

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

FIRST PERSON SERIES

Frank Liebermann

Thursday April 20, 2017

10:00 a.m. – 12:07 p.m.

Remote CART Captioning

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings.

This transcript is being provided in rough-draft format.



www.hometeamcaptions.com

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 the 18th year of the *First Person* program. Our

First Person today is Mr. Frank Liebermann, whom you shall meet shortly.

This 2017 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. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

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

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

Today's program will be livestreamed on the Museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the museum's website and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. Recordings of all First Person programs will be made available on the museum's youtube page. We are also accepting questions from our web audience today on Twitter. Please use the hashtag USHMM. Again, USHMM. And we invite those who are here in the auditorium today to also join us on the web when the rest of our programs in April and early May will be livestreamed. Please visit the First Person website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Frank is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have

prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

And we begin with this photograph of Frank Liebermann. He was born in Gleiwitz, Germany, which is now Poland. He was the only child of Hans and Lotte Liebermann. On the left we see Hans Liebermann and on the right we see Lotte and her first granddaughter, Joannie. Both of Frank's parents' families had lived in that part of Germany, which is now part of Poland, for several generations. Frank is pictured here with his paternal grandparents, Bernard and Jenny Liebermann. Hitler came into power in 1933. When Frank began school in 1935 Jewish students were separated from non-Jewish students and fear of anti-Semitic attacks became frequent. Pictured here is Frank's first grade class on the first day of school. The cones they are holding contain sweets to make school sweet. Frank is in the second row, the fourth from the right. I think my arrow is on him so you can see him. In 1936 Frank's father was no longer able to practice medicine as a result of anti-Jewish laws. In 1938 the family tried to obtain visas to come to the United States. Hans traveled first, and Frank and his mother followed a few months later in October of 1938. Here we see Frank's mother's ticket for the ship they took to the United States. The Liebermann family settled in Ohio. And Frank went on to graduate from Western Reserve, now Case Western Reserve University, in 1950 with a degree in chemistry. Frank graduated in college in 1950 and started a long and successful career in the textile industry in New York City. In that same year he married

Marianne, his wife of nearly 67 years. Frank worked in textile manufacturing until 1992 when he and Marianne moved to the Washington, DC area to be closer to their children. Frank lasted three in retirement before going into the travel business which he continues today, specializing in Europe and U.S. travel, including Alaska. He recently joined a new agency, Signature Travel in Maryland.

Frank and Marianne have three children, two daughters and a son. Their daughters, Nancy and Joan, live in this area and their son Jerry is in Seattle. They have five grandchildren, with the youngest about to turn 26. As Frank notes three of them are gainfully employed, one will graduate from Harvard Law School next month and get married in August, the other, after being a teaching assistant at Maastricht University in the Netherlands, is now working on his Ph.D. in Modern European History at the University of Suffolk in Brighton, England. Frank is joined by two of his friends in the front row.

Frank volunteers with the Museum's Visitor Services where you will find him here Thursday Mornings. He gets off from his regular job to join us on *First Person*. As part of his responsibilities, he speaks with various groups visiting the Museum. He also has spoken to wounded veterans at the recently closed Walter Reed Hospital.

And with that I would like you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Mr. Frank Liebermann.

(Applause)

Frank, thanks so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. We are glad to have you and we don't have a lot of time so we should probably start right away. Just one hour. Frank, you said your earlier memories start in 1934 when you were five years old. You also said of that time, all in all -- quote, all in

all, it was a good time for your parents. Tell us why that was so and what you can about your family and your life in Gleiwitz before Hitler really came to power and things turned so much worse.

Frank Liebermann: Gleiwitz is actually between Opole, or Opeln, and Beuthen. My mother's family came from Opeln, and my father's family came from Beuthen, and Gleiwitz was kind of in the middle. I usually like to mention three things happened in 1933 which were significant. One is my grandparents celebrated the hundredth anniversary of their wholesale business.

Bill Benson: That's remarkable, 100 years.

Frank Liebermann: Yeah. That they lived in -- in that city. Also, we bought a car, my mother and father bought a car, was smaller than the Beatle, so that we could visit because where we lived didn't require a car. There were streetcars. We lived on the main street. There was a streetcar going to the hospital. Everything was practically -- the town was about 100,000 people. Virtually everything was within walking distance. And cars were quite a luxury. That's about the time of the Model A Ford was popular. I was able to get around quite easily. We felt safe. And we had a loving family.

Bill Benson: You mentioned there were three things.

Frank Liebermann: The third of course was Hitler.

Bill Benson: Hitler coming to power. A bit more before we go to the events that followed. As you said, you have an early memory of your parents having a car, which was a luxury. As I remember you telling me, your mother's brothers drove motorcycles, which was also probably fairly unusual.

Frank Liebermann: And my grandmother never slept.

Bill Benson: Never slept.

(Laughter)

When your father married your mother, he was already professionally established.

Frank Liebermann: Yes.

Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about that.

Frank Liebermann: He studied medicine and took his residency from a doctor in Breslau who was quite helpful because he had patients from Gleiwitz which he really didn't want to handle. So he kind of inherited the recommendation and got settled pretty quickly in the town. That was also one of the reasons why he picked Gleiwitz.

Bill Benson: Thank you. As you mentioned, Hitler came to power in 1933. You started school in 1935, attending a public school. And you told me that recess was the most dangerous time for you. Will you say more about that?

Frank Liebermann: Recess area was separated between boys and girls and we were obviously identified as a group and basically being in a group was the most dangerous because you could be identified. And we tried to usually stay in the middle between the boy and the girl area where there were some teachers that tried to protect us. We were advised -- we started pretty much on time at the school, we had three rooms within a public school, but in leaving, where again you went en masse, we usually got out five minutes early that we can get out of the grounds and be on our way home before anybody else could.

Bill Benson: So let the Jewish students out five minutes early.

Frank Liebermann: Yes.

Bill Benson: Frank, that was 1935. The next year, 1936, circumstances for your parents and family turned more ominous and became more difficult, if not dangerous. Tell us what changed in 1936, a significant year.

Frank Liebermann: There was war in the east called the Crimean War in 1920, ended I think July 1921 that led to establish -- the establishment of Poland which changed certain borders and Gleiwitz was right at the border. In order to make it -- in order to let the Germans and Poles find the places where they would be comfortable and where they could move, there was part of the peace treaty required that there be no discrimination against either Germans or Poles on either side of the border and that expired in 1936. And that's when we left the country for -- during that time, not knowing what would happen. And when we came back, for instance, there were brown shirts in front of the apartment house where my father also had his office who threatened people who came to see him with loss of jobs and all kinds of things. He also lost his hospital privileges so that we knew we had to get out.

Bill Benson: Before we go there, Frank, what you said you left the country, where did you go in 1936?

Frank Liebermann: To an island called Bornholm. It was a Danish island in the Baltic. And I went back to visit it in the 1980s. Pretty much the same as it was kind of a unique culture. And coming back we had --

Bill Benson: And you weren't gone all that long.

Frank Liebermann: No.

Bill Benson: And it changed that much in --

Frank Liebermann: Yes, basically. We had posters -- we had posters of "Der Stürmer," which was the anti-Semitic magazine or newspaper. It was at virtually every street corner. It showed these ugly cartoon pictures and the atmosphere just changed completely, almost overnight. You probably see part of this in the exhibit which we have right now which is "Some Were Neighbors." But it was unique in that area near Poland because in most cases it -- it was more gradual between 1933 and 1936.

Bill Benson: Whereas in your case --

Frank Liebermann: This was over a weekend.

Bill Benson: Right. So a law protecting against discrimination expired and things changed immediately, immediately.

Frank Liebermann: Yes.

Bill Benson: In 1936, if I remember correctly, your mother went to Israel. Tell us about that.

Frank Liebermann: Well, that -- she went with her brother and they learned at that time that there was one doctor for every 100 people.

Bill Benson: In Palestine Israel.

Frank Liebermann: In Israel. Because it had -- the same thing the loss of hospital privileges and the blockading had happened to a lot of people before that. So we -- it hit us relatively late, but that's when we decided that Israel was not an option and we had to look elsewhere. And we fortunately, it turned out that we found the United States.

Bill Benson: And it wasn't an option because he couldn't have really made a living doing his profession.

Frank Liebermann: Exactly.

Bill Benson: Before we talk about your father coming to the United States, you've looked at -- you've been able to look at the, what you call the downhill slide of your grandparents' business. This business that you'd had in the family for a century. Tell us a little bit about that.

Frank Liebermann: They had a non-Jewish bookkeeper who kept the records and contacted my parents after World War II that they might be interested in it. It showed that their value between -- in 1933 was 100,000 marks. You can't compare that to anything today because of inflation and so forth. By 1938 when the business was confiscated, it was down to 20,000.

Bill Benson: So 80% drop.

Frank Liebermann: Yes. Basically due to blockades. The windows would be marked in red regularly "Uda" (phonetic) which means don't patronize.

Bill Benson: When your father lost his admitting privileges and lost his practice, how did he make ends meet for the family?

Frank Liebermann: Well, basically from whatever savings they had. I think my grandparents were established and they helped out. And we started looking.

Bill Benson: You found --

Frank Liebermann: By the way, also 1936, bank accounts were frozen. That means if you had money in the bank, you could only withdraw enough of what the Nazis determined that you needed in order to survive. Therefore, you really couldn't use your money to leave the country. If you left, you were allowed to take ten marks, which was nothing, maybe. By today's standard, \$50.

Bill Benson: \$50. That's what you were allowed to take with you.

Frank Liebermann: Correct.

Bill Benson: You shared with me that your family did not keep a kosher kitchen but you only purchased at kosher butchers. Why was that?

Frank Liebermann: Well, Gleiwitz was about 120,000 people. The Jewish population was about 1,000 families. The only way a kosher butcher could survive is everybody bought from him because if only those people who wanted kosher meat, they wouldn't be able to get it. He couldn't survive on it. So everybody had a sense of community.

Bill Benson: Frank, Israel wasn't an option and so you began to look elsewhere toward the United States. In 1938 your father made a trip to the US that would make it possible for him to move to the US later that year. Tell us about his trip in January of 1938 and then the events that led up to his departure. What made it possible for him to do that?

Frank Liebermann: Well, first of all, my grandfather, my mother's father, had a hobby of genealogy and he traced the family back to about 1700. He found two people who immigrated to the United States. One had married Michael Gratz who moved to Philadelphia, I think somewhere in the early 1700s, around 1730 or 1740. And were quite active, in fact during the revolution and they -- the family also founded Gratz College in Philadelphia. So he -- one of the places he went to were the archives in Philadelphia where he found that the daughter, Rebecca Gratz, who by the way was the heroine in Ivanhoe, never married and therefore had no survivors. Her brother moved west, which was Louisville, Kentucky.

Bill Benson: The frontier.

Frank Liebermann: The frontier. And all records were lost so that was not an option. The second option was reluctantly taken that in 1905 a son-in-law of my great grandfather asked to borrow \$3,000, which was a very large amount. A dollar was I think three marks in those days. And he said he needed it for a week and he used it to come to the United States and was really not heard from. My father did see him. He had done very well in the United States. He was vice president of Bendix Aviation which was one of the premiere companies.

Bill Benson: So your father saw him when he came in January of 1938.

Frank Liebermann: Correct. And he did get an affidavit which had to state -- the United States had a quota of 25,000 people for Germany. And you will to have an affidavit that from somebody in the United States who would promise that we wouldn't be on welfare. Otherwise, if you showed that you had \$5,000 you could also come to the United States. But that wasn't possible with frozen bank accounts. So he did come back with an affidavit and we got a number -- a quota number from the United States.

Bill Benson: So you -- you'd get a quota number, and there's a limited number of those, and then you get an affidavit saying that somebody will be responsible for you.

Frank Liebermann: With an affidavit, you could get a quota number.

Bill Benson: So now you have the quota number, okay.

Frank Liebermann: Yes. This was in January. And nothing happened. By beginning of March, he called a friend who said -- and said look, the council has a secretary called Fraulein Schmidt. I suggest send a nice box of candy.

(Laughter)

Which he did. And another month passed.

Bill Benson: Nothing happened.

Frank Liebermann: And nothing happened. And he called the friend and said, you know, I'm getting -- I'm really getting anxious. Things are getting worse. He said well, did you put 100 marks into it? Into the box? And so he never thought of that or -- I mean, that wasn't done. He sent another box of candy, this time with 100 marks, and shortly after we got notice to come to Berlin for a physical exam at the American Embassy. We got our Visa on I think the end of June, and he took the next -- that was good for 120 days. Since no money could be taken out, there was a possibility of getting -- if you took a first class ticket on a German boat, you were able to get a pretty good spending allowance for the boat, which could then be transferred.

Bill Benson: But only if it was a German boat.

Frank Liebermann: Only if it was a German boat. So my father took the next boat and we booked my mother and me for October because the Visa was good for 120 days and again, he was studying for the state boards in order to practice in Ohio.

Bill Benson: Before we go there, Frank, when your father got his Visa, he was paid a visit by the Gestapo right after that. Tell us about that.

Frank Liebermann: The way you get space -- rent space for stability you basically give the landlord a mortgage. And when he established his practice, which was 1928, he got the apartment with the help of my grandfather, he gave a mortgage to a landlord, and as long as the landlord had the mortgage, you basically could stay there. When he realized that we were moving, he canceled his lease and asked for the money to be transferred to his bank account, which by the way was frozen. It couldn't be taken

out.

The next day the Gestapo came and said we got -- you're under arrest. He said for what? Said you withdrew a substantial amount of money from -- from a certain bank which was the landlord's bank, and that's against the law. So he called the bank, his bank, and the president of the bank did assure the Gestapo that the money wasn't withdrawn but was transferred to the frozen account.

Bill Benson: And he couldn't touch it --

Frank Liebermann: And correct. And they left.

Bill Benson: And that allowed him then to continue --

Frank Liebermann: That allowed him to -- that allowed him to leave.

Bill Benson: So he goes to the US in June. Your Visas allow you to leave until October of 1938.

Frank Liebermann: October.

Bill Benson: Tell us about that period of time where now it's just you and your mom, your father's now gone to the United States, things are very tense. Tell us about that time.

Frank Liebermann: My mother closed up the household. The car went to the (inaudible) who's one of the people who defined the brown shirts and went to see my father.

Bill Benson: For care?

Frank Liebermann: For care. Then at that time we could still take with us any furniture or belongings that -- providing we pay the 100% tax. And it had to be used.

Bill Benson: So just -- I want to stay on that point for a minute. You could take your belongings but paid a 100% of the value of it in a tax.

Frank Liebermann: Correct.

Bill Benson: Okay.

Frank Liebermann: And that could -- since we have nothing -- no access to the money, that could be done.

Bill Benson: Right.

Frank Liebermann: She also bought the most up-to-date Singer sewing machine so that in case we didn't have money to buy clothes, she could sew. And basically closed up the household. During this time, I had -- I was foolish enough to play tag and broke my arm, and my mother called up for an orthopedist at the hospital whom she knew, and he said sorry, I don't treat Jews. Don't come -- don't bring him. She called -- frantically called various other people, and including an orthopedist at my -- the town where my father had grown up, Beuthen who said look, take a taxi to the back door of the -- delivery door of the Catholic orphanage in Beuthen. I'll meet you there. And he brought with him -- I saw him, I came out with a plaster cast and instructions for my local pediatrician on what exercise to do in order to get the movement back and stretch it. Now my left arm bends a little bit more than my right arm, he did such a good job.

Bill Benson: But that's what you had to go through to get your arm taken care of.

Frank Liebermann: Yes.

Bill Benson: As a little boy. What else happened during that time, those four months while you were waiting for your opportunity to -- to take this ship to join your father?

Frank Liebermann: We -- we got frantic telegrams, take an earlier boat.

Bill Benson: From your dad.

Frank Liebermann: This was in September. And couldn't, by the way, because space was taken. We didn't know why. Remember, censorship was complete. There was no Internet. It was a capital offense to listen to foreign broadcasts. All newspapers were totally censored. And mail was censored. So we waited, not knowing what was going on. We found out what happened when we finally got on the boat, which, by the way, wasn't in port when we were supposed to sail.

Bill Benson: And you were very close to the end of your Visa period, too, right?

Frank Liebermann: Yes.

Bill Benson: So you get there, and there's no -- your ship is not there.

Frank Liebermann: The ship is not there. But we were told that we -- that it would arrive the next day. What had happened during that time was Munich. The infamous conference where the prime minister of France, Daladier, the prime minister of England, Neville Chamberlain, gave Hitler permission to march into Czechoslovakia without their consent. And basically eliminated 14 divisions of Germany's underbelly and changed the balance of power in Europe for what was called Peace in our Time by Neville Chamberlain. That lasted about a year.

Bill Benson: World War II began the following year.

Frank Liebermann: Correct.

Bill Benson: So there you are at Bremerhaven, the ship wasn't there, but you have more to tell us about why the ship wasn't there.

Frank Liebermann: Well, part of Munich was that Hitler called back all ships at sea to threaten war in earnest. And the ship lost four days doing that, during the conference. And they could -- it could make up one trip a week, rather one day on each week because it was six sailing days and it always left on the same day. So we got the details when we got on the ship.

Bill Benson: Found out what had happened?

Frank Liebermann: Yes.

Bill Benson: So now you're safe, you're on the ship, you're on your way. What do you remember about your journey to the United States?

Frank Liebermann: It was during hurricane season in October. My mother never left the cabin. Partly due to exhaustion and seasickness. At one point, I had a private table in the first class dining room because there were only six people. They sat at the -- the captain's table while I had my own seat segregated. I didn't know why, but I don't get seasick so ...

Bill Benson: You made that part of it okay.

Frank Liebermann: Yeah. And in fact, I had my entertainment on that trip was to be -- I have to add, we had the cheapest first class ticket, which was very much in the front of the ship. And I spent a lot of time watching the bow literally dive into a wave and then gradually come up and when it hit the water line, kind of jerked up. That's how we slept at night. It was like going up and down in an elevator.

Bill Benson: Frank, if I remember right, you mentioned you had the first class ticket. That was important because that increased the spending allowance that you had.

Frank Liebermann: We lived on that.

Bill Benson: That's what you -- that's the money you would have to live on, by doing that.

Frank Liebermann: Correct.

Bill Benson: So you arrived in the United States. Your father is in Ohio. Tell us about what it was like to reunite with your father, and what had happened to him if that time.

Frank Liebermann: Oh, he picked -- he picked us up. We stayed rather in -- I got a sightseeing tour of New York on the double decker Fifth Avenue bus for five cents. It went up Fifth Avenue and Central Park, up to upper Manhattan and I mean, we stayed two nights and then left for Cleveland.

We brought the Visa giver a big crystal ashtray as a token of thanks which my mother had and went back to Cleveland where my father finished studying for the state boards, which he was scheduled to take in December.

Bill Benson: So your father, who had had his own established medical practice in Germany now in Ohio he has to go back to school basically to prepare for taking a new set of boards to become qualified --

Frank Liebermann: Correct.

Bill Benson: Okay.

Frank Liebermann: Well, look, I'm grateful that the education system sees to it that we're well taken care of, that at least that the education is par.

Bill Benson: So once he got his appropriate credentialing and licensing, what happened then?

Frank Liebermann: Well, we moved to Dayton because Dayton did not have a Jewish ear, nose, throat surgeon and we were -- we were persuaded by a fraternity brother of my father's to go to Dayton because he shared an office with an ear, nose, throat surgeon and wanted to get us out of town. It turned out to have been a very good decision. After a few bumps.

Bill Benson: Tell us about some of those bumps.

Frank Liebermann: He opened his office in Dayton -- on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1939, and immediately asked for -- filed to join the medical society which was at that time a sign of legitimacy that you're properly qualified. Right after he filed the -- his application, they called an emergency meeting on Friday night, which by the way is a Jewish Sabbath, and passed a law requiring citizenship in order to become a member. Now I have to speak -- that law passed by 51-49, and became part of their rules.

Bill Benson: Therefore denying your father --

Frank Liebermann: Correct.

Bill Benson: -- his membership in the medical society.

Frank Liebermann: Now I'd like to speak to the wonderful institution of the United States press. Somebody had called -- Saturday morning he got a call in the office from a reporter from the "Dayton Herald." He said, Doctor, could I come to see you for a few minutes? He said certainly. He spent half an hour, an hour, looking at his credential, asking him about his education and said thank you very much and said good-bye. The next morning the "Dayton Herald" had an editorial, Freedom of Opportunity in the United States, telling what happened, and the following Monday he had 11 new patients and basically that established his practice. One of my favorite sayings is if you get a lemon,

make lemonade.

Bill Benson: Frank, I want to go back a little bit a few months. Soon after you arrived. It's November 9, 10. You're in Cleveland still, I believe.

Frank Liebermann: Yes.

Bill Benson: And you're at home. Tell us what happened on the night of Kristallnacht and --

Frank Liebermann: That was probably the longest hour of my life. I believe it was a Wednesday, when the movie theater had a special I think 10 cents for the movie -- remember inflation, that was the equivalent of maybe \$1.50 or \$2 today. And they asked a neighbor in the apartment, by the way we had a one-bedroom apartment. I had a Murphy bed. I really loved that. It was mechanical. It could be pulled out every night. And at about 9:00 the phone rang. I was alone. It was a person-to-person call from my grandparents. I knew that something was wrong because it was 3:00 in the morning in Gleiwitz. There's a six-hour time difference between Cleveland and (inaudible) and the operator called, obviously the call was from my mother. I couldn't take it. The operator called every five minutes. Around 10:00 my parents came back. They got through. It turned out that my mother's -- two of my mother's brothers were arrested. The business was confiscated. And they were desperate. They decided -- they had originally thought it would blow over. This was not the time. They said what can be done? My father took the next bus to New York to see that the relative that gave the affidavit and at this point, he said he can't take any more responsibility, even though we didn't take a penny from him. Because -- I guess he felt that was too close because that was a son of the person who had loaned the money.

Bill Benson: When he absconded to the United States.

Frank Liebermann: Yeah. So that option wasn't possible. We had one more event in the meantime of course war was declared. My mother's brothers did manage to get permission to immigrate to Shanghai. There were two countries that took immigrants. One was Shanghai, occupied Japan at the time. And the other one was Dominican Republic, which wanted to have the expertise. Most people closed immigration altogether.

Bill Benson: Once the war began, right?

Frank Liebermann: Once the war began. They were on an Italian ship beginning of June in the Mediterranean. Was supposed to go into the Suez Canal. When Mussolini declared war on England and France, due to the fact that the Germans had occupied France and Mussolini felt it was safe to join to get the plunders of war, therefore the ship went back and we never heard from the two brothers. One of them was married with a 3-year-old daughter. Eventually I found out that they perished in Auschwitz.

Bill Benson: Did any other family members make it out, Frank?

Frank Liebermann: A distant cousin, one that I share a grandparent -- step grandparents with who lives in -- who now lives in Virginia.

Bill Benson: Was the only other survivor that you know of?

Frank Liebermann: Yes. Another one in California, but this was again further removed.

Bill Benson: Your father, after he tried to get your parents out -- his parents and couldn't get the affidavit, he then played a role in bringing many -- a number of people

out and was later recognized for his effort to save survivors.

Frank Liebermann: Well, during the war, after Pearl Harbor, he volunteered and was rejected because Dayton was such -- Dayton almost doubled in size and they didn't want people over 40. So he did stay in Dayton. After World War II, he decided he couldn't help his family. He -- he was a volunteer head of the Jewish family service in Dayton and basically personally gave 107 affidavits, of course with the help of the community. He couldn't do all of it.

Bill Benson: Right. But over 100.

Frank Liebermann: But 107 affidavits for war refugees because after World War II there were literally millions of displaced persons who had lost their homes and he, in fact, was -- received an award from the Jewish Resettlement Agency called HIAS together with President Truman for doing outstanding things to help in immigration.

Bill Benson: How long did your parents live?

Frank Liebermann: My father died in 1979 and my mother in 1990.

Bill Benson: We're going to turn to our audience for some questions in a minute, Frank. But before we do, there's another incident that you shared with me too that I'd like you to talk about. One of them involved when you finally did get the belongings out that -- that you have sent out of Germany, when they arrived. You know where I'm asking about.

Frank Liebermann: Yeah, I know what he's talking about. I'm talking about the extent of corruption during times of stress. Similar, for instance, you may know about the ship, the St. Louis, where the Cuban consul sold Visas that he wasn't authorized to sell. And when the people got to Havana, they couldn't get off. The ship spent ten days off the coast of Florida trying to resettle, trying to see if they could get immigration Visas. Unsuccessfully. The ship went back to Holland. And most of those people eventually did not survive. Corruption is something which just happens when people are desperate.

Bill Benson: So you're going to talk about the -- the bicycle.

Frank Liebermann: Yeah. Friends of my parents said, why don't you -- I know you're packing up. We can put your bicycle -- your son's bicycle into a box to make it to -- to give it less space for your packing. We'll prepare -- have Frank take it over to us and we'll box it. I have to go in background that when Germany went off the gold standard, it became all gold coins had to be turned in and exchanged for paper money. It was a capital offense to have gold coins. When we unpacked the lift or the container in Dayton, of course we unpacked everything, including the bicycle. And shortly afterwards got a letter from this family who had gotten out to Israel and said, look, when you unpack the bicycle, please be careful and remove the seat. Inside the frame we put some gold coins. Keep them for us and we'll get back to you. We may want something when we'll be able to get it. My father became livid because things were being checked by -- whether the lift was packed, there was a customs official checking out every item to see that the right amount of money was paid and that it was legal and in fact one of our suitcases was broken open by the Gestapo when we got to the ship. Nobody trusted anybody. And my father was livid that they -- for the sake of their coins that they took chances with my -- mine and my mother's lives.

Bill Benson: As you said, that was -- that would have been a capital offense to have that found.

Frank Liebermann: Yeah. But I think of immigration and desperation today, and it's understandable.

Bill Benson: Frank, thank you for that. We have time to turn to our audience for a few questions. And before we do, let me say first we hope that you'll have some questions to ask of Frank. We ask that you use a microphone. We're going to have microphones in either aisle. It will be passed to you, so use the microphone, please. Make your question as brief as you can. I will do my best to repeat the question, just to make sure that we hear it and hear it correctly, and then Frank will respond to it. So I think we can take a few questions. Let's see, do we have any questions from our audience? It's hard for me to see with the lights so I'm going to need help. There we go, I see at least one hand over here.

Audience Member: Thank you. My name is Dorian. Thank you for your story. It was moving. I just had a question. Your family, you say that they were denied access to Israel. I just wanted to know why, and then, did you and your family eventually get like dual citizenship with Israel now that you can go back and forth to the area as you please? Just want to know for my curiosity.

Bill Benson: If I hear the question correctly, you're asking why they didn't go to Israel.

Audience Member: It seems that he said that his -- the people who put the gold coins were able to go.

Bill Benson: The gold coins, I'm sorry, about the gold coins.

Audience Member: To Israel, why was his family denied access.

Bill Benson: It wasn't denied access. It was the question about your father's opportunity, why he -- why you didn't move to Israel when your mother went there.

Frank Liebermann: He couldn't make a living.

Bill Benson: Right. Too many doctors. Right. And so they could have moved there. He just wouldn't have been able to practice his profession.

Frank Liebermann: They used some of the gold coins to get out.

Bill Benson: Incidentally, did -- what happened to those gold coins?

Frank Liebermann: My -- each of my children and my daughter-in-law has one to use as a necklace.

Bill Benson: A necklace. Okay. All right. Do we have another question? We have one here. Yes, sir.

Audience Member: Have you returned to your hometown?

Bill Benson: Have you returned to your hometown?

Frank Liebermann: Yes, I did. I did it the first time in 1994 when I took a trip to Europe, to eastern Europe. I went to Budapest and Prague and I decided to take a one-day trip. I'd really just wanted to see like a fly on the wall what it looked like. I didn't want to spend a night there. And I did exactly that. I found my grandparents' business was the -- it was in a strategic area downtown near a bridge. That house was down completely. Our house was still standing. I also walked over to a synagogue which of course wasn't there anymore. It was a run-down playground. But what used to be the Jewish old age home, which was next to the synagogue, was a police station. And when I saw that, I said, let's get out of here. I mean, there was no reference of any kind. And --

Bill Benson: Not even a placard that said --

Frank Liebermann: Absolutely nothing.

Bill Benson: Nothing.

Frank Liebermann: And I did find out ten years later that there were three fire engines at the fire to prevent that building from being burned with the synagogue. The old age home was given 48 hours to clear the space and became the Nazi headquarters. But I didn't know that at the time. And by the way, the community of Gleiwitz did invite us in ten years later when a memorial plaque was put up, not on that ground but on the apartment area next to it because that ground was used -- was to be used for building and it was prime real estate. And the plaque acknowledged the role of the role of the Jewish community in aiding the growth of the city because that, at the time, was kind of the system of the aristocracy before Germany and they sold rights to the -- when coal was discovered, they didn't want to get their hands dirty and they sold rights to entrepreneurs who started mining the areas and started the steel industry and that area became kind of the east end. Unfortunately it was brown coal which was highly polluting. It's no longer active and it kills a lot of trees in the adjoining giant mountains.

Bill Benson: I think we probably -- one more. Let's do one more question, and then we need to close our program. The young man right here. Right. Let me just say, Frank is going to remain on the stage when we finish in just a few minutes. We're going to close with some thoughts from Frank. He will remain on the stage. So if you want to ask him a question afterwards, we absolutely invite you and encourage you to come up on stage, ask your question of Frank, shake his hand, get your picture taken with him, whatever you want to do. So you'll have a chance to chat with him. Yes, sir.

Audience Member: Was there ever a time that when just going outside you were afraid of being assaulted or just murdered?

Bill Benson: When you were in Germany were there times when you were afraid to go outside of being assaulted or even murdered as a child?

Frank Liebermann: Alone I didn't -- I felt relatively safe. I had my bicycle, I had -- we had -- I visited friends. It was in groups that it was dangerous because you couldn't be easily identified. After Kristallnacht, that was the Night of Broken Glass, which by which time we were already in the United States, then you had to wear a Jewish star in yellow. Then I couldn't have gone freely and felt safe. In fact, there weren't so many cars, it wasn't as dangerous to go places as it is now.

Bill Benson: And that all changed just soon after you came to the United States.

Frank Liebermann: Yes.

Bill Benson: Yes. We're going to close our program in a moment with Frank. It's our tradition that our *First Person* has the last word. And so Frank will share his closing thoughts with us. Before he does, I want to thank all of you for being with us. Remind you that we'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So we hope that you can come back and join us. When Frank is finished, our photographer, Joel, will lead us on the floor. Joel is here. Joel will come up on the stage. He's going to take a picture of Frank with you as the background. So we ask that you stay seated, if you don't mind, so that we can get that picture taken with Frank at the end of this program. So Frank.

Frank Liebermann: All right. I want to add that I've basically made peace with Germany. It's three generations and I'll go back to the Bible that Moses was lost in the

desert for 40 years, I think that's symbolic to saying that it takes two generations to change a mindset. Starting the 1990s -- by the way, I have gone to Germany a couple of times on business before, but my kids really wanted me to show them where we came from and in fact I took everybody for the dedication of that memorial. We met in Berlin and then drove east and I've -- I have to add that Germany is one of those countries which has not only acknowledged but has tried to atone for what happened to a civilized society. And I'd like to add that this is what the museum is all about, to keep the dark side of humanity from coming out. And that shows in some of our exhibits.

I feel I've had a chance to -- to live the American Dream, for which I'm very grateful, and I think I volunteer here because I want everybody to try to make the world a better place. I feel that's my goal. Thank you.

(Applause)

Bill Benson: Thank you. And remember, once Joel's finished with Frank and his photograph, then please feel free, if you wish, to come up on stage and say hi to Frank.