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FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON AL MUNZER
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>> Edna Friedberg: Good morning. Come on. You can do a little better than that. Good morning. Let's have some energy.
>> Good morning!
>> Edna Friedberg: Thank you. Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Edna Friedberg. I am one of the museum's historians. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the spring season of our *First Person* program. We are in our 16th year of *First Person* and our guest today, our honored guest today, is Dr. Alfred Munzer whom you will meet in a few moments.

The 2016 season of First Person is made possible by the support of a number of generous donors, including the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation and the Helena Rubinstein Foundation but particularly today the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are very pleased they are with us today. So if you could just wave.
>> [Applause]
>> Edna Friedberg: We love having this program. We are grateful.

First Person is a series of weekly or sometimes in the busy season twice weekly series of conversations with individuals who survived the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at the museum. So they are talking not only about what their personal experiences were but how they came to be connected with this museum and what it means to them to have you line up outside and come to hear about their lives.

Our program will continue through mid-August. If you have friends who are coming to town and would like to see the schedule, please visit our website to find the hours. We also have a podcast series and we are posting videos of these programs. You can look in the coming days and weeks to see if you would like to share a recording of this program with friends at home. Please look on our website.

Additionally, inside your program booklet is a card that says Stay Connected. If you would like to hear about these and other programs that the Museum does including possibly in your community -- we do travel around the country with exhibits and public programs such as this one -- please fill out the card and we would be glad to add you to our e-community.

I will ask you -- I'm sorry. If you do that you will also receive an electronic copy of Al's biography which will enable you follow up on some of the details that you will hear today.

I ask you to please silence all electronic devices right now. Thank you.

A little on our format. Al is going to share his first person account of his experiences during the Holocaust with us for about 45 minutes after which we will be sure to save time for your questions. So please keep those in mind as we go on.

To begin, we prepared a brief slide presentation. We begin with this very cute picture of Alfred Munzer as a little boy. I want to explain a little bit because it's a particularly appropriate photograph for today of all days. Today is a special day. Tonight marks the Jewish holiday of Purim on which children dress up in costume. And by coincidence, we didn't plan this but when we scheduled Al's talk today, this photo is a photo of Al dressed for Purim on that day. He's holding a charity box, which is to raise money for the Jewish community in Israel. It says the Jewish National Fund. And he is dressed as that box as well. Today he is not but there he is.

This beautiful, beautiful shot is a photograph of Al's parents on their wedding day. Simcha and Gisele were married in 1932 in The Hague, in the Netherlands. They had three children, Al, baby. The photograph of their three kids, the beautiful girls, Eva and Leah, and Al in between.

For historical context so you understand, the backdrop of which Al's life unfolded is that of World War II. On this map you will see the arrows indicating that the German Army invaded The Netherlands in May 1940, which, as you will hear, is actually before Al was born. Immediately life became difficult for Dutch Jews. And these invasion routes show not only The Netherlands but into France and across low countries, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Al survived, thanks to the courage and generosity and love of a man that we see here named Tole Madna. Tole Madna was an Indonesian immigrant. For those of you who are less familiar with the history of Indonesia, it was formerly a Dutch colony. So there was an Indonesian immigrant community in the Netherlands. And that is why you would see a face here not what you would think of as a typical Dutch rescuer. We will hear more about that in our conversation.

Al spent the rest of the war, first years of his life, in hiding in Tole Madna's home. He was cared for by Tole's Indonesian nanny, pictured here on the left, a very extraordinary woman named Mima Saina. Al is on the right, in Tole's arms. We will hear about them soon.

After the war, Al came to the United States with his mother, in 1958. He learned English. He went to college. He went on to medical school and became a very accomplished pulmonologist. I always embarrass him because he's modest but he eventually served as President of the American Lung Association. So a man who has devoted his life to service. He remains deeply involved in antismoking efforts around the world, working with the WHO, World Health Organization, to implement an international treaty on the control of tobacco.

We at the museum are very fortunate to be the beneficiaries of many of Al's volunteer hours as a speaker, as a translator, giving tours. He and his spouse are cherished members of our community.

With that, I would like to ask you to join me in welcoming Dr. Alfred Munzer.

>> [Applause]

>> Edna Friedberg: Thank you, Al, very much for joining us today.

>> Al Munzer: Delighted to be here.

>> Edna Friedberg: Let's begin at the beginning -- actually, before your beginning. Please tell us a little bit about your parents and your family background.

>> Al Munzer: Sure. Well, my parents were born in Eastern Europe, a part of the world that was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and which after the First World War became part of Poland. My mother was born in a small town called Rymanow, and my father in a neighboring town called Kanczuga. They were childhood sweethearts.

These are tiny little shtetles, as they are called but nonetheless, I always like to tell the story that one of the people who came from my mother's little hometown, from Rymanow, was Isidor Rabi. Isidor Rabi came to the United States, became a physicist, and ended up being awarded a Nobel Prize in physics in 1946 for the discovery of electromagnetism. So here you have a very prominent Nobel Prize winner coming from one of those tiny towns.

But opportunities in those towns were very limited. After those towns became part of Poland, after the end of the First World War, there was also a lot of anti-Semitism. So young Jews typically would leave their homes and seek their fortunes in a larger city. That big city with a lot of attraction was

Berlin. My mother had two older siblings who lived in Berlin and so she joined them in the 1920s. That's when she came to Berlin, before she finally joined my father at the end of 1932, in Holland.

My father, on the other hand, came directly from his little hometown to Holland where he started a men's clothing business in the Netherlands.

>> Edna Friedberg: And there's a sign still in place. Right? Is there not?

>> Al Munzer: Yes. To my great surprise -- this was a few years ago. We were walking around The Hague and came to the house where I was born. We lived above, in an apartment, and my father's business was downstairs. And there was still this sign of my father's business in the portico, a beautiful glass sign. An incredible shock to see that, a direct connection with my father, which, of course, I really did not have very much otherwise.

>> Edna Friedberg: So your parents came to Holland leaving, trying to escape from persecution, and being an intolerant place of opportunity. What did you know from your mother about what life was like for them in Holland during the 1930s?

>> Al Munzer: My parents made many friends in Holland. Most of their friends were not Jewish. Jews had lived in Holland for hundreds of years, were fully integrated into Dutch society, and my parents fit right in. As I said, my father's men's clothing business flourished. He did very well. They had many, many friends.

Among their neighbors were two women, one of whom I especially remember. I called her my Aunt Jo. She was a very devout Catholic woman. After the war, when I first met her, she would show me notebooks written by one of my little sisters. So she was really -- just this woman was so intimately involved with the lives of my parents that she had actually these notebooks and could tell these stories about my sisters.

>> Edna Friedberg: Speaking of your sisters, when did your parents start a family?

>> Al Munzer: Well, my oldest sister, Eva, was born in 1936, July 1936. I usually like to explain that while people were having these very happy circumstances in Holland, trying to live normal lives, just a few hundred miles away the Nazis really came to full power. So, for example, on the day that my parents -- very close to the date my parents were married was the day when Adolph Hitler had approached the aging president of Germany and was made chancellor of Germany starting the Nazi era. That was just about the same time my parents were married.

And similarly, my sister Eva was born just as the infamous Berlin Olympics were held, which Adolph Hitler, of course, turned into an instrument of Nazi propaganda. So you have the juxtaposition of a very happy family event and then just a few hundred miles away the increase, the rise, really, of the Nazi era.

And then two years later, in November 1938, is when my parents celebrated the birth of their second child and that was my sister Leah. That, too, corresponded to a horrible event in Germany because my sister Leah was born just two days after what is commonly called the Night of Broken Glass, Kristallnacht. It's the night when the full fury of anti-Semitism was unleashed in Germany and hundreds of synagogues were ransacked and destroyed and thousands of Jewish businesses were plundered.

So, again, a very happy occasion in Holland. And while my parents must have been worrying about the relatives they had left behind, especially in the case of my mother, her older brother and older sister who were still living in Berlin at the time with my parents celebrating this happy occasion of their second child.

>> Edna Friedberg: September 1, 1939, Germany invades Poland, sparking World War II. As I mentioned in the introduction, the following spring The Netherlands is invaded. What can you tell us about what this meant for your family and other Jews?

>> Al Munzer: Well, my mother has described the events of what happened as to the invasion to me. On the night of May 10, 1940, my parents had been asked to shelter a man who was a member of the Dutch resistance movement. He supposedly carried a briefcase, my mother told me, which contained plans to preemptively destroy the railroad center in the city. The Dutch resistance felt if they could destroy that railroad center it would slow down the German invasion.

That morning, my parents and their guest listened to the radio and heard that the port city of Rotterdam had been bombed and destroyed. And a few minutes later Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands came on the radio and announced, basically, that Holland had surrendered. She called on their citizens to do their duty wherever they happen to find themselves. My mother told me that the first person to speak up was the man who was a member of the Dutch resistance movement. And he said, in Dutch, "Thank God, it's over."

As far as he was concerned, he would just have to accommodate to living under the occupation but he could be satisfied that he had tried to do what he could to start or stop the German invasion. But for my parents, as they looked at their two little children in a playpen at the time, they realized that they were going to be all alone. And they knew what had happened to their relatives in Germany and in Poland especially. They knew they were going to be all alone and that things were going to change very rapidly.

And, indeed, in very, very short order all of the restrictions that had been put in place on Jews in Germany were put in place in Holland. The first thing that happened, my mother told me, was a ban on the ritual slaughter of animals for kosher meat. And it's something that some people felt, well, that's a pretty benign thing, nothing very serious. Maybe some people would even view it as, quote, humane. But that was just the first step of isolating the Jews. The next thing was the Jews had to take on a new middle name: the men, the middle name Israel; women, the middle name Sarah. They had to register their property to make confiscation ultimately much easier. And they had to register, of course, as Jews.

The other regulations that were put in place were much more restrictive to their personal lives. Jews were prohibited from using public transportation, my mother told me. And they were prohibited from going into public parks. That led to a particular incident with my mother, actually. When you have a regulation that doesn't make much sense, like being prohibited from going into your neighborhood park, you ignore it. So my mother ignored the regulation and she took my little sister, Leah, in her baby carriage, to the park, a neighborhood park. One day a German woman approached the baby carriage and my mother's heart, she told me, almost stopped. And then the woman looked at the baby, my little sister, the blond curls and blue eyes, and she turned to my mother and she said, "Uh, you can tell that this is good Aryan, German stock." And my mother, of course, had a sigh of relief, thanked the woman, and never went back into that park again.

>> Edna Friedberg: In fact, your parents actually enrolled your sister in a Catholic school, did they not?

>> Al Munzer: Yes. I'm not entirely clear about the timeframe that was but I do have photographs of my sisters being enrolled in a Catholic school to hide their Jewish identity. I'm not sure whether that happened before my sisters were placed into hiding or afterwards but it certainly was an attempt to hide their Jewish identity.

>> Edna Friedberg: Early in 1941 your parents realized something surprising, that your mother was pregnant, with you.

>> Al Munzer: That's right.

>> Edna Friedberg: Tell us what your mother told you about that time.

>> Al Munzer: Yeah, early in 1941, as the family tried to go on with their normal lives, my mother found out that she was pregnant again. And she consulted her obstetrician and he told her in no uncertain terms that she had to have an abortion. He told her that it would be immoral to bring another Jewish life into the world.

Now, my mother wasn't particularly religious at the time but she turned to the Bible for advice. And my mother told me that she read the story of Hannah. And Hannah, you might recall, was a woman who was desperate to conceive and would go to the temple every year and pray that she might have a child. And she made this pledge: If God will give me a child, I will give the child, that child, to the service of God all of the days of his or her life. And it was in reading of Hannah's desperate desire to have a child that my mother decided that she could not possibly have an abortion. Her obstetrician fired her as a patient. And so November 23, 1941, I was born at home with the help of a nurse.

>> Edna Friedberg: And in addition to the profound leap of faith and fears your parents must have had to bring a new Jewish life into the world at that time and place, eight days later they did something else extraordinary.
>> Al Munzer: Yes. Because traditionally little Jewish boys are circumcised in a Bris, a ceremony when they are 8 days old. And my parents' friends advised them very strongly, well, don't have him circumcised; it will identify him as being Jewish. But this time the answer to my parents' dilemma came in the form of the worried look on the face of a pediatrician who had just examined me. And my father turned to the pediatrician and he asked him, "Is there anything wrong with the baby?" And the pediatrician said, "No. It's nothing serious. It's just that your baby needs a minor operation that we call a circumcision." And so my parents told the pediatrician of our Jewish tradition and eight days later our family gathered probably for one of the very last of ceremonies in Holland, really the first milestone in the Jewish life for the Bris ceremony. Like any other family, they had photographs taken at the ceremony. They were very small photographs, actually. At least the only ones I've seen. And it shows the whole family gathered in the living room and a second picture with me on a pillow.

What's special about those photographs is that they were only about 1-by-1.5-inch in size and my mother was to keep the two little photographs hidden on her body through her subsequent state in 12 concentration camps. She developed this feeling, this superstition, that if she ever lost those photographs, it would mean that I had been killed.

Fortunately my mother survived, the photographs survived, and, of course, I survived. And those photographs, of course, are so fragile, so valuable, that I did not want to keep them in the house. And that's why I entrusted them to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and they are now part of the story of this museum.
>> Edna Friedberg: Thank you. And it is a sacred duty for us to care for them. So thank you.

Over the first 10 months of your life things became increasingly dangerous for Jews. In the Netherlands they were forced to wear yellow stars, riskier and riskier every day. Your parents eventually became convinced they needed to go into hiding. Tell us a little bit about how they arranged to do that.
>> Al Munzer: Well, many of you may be familiar with the famous story of Anne Frank, another Dutch family, Dutch Jewish family, that went into hiding. Of course, they went into hiding as one unit. But my parents decided, like many other families, that as a form of insurance so that if one person was taken in the family and was killed at least the others might survive that we ought to split up.

The first to go to hiding was my father. He had received a notice to report for labor duty in a camp in Holland. He knew that that meant eventually being sent to a camp much further east, as they were called at the time. So he was the first one to go into hiding, pretending to commit an act of suicide which gained him admission to a psychiatric hospital.

Then my mother, through the intervention of two -- the same aunt, our neighbor, Aunt Jo, as I said, was a very devout Catholic woman, and she put my mother in touch with two priests, a Father Cummings, and Father Ludders, [ph] and they, in turn, told her about a woman who had had a dream in which she saw the Virgin telling her to take Jewish children into hiding. And so my two sisters, Eva and Leah, were placed with that woman with that very devout Catholic woman. And that's when they really assumed, you know, their Catholic identity even though they may have attended a Catholic school before.

That left my mother alone with me in our home. My mother described being extremely frightened being alone in our house. She was afraid of the doorbell ringing because she thought it might be one of the German soldiers coming to the home so she dampened the clapper of the doorbell. And then, of course, she spent the whole night watching the clapper because it wasn't making any noise, to see if it was moving. So this was just the incredible tension that she felt being left alone in the house.

Jewish boy children were more difficult to place but finally a neighbor of my mother, a woman, Annie Madna, agreed to take me in. And so my mother took me to Annie who lived right across the street from us. But Annie had had some run-ins with the Nazis herself so she first passed me on to her sister. And then it turned out that the sister had a neighbor who was a member of the Dutch Nazi Party

and she was afraid that they might hear a baby crying so she returned me to Annie Madna. And then finally Annie Madna passed me on to her ex-husband. She had been married to an Indonesian man, Tole Madna. They were divorced. She passed me on to her ex-husband. And that's how I came to be with Tole Madna.

At that point my mother joined my father in the same psychiatric hospital, hiding, in her case pretending to be a nurse.

So I was adopted, for all practical purposes, by Tole Madna and especially by the nanny who had taken care of the three Madna children earlier. Her name was Mima Saina. She was an Indonesian woman, completely illiterate, spoke no Dutch, couldn't read or write, only spoke the Indonesian language, had come to the Netherlands to do work in a restaurant which Papa Madna, as I used to call him, Tole Madna, was manager of and eventually she became the nanny for his children.

This woman, who was illiterate, had a heart of gold. She would literally walk miles every day just to get milk for me. I was in the home completely illegally and everything was very, very strictly rationed. So you had to have coupons for any kind of food that you wanted. So if you wanted milk for a baby, you had to have coupons. And since I was in the home illegally, there were no coupons. So she had to scrounge around even to get milk for me.

Actually, a few years ago I was in Holland and a woman approached me and said, “You know, you used to drink my milk.” And I said, “What do you mean?” And she said, "Well, all school children in Holland were given a little bottle of milk every day. And my mother told me to save half that little bottle for the baby next door. And you were the baby next door." So here you have a 6-year-old child participating in saving another life.

>> Edna Friedberg: If I can interrupt just one second. Your sisters were not physically hidden, though. I want to make sure that the visitors understand that you could be hidden in the open and you could be visually, literally, hidden.

>> Al Munzer: Yes. They were hidden quite in the open, actually, as Catholic children, attending Catholic school. In my case, I was not allowed out of the house at all. There were only two little kids who were allowed to come into the house and play with me. They were neighbors, the neighbors' kids. And the reason they were trusted is that they were Germans but they were communists. They were German communists. So they were very anti-Nazi. So they were thoroughly trusted to come into the house and play with me.

I'm told that I slept in Mima's bed and she kept a knife under her pillow, I'm told, vowing to kill any Nazi who might try to come and get me or even, she said, kill me rather than have me fall in their hands. An amazing, amazing woman.

>> Edna Friedberg: When you describe the Communist neighbors, the little girl next door, it's just a reminder of how tenuous the situation was for you and for children like you, how it took networks of trust.

I would invite you, if you have time today, down the hall on this level. We have a special exhibition called Some Were Neighbors, and it's exactly about that, about the connections between friends, co-workers, teachers and students, all the personal relationships that could allow a small baby or an adult to survive.

Al, as a parent, it's hard for me to imagine the trust that your parents had to have in what were essentially strangers. What contact if any, did they have with you, with your sisters, with their rescuers? What did they know?

>> Al Munzer: Well, my mother -- my parents knew the Madna family quite well. They all lived in the same neighborhood. Papa Madna, after the war, always prided himself that he had a suit that came -- that was made by my father, actually, his workshop. So, you know, there was a really good connection and they were really trusted.

My parents did not know the woman who had agreed to take in my sisters very well. And that ended up being a major problem because about a year later or so, after my sisters were in hiding, her husband, the husband, announced his wife was hiding two Jewish children.

>> Edna Friedberg: So he turned her in.

>> Al Munzer: So his wife was taken prisoner, along with my two sisters. His wife eventually was freed but my sisters, who were then 6 and 8 years old, were taken to a prison first, near Holland, a building my mother could never stand to look at again. It was a real problem for her after the war because she knew that that's where my two sisters had been taken. They were then taken to a Dutch concentration camp, and then almost immediately shipped to Auschwitz where they were killed. February 11, 1944. They were 6 and 8 years old at the time. So there you have the two completely divergent stories.

The memories that I have of being with the Madna family -- there aren't too many memories. I was much too little, 9 months old, when I had been left with them. So I have very few memories but they are fun ones, happy ones. I remember Papa Madna playing at the piano. I remember Mima singing lullabies to me. I remember one time getting very angry, actually, at my two foster sisters. They were doing their homework and writing. So I, as a little kid, like any other kid, tried to imitate them. I took a pen and started scribbling. And they all broke out in laughter because obviously the scribblings made no sense. And I got very, very angry because they were laughing at me. It was one of those few memories that I have.

But there were other memories. I remember, for example, having to go into hiding into a small cellar. But even that was a happy memory because the one thing that stands out was playing with all the Christmas decorations that were hiding there. And that's the thing that stands out. So my memories, you know, of those years were very, very happy ones.

Now, my parents, interestingly enough, were allowed one more visit with my sisters before my parents were also deported. And that was for Christmas Day 1942. That's when my two sisters were taken to the psychiatric hospital where both my parents at that point were hiding, my mother a nurse, my father as a patient, and there was a mini reunion of the family then. But three days later the psychiatric hospital was emptied of all patients and staff and they were all deported and taken to a concentration camp.

>> Edna Friedberg: So they could not know that would be the last time they would see their girls.

>> Al Munzer: Absolutely. No. No. There was still that hope that eventually there might be peace.

After, my parents were taken to the same concentration camp that I mentioned earlier, Westerbork, then to another concentration camp on Dutch soil called Vught where they both did slave labor for the Philips electronics company. And my mother described being in that concentration camp where there would be a morning line-up every day at about 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. She says one day Heinrich Himmler, Hitler's second in command, came to visit the camp and he gave a big speech. He exhorted all the prisoners to keep working for the success of the German Reich and that as long as they kept working, nothing bad would ever happen to them.

My mother told me way in the distance while he was speaking she saw a spire of a small Dutch church. She said it would be so wonderful if peace were to come at that moment and she could run to that church and fall on her knees and thank God for being freed. It didn't matter to her whether it was a church, a synagogue, or a mosque, just a place to thank God for being freed.

Of course, you know, Heinrich Himmler lied and three months later the concentration camp in Vught was emptied of all prisoners and they were all sent to Auschwitz. And that's where my parents were separated.

>> Edna Friedberg: You described your time in the Madna household to me as life through the mail slot. Can you describe what you mean by that?

>> Al Munzer: Yes. As I said, I wasn't allowed out of the house at all. And the only view that I had of the outside world was what I could see through a mail slot. There were some people who were really neighbors of my parents who were very anxious to see how I was doing and they were not allowed into the house either but they, too, could look into the house through the mail slot to see that I was around. And that's really the limit of my outside view.

>> Edna Friedberg: For years.

>> Al Munzer: The first four years of my life.

>> Edna Friedberg: You said that not many of the Dutch neighbors knew you were there but many in the Indonesian community did. Given that this was a period of time when Jews were being actively

hunted by Germans, what story did the Madna family come up with to explain the presence of a white toddler in their Indonesian household had you been seen?
>> Al Munzer: They had three children who really looked very, very different but who did adopt me as their little brother. Actually, there was a vote in the family to keep me there. That's something I found out fairly recently. The plan initially was for me to be shipped to the family in some of the Dutch farmlands where most Jewish children were hidden. But the Madna children were so fond of me they wouldn't part with me. And that's how I ended up spending the years with them.
>> Edna Friedberg: At great risk to their family.
>> Al Munzer: Absolutely, a tremendous risk to the family.
>> Edna Friedberg: You've said by the winter of 1944, 1945, you're a little older, you have some clearer memories, that that winter was particularly hard and bitter. Can you tell us a little about what you recall?
>> Al Munzer: What I remember was being hungry. There was very, very little food in Holland during that last winter. All I remember is one day seeing the table set for breakfast and I got up from my bed, walked over to the table, hoping that I was about to be fed. I remember falling asleep with my head falling on the plate and one of my foster sisters coming to get me there and finding me there. That's one of those other memories of being with the Madna family.
>> Edna Friedberg: That winter a lot of the Dutch population survived by eating tulip bulbs.
>> Al Munzer: That's correct. Yes.

You asked me of the stories Papa Madna would come up with to explain my presence. Because the house had been searched several times. He told some of the German soldiers that I was the illegitimate child of his ex-wife and that she now had a new boyfriend who did not want me around and that's why she had passed me on to him. That was one of the many stories he concocted.

I'm told that another time the family decided that it should be Mima answering the door. Because she spoke no Dutch no German, there was total miscommunication between her and the soldier who came to the door. So he gave up and just walked away.

Papa Madna was a man who was fabulous at making up stories. He could tell a story like the one I told you just with a straight face and be very, very believable.
>> Edna Friedberg: We are running short on time but there are several more things to cover. Tell us briefly what happened to your parents after they were incarcerated.
>> Al Munzer: Well, my mother -- both of my parents, as I said, ended up in Auschwitz. That's where they were separated. My mother was sent on to work through slave labor in another electronics factory, Telefunken, in a concentration camp called Reichenbach. My mother described witnessing that camp being bombed by the allies and saying a prayer of thanks to God in Hebrew as she saw the factory going up in flames.

But that was not the end of her ordeal because the Germans then evacuated all the prisoners and moved them further west on what were called Death Marches. And many people did succumb. But eventually my mother was freed at the Danish border.

My father's story was different. He remained in Auschwitz for about six months and then went on to another concentration camp in Austria called Mauthausen, a real hell hole of a camp.

If you visit the exhibit upstairs, you will see an exhibit of these huge boulders that the prisoners were forced to carry in that camp where they would very often be tripped. Many of them lost their lives that way.

Then my father went on from Mauthausen to three more camps, Gusen, Styr, and finally a camp called Ebensee. It was high in the Austrian alps, a beautiful spot where "The Sound of Music" was actually filmed.

My father worked in abandoned salt mines assembling rockets, horrible, horrible work. He did see liberation. He was liberated by the U.S. Army but he was so weakened that he passed away two months later, still in Ebensee. He lies buried in the concentration camp of Ebensee.

And I visited his grave, which was an amazing experience. It's the first time, the only time, when I fully came to grips with the loss of my father. I broke out in tears as I stood at his grave. An

incredible experience. Something similar happened when I visited Mauthausen. There was a monument put up by the Dutch government. And there I found, totally to my surprise, my father's name. Again, the same reaction. It really suddenly hit me that I had lost my father, that I never had a chance to know my father.
>> Edna Friedberg: Just last year you learned additional details about your father through documents in this building. Right?
>> Al Munzer: That's right. Yeah, every day still documents still appear. I came across a little slip of paper of when my father was in Auschwitz. It his number as a prisoner. And then in German it said "Premium Employee." No name, just a number. And then a signature, “Premium Employee.” So I asked a researcher what that meant. And the researcher told me that it meant that the Germans -- the factories had to pay the wages of the slave laborer they employed to the SS, to the Nazis. And it meant that your father was considered a premium employee and they had to pay higher wages to the SS. Just an amazing example of the tremendous bureaucracy that was set up basically to kill people.
>> Edna Friedberg: That story is just one example of what we are constantly, daily, discovering. It's easy to think about the Holocaust as an exhaustively researched topic but every day we find new things. We expect the size of our collection to double in the next 10 years, double. That's mindboggling, a little intimidating to historians, but each of them is a story like your father.

Tell us about your mother's liberation.
>> Al Munzer: My mother was liberated through the intervention of a man who was the head of the Swedish Red Cross. He had negotiated the freedom of several thousand women. My mother described coming off of these cattle cars on to Danish soil and being greeted by the count. And she says she and her fellow prisoners were so ashamed of their appearance but the count insisted on embracing every single one of the prisoners as they came off the train.

And then she was sent to recuperate in Sweden. And she remained in Sweden for about three months. And in August 1945 is when I was reunited with my mother. And that's the first really clear memory that I have. I remember being asleep in one of the back rooms, my sister coming to wake me.
>> Edna Friedberg: Your foster sister.
>> Al Munzer: Right. I still call her my sister now. She's still alive. That's -- exactly. But she carried me into the living room. I was cranky, crying. And the whole family was gathered in the living room, sitting in a circle. She passed me from lap to lap like you do with a kid who is crying. And I remember that there was one lap I wouldn't sit in, one woman I pushed away. And that was my own mother. Because she was a total stranger to me. And I already had a mother and that was Mima Saina.

My mother realized that it would be very difficult to separate me from Mima and so her plan was for Mima to continue to care for me while my mother went out looking for work. But sadly two months later, October 1945, Mima had a cerebral hemorrhage and passed away. And so I have very, very few memories, actually, of Mima, a few words of the Indonesian language which was my native tongue. That's how she spoke to me. And I remember visiting her grave because Papa Madna took me there so many times. But other than that I have really no direct memories of Mima at all.
>> Edna Friedberg: You did describe Mima singing lullabies to you. Can you tell us about one?
>> Al Munzer: One of the amazing experiences I've had through the Museum was about two years ago. I was meeting up with a group of Indonesian students visiting the United States, a group of about 30 students. I told them the story, with photographs of Mima holding me, Mima in very traditional Indonesian dressing. And then at the very end of the story, I said, you know, Mima used to sing a lullaby to me and it was called "Nina Bobo." And all 30 students started singing the lullaby in unison. An amazing, amazingly moving experience for me.

And after that, young women with head scarves, traditional -- you know, Indonesia is now the largest Muslim country in the world. These young women in head scarves coming up to me, hugging me and kissing me and saying "We are all one family." An amazingly powerful message. It shows, you know, that the message that we convey in the museum and my personal story has still a tremendous impact.

>> Edna Friedberg: You now have gone to Indonesia. And the Museum does work in Bahasa, the language of Indonesia, and Al is a close partner in that work.

I'll ask you two more things before we open it to the audience. Tell us about an incident at the movies that happened to you and your mother when you and your mother were in Holland not long after the war when you went to see a movie.

>> Al Munzer: We often think that, you know, the end of the Holocaust or the end of anti-Semitism.

>> Edna Friedberg: Of hatred of Jews.

>> Al Munzer: Yeah. But my mother and I were standing in line to go to a movie. This must have been 1946, sometime. There was a man standing behind us and he saw my mother's tattoo from Auschwitz. And he said in Dutch, "There is one they didn't get." After that, of course, my mother always wore 3/4-length sleeves. She did not want anyone to see the number that she had. It sadly shows that anti-Semitism, hatred of Jews, did not end with the Holocaust. Neither did it end hatred at all.

The saddest part of the story of the Holocaust, as far as I'm concerned, is that it did not spell an end tohatred. Hatred and genocide continue to this day.

>> Edna Friedberg: I think on that note we should open it for questions. We have runners with microphones because we want to be sure that everyone can hear. Please raise your hand and I will get a microphone to you.

First this woman and then this young man.

>> My English is not very good. I come from Germany. I would like to know where your father went -- why your mother immigrated to the United States. Was it anti-Semitism still, even now, active in all of Europe? I'm sorry for this.

>> Edna Friedberg: Did people hear the question? I'll repeat.

>> Did you understand? I'm sorry. My English is not very good.

>> Edna Friedberg: Even for American accents I always repeat. The question is about why your father first immigrated to The Netherlands and then why you and your mother left The Netherlands. Was it because of anti-Semitism, discrimination against Jews?

>> Al Munzer: My father left his hometown, Kanczuga, basically for two reasons: one, a lot of anti-Semitism, and the second in Poland there were very few opportunities so he decided to build a new life in a country that had a much more liberal atmosphere and that was Holland. That's how he came to Holland. And that's the same motivation that my mother had in coming to Berlin in the 1920s.

And the second?

>> Edna Friedberg: Why you left Holland. Came to the U.S.

>> Al Munzer: I think my mother just really wanted to get away from all of the memories of the Second World War, of the Holocaust. After we came to the United States she never went back to Holland. She traveled a lot, really tried to start life all over again and was very successful at that, I think. But there were certain things that she did not want to go back to and one of them was going back to Holland. She never did.

By the same token, my mother never had a strong anti-German feeling. She always -- she impressed this on me, that we judge people as individuals and never as part of a group.

>> Edna Friedberg: Thank you.

Yes?

>> Thank you. You started to touch upon my question with the movie theater story. I know there's no brief answer to this but as briefly as you can, I was hoping you could elaborate a little further on life after the war in between the time of August 1945 and when you emigrated to the United States.

>> Al Munzer: Very good question. I grew up with the Holocaust in those immediate Postwar years. So I heard talk all around me of people who had not come back -- that's the expression that was used -- and others who did come back, like my mother. And somehow, you know, my sisters did not come back. I didn't know what had happened to them. Aunt Jo, as I told you, used to tell stories about my sisters and how wonderful they were. My mother told me stories like that. And as a child, 4-year-old, 5-year-old, I was actually slightly jealous of my two sisters. I did not understand what had happened to them. Many of my classmates had lost brothers and sisters. Many of them had lost both parents. So I

grew up really with the Holocaust and it took many years for me to really understand what that meant. I guess I gained that knowledge very, very gradually. But I thought, you know, playing in a city that had been reduced to rubble was the most normal thing. Playing on the beach, hiding in bunkers, I thought that's what kids do. Sadly kids still do that in war zones today.
>> Edna Friedberg: Other questions?
Yes? The woman in green.
>> There were pictures that were shown of your sisters and your parents getting married. How did you get those photographs after the war?
>> Al Munzer: How did I get the photographs after the war? Fortunately in Holland there were some good people and there were people who kept many of my parents' possessions including a very prized possession of boxes of photographs. I have gone through those photographs. I sat down with my mother, went through the photographs. And that's how I have been able to tell the story of my family.
>> Edna Friedberg: It's our tradition here that our *First Person* guest has the last word. So, Al, is there any closing thoughts you would like to share with us?
>> Al Munzer: I think the one message that I'd like to leave is that, yes, the story of the Holocaust obviously is a horrible story. It's a terrible event. But what I'd like the message to leave you with is there were people in this huge sea of terror, of horrible events, of hatred, there were a few people who were willing to stand up and do the right thing, like the Madna family. I would hope -- this is the thing I leave children with when I talk to classrooms. I said, you know, whenever you hear people using the word "hate," remember where that can lead, that that can lead to people ultimately being killed. Let's do everything we possibly can to imitate the Madna family and stand up even in a sea of hate.
>> Edna Friedberg: Al, thank you very, very much.
>> [Applause]