UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON FANNY AIZENBERG
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Remote CART Captioning

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>> Bill Benson: Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today. This is the start of our 18th year of the *First Person* program. Our first *First Person* of 2017 is Mrs. Fanny Aizenberg, whom we 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 serve as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue twice-weekly until mid-August. The museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

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

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

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

We begin with this portrait of Fanny and her daughter, Josiane, taken in 1942. Fanny was born on December 3, 1916, in Lodz, Poland. She was the second of three daughters born to Benjamin Orenbach and Rivke Leah Aspis Orenbach.

Soon after her young sister Rose's birth in 1921, the Orenbachs moved with their daughters, Terese, Fanny, and Rose, to Brussels, Belgium. On this map of Belgium the arrow points to Brussels.

Fanny graduated from college where she studied dressmaking and design. While working as a dressmaker for the Royal House, Fanny met Jacques Aizenberg. On May 19, 1938, Fanny and Jacques were married. Here we see their wedding portrait.

One year later, on March 21, 1939, Fanny gave birth to Josiane. The following year, on May 10, 1940, Germany invaded Belgium. This picture of Jacques, Fanny and Josiane was taken in 1941.

In 1942, Germany began the roundup of Belgian Jews. Fanny arranged to hide Josiane in a Carmelite Convent. For security reasons, Fanny was not told where her daughter was hidden. This photo of Josiane was taken in 1941.

In Brussels, Fanny worked for the underground. In 1943, she was denounced and sent to the Malines transit camp in Belgium and then to Auschwitz. The arrow on this map points to Auschwitz.

Here we see a document recently uncovered in the International Tracing Service archive listing Fanny on the transport list from Malines to Auschwitz. She is listed as No. 119, about a third down the page. Her profession of seamstress is listed in French on the right-hand side.

Here we see Fanny's daughter, Josiane, being recognized for Fanny's work in the Belgian Resistance. This photo was taken in the fall of 1944 after Belgium was liberated but before Fanny was liberated.

Fanny lives in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. She and her husband Jacques moved here in 1983 after 25 years in Atlantic City. Jacques passed away in 1988. Fanny's daughter, Josiane, lives near her and is retired from her work as a social worker for abused children. Josiane and her husband, Alfred Traum, are also Holocaust survivors. Fanny has three grandchildren from Josi and Freddy and I'd like to point out that Josi is here us in the front row.

On Sundays, you will find Fanny at the Museum's Donor's Desk answering questions. Fanny's volunteer work at this museum has included translating documents from French to English. For example, she translated a book about the deportation of Belgian Jews written by a non-Jewish teacher from the Holocaust. Fanny has spoken at several seminars about the Holocaust including this museum's event to commemorate the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

Fanny started and was an active member of the Yiddish Club at a senior citizens center that meets twice weekly. She is also a sculptor. I don't think Fanny will mind me sharing with you that she celebrated her 100th birthday this past December.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Fanny Aizenberg.
>> [Applause]
>> Bill Benson: Fanny, we are so glad you are here with us today and willing to spend an hour with us telling us what you went through. And today we're focusing on what you experienced, you and your family. We don't have a lot of time but let me start with my first question, Fanny. Tell us about your early life when your family moved from pollen to Brussels. You explained to me that your early years you had a wonderful life. Tell us about that wonderful life.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: The reason it was a wonderful life is because we were young, innocent, and very believing. And we were also very, very lucky that our parents cared. The reason why we left Poland from that time where we were all born we don't know. But we know one thing, that we took -- we were encouraged by my father and mother. My father happened to be a very

educated person. And his job was to work for the Jewish community mainly organizing the synagogue.

And at that time, it was a very small country. They were supposed to remain a free country, not to be occupied, free like Switzerland. We didn't know a lot of things at that time. Not only because we were young but we were very innocent. And we had parents who had encouraged us to go a little bit further than just the daily news and just high school, which we all did.

Belgium is a small country but a wonderful country. Education is free of charge. I don't know if it is still today. If you were good, till the fifth grade, that means you were intelligent enough to understand the pages were you just turning or what you were learning, then you could continue another grade and after that another grade.

And most of us, we were very, very lucky that we finished college because my parents and many other parents would not have the monetary ability of supporting college because college in Belgium was just as costly as here in America. And even in Belgium, if a student was not good enough to get an education, they had to learn a trade which means that they would be able to be without the welfare. Belgium does not have -- they have a system but they don't have one thing, as of today.

>> Bill Benson: Before the war began in Europe in 1939, you finished college, you went to work, you got married and you gave birth to a child. During that time Hitler consolidated his power and Kristallnacht happened, the Night of Broken Glass. Tell us about that time as you were starting your life while Hitler is becoming to power, Nazis are gaining power. War hadn't begun yet. What was your life like? Tell us about meeting Jacques and getting married. Tell us what your life was like.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: It was very easy for young people to meet other young people, especially if they were a musician and he was.

>> Bill Benson: He was a musician.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes, and has a trade somehow.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about your future husband being a musician. What did he do?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: One, he made a living by playing in the movie houses. Don't forget, you are so educated and so knowledgeable, now you don't need that. Now you have automatic music with the movie.

>> Bill Benson: This was the silent films. He was a musician at the silent films. Right?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Five musicians were playing in one movie house but they had to play according to what the movie was. But now it's a different world, like so many things have changed for all of you young people.

>> Bill Benson: And when the talkies came in, Jacques lost his job. Right?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Not only Jacques, everybody who was in the music industry. The same thing as his teacher who was also already head of music department, he lost his job.

>> Bill Benson: What did Jacques do then?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Jacques went to night school and learned to be a tailor. And he worked a lot. You had to know a profession. You could not just go and say I'm going to be a tailor or I'm going to be something and do it. You had to go to school. And you had to have proof that you did go to school and that you learned it.

>> Bill Benson: You and Jacques got married in 1938, and the next year, March 21, 1939, 78 years ago, you had your baby Josiane.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Right.

>> Bill Benson: At that time, March 1939, the war would begin a few months later. Do you recall whether you were fearful about the future when you were giving birth to Josiane?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: We were scared to death. There's no word to describe it. But we were afraid to talk amongst ourselves. We were so sure that Belgium and Holland would be such a peaceful country and peaceful people that the war would never happen or they wouldn't let it. None of us, not even our big politicians, knew the power of the Germans.

Believe it or not, as of today I'm talking to you, Germany does not recognize that they were the ones who started the war. And they have been killing many, many people.
>> Bill Benson: Go back to that time just a little bit, you graduated from college.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: You got your Bachelor's degree in dress design. And then you got a very prestigious job. Tell us what you did.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Well, each one of us -- there were groups chosen, that made the whole group, that made the whole outfit. We had to know what kind of party they were going to go, how many people were going to be, is it morning, noon, evening. It was very, very, very well organized. And everything was quiet.
>> Bill Benson: And you were working for the Royal family. Right?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Can you believe it? But they were the same people like anybody else.
>> Bill Benson: They were?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: The only thing is what we people -- we lost because we didn't get Social Security. Now I started Social Security and I get $56 of $59. For three years we didn't get money.
>> Bill Benson: Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland in September 1939 to start World War II. Eight months later the Nazis invaded Belgium and The Netherlands and the low countries. What was your life like, as you recall it, during that time?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Scared to death.
>> Bill Benson: Scared to death. Ok.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Because many people at that particular time were able to escape from Austria and Belgium had an open door. And that's what happened.
>> Bill Benson: And at that time in May, I think, of 1940, when the Nazis were coming, there was a call for men to join the military.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: That's correct.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us what Jacques did.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Well, not only my late husband but every young person from any other country, they were able to escape because from Belgium there was a way to go to England. That was the main point.
>> Bill Benson: He left. He was planning to join the British military, right?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: They did.
>> Bill Benson: He did.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: They did.
>> Bill Benson: When he left, when he left you, he responded to the call to join the military. Once he left, did you know what happened to him?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Nobody did.
>> Bill Benson: Nobody did?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Because apparently even before the Germans invaded Belgium they had already spies and checking. And they had made a request. Whatever the Germans wanted, it

was not a demand, it was a request. You had to -- or you go to work. You still don't know which one you would be.
>> Bill Benson: When Jacques left, you didn't know what happened to him. And now you're alone with Josiane. What did you do then?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I had no problem. There was a daycare. She went every day to daycare. And besides that, daycare was responsible. They were also checking, according to the age of the baby, what kind of medicine, what kind of vitamins. We were so much ahead of time where the daycare is, much, much, because more young women went either to school or to work, but mostly went to school.
>> Bill Benson: You shared with me that once the Nazis were in power in Belgium, conditions got worse and worse very quickly, especially for Jews. One of the things that you shared with me is that there was a system of clinics for mothers and babies in Belgium that you had access to but one of the first restrictions imposed was to cut off Jewish women and babies from those clinics.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Correct. That's right.
>> Bill Benson: What did that mean for you?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: It meant all of the Jewish people. But then again, as soon as the Germans occupied Belgium, the first restriction we had is confiscate our radio. Like the newspapers today or wherever you got the news, it's so difficult for young people to understand that you can or you have or you must live without the radio. And we didn't have the radio until my late husband left.
>> Bill Benson: During that time, you still had your mother and father. What were your parents doing at that time?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Well, they were still -- had been paid to work in the synagogue. And my mother was always helping somebody else. And there were many organizations which were depending on somebody else. We were not wealthy people but we always had our house open.

Can you believe it? At that time, which is not that so many years ago, we were the first people who had a record player.
>> Bill Benson: You were the first with a record player.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: In a big, big neighborhood.
>> Bill Benson: You lived in your apartment with Josiane until 1942.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us when the deportations started. Do you remember when that happened?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: The deportations started very, very strangely, also because the Germans or Nazis, whatever you want to call them, they knows who they are, and in Germany, of course, they were able to organize to get the children. This way they could take the parents. But the children, they were sending them to Holland and Belgium.
>> Bill Benson: Once the deportations began, Fanny, you made this extraordinary decision to put your daughter, Josiane --
>> Fanny Aizenberg: It took a long -- how could a single mother with a child of -- very happy singing. She didn't talk but she started to sing. And it was wonderful. How do you put the child away? That's the only thing I had. I had nothing else. And that decision is still bugging me badly today, would I try or wouldn't I try. Because the people who took care of any child they took from a home, we were not allowed to know where that child is going to be put in case we are getting caught. Then we definitely, in order to save --

>> Bill Benson: So you had no idea where Josi was.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: We were not allowed. It's not because they didn't want to tell us.
>> Bill Benson: Right.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: And today I still think maybe I should and maybe I shouldn't. But she's alive today, thank God. But you never know. At that particular time, especially as small country. Number one, we were not allowed to go to school anymore. I lost my job not because the queen didn't want me or didn't like me anymore but Jewish people were not allowed to work for non-Jewish people. Even as servants they were not allowed to work. This was such an easy way to make us less and less in number without being able to function. A teacher was not allowed to teach anymore, so there was no salary. So you could imagine how fewer and fewer families having to live in this situation. And the scare of the Germans was unbelievable.
>> Bill Benson: With Josi in hiding, somewhere you didn't know, Jacques gone, you didn't know where he was, you then joined the Belgium resistance.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I think most of us.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about what it was like to be part of the resistance.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I think it was unbelievable because it kept your mind from the daily business and the daily pain and the daily hunger.
>> Bill Benson: What did you do in the resistance?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Well, we all went down. We all had a job.

Can you believe, 5-year-old boys were the leaders of the underground. They were the ones, because they were so innocent looking, they were able to do -- display like newspapers which we didn't get anymore. It's undescribable.

The more -- I wouldn't say -- it's constant in our mind. And the older I'm getting, it's aching, like taking your soul away.
>> Bill Benson: You told me one of the things you did was go out at night and put anti-Nazi posters up.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: That's correct.
>> Bill Benson: That had to be very dangerous.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Of course it was. Not only because it was, but next to the signs you were trying to put -- there was a sign that said if you caught somebody, they are going to be shot on the spot, which they were.
>> Bill Benson: And somehow or another, for a while, you were safe and able to do that.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Right.
>> Bill Benson: Where were you hiding?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: We were hiding in so many different places. Any kind person who was willing to open the door and share a slice of bread with a Jewish person in hiding, and there were many.

And I want you all to know, it is undescribable and unbelievable. Belgium is the only country that today we have 4,000 Jewish people who are alive thanks to the churches. And don't forget, the churches were in danger. Because when the Nazis came to a church and they said we want the Jewish children because we're going to take them on a vacation, Mother Superior said, well, you have to come back in two days because we have to see if we can clothes for them. And Mother Superior was about maybe two feet tall.
>> [Laughter]
>> Fanny Aizenberg: That's the amazing thing. It's so incredible what people were willing -- I say were willing. Nobody was forced.

>> Bill Benson: Fanny, you were in hiding, your mother was in hiding, your two sisters were in hiding in that time.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Where was your father? What happened to him?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: My father, since he was working for the synagogue -- and Jewish people were not allowed to be buried. So all of that had to be done in hiding, which it was. And that was always done at night at the rabbi's house. That's where they had the ritual.
>> Bill Benson: Your father was taken away?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes. But he was caught very, very, very early. And then they had a camp. It is now a museum. And what the Nazis did -- they still had Nazis working. They showed the tomb. Nobody had ever gone out alive.

They have today a museum and they showed the tomb and how they were using to torture those people. And they were killing the Jewish men. And in that museum there's like a record player and it tells you what they did and how they did it.
>> Bill Benson: In 1943, you and your mother were both denounced and you were taken and arrested by the Gestapo. Tell us about the arrest and what happened to you.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Well, the arrest is very scary. They scare you. Because the main thing that they were hurting us or hitting us is on the face. They deformed us and then -- that's what they told us, we wouldn't be used for anything.
>> Bill Benson: Did you know who denounced you? Did you know who denounced you?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: No. We still don't know today. And many, I wouldn't say prominent people, but very active people -- when I say active people, people who were involved of helping either or the other -- don't forget, it was also a matter of supply ammunition to the people who were hiding because -- so both sides in case they would be discovered.
>> Bill Benson: After you were taken to the Gestapo headquarters, from there you were sent to a camp called Malines. What kind of a place was that?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: It was a camp, organizing people where they should be sent. And everybody who was sent to any camp, they would send in cars used for animals. So we were all covered up. We were 116 people and we got to Auschwitz three nights and four days later. 40 people came out alive.
>> Bill Benson: Out of the 116.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Of the 116. There was one wagon they were able to have over 200 people. So the more people they had in those -- I don't know how you called it -- the less that came out. But it didn't matter to the Germans because it would be less elimination and less people put through the gas chambers.

That's another thing. We have learned so many things we didn't know before, like gas chambers. And I'm sure when I meet people who come to visit the museum, they hadn't heard about gas chambers either. And thank God they haven't. That's what's so amazing today. A week ago -- there's a delegation from America from this imposition who go to Germany and still try to have some people recognized, that over six million Jews have been killed and they still are discovering more and more dead bodies in Poland, underground, that they didn't have time to get yet.
>> Bill Benson: You told me you don't have the words to describe what Auschwitz was like. To the extent you can, tell us a little bit about what it was like for you when you went to Auschwitz, what it was like once you got there.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: There's no words. There's smarter people than I am and many of them are much more educated but nobody has found a word.

How could a normal human being, any kind of education, could invent that in nine minutes on the clock 100 people were dead? They had a regimen of Nazis going around those dead bodies and making sure. That's why we don't have gold anymore. All the gold had been taken out from anybody who went to Auschwitz or any of the camps because the gold they collected from the bodies, on the train, or any transportation -- the main transportation was trains because they still used the trains.

>> Bill Benson: When you got to Auschwitz, you were selected to do slave labor.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Correct.

>> Bill Benson: What was the labor that you were forced to do?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Either the kitchen on the grounds. But our main job was to work in the ammunition factory. Because we were dying much faster than we would die at another job. Faster than we would die working on [Inaudible]

>> Bill Benson: Because the work in the ammunition factory was so dangerous.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: From the smoke and fumes. That's why when we were liberated, we didn't have nails anymore. And we didn't have the color of the eyes.

>> Bill Benson: From the chemicals.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: That's correct. And we had to work 20 hours a shift.

>> Bill Benson: You shared with me that you were given a tattooed number when you got to Auschwitz, not once but twice.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Right. And both are the same.

>> Bill Benson: Explain that to us.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: I can't because they were too stupid.

>> [Laughter]

>> Fanny Aizenberg: I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way.

>> Bill Benson: So they had given you -- first they gave you a number that they had tattooed on somebody else, so then they had to tattoo you again.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: I have two numbers. And what they have done at the museum here, shows many survivors because we have more than one number or two or three. That was their pride because they had invented that. Nobody had numbers, except cattle. That's why we all had numbers. They commended their invention on its numbers.

What we are so grateful, that the Holocaust Museum has decided, in order to -- whatever they said they would do to us, they ask, can we see your number? I don't show my number either. So they have a room and they show a number of numbers which has been done in camp. So the visitors don't have to see that and they see that people had been hurt by having a number because normal people, people living in any country, they never had a number.

>> Bill Benson: I know this is very difficult to talk about. I'm going to ask you if you would say anything about the fact that medical experiments were conducted on you at Auschwitz.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: This is what the reporters from America had found last week. They had made medical experimentation on babies, believe it or not. The most experimentations had been done to young women under the age of 20.

>> Bill Benson: And you were one of them.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yeah, I think I just made the deadline.

>> Bill Benson: Fanny, you shared with me -- what you said is it was not done by hoodlums. The experimentation was done by very educated people.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: They had to be educated to look and do this kind of surgery on all of us. And some were younger than I was.
>> Bill Benson: And you told me that you were not permitted to scream.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: You couldn't scream. That's way to be killed. And that's a good excuse to be killed. Or if killing was not fast enough, they had leather whips and 10 of those and then you were gone.
>> Bill Benson: In January 1945, as the allies were advancing, the Germans forced you and others who were still alive to go on a Death March before you were liberated.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Right. You would know. He made the map of Germany. I wanted to know where we went.
>> Bill Benson: Did a map of where you went on your Death March?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Oh, yes, every city and every country.
>> Bill Benson: So it was for about four months.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: What happened on the Death March. How did you survive that?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I would say 90%. That's why it was called the Death March.
>> Bill Benson: Because almost everybody died.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Most of us, because it was very heavy snow and very, very cold. And not only that, we hadn't eaten for two years by then. So it was very tough to remain.
And six of us, because we had stuck together, in good and in bad, mostly bad.
>> Bill Benson: You became very close to those other five, like family.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yeah. We played together. Even a piece of bread, or a peel of a potato was shared amongst the six of us.
>> Bill Benson: After the Death March, you were still alive, you were taken to Ravensbruck. What was it?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: It was a concentration camp which was already empty because the Russians were too close.
>> Bill Benson: And that was a camp mostly for women. Right?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Right. Only women.
>> Bill Benson: You were liberated in April 1945. Tell us about your liberation.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Well, the main thing, we couldn't walk anymore or we couldn't talk anymore. We were not humans anymore. And we just fell down. Being snow it would have been very easy to have disappeared, like many have been discovered now or much later even. And we were very lucky because it was the last battle they had a victory.

Believe it or not, I had a hard time to believe it -- do you know that the Russians, because they had been fighting for so long and so much and they had lost so many of their population, they were the first nation who had signed the liberty to the American papers.
>> Bill Benson: You were liberated by the Russians.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: The Russians helped us because we were not -- they were willing to share what they had.

First of all, they cleaned us up. Can you imagine after so many months of marching and not eating? I don't know what would have killed us more. Many of the young women died because their body couldn't hold food, especially the ones liberated by the Americans or the

English. They had wonderful food, we were told. And many had died. A cousin of ours lost his sister, the only one who had remained alive because her body could not absorb the food.

We were lucky. They didn't have anything. So what they did, they used to steal from a farm a horse or two and go to another farm and steal a cow. But we got the same amount as other people. And we were really treated as human beings which we hadn't been for such a long time.

>> Bill Benson: After the war ended, you found your daughter, Josiane, and then you were reunited with your husband, Jacques. Will you tell us about that, how that happened?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: That's such a difficult emotion. First of all, my sister, she was in the underground for so long, she got her apartment. And the only thing she could do was get the iron cots. So she had her own food, my only sister.

>> Bill Benson: And all of them were in hiding as well. Right?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Oh, yeah. Also in a church. Her three sons were in a church. And remained alive.

But anyway, it's --

>> Bill Benson: Your sister is the one who was able to find Josiane, right?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes. Because through the underground. There was no problem. In many corners of the different streets there was a list of each town a person was from. So a name was on that piece of paper. So anybody passing had a chance of finding somebody.

The most interesting thing -- and I don't know if my daughter recognized me or not. But what she did, at night she used to come to my cot and used to tie a knot in her night gown and mine so I wouldn't run away anymore. But it took her a while till she had realized.

>> Bill Benson: When Belgium, I believe, was liberated, in the fall of 1944, so your sisters and Josiane, they were all liberated many months before you were.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Oh, sure.

>> Bill Benson: They had no idea where you were.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Nobody had. They were not allowed to. Otherwise maybe somebody would be looking for us.

>> Bill Benson: How did you make it back to Brussels after your liberation?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: With the Red Cross. No problem. They were wonderful people. And they were also people -- they brought us back where we come from. That's how they wound up at my sister's. She's the only one who had an extra cot.

>> Bill Benson: So you were reunited with your sisters and Josiane in the spring of 1945.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Right.

>> Bill Benson: And at that time, again, you still did not know what happened to Jacques. How did you find out about Jacques?

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Because his position -- they got hit by a bomb very badly. And he worked for two years in a hospital in England. But nobody knew where those people had gone. I guess everybody was running and trying to find a hiding place or a place people would open the door for them.

>> Bill Benson: When was it that you finally were reunited with Jacques? He spent two years in the hospital.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: It was the beginning of 1946 because it was already two years after the hospital.

>> Bill Benson: So it took until 1946 before your family was back together.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: And I had a very hard time. I was in the hospital in Belgium, after when we came to America, also.
>> Bill Benson: Which happened in 1949. Why did it take from 1946, ‘45, until 1949 to come to the United States?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Because it took three years to get a visa permit.
>> Bill Benson: Once you arrived in the United States as immigrants, share with us what it was like for you here. How did you get established? How did you find ways to earn your living?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Well, it was very difficult. The reason why it was difficult, number one, in order to apply for an American citizen, you had to know how to speak English. So we went to night school. It was very, very difficult.
>> Bill Benson: What did your sisters do after the war?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: My older sister's husband and she finally got together with the three sons. They had medical problems. We all had medical problems. But besides that, I think we made it with flying colors as human beings, as civilized human beings, I could say. I don't know any better.
>> Bill Benson: Exactly right.
Fanny, what is it like for you to talk about the Holocaust?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I didn't.
>> Bill Benson: You didn't?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I volunteered at the Holocaust Museum and I had a wonderful boss. I worked for him about eight years. He kept telling me, “You are old already. When are you going to start talking?” And he was in glory when I had my birthday party.
>> Bill Benson: And you had some great birthday parties here.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Very great birthday parties. Done right here. It was just wonderful.
>> Bill Benson: We're sure glad you're willing to speak out and spend this time with us.
Fanny, we have time for some questions from our audience. Would that be ok?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Of course. That's why I'm here. It's wonderful. I'm volunteering here every Sunday. And the reason it's Sunday, because we have the largest attendance, families with youngsters. And it's wonderful. Because you get educated by the questions you get from them. Here's a volunteer. This is another volunteer. And it's wonderful how we get along with such a different background.
>> Bill Benson: So wonderful that you come each Sunday.
So let's turn to our audience, Fanny.
We're going to ask that you please remain with us through the question and answer period because when we're done with that I'm going to turn back to Fanny for her to offer us her last word to close our program, her final thoughts.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: And excuse me, I also need to have to show the picture.
>> Bill Benson: Absolutely.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Now I have a right to show them.
>> Bill Benson: You have the right. Yes, you have earned that for sure.
Our ushers will have two microphones. So we ask that you use the microphone in order to ask your question; that way we will hear it and everybody in the room can hear it. In addition, I will repeat the question just to make sure that we hear it correctly.
Let's see if anybody would like to ask the question of Fanny to start us off. We have a young. Woman here. Thank you.

>> Hi. So you said that you didn't know the location of your daughter. How were you reunited with her? How was that organized?
>> Bill Benson: The question was -- because you didn't know where Josiane was hidden, when you were able to reunite with her -- well, your sister is the one who found her. Describe how your sister was able to find Josiane.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: No problem. My child was brought to my sister because they knew my sister and her husband and the rest of the family. So they knew she would be in good hands.
>> Bill Benson: And your sister was also with the underground.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: That's correct. That's why they had --
>> Bill Benson: And the underground placed Josi so they knew where she was. That's how they were able to bring them together.

Were you, Fanny -- when you came back, were you surprised to find Josi?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I was surprised to be a person or to be alive. And I think I had lost a lot of my softness and many of the others. And still today it's very difficult many times to be back as a person.
>> Bill Benson: And you are. You've got a fan club here. Everybody knows you as this extraordinary human being in every way. We are so glad you're here.

Let's see if we have some more questions. There we have one right there.
>> You said that you had gotten really close with five other ladies during your Death March. Are you still -- were you able to stay in contact with them after you were liberated for any amount of time?
>> Bill Benson: The question, Fanny, you were so close to the other five women at Auschwitz and then on the Death March; after the war were you able to stay in touch with those women?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: With some. They were much older than I was. And they were deported much earlier than I was. That made a big difference. Just a day or an hour in Auschwitz made a difference of a lifetime.
>> Bill Benson: But you were able to stay in touch.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes, but they were much older and died much earlier. I don't know why I'm still around here.
>> Bill Benson: Because you need to be and we're glad.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Why?
>> [Laughter]
>> Bill Benson: To do what you're doing today. That's one of many good reasons.

Do we have another question?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I really would like to show --
>> Bill Benson: You want to show your picture? Ok.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Just one picture. Go ahead.
>> Bill Benson: You describe it. You tell us what this is.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: This is a wonderful picture 15, 16-year-old young girl who graduated and had her picture taken with us.
>> Bill Benson: It's beautiful. For folks who would like a closer look, when we're done, you'll have the opportunity to do that. Oh, just wonderful, wonderful set of photographs.

All right. We'll have a chance to share that. You want to show this one, too, don't you?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: Yes, please.
>> Bill Benson: Don't know if we'll have time for that but let's do this one. Tell us what we have here.

>> Fanny Aizenberg: Well, I'm sure the audience know.
>> Bill Benson: You think so? Ok. But they can't see what's on this side. What's this?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: You better read it to them.
>> Bill Benson: Ok, ok.

November 7, 2016, stationary of the White House. “Dear Fanny, I send my warmest wishes for a happy 100th birthday and I hope you get to spend the day with loved ones.” And you sure did. “You are part of an extraordinary generation that in the face of unspeakable evil showed the courage to persevere and the strength to thrive. More than half a century after the horror of the Holocaust, our grief for those we lost is not diminished and the legacy of hope and moral triumph left by survivors continues to inspire us. Michelle and I wish you all the best for the coming year, sincerely Barack Obama.”
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I did show up. Thank you.
>> Bill Benson: You bet.

I'm going to turn back to Fanny in a moment to close our program. I want to first thank all of you for being here with us today. I remind you we'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August. We hope you'll have an opportunity to return and join us.

For those of you who would still like to ask Fanny a question when we finish, Fanny will remain here on the stage. We invite any of you to come up on stage, look at Fanny's pictures, ask her a question, just give her a hug or have your photo taken with her. Please feel free to do that.
>> Fanny Aizenberg: And another thing I would like to tell your audience. Don't forget anybody who is visiting the museum today or anytime you come here, you go home and read a become or a newspaper or anything else and if you have any kind of question, I said any kind of question, even a funny one, you send your question right to the office here and any of the survivors is answering you. I want you to know you get your answer definitely. I got a letter not too long ago. Two years -- it took two years to come from Texas because it got lost on the way. But the person got their questions.

And you feel so good to contact another human being. I think this is going to be the next and the next generation, more interests in one another and caring for another. And you'd be surprised how much you could do for one another, a lot.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Fanny.

Our photographer, Joel, is going to come up on the stage and he's going to take a video of Fanny with you as the backdrop. So if you don't mind, when Fanny finishes, we're going to ask you to stay for a moment. In fact, I think we'll ask you stand as part of that photograph, if you will.

Fanny, to end our program today, our first program of 2017, any last thing you would like to share with us?
>> Fanny Aizenberg: I want to thank you all for coming. It's wonderful that you show an interest in that part of history because it's going to affect us for many, many of our future generations. That's why.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you very much.

Joel?
>> [Applause]