

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

FIRST PERSON SERIES

Al Munzer

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Edna Friedberg: Good morning. I always ask for a livelier good morning. Good morning.

>> Good morning.

Edna Friedberg: Good morning. Thank you. Just to know that you're all out there. My name is Edna Friedberg and I'm a historian here at the museum. Would like to welcome you to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Could you see a show of hands, how many of you it's your first time in this building? Wow. Overwhelming. Al, turn around and look. Keep your hands up a second. That's fantastic. Great. Welcome, we are very, very glad to have you here and welcome you for our 18th year of the museum's "First Person" program. Our special guest today is Dr. Alfred Munzer who you'll meet in just a minute. First A few housekeeping notes. First of all, a note of thanks. This 2017 season of "First Person" is made possible by the generous support of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher foundation. We're very grateful for their sponsorship and making this opportunity available to all of you today.

"First Person" is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their Experiences. Each of our "First Person" guests like Dr. Munzer, serves as a volunteer here at the museum. They are literally part of our family here. Very lucky. If you have friends coming back through Washington this spring or summer you could let them know the "First Person" program is offered twice a week every Wednesday and Thursday usually from now through mid August. There will be other opportunities to hear from others in our survivor volunteer community. Anyone interested in staying in touch with the museum, inside your program is card that says Stay Connected to be informed if we have events in our home areas and home events and streamable events also online via our website. If you do that, you will also receive an electronic copy of Al's biography today and be able to share it with others once you get home.

Al will share his "First Person" account of his Experience during the Holocaust period for about 45 minutes today after which there will be an opportunity for you to ask questions. If there's something we leave out or you're curious about, keep it in mind for time at the end. What you're about to hear is one person's experience during the Holocaust. We have

prepared a brief slide presentation to orient you to his story. We begin here with personally one of my favorites. A cute picture of young Al dressed up for the Jewish holiday of Purim which took place a couple of weeks ago. It is traditionally a costume holiday and Al is maybe a first-grader, second-grader something around there dressed up as a charity collection box, collecting funds for the newly founded state of Israel.

This next picture we see Al's parents, Simcha and guess sell, at the occasion of their wedding in 1932 in the Dutch city of The Hague. Al had two older sisters, Ava and Leana. With baby Al propped up between them for support. This map has a broader context. The circle is the Netherlands and these arrows indicate in May 1940 the path of the German Army. Invading the Netherlands and this is before Al was born. Immediately life became very difficult for Jews living in Holland and after the invasion the Munzers remained in their home and endured repressive measures, as we shall see. In 1942 Al's sisters went into hiding with a friend of the neighbor and Al, baby Al, was put into hiding with the ex-husband of a neighbor, a gentleman that we see here, in Indonesian immigrant named Tole Madna. As we will soon hear in great detail, Al spent the rest of the war in hiding in Tole Madna's home where he was cared for by the Indonesian nanny, Mima Saina. And in this photograph taken with Al as the baby T toddler in Tole Madna's arms, Mima Saina is. He went to learned English, went to medical school where he trained as a pulmonologist. He's quite modest but we became the president of the American Lung Association. He remains deeply involved in anti-smoking efforts, internationally working with the World Health Organization. And is deeply involved here at that time museum. We are very fortunate that Al gives very, very generously of his time to us. I was saying to him I think I see him more than some of our my paid colleagues. He translates Holocaust diaries, leads tours and does programs like this one. With this backdrop, please join me in welcoming Dr. Alfred Munzer.

(Applause)

Welcome, Al. Thank you very much for joining us. Can you hear us okay? Can you hear me?

Al Munzer: Can you hear me.

Edna Friedberg: More important, can you hear Al? Thank you for being our first person guest today.

Al Munzer: Sure.

Edna Friedberg: Let's begin with talk ago little bit about your parents. Tell us about who they were in their lives before the second world war.

Al Munzer: Sure. Well, my parents were born in eastern Europe in a part of the world that prior to the first world war was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. After the first world war, their little home towns became part of Poland. My mother was born in a small town called Rymanow, and my father in a neighboring town called Kanzcuga. And, you know, there were very few opportunities in those towns. There was also increasing anti-semitism so sometime in the 1920s when they were about 18 years old, my parents left their home. They actually followed in the footsteps of some -- some other people who had left the town. One person I like to mention from my mother's hometown, which people have this -- this idea that these little towns were very backward, especially if anyone has seen the movie "Fiddler on the Roof." In actual fact, one of the people who came from my mother's hometown was a man by the name of Isador Rabi who was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1946 for the discovery of electromagnetism. Here you have it someone coming from one of these little towns. My

parents were not in that same category but my father left home directly to go to Holland to start a men's clothing business and my mother went to Berlin where she joined older siblings and worked in their business actually until she finally joined my father, as you've mentioned, at the end of 1932 in Holland where they were married.

Edna Friedberg: And you mention that your father had started a men's clothing business. There's still actually a sign there, isn't there?

Al Munzer: Yes, even, you know, just a few years ago, I was in Holland, went back to our former home and then right next to our home was my father's business. And lo and behold, this huge sign of it says Siegfried Munzer tailor and a little bit of a white lie, tailor from Vienna, you know, sort of boasting. That big sign is still there to my great surprise.

Edna Friedberg: So your parents made their way to Holland, both for economic opportunity but as you mentioned also to escape anti-semitism, anti-Jewish feeling. What do you know from your mother about what life was like in Holland for them in the 1930s?

Al Munzer: Well, when my parents arrived in Holland, they joined a fairly well think well-to-do Jewish community that had been established in Holland for hundreds of years, was totally integrated into Dutch society. They were in the arts, they were in the government and really, you know, a very well established Jewish community that in some ways went all the way back to the expulsion of Jews in 1492 from Spain. So they had been there, as I said, for a very long time. My parents made many, many friends. Most of them not Jewish and really, you know, their business thrived and they really had really good lives in Holland.

Edna Friedberg: And their family expanded shortly thereafter.

Al Munzer: Yes as my father's business flourished so my parents felt confident they ought to start a family. And in July 1936 my mother gave birth to her first child and that was my sister Eva. Interestingly enough, Eva was born just about the same time that the infamous Berlin Olympics were held which Adolf Hitler tried to turn into an instrument of Nazi propaganda. So here you have it, you know, the beginning of the rise of the Nazis really just a few hundred miles away actually almost pretty much -- almost the middle of the Nazi era. And in Holland, you know, people celebrating a very happy occasion, the birth of a young daughter.

Edna Friedberg: And when was their second daughter born?

Al Munzer: My sister Leana was born in 1938. She was born November 12, 1938. And that, too, is a very important historical date because she was born just three days after what is called Kristallnacht or the night of broken glass when the full fury of anti-semitism was unleashed in Germany and in Austria. And it's when hundreds of synagogues were destroyed and thousands of Jewish businesses were plundered in Germany and the German Reich. So here you have the contrast again of a very happy occasion, the birth of their second daughter, while the Nazi era, you know, is progressing, just a few hundred miles away.

Edna Friedberg: And then less than a year later on September 1, 1939, Germany invades Poland starting World War II. By the spring of 1940, the war has come literally to your parents' doorstep with the German invasion. Tell us if you can what that meant for your family and other families live Jews living in Holland.

Al Munzer: That represented a very, very major change in their lives. It actually began during the night of May 9 or 10 -- sorry. 1940 when my parents had been asked to host a member of the Dutch resistance movement. A man who had a briefcase with him that supposedly contained plans to preemptively destroy the major railroad center in the city of Utrecht with the expectation of slowing that railroad center might slow down any invasion coming from Germany. But the following morning my parents and their guests listened to the

radio and they heard that the port city of Rotterdam, the largest port in Europe, had been bombed and destroyed by Nazi invaders. And just a few minutes later Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands came on the radio and announced that Holland had surrendered. And she told people to do their job or their duty everywhere wherever they happened to find themselves. And it was actually my parents' guest who was the first one to speak up, and in Dutch he said, (speaking non-English phrase). Thank God it's over. As far as he was concerned, he would -- he had done what he could by being a member of the Dutch resistance movement. He had tried to slow down any invasion. And he now would just have to try to accommodate to living under an occupation.

But my parents, thinking of their two little children, and knowing what had happened to their relatives in Germany and Berlin, their relatives remaining in Poland, knew that things were going to get very hard and that they were going to be very much alone. And indeed almost immediately all of the restrictions on Jewish life that had been put in place over years in Germany and in Austria were put in place in Holland over just the matter of days. So one of the first things that happened was that the ritual slaughter of animals was banned for kosher meat. And you know some people might have thought well, so-called humane measure. But then Jews had to register as Jews. Jewish men had to take a new middle name, Israel. Jewish women a new middle name Sara. And then there were regulations that really made absolutely no sense whatsoever, even if you assumed the others did, and that's that the Jews were prohibited from going into public parks or from using public transportation. And, you know, when you have a regulation like that, it makes really very, very little sense. People tend to disobey it. So my mother told me that, you know, she defied the ordinance and she would take my little sister Leana in the baby carriage to the park. And one day a German woman approached the baby carriage and my mother's heart almost stopped because she knew she wasn't supposed to be there. And then the German woman looked at my sister in the baby carriage and she saw blond curls blue eyes and she turned to my mother and smiled and said you can tell this is good German Aryan blood. My mother thanked the woman of course and then she left the park and never went back there again. This was just one of many episodes that showed, you know, the terrible conditions under which Jews lived in Holland during those even early years of the occupation.

Edna Friedberg: There were all of these measures to identify and track Jews, to marginalize them through law in society. By March 1941 there was a big economic impact when Jewish property was quote, unquote, Aryanized. Can you tell our audience what that meant?

Al Munzer: Well, it meant that my father's business, for example, had to be registered and officially became part of German ownership of the German government. She had to -- my parents, you know, had to surrender their jewelry, for example. And it really meant impoverishing the Dutch Jewish community. And fortunately they were able to hide some of their possessions. Again, this was a major step towards isolating the Jews, towards restricting their business activities, and making life in general miserable. You know, some of the family members, there was one family member essentially who escaped from Germany to join our family, it was my father's brother, my uncle and he had hoped by leaving Germany and crossing the border into Holland that he would be safe. And, you know, he joined our family and initially indeed, you know, this was before the invasion, indeed, you know, they had a fairly normal life together. But after the invasion of course it became really miserable.

Edna Friedberg: And the stranglehold on the Jews living in Holland became worse and

worse. By August 1941 Jewish children were banned from public schools. Your parents had already made a different decision with regard to your sister Eva and school. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Al Munzer: Well, my two sisters were enrolled in a Catholic school as a way of hiding their Jewish identity. And, you know, that -- eventually that led to where they were hidden actually. But this was also just about the time when my mother found out that she was pregnant again and it was an unplanned pregnancy. And she consulted her obstetrician, and the obstetrician told my mother in no uncertain terms that she should have an abortion. He told her that it would be immoral to bring another Jewish life into the world. And my mother wasn't particularly religious, even though she came from a very traditional Jewish background, but, you know, they were sort of rebelling against that, my parents. But at that time my mother turned to the Bible for advice and she read the story of a woman called Hannah. A woman who was desperate to conceive and would go through to the temple every year and pray that she might have a child. And it was in reading of Hannah's agonizing desire to have a child that my mother decided she could not possibly have an abortion. Her obstetrician fired her as a patient and so nine months later I was born with the help of a nurse at home.

Edna Friedberg: That's November 23, 1941.

Al Munzer: That was November 23, 1941. Really 18 months into the Nazi occupation. And, you know, that was brought about another dilemma in Jewish life because traditionally Jewish baby boys, when they're eight days old, are circumcised. It's really a major milestone in a Jewish life, the first milestone. And my parents' friends said, you know, don't have him circumcised because it will identify him as being Jewish. And this time the answer to my parents' dilemma came in the form of a worried look on the face of a pediatrician who had just examined me and my father asked the pediatrician, is in anything wrong with the baby? And the pediatrician smiled and said no. He said, it's nothing serious. It's just that your little boy needs a minor operation that we call a circumcision. And so eight days later our family gathered in our living room and observed this first milestone in a Jewish life, probably the last such ceremony held in the city I was born in The Hague. And that was very special about that, obviously I said very important milestone, so my parents had pictures taken. And what we have actually are two very small photographs, about one by one and a half inch in size taken at that ceremony. So I can barely see my two sisters, my uncle, the one who joined us from Germany, and some other people in that picture. I'm in the second picture. And what made these pictures very special is that my mother was to keep them hidden on her body through her subsequent stay in 12 concentration camps. And she developed this feeling, this superstition that if she ever lost those photographs it would mean that I had been killed. Fortunately my mother survived, the photos survived, and I survived and those photos now are so fragile and they're so valuable that I did not want to keep them in the house and they are now part of the collection of this museum. But it's, you know, just one of those little stories that comes out of an event like that. But as I said, the last such celebration in Holland.

Edna Friedberg: Thank you for entrusting us with those, you know, precious photographs. It's really our sacred duty to care for them. And I'm struck when you mention the choices your parents had to make, the leap of faith to bring another Jewish life into the world at this very perilous moment. The historical coincidences that coincided more or less with your sisters' births, that when we talk about history and part of what's so amazing in these conversations is to realize that people are still leading their lives. It's easy to look at history as a series of dates and decisions by people in offices but it happens to real people with real

families and real considerations on a different trajectory.

So they had this new baby, they have two young children, they don't have a reliable way to make a living. What happened over the next year until September 42?

Al Munzer: Well, in just about mid 1942, September -- August, September 1942, I guess when I was about six, seven months old or so, and there's a beautiful photograph. Oh, you saw the photograph earlier of me with my two sisters taken probably precisely at that time. That's when Jewish men were beginning to get notices to report for so-called labor duty. And it meant going to a concentration camp A labor camp, somewhere in Holland. But also, knowing full well that that might be something temporary and that they might well be sent on, you know, much further east to concentration camps located in Poland. And so this was really when many Jewish families made the decision to try to find a place to hide. Now, some families, like famous family Anne Frank, went into hiding as one family unit. The famous attic that the Anne Frank -- Anne Frank's family occupied in Amsterdam. My parents made a different decision. They decided that as a form of insurance to make sure that even if all other members of the family were taken by the Nazis, at least some -- the others might have a chance to survive, that we would split up. So the first ones to be placed were my two sisters. A very -- a very devout Catholic woman had a dream in which she saw the virgin telling her to take Jewish children into hiding. She told that story to her priest. The priest told the story to my parents' neighbor, and so my two sisters were entrusted to this woman's care.

My father committed or tried to show -- claimed to commit an act of suicide or -- and that gained him admission to a psychiatric hospital, pretended is the word I was looking for, pretended to commit an act of suicide and that gained him admission to a psychiatric hospital where he went into hiding. And as we said earlier, Jewish boys were more difficult to place but eventually my mother's neighbor, a woman by the name of Annie Madna agreed to take me in, at least temporarily. And at that point my mother joined my father in that same psychiatric hospital, in her case pretending to be a nurse. And that's when she closed the door on our home for the very, very last time, after having found my father, having gone into hiding, having found a refuge for my two sisters, a refuge for me, and she finally then closed the door on our home for the very last time and joined my father.

Annie Madna, the woman I had been left with, had had some bad run-ins with the Nazis. And so she was scared that they would find that she was hiding a Jewish baby. So she initially passed me on to a sister and then it turned out that the sister had a neighbor who was a member of the Dutch Nazi party. And so she got scared. She was afraid that he might hear the little baby crying, so she passed me back to Annie. And then finally Annie decided to pass me on to her ex-husband. She was divorced and had been married to a man born in Indonesia. And that's how I ended up with an Indonesian family for the rest of the war years.

Edna Friedberg: And Al, if I may interrupt, people less familiar with Dutch history, Indonesia had been a colony of the Netherlands so there was a sizable Indonesian immigrant colony living in the Netherlands.

Al Munzer: Indonesia was a Dutch colony and many Indonesians in the early 1900 had come to Holland, including my new foster father, the man I called Papa for the rest of his life. He came to Holland with his mother. They said in the early 1900s and eventually became a manager of an Indonesian restaurant. And a woman, there was a woman who worked there who was also Indonesian but on a much poorer background. Her name I was Mima Saina. And she was completely illiterate, uneducated, did not speak the Dutch language, only the Indonesian language. But she was a very good woman. She worked in the restaurant, like

many other immigrants, doing menial work. But Papa Madna realized she was very good and very kind, so he hired her to take care of the three Madna children. And when I joined the household, she is the one who then assumed the role of being my nanny or really my mother. And even though this woman was completely illiterate, uneducated, Muslim, she had a heart of gold and she would walk miles every day, you know, just to get milk for me. Since I was in the home completely illegally, there were no ration coupons for me. Ration coupons which you needed to get any kind of milk or bread, whatever. And so she would have to walk miles just to get milk. In fact, you know, just a few years ago when I was in Holland a woman stopped me and said, you know, you used to drink my milk. And I asked her what do you mean? And she said, well, she said, during the war years all children in school were given a small bottle of milk and my mother told me to save half of the little bottle for the baby next door. And you were the baby next door. And this is how, you know, you have a little girl, perhaps eight or nine years old, already participating in saving a human life. I'm told I slept on Mima's bed and she kept a knife under her pillow vow to go kill any Nazi who might try to come and get me. But, you know, whatever memories that I have of that time, are really actually very happy ones. I remember Papa Madna playing the piano. I remember that there was a little dog in the family. Actually for little -- you know, little Jewish children placed in hiding were given a new name, and I was given the name Bobbie. And to this day when I talk to my foster family, the family that I was hidden with, I always have to use that name Bobbie. And for many, many years I thought I was given the name Bobbie after the little dog that they had.

(Laughter)

The reason for that was the neighbors heard Bobbie being killed -- being called, they would think well, they're just calling the little dog. Well, I told this story just about two years ago to one of my foster sisters, Debbie Madna who's 87 years old, and I told her the story. And she said you're absolutely wrong. The little dog's name was teddy, not Bobbie.

(Laughter)

So there -- there went that whole theory. And the reason I was called Bobbie was probably after the third of the Madna children who was a little boy by the name of Robbie, Robbie Madna. And those two names also are very close, same theory. Neighbors hearing Bobbie being called, they'd think well, they're just calling Robbie, and another way of course of making sure that people did not know that there was a strange Jewish baby in the household. I wasn't allowed out of the house at all.

Edna Friedberg: For how long?

Al Munzer: For about three years. The only view that I had of the outside world was through a mail slot. That was my total view of the outside world. That's how I grew up. And I was allowed a little bit in the backyard fortunately. There were also two neighbor children who were allowed to come in and play with me. And the reason they were considered safe was that they were German but their parents were German communists and so they were very staunchly anti-nazi, anti-fascist, and so they were entirely trusted to come in to the house and play with me.

Edna Friedberg: Just to imagine any of us who live with or have lived with a toddler, just being caught up in a room for an hour can feel like years, three years that you're inside, and jokes aside about it, how risky and how tenuous your situation was. The networks of trust that were required. People must have known in the neighborhood also that there's a little white boy living with this Indonesian family, more -- more than just one or two people knew.

Al Munzer: Yes. Many years later when I came back to Holland and went into an

Indonesian grocery store with Papa Madna, a man pointed to me and said Bobbie. He immediately, you know, seeing the combination of an Indonesian man and someone Caucasian, he immediately knew I was the little boy he had heard about many, many years earlier. So yes, you know, some people in the Indonesian community certainly were aware of my presence and kept that secret.

There were times, though, when I'm told the house was being searched and what I remember about it is just having to go into a little cellar and someone closing the door on the cellar was really more like a closet. And I would play there with the Christmas decorations of the family. That's the memory that I have. I don't remember anything, that the reason was I was there because the house was being searched. But that was one of those occasions and one of those memories that I have. Papa Madna told me that he had told the Germans when they searched the house and questioned the presence of a Caucasian child, he told them that I was the illegitimate child of his ex-wife and that she now had a new boyfriend who did not want me around, and that's how he explained the presence of this little white little boy in a household of people of three other children, older children who looked very, very different.

Edna Friedberg: I find it very hard to imagine the courage and the mindset of your parents to give up their three young children to the care of strangers. Did they have any news of you or your sisters? Any contact with you?

Al Munzer: The last -- they had very little contact with me actually, as far as I know. They saw my sisters one last time on Christmas day 1942. That's when my two sisters were brought to the psychiatric hospital for just a very brief moment. The family was reunited, at least that part of the family. But then, just a week later, on New Year's day, 1943, the psychiatric hospital where my parents had been hidden was emptied of all patients and staff and they were all deported and sent to concentration camps. My parents first went to a concentration camp in Holland called Westerbork which was a transient camp. From there they went to another concentration camp, still located in Holland, called Vught where they were assigned to do slave labor for the Philips Electronics factory. And my mother told me one day -- every morning there would be a line-up of all the prisoners and she said one day a very high Nazi official came to visit the prisoners and address the prisoners and that was a man by the name of Himmler, Heimlich Himmler, Hitler's second in command. He said if you keep working for the success of Germany, of the German Reich, nothing bad will ever happen to you. And my mother told me that way off in the distance in Holland she could see the spire of a small Dutch church, and she said it would be so wonderful if peace were to break out at that moment, if she could just run to that church, fall on her knees, and thank God for having survived. She didn't care whether it was a church, a mosque, or a synagogue, just a place to thank God. But of course that wasn't to happen. And on the promise that Himmler made to the inmates, to the prisoners, wasn't kept, and just a few months later that prison -- that camp was emptied of all prisoners and they were all sent on to Poland to Auschwitz. And that's where my parents were separated. My father remained in Auschwitz for about six months, and my mother was sent on to another camp called Reichenbach where she continued to do electronics work for the Telefunken company. And all the while, of course, they thought that their children were safe. That was one bit of satisfaction, one thing that I really think kept them alive at the time, was this idea that, you know, they had children to come home to eventually.

Sadly, sadly the husband of the wife, the woman who had taken in my children --

Edna Friedberg: Your sisters.

Al Munzer: Who had taken, sorry, my sisters, denounced his wife as hiding two Jewish

children, so the Nazis took his wife. She was imprisoned, but eventually freed. But my two sisters were immediately sent to Auschwitz and killed. And they were only six and eight years old. They were killed February 11, 1944. And that was something, of course, that my parents did not know about at the time and that my mother was to learn much, much later.

Edna Friedberg: They knew nothing of what was going on with you, and you were obviously too young to know, but you say you have memories from the winter of 1944 to '45 as especially bitter.

Al Munzer: Yes, there was absolutely no food left in Holland. The only thing that was there to eat really was ground up tulip bulbs which Holland had many of. And y'all know famous Dutch tulips. People would grind up the tulip bulbs and sort of create a mush or a pudding out of that, and that's what sustained people. And what I remember is that one evening I saw the table set with plates and I thought we were going to be fed, I was going to be fed. So I sat down at my chair at the table. And fell asleep. My head falling into the plate, and that's how the family found me the following morning. I remember the very intense hunger of that very last winter in Holland.

Edna Friedberg: What happened to your parents for the duration of the war?

Al Munzer: Well, my mother, as I said, she was in this factory called Telefunken where she also assembled -- where she assembled radio tubes. She had learned that was an essential thing for the war effort. And my mother took some satisfaction at that time in working alongside German soldiers who had served on the eastern front, who had been repatriated from Russia. And they were minus an arm or a leg. They had been severely injured, were no longer fit for duty. And so they were sent to work alongside in this factory. And they had become so anti-Hitler that they did everything possible to sabotage the workings of the factory so.

That encouraged my mother to start her own little acts of defiance. And one of the things that she did was she would spend a whole day assembling one radio tube and then when the siren was sounded at the end of the day to indicate the end of work, she would disassemble the radio tube, put all the parts back in the drawer and then start the process all over again the following day. An act of defiance that really, I think, kept her going.

Another act of defiance was observing Jewish holidays or trying to. And one of them is the holiday of Chanukah. Chanukah is when candles and festival of lights. And so my mother told me the women would go to the infirmary and tell the nurse that they were having their menstrual period and needed a wad of cotton. And they would then save a little bit of oil from the machinery they were working on, fashion wicks out of the cotton, and put those into a potato, which was the only kind of food that they had. And then in the evening light that little wick. And that's how they continued to observe the holiday of Chanukah. Something that again an act of defiance that I think kept her alive. My mother eventually witnessed the bombing by the allies of that factory, as she said a Hebrew prayer of thanks to God when she saw the factory going up in flames. Thanking God for having survived to see that particular day. But that wasn't the end of her ordeal. Because my mother then was put on a whole series of death marchers as the Soviet Army approached all of the prisoners were marched further and further back west until my mother finally came into a camp at the Danish border where she was liberated to the intervention of a man called Bernadotte who was the head of the Swedish Red Cross. And my mother then was repatriated, sent to Sweden to recuperate. My father, on the other hand, as I said remained in Auschwitz. Was sent on to a horrible camp called Mauthausen, then three more camps in Austria, Gusen, Steyr, and finally a beautiful

place high up in the Austrian Alps where he did horrible work assembling V2 rockets for the German Army in abandoned salt mines. And terrible, terrible work, debilitating work. But he did see liberation by the American Army. But he was so weakened that he passed away two months later and he's actually buried in that concentration camp. I have visited his grave there and the only time that I really shed tears for my family, like really understood the loss of a father is when I stood at his grave and broke down in tears

Edna Friedberg: Your mother, having managed to survive, returned to the Netherlands, hoping to reunite with her children. How did she learn what had happened to her two little girls?

Al Munzer: Well Debbie Madna told me that my mother came to her house which was really her mother's house, the woman I was left with initially, and she was the one to tell her that my sisters were no longer there. Without any real details. I don't know exactly what my mother found out what happened to my sisters. But then she took me -- she took my mother over to the house where I now was, and that's the very clear memory that I have. I remember being asleep in one of the back rooms of the house and my sister Debbie coming to wake me up and carry me into the living room where the whole family was sitting in a circle. And I was cranky and crying, so they did what you typically do with a crying child. They passed me from lap to lap. And what I remember there was one lap I wouldn't sit in, a woman I kept pushing away. And that was my own mother. Because she was, you know, complete stranger to me. I already had a mother and that was Mima Saina. And my mother knew that it would be very difficult to separate me from Mima, so she decided that Mima ought to continue to care for me while she and my mother went out looking for work. But that only lasted a few months because in October 1945 sadly Mima had a cerebral hemorrhage and passed away. And I have very, very few memories actually of Mima Saina. I remember visiting her grave and another memory that I have that I recently or a few years ago for the very first time was able to share with students from Indonesia visiting the United States to learn about what religious pluralism is about. And I told them the story of my family, showed them photographs of me with Mima and then at the very end, I said, you know, I have almost no memories of Mima except that she used to sing a lullaby to me. And it was called "Nina Bobo" and this whole group of students started singing it in unison. An amazing moment. It brought tears to my eyes. And after that these young women, Muslim women, young Muslim women wearing traditional head scarves, came up to me, hugged me, kissed me, and said, you know, we are family. And incredibly, you know, incredibly powerful moment that I will never forget. And it's one moment that really gives me a little bit of hope in my story.

Edna Friedberg: You should know that Al continues to work with groups from Indonesia, with survivors from the genocide in Cambodia. He really understands and puts your heart into knowing what your stories can do to build bridges. We have just another minute or two before we open to questions. I do want you to tell us about an incident at that time movies that happened, your mother came back to the Netherlands, she's lost her husband, two of her three children, her extended family, but she has to try to --

Al Munzer: Sure.

Edna Friedberg: -- continue with life.

Al Munzer: Sure. And so my mother, you know, tried -- she really wanted me to get used to being alone with her. Rather than being entirely dependent on Mima. So my mother gave Mima a ticket to go see a movie. And Mima left the house and then she came back a few minutes later. Wagged her finger at my mother, don't hit him. That's how protective Mima was

on me that she didn't even trust my own mother to care for me. A woman who was really totally devoted to me. In fact, some people say that, you know, she passed away not just of a cerebral hemorrhage but because of a broken heart, she was so afraid she might lose the little baby that she had cared for.

Edna Friedberg: And Al, you were able to get the Madna family and Mima recognized as righteous among the nations for the incredible risk they took to save your life.

Al Munzer: Yes, they were recognized by Yad Vashem, the memorial to the Holocaust in Jerusalem where their names are inscribed as righteous among the nations, people who risked their lives to save Jewish children and adults. People, you know -- in this whole sea of evil, there were a few good people like them who really risked their lives to continue to do what is right. And so I am so glad that they were recognized over there. If that 30 had been ten times or 100 times as many people like them perhaps the Holocaust might not have happened. And I think, you know, their lesson is really important one. And that's why I continue to share the story with Papa Madna's grandchildren, great grandchildren, and now with anybody coming to visit the museum and students from all over the country, all over the world, because I want them to learn that it is possible to stand up for what is right, even when you're surrounded by evil.

Edna Friedberg: I'd like to open it up to questions from the audience. We have two ushers with microphones. If you have a question, please raise your hand and we'll pass the microphone to you. There's one down here in front and one on the back aisle as well. And if I could ask if you'd keep your questions brief, that would be great. Thank you.

Audience Member: Should I go ahead?

Edna Friedberg: Sure. If you've got the mic first.

Audience Member: Thank you very much. That was awesome. My question to you is, amidst everything that was going on in Europe and learning something I never knew before, that Indonesian community that was there, how much fear did they have of the Nazis being Indonesian, Muslim, and in a place that they were a minority?

Al Munzer: It's a very good question, and I really don't have a very good answer to it. In actual fact, what I've been able to learn is that the Indonesian community in Holland was not singled out like the Jews. Or like African people -- people of African descent might have been. And why that is, I don't really know. Whether they were not grouped with the so-called inferior races might be one reason. But many Indonesians living in Holland were part of the resistance movement. Very active resistance movement, especially among Indonesian students. They were fighting for freedom for Indonesia from Holland, from being a colony, but they said first we have to deal with the Germans and then we'll deal with Holland. That was sort of their motto.

Edna Friedberg: If I could just add, one of the other things you notice if you look at Nazi racial policy is how inconsistent it often is. There will be exceptions and depending on the context also a lot was left to the discretion of an individual official in different locations. And even in the way that anti-Jewish policy was enforced varied greatly from place to place. So it is consistent to be inconsistent is essentially how I would answer your question. Yes, sir.

Audience Member: A number of us in the front couple of rows here are from Minnesota and about a week ago they announced that they had found a member of the Nazi SS living in Minneapolis in St. Paul. I think he's 98 years old. Do you have any personal feelings as to what should happen when we discover, when we find someone like that?

Al Munzer: This is a really tough question, you know. Many, many years have passed.

On the other hand, it's never too late for justice to occur. And I think it is important to prosecute whatever remaining Nazis there are. Obviously, you know, it's -- there are fewer and fewer of them around. But if we allow their crimes to go unanswered, we are really becoming complicit in these crimes. And these are crimes that really I think need to be prosecuted to the very end. I think it's part of the human conscience.

Edna Friedberg: I'd like to add, if I might, too, a couple of other reasons for trials. It's one thing to think about a very elderly man near the end of his life but part of what trials do, they're also how we as a society express our values and there's a reason why crimes like murder, quote, unquote murder, also crimes like genocide, there's no statute of limitations, because they really -- the evil does not -- did not dissipate with the passage of time. The last thing I would say related to that, too, is trials are often a way that we learn much more about the historical record and how crimes are committed. Just a year or two ago there was a trial of a man in Germany, also quite elderly, referred to in the presence of bookkeeper of Auschwitz, he helped to process valuables that were confiscated from prisoners. Through that trial we learned a great deal about the mechanisms, the mass theft that was part of the genocide. So it's not only about the fate or how much punishment can you give a person at the end of his life but also about establishing an unimpeachable record so people who might deny these crimes can see that the perpetrators themselves gave testimony of it. And I think that's very valuable. We have a question here.

Audience Member: Yes. First of all, thank you, Dr. Munzer, for had outstanding time you're spending with us. What can we learn from your mother after the war, after losing two daughters and her husband and all she went through in the camps? What can we learn from her?

Al Munzer: What we learn from her, what I learned from her is the incredible human spirit. You know, the fact that she was able to start life over again, to continue with life, I think probably one very important reason for that was that she found me alive and she had me to take care of. You know, my mother used to remind me of that story of Hannah that I told you about. And Hannah made a pledge, she said if the almighty will give me a child, I will give that child to the service of God all of the days of his or her life. And my mother emphatically would remind me of that pledge, I said the same thing.

Edna Friedberg: No pressure.

Al Munzer: So I want you to succeed. I want you to do the right thing in your life. And that's something that really influenced me and probably why I became a doctor and I've tried to live up to that pledge for my life.

Edna Friedberg: We have time for one final question. There was a person here.

Audience Member: I'd like to thank you again so much for your very special and touching stories about your family, both by birth and your foster family. But I'm curious to hear your opinions about the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe and rising anti-Muslim sentiments that are occurring in places such as the Netherlands and any parallels you think might exist between these two topics.

Al Munzer: I think it's extremely -- it's just disheartening isn't even the word. You know, I think the greatest tragedy, to me, of the Holocaust wasn't just that I was deprived of a father or deprived of the companionship of two sisters, but it was that the world did not learn the lessons of the Holocaust. Did not ban hatred and discrimination, that we did not see an end to atrocities perpetrated by governments and that they continue to be a need for refugees. And, you know, one of the -- if my family had been given refuge in a country like the United States,

or anywhere else, I might have had a father and I might have had, you know, sisters who were alive. So I feel very much, you know, for the refugees who are trying to find a safe place, a safe haven. And I very much hope that there will be an end at some point to the need for refugees. But in the meantime, I think we have an obligation in the world to provide a safe shelter for the people who are seeking it.

Edna Friedberg: And Al does more than hope. I should mention he's in the middle of a tour actually around the country with a young Syrian refugee, a man named Mouaz as part of the Center for Prevention of Genocide. I would encourage you to look at our website and see the various programs and initiatives we do to raise awareness and influence the policy makers. We are out of time. I know that Al, Dr. Munzer, will be happy to stay and answer your questions, talk to you afterwards, but it is our tradition at "First Person" that the "First Person" guest has the last word so I will turn it over to you for any closing thoughts.

Al Munzer: My thought is what I said earlier, it is possible, even when surrounded by things that are wrong, surrounded by evil, it's still possible to do what is right. And that is, I think, my -- the most important message that I really want to leave with you.

Edna Friedberg: Thank you for sharing your family's history with us, and thank you for joining us today.

(Applause).