UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON HARRY MARKOWICZ
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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. We are in our 17th year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mr. Harry Markowicz, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2016 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 a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue twice-weekly through mid-August. The museum's website, listed on the back of your program, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests. The address is www.ushmm.org.

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. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Harry Markowicz's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Harry will share his "First Person" account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows we will have an opportunity for you to ask Harry questions.

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

We begin with this photograph of Harry and his siblings, Rosa and Manfred, or Mani, in 1941. Harry was born on August 9, 1937, in Berlin, Germany. His parents, Max and Marja, had emigrated from Poland shortly after World War I.

This photo shows Harry's mother's family around 1914, in Widawa, Poland. Harry's mother is the second from the left in the back row, with the long braids. The others in the picture are Harry's aunts and uncles, 11 in all, and Harry's grandmother who is in the middle sitting next to her youngest child, Bolek. Of those in the photo only three survived World War II: Harry's mother, her youngest sibling, Bolek, and her sister, Leonia, third from the left in the back row.

Here we see Harry's father, Max, in Berlin, Germany, in front of the Reichstag building around 1919 or 1920. He had recently arrived from Poland.

On this map of Germany, the arrow points to Berlin, where Harry and his family lived when he was born. In 1938, a family friend, who was a policeman, warned the Markowiczes of an impending outbreak of violence against Jews in Germany. Harry and his family escaped to Antwerp, Belgium.

This arrow shows where Antwerp is located. When Germany invaded Belgium in May 1940, the Markowiczs tried to cross the border to France and were denied entry, so they rented a beach house in La Panne, Belgium. The second arrow on the left points to that area. They stayed until Belgium surrendered to Germany in late May.

In 1942, Harry and his family went into hiding in Brussels. Harry and his siblings were placed separately in children's homes and with different families. Harry lived with the Vanderlinden family until the liberation of Belgium in September 1944. Here we see Harry with Mrs. Vanderlinden.

After the war, the Markowiczes resumed their life in Brussels. Here we see Harry and his family in Brussels. Harry and his parents emigrated to the United States in 1951, joining his siblings who had emigrated in 1949 and 1950.

After arriving in the U.S. in 1951, Harry and his parents settled in Seattle, Washington, where his brother and sister had gone after their move to the U.S. He went to the University of Washington for his undergraduate studies then attended Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, for his graduate degree. At Simon Fraser, Harry's study in linguistics and particularly in sign language led to his career working with people with deafness. After his studies Harry spent a year in France. He returned to France later to work for five years before becoming a Professor of English at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, the world's only university with programs and services specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard of hearing students. It was established by an Act of Congress in 1864. After 30 years at Gallaudet he retired in 2008.

Harry also taught English as a Second Language in Israel and Canada, as well as French in the U.S. and in Canada.

Since his retirement Harry has become very involved with this museum as a volunteer. You will find him at the Membership Desk on Wednesday afternoons. Harry also participates in the museum's writing program for survivors. You can read several of Harry's writings on the museum's website.

Harry and his wife, Arlene, whom he met in Washington, D.C. but to whom he proposed in France when she came to visit, will celebrate their 39th wedding anniversary on June 26th. They live in Silver Spring, Maryland. Arlene could not be here today with Harry because of another obligation but he is accompanied by his former colleague and good friend Marcia Bordman, as well as Arlene's sister, Joanne Cooper, and her daughters Shira and Yael.

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

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Harry, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our *First Person* today. Thank you. You have a lot to share with us in a short period of time, an hour, so we'll go ahead and get started if that's ok.

Your father settled in Berlin in 1919 and married your mother in 1926. By the time you were born in 1937, Hitler and the Nazis had been in power for four years. Let's begin with you telling us what you can, given how young you were, about your parents and their lives prior to your birth.

>> Harry Markowicz: I was very young.

>> Bill Benson: Very young prior to your birth. That's true.

>> Harry Markowicz: In fact, anything I say is probably going to be hearsay.

My father left Poland in 1919 and moved to Berlin. We didn't talk about this but I guess there were some reasons for that. For one, Germany, after World War I, became a democracy. Presumably it was a better situation for Jews to live in Germany at the time than it was in Poland where there was a lot of anti-Semitism.

Also, my father had been a soldier during World War I in the Polish Army. Although he never told us what he did. My wife Arlene asked him once what he did or what it was like. He just said it was

terrible. I'm assuming he was in the cavalry because he knew how to ride a horse well. Other than that I don't know what he did.

In 1919, Poland became an independent nation. Until then it had been part of Russia for several centuries. It became independent. There were some conflict developing with Russia. War was imminent. In fact, the war started in 1920 and through 1921 between Poland and Russia. And my father decided he doesn't want to fight anymore. He had had enough. He was a teenager when he was in the war. He was only 15 when he went in the Army, so he was very young.

So he left. And I think other Jewish young men who were in the same situation left. It was very tough to be Jewish and young in those days because of the anti-Semitism. So he settled in Berlin. Two brothers were also there. I don't know if they went before. They were older. They might have gone before. I'm not sure.

>> Bill Benson: What was your father's occupation?

>> Harry Markowicz: He dealt with furs. He was involved in the process of converting raw skins of animals to pelts into furs. He would collect the pelts from the farmers. He had people working for him. They went out in the country. I guess there were a lot of rabbits and animals like that. It was a whole process. That's what he did.

He met my mother at a wedding in Danzig. Danzig at the time was an international city/state. It had been part of Germany but after World War I it was taken away and made independent city/state so that Poland could have access to the harbor. And my father went to this wedding of a friend who also couldn't go back to Poland because he had also left because of the draft. So he couldn't go back to Poland to marry the woman he was going to marry. So they had the wedding in Danzig, which is today called Gdansk in Poland.

At the wedding, after this couple got married, the groom turned to my father and said, well, why don't you pick somebody from --

>> Bill Benson: The wedding party?

>> Harry Markowicz: From the wedding party. So my father said, ok, and picked out my mother. Who else would he pick? [Laughter] So my mother thought they were going to get married later but he said, no we're going to get married now. He said to send a telegram to her mother in Poland and tell her to come to the wedding and bring your stuff because you're not going back to Poland. So apparently a couple of days later they got married. My father brought back my mother to Berlin.

>> Bill Benson: Your parents came back to Berlin, as you said. Your siblings were born in the late 1920s. You were born in 1937. So four years after Hitler took power. Did your parents ever talk to you about what it was like for them, those early years of the Nazis coming to power?

I think one of the things you said to me was that your father was one of those who thought Nazism couldn't last very long.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yeah, he thought, like many other people, that it was so terrible what was happening in Germany with regard to Jews and others, Romas, gypsies, and others; that the world wouldn't let it go on. Just like many today. We have situations where people think the world is going to stop what's happening in, say, for example, Syria but nothing stops them. The world was not going to interfere.

My father did try to get visas for the United States.

>> Bill Benson: So that you could leave Germany?

>> Harry Markowicz: Yeah. That didn't work out. Few visas were being issued. It would have taken years. So he was pretty much resigned to staying.

And it was like other people. If you were professional like a lawyer or doctor, you couldn't practice. If you were a teacher, you couldn't work. University professors couldn't work.

>> Bill Benson: If you were Jewish.

>> Harry Markowicz: If you were Jewish. I'm sorry. Yeah. All civil servants who were Jewish were dismissed. But he wasn't affected that way. Also, he didn't have a store so he didn't have any presence on the streets. It was wholesale. So he wasn't bothered by the Nazis. Which was a good thing. But that didn't encourage him to leave until sometime -- the fall of 1938, a friend of his -- you mentioned this in

the introduction. A friend was a policeman. He was the fiance of a man who my parents knew from before I was born.
>> Bill Benson: He was the fiance of your nanny?
>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. He came to my father and told him that things were going to get absolutely terrible for Jews and that my father should get out with his family. So my father made an attempt. There were smugglers who got people out of Germany and into adjoining countries. So my father took my brother and sister -- I was only 1-year-old. So I stayed in Berlin with my mother.

Also, I should say, at the time, the Germans and the Nazis in particular, left women and children pretty much alone. They bothered the men more.

Anyway, my father went to Aachen, which is a city on the border of Germany where it comes together with Belgium and Holland, to a spa town. So he pretended to go on vacation and ended up in a hotel where they were supposed to meet a smuggler. The smuggler, somebody who was getting paid for this, apparently she was not very experienced because she took him to Holland, the Dutch border, through the forest and my father, my sister, my brother, a lot of other people --
>> Bill Benson: And she was smuggling this group out?
>> Harry Markowicz: Through the forest. They ran into a Dutch patrol. She led them by mistake to the Dutch border instead of the Belgium border which was a big difference because the Dutch were not accepting refugees, Jewish refugees while Belgium was. So they were turned over by the Dutch to the German authorities. My father and the other adults were put in jail. My brother and sisters and some of the other kids were put with Jewish families who happened to be living in Aachen.

After a few weeks my father was released. The German authorities were not concerned at that time, not that concerned about Jews leaving. They wanted them out but they were making sure that they had paid their taxes before leaving. There was a whole process to get out. You had to pay fees and so on. And my father had taken care of everything as far as payment, taxes, and so on. So that's why they let him go.

Then he went on his own. He got smuggled across into Belgium this time. And then he planned to get the rest of the family out of Germany. He arranged for a Belgian who lived near the border. I think he worked in Germany and commuted every day. He arranged for him to drive us across the border as his family, pass us off as his family.

What happened, it was September 26, a day when Hitler was giving a speech on the radio, an important speech because it dealt with the issue of [Indiscernible], a part of Czechoslovakia where three million German-speaking people, Czech, lived. They had been part of Germany before World War I. And Hitler wanted that piece of territory. He promised that that would be the end of the territorial conquest. He didn't use the word conquest but that would satisfy him. He wouldn't take anything else. Of course, that was a lie.

So the speech was on while we just happened to arrive at the border. One German guard came up from the guard house. He was rather anxious to get back in so he could hear the speech, apparently, so we got through. And then the Belgian border, we pretended we were his family. They knew him already because he commuted every day. So that's how we got into Belgium. We were allowed to stay but my father wasn't allowed to take a job. Needed a work permit. I think he dealt in furs for some time.
>> Bill Benson: Sort of an underground economy or black market?
>> Harry Markowicz: I don't know about the furs. Eventually he went into the black market dealing with currency. Everybody knew that the war was imminent and people wanted to have currency that was going to be worth something, that was the British pound and the American dollar, maybe the Swiss franc. So he dealt in that to earn his living.
>> Bill Benson: So the family now is in Belgium. You're out of Germany. War would break out in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland and Russia invaded Poland from the east. You were in Antwerp. And then a few months later Germany invaded Belgium on May 10, 1940. So you had been in Belgium by that time for maybe perhaps 18 months, almost two years.

A few days after Germany invaded Belgium, your family fled for France. Tell us what you can about your family's attempt to try to get into France once Germany invaded Belgium.
>> Harry Markowicz: All right. We tried to go to France. But we were not the only ones. There was a mass exodus of Belgians.
>> Bill Benson: When you say a mass exodus, from what you told me, it's like a scene from a war movie with thousands of people on the roads, choking the roads with bikes, cars, carts, horses, people trying to flee the German advance.
>> Harry Markowicz: Right. My parents, together with four other families, rented a truck and a driver to drive us to the French border. We arrived on the Belgium coast. There the driver said he's not going any further and dropped us off. I don't know what his reason was. Maybe -- the driving was very slow. There were all of these thousands and thousands of people on the roads. Many were walking. Cars were running out of gas. Maybe he was frayed he would not be able to get gas and get back so he left us. We started walking. I was 3 years old.
>> Bill Benson: In fact, if I can just ask you a question. Not only were the roads checked and people running out of gas, weren't the Germans flying in and strafing with airplanes?
>> Harry Markowicz: That was a little later, when we got to the border.

So walking. Then eventually my parents and then with one other family related to them somehow, cousins, I guess, they continued together. They bought -- I don't know exactly what you would call it. A resort, you know, they have them in Virginia Beach, it's a bicycle with three or four wheels you pedal, there's a bench. Two people sit side-by-side and you ride it around the boardwalk. They bought one of those, put whatever stuff they had between the two families. The other family had a little girl my age, 3. They put her and me on top and pushed it.
>> Bill Benson: Both families' belongings are piled on top of this little pedal-driven cart with you and the little girl sitting on top of it.
>> Harry Markowicz: Right. And they went to the French border. When we got there, they let in the Belgians or the Dutch who were coming also but they didn't let us in. Because we were stateless. Germany had taken away Jewish citizenship. By the time I was born, they didn't give citizenship to Jews. So we were stateless, no country.
>> Bill Benson: So people understand, the Germans took away your citizenship so being stateless meant that you belonged to no country.
>> Harry Markowicz: Right.
>> Bill Benson: So there you are, you're being told you can't come in because you don't have a country.
>> Harry Markowicz: Mm-hmm. Right. So we were stuck at the border.

My first memories from then -- when the war broke out, September 1, 1939, the year before, England had sent troops, 300,000 troops, to France, to help France fight off the Germans. These troops were on the border with Belgium. And then when the invasion started, they came into Belgium. So my first memory is of seeing a British soldier, officer, standing next to me. I was lying in a ditch. I know my mother was next to me and other people were also in the ditch. The British officer was looking at the sky with binoculars. And then I fell asleep. And then I woke up and I noticed the British soldier, the British officer, was gone. I asked my mother where he went and she said they were gone.

What had happened -- I found it out later. If you're familiar with the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force in Dunkirk -- Dunkirk is a harbor in France just across the border. The British troops, and the French, had been surrounded by the Germans. The Germans had arrived much faster than they expected and they were surrounded with their backs to the sea, with no way out except from the sea.

We were right there, the Germans who were arriving. For some reason the German ground troops had stopped I guess about 20 miles back. Maybe they outran supplies. For some reason they stopped. But they were still bombing and strafing the British who were on the beaches by then.

I asked my brother lately what he was going on when we were in the ditch. He says, "I don't remember a ditch." So we have different memories. He's eight years older than I am. But I said, “Is it

possible we were in a ditch?" He says "Yeah." I said, "Why?" Well, because they were strafing the roads. They were strafing the roads get to the British. But also they wanted to get the refugees off the roads so they could come through.
>> Bill Benson: So you're stranded now at the border. You can't get in. I know your parents made a number of attempts to try to persuade the officials but you were turned away. So you can't go into France. The German Army is advancing. What did you do?
>> Harry Markowicz: My parents rented a villa along the coast, the Belgium coast. It was all resorts. Of course nobody was on vacation. Also it was May. So they rented the villa. We stayed there until the Belgian troops were still fighting until I think it was the 26th of May or 28th of May. They fought 18 days and then the king who was in charge surrendered to the Germans. Belgium is a very small country and couldn't hold back the Germans. So they just swooped in and Belgium was occupied.

We started walking. On the way, we were picked up by German trucks that were empty because they were coming back from the front. They transported us part of the way back to Antwerp. They -- my brother said -- there were no stores open or anything. They gave us bread. They were soldiers. They didn't care if we were Jewish, we and many other people.
>> Bill Benson: You told me that once the family was back in Antwerp, because you could not get into France, you're back at Antwerp, the Nazis are in control. Now they begin issuing all kinds of anti-Jewish decrees. Tell us some of the things that they imposed on you.
>> Harry Markowicz: They first set up a Jewish council, which they did everywhere they occupied, in every country. They set up a Jewish council consisting of the elderly of the community in order to control the Jews. It was easier to go through the council than try to give orders directly to the individual Jews.

So all of these measures, edicts, coming from the Germans went to the Jewish council. One of the first things was you had to register that you were Jewish. Everybody in Europe had to register where they lived but in Belgium it was in the Constitution that you couldn't put religion on any legal document, any government document. So at first the Belgian authority said, well, we can't register Jews because that's against the law in this country but after a short while they decided they better because there was nothing they could do against the Germans. So they gave in and Jews had to register. We followed the law. Most did, anyway.

Other things like there was a curfew. Jews couldn't own radios so we couldn't get information.
>> Bill Benson: So you had to give up all of your radios.
>> Harry Markowicz: Eventually professionals couldn't practice. Again, just like in Germany except it happened faster. Jews had to give up their businesses, didn't get compensated.
>> Bill Benson: I think even things like bicycles were taken away. And then at some point you had to start wearing the yellow star. Right?
>> Harry Markowicz: Actually -- yes, but not until 1942.
>> Bill Benson: Later.
>> Harry Markowicz: May `42, which is very late compared to what was going on in Eastern Europe. But in Eastern Europe the treatment of Jews was very, very different, at least in public. Once you were in their hands. In Western Europe it was the same as the east. But they were very concerned about public opinion. The Germans had very low opinions of Eastern Europe but not Western Europe. They considered Western Europeans like Germans. They might have eventually made them Arians.
In the east they were planning to make slaves out of the Pols and send in to populate the other countries in Eastern Europe, the same prejudice that existed at the time in the United States.
>> Bill Benson: Your father was called up for forced labor at some point. Wasn't he?
>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. I think around 1941. That's one of the things they did. They requested abled-bodied men to work in, presuming, factories to replace all of these young Germans who were in the Army.

My father was called up. He was supposed to report to work on a certain day. He didn't want to go. He didn't trust them. So he didn't go. Instead, we left Antwerp and moved to Brussels. And in Brussels, my parents did not register us as Jews.

>> Bill Benson: You told me that when they moved into Brussels, the way you described to me, they didn't register. They sort of went off the grid. You said they weren't, at first, directly hiding but living somewhat anonymously, I think is the word, that you used. But at some point after September 1942 your family did make this profound decision to go into hiding. Tell us about that.
>> Harry Markowicz: Ok. In Brussels we lived in a Jewish neighborhood. My mother was the one who went to Brussels to look for an apartment. She didn't speak the language that was spoken in Belgium, either French or Flemish, didn't speak either one. She took the train from Antwerp to Brussels. When she got off the station in Brussels, she heard Yiddish spoken. So she found an apartment right away but it was a Jewish neighborhood. So although we were not registered, we were living surrounded by Jews.

In 1942, in the summer, in August, the Germans started having roundups. It started in Antwerp, where most Jews lived. They came at night, surrounded the Jewish neighborhoods. They had all the addresses where Jews were living. They picked up all the Jews that they found, not just men but women, old people, sick people, babies, children. So it was obvious that they were taking them not to work, sick people, babies can't work.

At that point there was only one thing you could do, to go into hiding. There were underground organizations, Jewish and non-Jewish, that helped the Jews to hide. And mostly they helped to find hiding places for children. It was safer for the children to be separated from the parents. They were hiding places like orphanages or convents, a lot of Catholic institutions hid children. The Catholic hierarchy did not speak up but one Cardinal did and said that the priest and nuns and good Catholics should help Jews. There were hiding places with families, with Belgium families.
>> Bill Benson: Where did your parents end up finding places for their kids to hide and then for themselves? Tell us about that.
>> Harry Markowicz: We were in different places. The first place was with an elderly couple. I think my parents found these people on their own. They lived in the Jewish neighborhood. And my parents asked them to move out of the neighborhood. They paid them to do this.
>> Bill Benson: To move to a non-Jewish neighborhood?
>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. So they agreed to do that. I don't remember how long, maybe a week, month, but not very long because they decided they didn't like their new apartment. Then they moved back to their -- not their old apartment. They moved back to the old neighborhood, the Jewish neighborhood. The neighborhood had a lot of empty apartments where the Jews lived, so they moved back there.

Another thing. They had their grandson living with them, 18 years old. He joined the Belgian fascist party. It was a paramilitary group that eventually fought with the Germans. My brother said he joined not out of ideology but just that it was a job for him. But that, too, was dangerous. So when our parents found out, first that they moved back to the old neighborhood, they took us out of there.
I wanted to stay with my parents for a while until they could arrange for another place for me, my brother, my sister.
>> Bill Benson: And that was the Vanderlindens?
>> Harry Markowicz: Not yet. In between my sister and I stayed in a villa out in the countryside with other children. I don't know what it was. My brother came to visit. Then he saw my parents and told them that there were Jewish adults living in that villa. Adults were more dangerous than just Jewish kids. Jewish kids, being kids we learned French or Flemish very quickly and we could pass but adults it takes a long time. They were not assimilated. So it was dangerous for us to there be with them so my mother came and got us out of there.

Then I lived -- I think it was an underground organization that found them for us. Again with my sister because I was only 5 years old at the time.
>> Bill Benson: It was you and your sister. Your brother was somewhere else?
>> Harry Markowicz: My brother -- I didn't know this because they hadn't told me. They didn't want me to know so that I couldn't tell anybody else. My brother was also in the same neighborhood. It was a working class area on the edge of the city. I think it was municipal houses built by the municipality for

working class people. They were nice little houses. There was a garden in front and in back. Modern. It was very nice.

So I was there with my sister with this family. They had a daughter.

>> Bill Benson: And were you there as relatives of theirs? Was that the notion that you were relatives that were staying with them or that you were their children? Do you know?

>> Harry Markowicz: I don't remember what they said to the neighbors. But obviously the neighbors knew that we were not their children.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Harry Markowicz: We just showed up one day. So there was that.

I went to school. This was a Flemish-speaking area. The school was a Catholic school. The teachers were nuns. And everybody spoke Flemish but I didn't. When we lived in Antwerp, it's Flemish but I was too young to go to school tore go outside and play so I didn't learn Flemish. My brother and sister knew Flemish but I didn't. So in the school I didn't have anybody to talk to. But then one day an older boy -- I think it was a boys' school, came up to me and he spoke French. Then he introduced me to some other French-speaking kids. They were older Jewish kids, it turns out. They were the Jewish kids who had come from Brussels.

>> Bill Benson: So there were a number of Jewish kids hidden, if you will.

>> Harry Markowicz: About 14 kids there. My brother was living with another family nearby. Might have been a couple of blocks away: I don't know where because I didn't know that he was there. But what happened, one day the Gestapo intelligence came to the house where he was staying. There were two other Jewish kids. There were three altogether. They came in. They didn't bother them. They were looking for the son of the family who was a young adult and he was a railroad worker. He was working in Germany. The Germans hired Belgians to work in Germany when they couldn't hire anymore because there were no more volunteers to work in Germany. They just took Belgians, forced them into forced labor.

Anyway, he had been working in the railroad yard with several other young Belgians. They were given five days to go home on leave but it took them three days to get home because the train didn't run on schedule. There were bombings and stuff like that. So when they arrived in Brussels, they decided they would stay I don't know how many days, a couple of days, and then go back. But that meant when they got back to Germany, they were late.

In the meantime, the railroad yard had been bombed by the allies so the Germans suspected that one or more of these Belgians had transmitted information to the allies about whatever was going on in the railroad yards or whatever was nearby. And they arrested them. And then the Gestapo intelligence came to the house where this young man lived and they were searching for a radio transmitter. They didn't find one. But as they were leaving, they told my brother and the other two kids in German that they will be back for them tomorrow.

>> Bill Benson: So they realized they were Jewish kids.

>> Harry Markowicz: They knew from the beginning.

>> Bill Benson: From the beginning. Said we'll be back for you.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yeah. Said oh, here are the Jewish kids, as if they already knew before they came. But they didn't come back the next day.

Anyway, my brother and the other two kids didn't wait around. My brother came over to where we were staying, my sister and I, and we left. He said the Germans might come the next day and that it was not safe. So I stayed with my parents for a while.

My parents lived in an apartment, in a building that looked vacant. All the windows were either whitewashed or covered with newspapers. I can't remember which it was. And the neighbor across the street went shopping for food for them. There was no other food during the war. They shopped for them and then brought the food over and then also brought a newspaper for my father so he could keep up with what was going on because it was censored by the Germans but it gave some news.

>> Bill Benson: At some point, the Vanderlindens family with whom you were living moved into the city of Brussels from being on the outskirts, taking you with them. So now they are living right in the city.

That meant that they changed jobs and everything to go do that. What was your life like for you and your sister? Was your sister still with you?
>> Harry Markowicz: No.
>> Bill Benson: Living now in the City of Brussels. Your parents are in hiding in the building you described. This is getting later in the war. There you are hidden inside with the Vanderlindens.
>> Harry Markowicz: Again, my parents paid the Vanderlindens but they had to give up a lot, their jobs and so on.

So now we're in the neighborhood where people didn't know them before, I could pass for their son. I was freer than before. It was less of a stress on me and especially on them. My sister wasn't with me anymore. I started going to school again, a French-speaking school. I got very used to them. They treated me very well. They treated me like their son, for real.

My mother came to visit me sometimes. This was very dangerous for her. Once, I was playing in the street near the apartment where the Vanderlindens lived and I was throwing a ball with one of my friends. I saw somebody in the distance walking behind him, coming towards us. The person got closer. I realized it was my mother. I had to decide what do I do. Do I acknowledge her?

I had been given very specific instructions about certain things like I wasn't supposed to tell anybody I was Jewish. In Europe, males typically were not circumcised except Jewish boys. So that's one way that the Germans could figure out who was Jewish. They would make men or boys take down their pants if they were circumcised, you were Jewish as far as they were concerned. So that was one of the things I had been told, not to pee in front of the other boys or anybody else and things like that. Of course, I had a different name. I had to pretend to be Catholic and so on. I had a completely different identity. But nobody was telling me what to do if I see my mother on the street because they didn't anticipate that would ever happen. But it did. So she walked right next to me. I could have touched her.
>> Bill Benson: She kept going? Yeah? And you didn't acknowledge her either? You knew enough not to acknowledge her. Right?

Harry, in the time we have left, which is short, your mother, in August or September of 1944, your mother, as the Germans were retreating, came and got you from the Vanderlindens. Tell us about that time with your mom. There's still, oh, many months of war itself but the Germans are leaving and your mother's got you. Tell us what that was like. There were some important events then.
>> Harry Markowicz: One day my mother showed up. It might have been late August `44. My mother just showed up. There were no telephones or anything. She said she had come to visit me other times but this was different because she said she was coming to get me. She wanted to be with me and my father. She didn't explain why. I was rather attached to the Vanderlindens at this time. I was living a normal life.
>> Bill Benson: You had been with them for two years by this point.
>> Harry Markowicz: Not quite two years. They treated me very well. Mrs. Vanderlinden was very warm, affectionate, played with me a lot. So I was very happy there. So my mother promised I could come back after the Germans are gone. So I went with her.

We were on a street car. It was stopped. I was sit big the window -- sitting by the window. My mother turned toward me and she whispered because she was speaking in German. And she said, "Look." She pointed to the window. Next to us there was a German -- a little truck and it was being towed by a horse. It might have run out of gas. And on top of the little truck there was a German soldier lying down with a machine gun but he was acting very strange. He was looking around, looking at the building. I didn't realize then what was going on. The Germans were running away and they were being attacked by the Belgian Resistance. So my mother said to me, “The Germans are running away. Remember that, remember this scene always.”

So then we joined my father. And a few days later the British arrived in Brussels. Brussels was liberated by the British.
>> Bill Benson: You mentioned your mother had, a couple of times, been able to come to see you where you were hidden. You also encountered her on the street. Your father, on the other hand, if I

remember correctly, he never ventured out for some of the reasons you explained. So he was indoors pretty much the duration of that period of time, wasn't he?
>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. For two years.
>> Bill Benson: Two years indoors.
>> Harry Markowicz: Mm-hmm.

During the whole war I was too little to understand the war and what was going on. I don't remember being afraid of things that adults were afraid. I was afraid when they were bombing. I knew that sometimes bombs fell on houses and killed the people. But I wasn't afraid because I didn't know any better.
>> Bill Benson: Too young. Yeah.

You mentioned that then, of course, the British arrived. The Germans were gone. The British arrived. Do tell us about your mother taking you to the park to see the British soldiers.
>> Harry Markowicz: One morning -- we had been hearing shelling, bombs, in the distance, very far away. And one morning my mother said, “Come, we're going to the park.” There was a park nearby. She must have said more but I didn't understand what she was saying.

So we were going and all kinds of people are walking or running in the same direction we are. On the way we passed a tank which is burning, on fire. There were no soldiers around. There was probably a German tank that had been hit by a Molotov cocktail thrown by the Belgians. I thought -- I mean, how often do you see a burning tank in the streets. I was fascinated. I remember my mother grabbing me. She was very anxious to go. Everybody was running. We got to the park and there was a long row of tanks. And my mother wasn't afraid anymore.
>> Bill Benson: Your mother wasn't afraid anymore?
>> Harry Markowicz: They were British tanks.
>> Bill Benson: And maybe I could share a little bit about what you told me. Your mother -- there was a British soldier who was out of the tank, up in the turret looking down. And your mom handed you up to the soldier and that was a very poignant moment for everybody.
>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. He was actually standing up on the tank. There were people all over but. There was a lot of cheering going on. He picked me up and held me in his arms. I was 7 years old then, by the way. And my mother said to me, "Give him a kiss." So I kissed him on the cheek. Then I looked down at my mother maybe expecting her to say what else to do next, and she was crying. Of course, I didn't know why and I was very disturbed by that. She said, "It's ok. I'm crying out of joy," happiness. The soldier was smiling.
>> Bill Benson: And from that moment on you were liberated but in some ways you did not know that because the Battle of the Bulge took place and there was worries the Germans would come back through. So there were fears that the war was really not over but as it turned out, it was over for you; although the war would continue in Europe until May the following year.

In just the little bit of time we have left, Harry, tell us about your extended family. Your mother -- your immediate family, your mother and father got you from the Vanderlindens and they were able to then find -- get your brother and sister back. There was one incident when they went to get your brother, I believe. Tell us about that and then just say a word about your extended family before we close the program.
>> Harry Markowicz: Ok. At first my parents couldn't get my brother and sister. By then they were living separately but with families in Belgium and the only way to get there was by train but the trains were not running at first. The allies took over the transport, war material. You had to get permission to travel, so it took a little while before they could go get them. On the way my parents were talking to each other, whispering in German.
>> Bill Benson: Because that was their language.
>> Harry Markowicz: Yes. That was their language. They were overheard by some of the Belgians on the train who had no love for the Germans, whether soldiers or not. Quickly a mob formed and it was very threatening. A Belgian policeman rescued them.
>> Bill Benson: You said that they probably would have been lynched if they hadn't -- harmed.

>> Harry Markowicz: Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: What about the rest of your family?
>> Harry Markowicz: Most of my family was in Poland. My mother had a brother in Brussels. He and his wife and a son -- their son had been hidden with my brother at one point but then they had to leave the place where they were because Germans came. My cousin went to stay with his parents and they were denounced. There was an air raid. They went to a shelter. Somebody denounced them, turned them in to the Germans. So they were arrested and deported on the last train that left Belgium for Auschwitz. My aunt came back but my uncle and my cousin didn't come back. That was in Belgium.

But most of our relatives were in Poland still. My grandparents on both sides. So my mother had a large family, in the picture before. And my father, there were six children but four of them had left Poland. They all survived. One sister -- they got out. They were in Paris during the war and then they got out in 1942. Then they got to Spain from Spain to Portugal, from Portugal to Venezuela. And that's where they lived and part of the family is still there.

Another uncle joined the French Foreign Legion and he was sent to North Africa and survived that way. But his wife didn't survive. She stayed in Paris.

Another uncle, another brother -- my father's brother, was in [Indiscernible] during the war, survived that way. But the ones in Poland, there were a couple of cousins. That's about all that survived.
>> Bill Benson: Harry, we don't have time for questions from our audience. I'm going to turn back to Harry to close the program in just a moment because it's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. And when Harry's done, he's going to stay up here on the stage. We invite anybody who would like to ask him a question to come up and do it at that time or just chat with him for I minute if you would like to do that.

Before I turn back to Harry, I want to thank all of you for being with us. I remind you that we will have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. We hope that you will have an opportunity to come back and hear one of our other programs.

On that note, I'm going to turn to Harry now to close our program with his last word.
>> Harry Markowicz: In every country that was occupied by Germany there were people who collaborated with the Germans and others who denounced Jews for their reward they got. There's an exhibit at the museum called "Some Were Neighbors: Complicit in the Holocaust" which deals with that. It's on the lower floor here.

But not everybody collaborated. There were many courageous people -- and I'm speaking about Belgium now -- who helped Jews survive by finding hiding places or by printing counterfeit papers and so on. In Belgium, over 50% of the Jews survived. If you compare that to other countries like Holland, which is right next door so a small country, the percentage of Jews that survived there was 26. In Poland it was 10%. And there are reasons why it's so different. But the figure, the survival rates for Belgium, is remarkable when you consider that 90% of the Jews living in Belgium during the war were not Belgian citizens. They were foreigners like my family, refugees who came from Germany, Austria, and Poland to escape persecution and the anti-Semitism. Also, these people were different. They had a different religion. They were culturally different. Most of them or many of them didn't know the language of the country. The language was French and Flemish. Definitely outsiders and yet the Belgian people, many, helped them to survive.

In the Permanent Exhibition, which I assume most of you will visit, there's a wall on the second floor. It's a white wall. It's called the Wall of Rescuers, where the names of rescuers are written. They are arranged by country. In the section on Belgium, you'll see a plaque. Most of them have just the names. But you'll see a plaque with a name Father Joseph [Indiscernible], a priest who helped save hundreds of people -- hundreds of children. And nearby there's another plaque of a woman, a young woman at the time, early 20s. She also worked with the underground to save Jewish lives. [Indiscernible]. And these two people made it possible for my brother, my sister and I to survive.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you.
>> [Applause]