people were. And I could have been. But I wasn't. Maybe I was lucky.

>> Bill Benson: During that time were you able to continue your schooling? If so, what was that like for you?

>> Manny Mandel: Well, school was -- I began school at the age of 6 and 42. As it happened, we lived on the street that we lived a number of the houses, number 13. The school was at number 44. Now, think about it. We're talking two blocks away. Yet with the yellow star -- I'm told on occasion I would have somebody follow me to school depending what the news was bringing. If there was a rash of people being whacked on the head, somebody would follow me to school. I didn't know this. Not necessarily my parents. So although -- interestingly, our apartment was on the corner of the building. My parents could see the school from their bedroom, number 44. Yet somebody would follow me.

So I did not experience any significant kinds of things but then I'm 6 years old. The realization of the star was not as much of a mark of the distinction. It happens later. But my life continues very much in the bubble that they created for me, in my apartment, some friends, that kind of stuff. I had some friends on the same floor. One floor below. The only kid I remember visiting outside of the apartment was a kid around the corner who was my friend. But life was fairly placid. And though it wasn't for the adults, it was for me.

>> Bill Benson: Speaking of adults, your father was assigned to a labor battalion. What did that mean?

>> Manny Mandel: Hungarian men were in the Army. They were in the Russian front. The work that had to be done by men who were not there was performed by these legions, battalions, of labor force of Jewish males who were not Army eligible. So they would be out -- my father would get a note or a phone call or a visit that said on Tuesday at 3:00, you'll be at the train station. You'll be gone for a day or a week or an indefinite amount of time. He was home and away with incredible frequency to the point I didn't realize when he would be home and not at home. I caught him with the bicycle discussion on one of his home stays.

They did mining. They did agriculture. They did repair of roads, repair from bombings, heavy, physical work for which none of them were qualified but they learned. They were young enough to withstand that. Food was not a major benefit but that was going on in Hungary particularly. Most of the people that I knew, my uncles, were all in labor camp except for the youngest who was with us, who taught Hebrew because he was still at the university. He was able to finish the university with a yellow star and an the last yellow star graduate from the university; if not the very last, next to the last but almost the very end.

>> Bill Benson: In December 1941, your family had a horrifying experience while visiting your aunt in another city. Tell us what you can about that.

>> Manny Mandel: We talked a little earlier about my grandfather, my mother's father. He lived in, again, in Novi Sad, which is down the Danube from Budapest, maybe three hours or so by train. So in the winter, December of 1941, my parents decided to go down to spend the week with my grandparents on a visit. I wasn't in school yet. My father had the time. So we did.

My mother had two sisters in Novi Sad, both of whose husbands died in labor camp a little bit later during the war, both of whom survived but their husbands didn't. We stayed in the home of one of them. I have no recollection specifically of what I did. All I do remember my uncle owned, ran or had partnership in a cork factory. He took me there. He had a special bicycle with a seat built on the handle bars that was safe for a child. We rode to the factory. I'm reminded I did that. What I saw I couldn't tell you.

That was the second or third day. We heard there was some commotion in the street. Within five minutes of that commotion, two policemen came upstairs to the door, knock, knock. Rather gently, they said, "Ladies and gentlemen, you need to dress warmly. You need to go outside. We have to conduct a census."

We all know what a census is. We have one here every 10 years. We had one in 2010. The Germans and the German minions and their buddies and what not kind of felt if you do a census every 15 minutes, exaggeration, but every 15 minutes, then you knew where everybody was. If you knew where people were, you could control them.

Well, it's logical, as tragic as it becomes. We're told to come out to the street. My mother, my father and I and my mother's younger sister. There were three sisters all together, both younger than my mother. We were told to turn left and to walk in that direction. I know that we walked for some time. I walked. My father carried me. My mother carried me. We were warm. It was wintertime. There was snow on the ground but it wasn't bitter or a terrible day. But we were well dressed.

After maybe a couple of hours, I don't know exactly how long, we arrived at a place which I recognized. It was an eight-foot stockade fence on the left and we were walking along this fence. I recognized it because the previous summer just a few months before I had been there. In European cities which are not on the lake or not on the ocean but are on the river, the river becomes a beach. The people build wade pools, hot pools, thermal pools, cold pools, restaurants, amusement parks along a two, three, four-mile stretch along the Danube right in the city. And inside this fence about 200, 300 yards, maybe more, were these particular developments, these entertainment centers.

So I recognized it. My parents, of course, did because they had lived there before. I had no idea why I was there. Nobody knew why we were there. We were just walking along this stockade fence. We noticed after a while, I don't know how long, that a piece down the road, the fence gates, enormous, big stockade wooden gates, were open and people were turning left towards the river. We kept moving along. My grandparents already joined us. Some other people. We were in the group of maybe a dozen to 18 people, kind of addling along.

As we came to maybe 100, 150 yards from the gate there's a policeman on the right who says to my father, "Mister what are you doing here?" My father said, "I'm visiting with my family," in-laws, so forth. He says, "That's not what I mean. That's your business. But he says, what are you doing here? You're not from here. Therefore if you counted in the census, you'll mess up the numbers in so many ways." It saved our life. He said "Step aside." We all stepped aside.

I'm sure by coincidence, within minutes of the stepping aside, a staff guard came down the road, the guy came up in the uniform. I don't even know what kind of uniform he had. He had a pow-wow with the officials there and announced on the bullhorn, "Ladies and gentlemen, the requirements of the census have been met. Please go home." There's a school on your way a short distance; there's hot coffee and hot chocolate. Have some if you like. Go home. Which we did.

What we didn't know, what we didn't know, was that everybody who turned left in toward the river walked out about 300 yards of whatever. The river was frozen but it had been blasted open that morning by cannon fire because the ice was thick. These people were shot in the back, into the river, and they were found, if found at all, when the river thawed in March or they were never found at all. 350 people were killed.

When I said the guy saved our life, I mean it. He didn't know it but that's what he did. He said he recognized my father because he was a foot patrolman in our neighborhood in Budapest. My father walked around the neighborhood lots of times to various places, offices and so forth, and he recognized him. I guess he was recognizable. And because he did, and he said that, we were saved. We went back to my aunt's house and made immediate arrangements to leave the next morning first thing.

A second before I get there. The other aunt, my mother's other sister, lives on the other part of town. We still had telephones. We were talking with her. She says, "Where were you? We had plans for the day?" I forget what they were. She says, "Well, two policemen came to my door at 7:30 in the morning and said they had some questions. I did what I would normally do. I invite them in and gave them cake and coffee." When this aunt gave somebody cake and coffee, and they're people who know this aunt, they would have 17 coffees, 19 cakes, and a kitchen full of dishes.

>> [Laughter]

>> Manny Mandel: These guys had the very best breakfast coffee in their life from my aunt. That was a little bit -- well, my cousins are here. They related.

In any case, in any case, the next morning, very early, my father ordered a taxi and we went to the train station to go back to Budapest. I need to tell you, for a kid that age, 5 1/2 years old, the taxi was a great surprise and a very exciting idea because we got a one-horse-powered taxi.

Any idea?

It's a sled. In Novi Sad in the wintertime there were taxis with wheels and engines and also sleds were taxis. For a reason I can't tell you, the one that showed up, that my father called, on a dispatch, was a one-horse sled. Put the suitcases in the taxi and took us to the train station. But to me the adventure was the horse not the rest of the disaster that took place the day before or two days before.

>> Bill Benson: The Germans occupied Budapest in March 1944. All of those years you lived in the circumstance you describe but relatively normal.

>> Manny Mandel: Absolutely.

>> Bill Benson: But the Germans came in March 1944. What led to the German occupation and then how did circumstances change so dramatically once they were there?

>> Manny Mandel: There are two parts to that discussion or that answer. One is that the alliance between the Germans and the Hungarians broke down. The Germans were no longer an ally. They would occupy. The other side, in 1942 -- again those of you going to the museum or have been there, you will see an exhibit. There is the Warsaw Ghetto. Directly before there is an exhibit about the Wannsee Conference. In 1942, the head of the Nazis in eastern Hungary in Czechoslovakia, members of [Indiscernible] who was later assassinated in Prague, called a conference for the purpose of establishing the final solution to the Jewish problem. And you know what the final solution was. And they appointed an official to, in fact, do the mechanics on that final solution. The official's name was Adolf Eichmann. You recall the name?

Eichmann comes to Budapest the 19th of March 1944, having since 1942 done all of the other cleanout of all of the other countries. Hungary, having been an ally, is the last to get the benefits of his services. He arrives on the 19th of March. The deportations begin at the rate of 12,000 a day.

Can I go on to the Kasztner business?

>> Bill Benson: Please. Yes.

>> Manny Mandel: As soon as he arrives and sets up his headquarters in the Majestic Hotel, an historic hotel in Budapest -- which I saw earlier this summer because we visited there -- two men, kind of a self-appointed rescue committee, two Jews, insist on approaching Eichmann.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, in a very different way, these people went to see Eichmann much as if you went to Rome and said, "I want to see the Pope." It's not something you can do. I'm not talking about it's the same situation but you don't approach Eichmann and say I insist on seeing him. They did. He received them. And they discussed methods by which they could possibly make some kind of a deal which would benefit both sides.

This was the beginning of the deal -- Bill mentioned this earlier in the introduction. If Eichmann were to take one million Jews from the available concentration camps, they would supply him with 10,000 trucks to be used against the eastern front.

Now, there were two major problems with this proposition. One, there were no more million Jews to be had. Two, these guys didn't have a bicycle pump not 10,000 trucks. This was all phony-baloney.

One of the two was sent to talk to the British about trucks. He was arrested in Syria, spent the rest of the war in a prison in Cairo as a spy. He survived the war but that was as far as he got in negotiating for trucks.

These negotiations continued. The man who stayed in Budapest for the negotiations was a lawyer by the name of Kasztner. Whole other story about him. And the negotiation eventually became -- they wound up at the point of the selection in some magical way of 1,700 people to be put on 35 cars, to be taken to a free port, or a neutral port, in exchange of which Eichmann and his cronies would receive significant, significant items to be carried in suitcases. You can imagine what they were. Money was useless. Unless you had American dollars or British pound sterling which nobody had. But

jewelry and other kinds of things of this nature amassed into significant dollars in those days, the reward that he received from the many others that wound up after the war -- if you recall, where was Eichmann? Arrested or found by the Israeli Secret Service in Argentina. He establishes his life as did Dr. Mengeli and others through these barterers. As a consequence, taken by train to some neutral port in Spain, maybe even in Germany or to Turkey, to be sent to Palestine because we all claimed to be displaced persons because of the war.

If you believe that, I have several more \$3 bills I can give you.

>> Bill Benson: Before you go on to tell us about that, I was going to go back and ask you a couple of other questions.

Once Eichmann was there in March 1944, I think you very quickly lost your grandparents.

>> Manny Mandel: Well, my grandparents lived in Novi Sad, where I described, which is, as I say, about four hours south of Budapest. The grandparents were deported as were everybody else as you clean out. But interesting, the grandparents were deported with the grandparents, the two aunts whose husbands were already in labor camp, and the daughter of one of the aunts, my cousin a year younger than I. They were taken to Auschwitz. And in Auschwitz the selections took place. The grandparents, old, in their early middle 60s, and the child who was 7 went this way. Probably dead within two hours. The two aunts, the sisters, went this way, went to half a dozen different camps, worked like horses. But they were young women, healthy, and they survived the war and died later of various other causes having little to do with the specifics of the war.

My other grandparent, my grandmother, my father's mother -- I told you we were on the fifth floor of the building. Air raids were once or twice a night. She had a difficult time up and down the stairs. You couldn't use the elevator. My father and his brother decided maybe she would be better off in the village where they were both born. The village was a primitive place but no air raids. What there was, Eichmann came and his minions and she was deported to Auschwitz. We're not too sure -- we were pretty sure when the other grandparents went but not this one. My three grandparents, a bunch of uncles and so forth went.

>> Bill Benson: And as you mentioned a little while ago, once Eichmann was there, Jews were deported at the rate of about 12,000 a day.

>> Manny Mandel: From Budapest. Yes.

>> Bill Benson: If I remember correctly, the speed was just almost unimaginable. I believe within six weeks almost half a million Jews were deported.

>> Manny Mandel: You have to do arithmetic of 12,000 a day, how many times it may take to get to 400,000 which is about the number. Yes.

We were then, in July of 1944, part of this train.

>> Bill Benson: Of the 1,700.

>> Manny Mandel: How we got into it I can't tell you because I don't know. Maybe because of a certain position, holdings, or certain economy. But my mother, and I and my uncle, the youngest uncle, were part of the three of the 1,700 or so people. But instead of being taken to a neutral port we were told we were going to stop in this place which nobody knew, honestly, and I certainly didn't know, for a three-day R & R after a nine-day train ride before we board ships. The name of the R & R encampment was one called Bergen-Belsen. Bergen-Belsen was not a terminal killing camp as others were in Poland but it was a concentration camp. It was certainly a death camp but not a killing camp. We were there. And after six weeks after additional negotiations, about 350 other people of this group were, in fact, taken by German troop train to Switzerland. I wasn't part of it.

>> Bill Benson: Given you were so young, do you remember arriving at Bergen-Belsen? Can you tell us anything about what your time there was like? And for the audience members, they may know that as the place where Anne Frank died.

>> Manny Mandel: Yes. I will talk about that. I was not part of the first group. I stayed a full six months almost. I remember arriving there, stepping out of the boxcars of which one you'll see upstairs, after nine days. We were in the boxcars for nine days. This is July. Weather was good. We could sleep outside under guard. But during the day we were in the cars. We arrived at this platform. We

marched not a tremendously long distance from the platform to our particular barracks. And we were in the barracks.

I'll talk about life in Bergen-Belsen in a minute.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Manny Mandel: The activities of the camp consisted most specifically, again, of a census. Every morning we were told at dawn to be outside to be counted. They came to count as any time from 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, or 11:00, whenever their mood said so until a different officer said I think ridiculous; I will be here at 8:00 and you can count on my punctuality. I don't care if you're here at five minutes before 8:00 but at 8:00 you better be here. We were there probably at 7:30. But it was a much better deal to be out 7:30 to 8:00 than from 4:00 to 11:00.

Was this humanity? I don't know. Was it efficiency? I don't know. But the bottom line was we were in some way saved from certain physical kinds of problems in the German winter which was rainy and miserable and muddy and so forth. That took up most of the time. The rest of the time was made up -- I'll talk about that later.

>> Bill Benson: Was your father with you?

>> Manny Mandel: Nope. My father was in labor camp.

>> Bill Benson: Still there.

>> Manny Mandel: Described before. By this time he was probably in the Ukraine. My father survived. We reunited. But he was not in camp with us. Had he been in Budapest, he would have been part of the group but he was not.

>> Bill Benson: Continue telling us about Bergen-Belsen.

>> Manny Mandel: Bergen-Belsen was a camp that its heyday was about 25,000 people. It was mostly a labor and transit camp. In other words, people were brought in and moved over to someplace else.

As it happened, because of the special nature of our group -- remember, we were either the golden eggs or the goose that laid the golden egg. They were somewhat more gentle with us because they knew if we die, the bargaining position also dies. The suitcases full of valuables were not delivered all at once before we left. They delivered during. They wanted to be sure to get whatever the whole total amount would be. So we were in a sense in reasonably good shape. The weather was poor. The conditions were poor. The food was poor. But we were not being either beaten or shot every day.

You had mentioned Anne Frank. There's an interesting kind of emotional connection. You recall that Anne Frank was turned in, in Amsterdam, sent to Auschwitz. And from Auschwitz she was sent to Bergen-Belsen arriving there in August 1944. I arrived in July of 1944. I was taken out of Bergen-Belsen in December of 1944 and she stayed there until March when she died, weeks before liberation.

The reason I have a certain connection -- I never knew the woman. She would have been much too old for me anyhow. I was 8. She was 15. Old lady. But the really important point is I had this kind of feeling for about four months we breathed the same air. She was there. I was here. We were in the same place at the same time. I feel a certain sense of kinship to that.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind, tell us about your uncle who was there with you telling you to get your shoes fixed.

>> Manny Mandel: He got them fixed.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Manny Mandel: European shoe manufacturing was not what it is today. You didn't go to a store and buy a pair of ready-made shoes. We didn't. Shoes were made for you. And before we left, since my parents didn't quite know exactly where, how, and who, they thought a good pair of shoes would be a good idea. Yes. So they had made for me a pair of kind of 3/4 boots with thick soles. In those days they would sew the soles on the shoe and then put dowels in it, wooden, like match sticks. You knocked them in instead of nails because nails would rust. The dowels if wet would expand and hold

the shoes together. But after they expanded for days and hours standing in the mud for those censuses, they fell out. So the shoes parted this way.

Now, you might find it either amusing or strange that one of the things that happened in Bergen-Belsen within weeks of our arrival, and I mean weeks, is businesses opened up, businesses. They were not quite the businesses that you folks might be involved in. But we had some tin cans with us from which we took food we were told to take along for the ride. People made jewelry out of them, bracelets, earrings, necklaces which they would trade for two cigarettes, which they would trade for a haircut, which they would trade for a shoe repair.

My uncle was able to talk to one of his whatever who, in fact, was a cobbler and had tools with him. Don't ask me why or how but he took his tools with him, at least enough to be able to fix a pair of shoes. Used match sticks, thick match sticks to knock into the shoes so they would stay together mix father -- my uncle said, "Well, I got your shoes fixed, kid. Now stop running around."

>> [Laughter]

>> Manny Mandel: I'm 8 years old. It was a blessing with a double-edged sword. I had shoes in which I couldn't run around. What else could I do?

>> Bill Benson: While you were there, I believe you got very ill with pneumonia. Your mother was able to get some care for you.

>> Manny Mandel: Well, we had about 35 doctors in the group. Only problem is, you know, pneumonia is a bacterial infection and you can cure it with a shot of penicillin or a couple of pills. Nobody had pills. Penicillin had just been discovered. We were not the first to get it. So pneumonia was a disease that was to be cured by the body or you died. The other concern was they could have given me some medications but it would have required me to leave the compound to go to the post hospital run by the Nazis. My mother was very concerned if I ever were to go there, I may never come back. So I stayed in the barracks. I was excused from being outside for the census.

And the only thing they could do for me was something I will never forget. As a palliative form of treatment, make you feel better not cure you, make you feel comfortable, they wrapped burlap in mustard seed oil. Where they got it I don't know. But it acts like Bengay or Vick's. You put it on your chest cross-wise and heats the chest. It makes you feel better. It doesn't cure the infection but when you're breathing in pneumonia, it makes you feel like you're not going to die every time you take a breath. That was my treatment. My mother arranged for that. There was nothing else she could do. That was primitive treatment of those days.

>> Bill Benson: After about six months in Bergen-Belsen in December of 1944, you were sent to Switzerland. Tell us about how you got there and what that meant.

>> Manny Mandel: We were upgraded from cattle cars to military transport cars. But they had seats in them. I don't remember how long this was but I do remember that we went, 1,300 and some of us, the remainder from the 1,700. We entered Switzerland near the German part. We were taken to the gymnasium of a school or some large auditorium. The first thing they did to us is they decided we had to be fumigated. Because the camp was full of lice and vermin of that sort. They were much too clean to permit that to come in so they fumigated us and then sent us to the French part of Switzerland.

Those of you who know the country, it's a small country. Above the city, near Geneva, was a lovely vacation hotel, beautiful hotel, that the Red Cross had taken over. It's in a place called Caux where they kept us for several weeks, fed us lots of potatoes. We were not starved. We were not the skeletons that you see but we all could use a couple of pounds.

After that they had to divide us up because other people were coming in from various places. The Red Cross had this system working. So they had to send people. There were 20 kids ages 6 to 14 slated to go to a children's home. It's like a boarding school in the German part, in the Province, in a city called Heiden. You saw the picture, my mother, I, some of the kids in the posed photograph in a city in Heiden. It was very nice. We lived in like a boarding school.

The reason my mother went along -- Bill said my mother had been a teacher. She was. They had to send somebody along who, first, spoke Hungarian because we spoke nothing else, spoke German which she spoke quite well, and had a good amount of French. Most of the staff and most of

the kids there were from Belgium and France. We could not speak fluent. We learned German but there had to be somebody who could speak with us and be the teacher for kids of age 6 to 14. People knew my mother had been a teacher. They said, well, she'll go and she'll be the caretaker, guardian, teacher, whatever else. Which made it very interesting for me. When your mother is the teacher, either the world is the best world or the worst world.

>> [Laughter]

>> Manny Mandel: Both took place. If anybody did anything wrong and the administration found out, guess who got a little bit of a flecking in the morning. Me. But it's survival. That was not terrible. I made some friends. One of those kids I met many years later on here. He became a Rice professor at the University of Michigan State. Unfortunately he died of cancer. Another one became an Olympic athlete who lives in Israel. I saw him this past year. He became an Olympic walker. You know those guys who waddle?

>> [Laughter]

>> Manny Mandel: That's what he does. He's now 79 years old and walks 79 kilometers. Next year he's going to walk 80. He does this on his birthday.

>> Bill Benson: Do you recall what the emotions were of the adults? Here you've been in Bergen-Belsen a concentration camp, segregated in a section for you because of your special status but nonetheless, as you said, a concentration camp. You cross the border in Switzerland. The war is absolutely still on. If you have any sense of that, what was the emotional response?

>> Manny Mandel: I can describe what I remember and that should give you a sense of emotional difference.

We arrived on one side of the tracks with the German troop train, dark, dingy, half the windows shot out. I've been told -- I don't know if this is accurate -- that the German gauge of railroads is different than the Swiss. So the German trains could not run into Switzerland therefore could not be invaded. Don't know if that's true but it's a good idea.

We arrived on one side of the platform from this dingy, dirty, whatever cars and on the other side of the platform sits this big, beautiful, warm, lit Swiss cars. The emotional reaction was to go from this to that. It's exemplified to me by the two kinds of cars. That took us to Sungala (phonetic) to the fumigation, eventually to Caux and eventually Heiden.

>> Bill Benson: Once in Switzerland and then going on to the home in Heiden, was your mother able to establish contact with your father who I believe was still in Budapest at that time?

>> Manny Mandel: My father was able to get back to Budapest with some other people before the end of the war or before the Russians liberated Budapest. The Russian liberation was a peculiar kind of liberation. It was a liberation, yes, and subjugation, yes, at the same time. But he's back in Budapest. He is trying to contact us because the group was known. So he was trying to find out.

When he got back to Budapest, we were still in Bergen-Belsen. But my mother and father recalled or in some way that my father had a colleague with whom he went to school. My mother contacted this man who was able to contact my father in Budapest not by phone but probably some kind of courier or contact that had. He was living in Switzerland. He had negotiating possibilities. My mother didn't.

So my mother talks to this -- not talks to but contacts this man, visited with him, who was in touch with my father, my father in touch with him who was in touch with my mother. So they established contact. My mother was asked by my father to come back to Budapest. She refused. She said, "I will never step foot in Hungary again." And she didn't. She went back to Yugoslavia and other places in Europe but not Hungary for the various reasons. We continued what was our original destination in Palestine. We arrived in September 1945.

>> Bill Benson: Was your father with you when you arrived there?

>> Manny Mandel: No. About a year later. An entirely different set of adventures having to do with the immigration business he became part of. He arrived in August 1946.

>> Bill Benson: Your father, I think, was involved in some underground activities before the end of the war. Can you say a little bit about that?

>> Manny Mandel: How much underground I don't know but when he comes back -- my father, as I told you earlier, was Hungarian. Spoke the language not only magnificently but very well. He had an earthy, street Hungarian as well as a literary Hungarian. He was a short, stocky man with big shoulders. He grew his mustache into big handle bar mustache. Got himself a sheep skin coat, the sheep skin on the outside. He -- if you saw his picture, he's got a round face. He could easily pass for a native Hungarian. As a consequence he took the risk of walking streets and became a courier between the Swedish litigation, Wallenberg active, the Swiss House, the embassy or the central location of the church, and he became a runner in between. Had he been caught anywhere, he would have been shot in the street. He was able to get away. That was his connection to the underground.

>> Bill Benson: Serving as a runner, courier.

>> Manny Mandel: Between the places. Right. This is the ghetto in Budapest. He was only there for six weeks. Our apartment apparently was there. It had had some bomb damage but nothing serious. So that's what he did until he was able to find some way to begin to leave Hungary to, in fact, almost literally walk to Italy to one of those ships that became the illegal ships, which is a whole different story.

>> Bill Benson: It's quite a story, as a matter of fact. When your father finally arrives in Palestine in 1946, how did you get from there to the United States? What caused that to happen?

>> Manny Mandel: Well, we were very happy there. My father had a sister. There were seven of them originally. Two of the women died in the 30s of various causes. Three of the brothers -- two of the brothers died in labor camp. The youngest brother, the one I spoke about before, dropped dead, eventually, in 1948. We were still there. He died after we left. But my father had a sister in Philadelphia. She was dispatched to Philadelphia in 1914 to reduce the burden on my grandfather's inability to feed the family. She came to Philadelphia to a cousin. She stayed in Philadelphia, became a cigar maker, met a cigar maker whom she married. They had three children. They lived a nice, long life in Philadelphia.

My father hadn't seen his sister for 40 years. He wanted to come to the states, to visit with my Aunt Helen. As he came here through a series of circumstances he found that maybe he could secure a position here which might be a position that's a more liking to him and more successful than the one he had in Israel. He wrote us and said -- he came in '48. In '49 we came. That's how we came. People said, how did you get here? I said, "We came by plane."

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Unusual.

>> Manny Mandel: Unusual. But for circumstances I cannot remember we came by plane a TWA Constellation, for you aeronautic fans, a Howard Hughes Constellation, a beautiful plane.

>> Bill Benson: I think we have time to turn to our audience for questions. What I'm going to ask -- if you have a question, please raise your hand. We'll get a microphone to you. We'll have mics on either aisle. Once you have the mic, try to make the question as brief as you can. I will likely repeat it just to make sure everybody in the room, including Manny, hears the question before he responds to you.

Let's see. You have one back there, Clara? Ok. Thank you.

>> When your dad was gone, did you miss him?

>> Bill Benson: When your dad was gone, did you miss him?

>> Manny Mandel: One of the older people back there.

>> [Laughter]

>> Manny Mandel: In an odd way, the uncle that I mentioned, whose name was David -- to the point that my daughter's brother is named David -- my wife and I decided if we have a son, we will give him the name David. We were not going to give my daughter the name Davida or something like that. But we had a son David. He was close to me for a long time because my father wasn't around. And David was -- in some ways the youngest brother was a surrogate father to me for a long period of time. So in a sense I didn't miss my father because I hardly saw my father. You don't see something, at that age, you don't miss it.

My father from 1946 on and I saw each other all the time. We got reacquainted. I no longer missed him.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

We have one right here and one in the front row.

>> Thank you for sharing your story. In sharing that, what would you hope for us as listeners to take away with us?

>> Manny Mandel: You're ahead of the game.

>> Making sure we get it in.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to answer that. Manny will answer that in a little bit if that's ok.

>> Manny Mandel: *First Person* has been on for years. I think I've done it eight times, four times with Bill and others. The audience is always different so I don't have to worry about saying the same thing. But one thing that's a constant is I'm asked at the end what would you like to leave as a word. And I will get to your question at that point.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you for that.

And a question right here. Clara, down in the front row. Pass that down. Thank you very much. There we go.

>> The fumigation sounds scary. Can you elaborate about that, how long it took, what was involved in that?

>> Bill Benson: For the folks in the back, the question is -- you mentioned being fumigated and that sounds scary. What did that mean?

>> Manny Mandel: It is not a dangerous thing but they sprayed us. At least on the outside. They did not make us undress and everything else. But they decided to spray us as you do with a cit gun of some sort or canister.

>> [Inaudible]

>> Manny Mandel: No. I suppose if anybody was dumb enough to keep his eyes open, it might burn.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

>> Or mouth.

>> Manny Mandel: Or mouth.

>> Bill Benson: I think there's a hand right back here. Morris? There you go. Thank you.

>> What happened to your Uncle David? Did he make it to America?

>> Manny Mandel: My Uncle David, before we left on that group back in Budapest, he and his wife-to-be were to be married. They had papers. They just hadn't yet gone and done the ceremony. She was deported to Auschwitz. David was with us. But as luck would have it and as life is much stranger than fiction, they both made it to Palestine. And they married. And they had a set of twins. And he got the job as a teacher in one of the finest high schools in Israel and dropped dead at the age of 34 or 35 or something like that to the point that I knew him much better than his own children who were little babies when they were born. Since that time, one is alive in Israel, the boy. The girl died of cancer some years ago. But my Uncle David got to Israel through all the stuff, remet his wife, married, had children, and then literally dropped dead.

>> Bill Benson: We have one right here.

>> What happened to your grandparents?

>> Bill Benson: What happened to your grandparents?

>> Manny Mandel: Well, I think I said before all three of my -- my grandfather, father's father, died before I was born. He died because he would go to work every day with a tin of 50 cigarettes. He would come home rolling his cigarettes in paper having finished the 50. He died of those conditions. The other three grandparents, my father's mother and my mother's father and mother died in Auschwitz.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you. We have time for really I think one more question. The gentleman in the middle right there.

>> Thank you for sharing your story. You mentioned that you used to have a yellow -- used to wear a yellow star. I wonder, is that your first recognition that you were being treated differently? If not, what

was your realization that, hey, I'm being treated, me, others like me, politically, religiously, ethnically, whatever the case may be were being treated differently than others?

>> Manny Mandel: I would think that the yellow star may have, in fact, been the first of those which I thought was a matter of pride and I learned it wasn't. It was the first visual, you know, kind of conscious way of being told. Because prior to that the city of Budapest was 20%, 25% Jewish. My life was among the community in which I lived. I had no interaction nor desired interaction with anybody -- although, you may recall I said on the same floor where I lived, right next door to us on the right side was a family with two girls, one older than I, one younger. Both went to Catholic school. But our buddyship was not affected by that.

So the first sign that I was different -- and they didn't give a hoot if I wore a yellow star or not. They were my friends. I was their friend. We played together, whatever the hell 6-year-olds do, we did. I don't think I want to mention. But whatever.

>> [Laughter]

>> Manny Mandel: In any case, yes, I think that would be the first point that I could think back and consciously recall that as a, hey, you're different, we are making you different.

>> Bill Benson: We're at the end of our program. As Manny said, I'm going to turn back to him for what we call the last word. It is our tradition that the First Person has the last word.

Before I do that, I want to note that there were several folks who had questions we didn't get to. When Manny's finished, he's going to stay up here on the stage. So we invite you to come up and talk to him if you have a question to ask him. That's an opportunity. Or if nothing else, just to shake Manny's hand or get your photograph taken with him if you want. We'll have that opportunity when he finishes.

I want to thank all of you for being here. I remind you that we have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. We will resume a *First Person* program 2016. So we hope you can come back sometime.

On that note, I will turn it over to Manny.

>> Manny Mandel: If you come back, tell me so I tell different stories.

>> [Laughter]

>> Manny Mandel: Bill mentioned earlier that I do volunteer work here and I do a variety of things, including being at the Information Desk at times. I find folks that our knowledge of history -- I can't pronounce the word. It sounds like abominable -- We don't know history. Therefore, my admonition to you is to learn the words of somebody whose words you know but you don't know who said it. I would be delighted if anybody know who said if we do not learn our history well, we may be doomed to repeat it. 110, 120 years ago.

The point I'm making to you in terms of what you leave as a legacy to your children or yourselves, we cannot learn from the future. We can learn from the past which we apply to the future. I urge you and beseech you to do that.

Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

[Applause]