UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON DAVID BAYER
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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. We are in our 18th year of *First Person*. Our First Person today is Mr. David Bayer, 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 serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue twice-weekly until mid-August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

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

David will share with us 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 David questions.

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

We begin with this 1945 portrait of David Bayer taken in his hometown after liberation.

On this map of Europe, the arrow points to Poland, where David was born September 27, 1922. He will be 95 in September.

On this map of Poland, the arrow points to the approximate location of Kozienice, David's hometown. This is a contemporary photograph of David's home in Kozienice. David's brother, Joshua, is in this 1938 photo of a Zionist youth group. He is in the third row, third from the left.

In 1939, German troops invaded Poland starting the Second World War. The next year the Bayers were forced to move into Kozienice ghetto. Here we see a view of the Kozienice ghetto through the barbed wire fence that enclosed it.

In September 1942, the ghetto was liquidated and its inhabitants, including members of David's family, were deported to the Treblinka killing center. The arrow points to Treblinka. David was taken to Pionki, an industrial complex that produced munitions. In 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz. The second arrow points to Auschwitz.

Our next photo shows a fence around the barracks in the main camp, Auschwitz 1.

As the Soviet Army neared, David and the other prisoners were sent on a Death March. However, David managed to escape into the forest and was found by the Soviets. He spent two years in the Foehrenwald displaced persons camp in Germany.

Here we have a map of the major camps for Jewish displaced persons with the arrow pointing to the Foehrenwald displaced persons camp.

In this next photo, David, first row, third from the left, and friends pose at an airport near the displaced persons camp in 1946.

Here we see David with a friend at the Foehrenwald DP camp in 1947.

Later that year, David moved to Panama. We close with two photos in Panama. First, here is David in front of a gate to a synagogue in Panama City. And next we see David standing by his employer's horse in Panama City.

After a remarkable year in Panama, David went to Israel as a soldier in Israel's War for Independence and saw a great deal of combat as the State of Israel was created. Eventually, David returned to Panama before coming to the United States to start a family and a new life.

Today, David and his wife, Adele, live just outside of Washington, D.C. The Bayers have two children: daughter, Sandra and son, Mark, two grandchildren and a great grandson, Miles, who is now 3 years old. Their grandson, Josh, who served in the Israeli Army, is a civil engineer in Virginia. Their granddaughter, Jennifer, who is the mother of David and Adele's great-grandson, is a recent graduate of the University of Kansas. Adele and Sandra are here today with David. And all three are seated right here in the front row.

Since 1992, David has volunteered his time in the Museum's Registry on Wednesdays and often on other days. As part of the Registry, David researches and compiles lists of those who survived the Holocaust as well as those who perished. Among other purposes, the Registry helps make it possible for survivors, family members, and others to find those who may have survived.

In addition to our *First Person* program David speaks frequently about his Holocaust, experience especially to area schools. In April he will speak at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis. He also speaks with groups of visitors at the museum, especially those who are Spanish-speaking as David is fluent in Spanish. He says speaking with kids is especially important to him.

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

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: David, thank you and welcome. Thank you for being our First Person today. You have so much to share with us in our hour together so we will just get started right away.

David, it was less than a month before your 17th birthday when the Nazis invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Before you talk about your life during the war and the

Holocaust, let's start first with you telling us about your family, your community, and yourself in Kozienice before the war began.
>> David Bayer: Well, I was born September 27, 1922. The Germans attacked Poland September 1. I was 16 years old. I was going to school and I worked in my father's factory sometimes after school. My father had a shoe factory. There were 25, 30 people working. We sold shoes wholesale all over the country.

We lived in a big house. We had a maid. I had two sisters and a brother. My parents were only in their 40s. We lived in a nice neighborhood across from a big church. We had a good life.
>> Bill Benson: I'm going to ask you a couple of questions before you tell us about the Germans coming in. Tell us how large was your family.
>> David Bayer: Well, my father had four more brothers younger than he. My grandfather was a wholesale -- had a wholesale business, selling supplies for shoe making, supplies for fishing industry, and supplies for casket making, a big business. They were all brothers working there. My father was the first one, so he got married and went on his own.

My sister was 18 or 19 when the Germans came in. My little brother was 12. And my little sister 8.
>> Bill Benson: And David, I was also going to ask you something you shared with me. You told us that your father had a shoe making business. On the sole of the shoes was stamped a goat.
>> David Bayer: A goat. The town of my hometown, Kozienice, means nothing happened to the goat. That's the name of the town. Because my area was a lot of wild goats. So they named it Kozienice, goats. A prince or king or something years ago came before I was born. He went hunting and his wife yelled, “Nothing happened to the goat.” They couldn't shoot goat.
>> Bill Benson: Nothing happened to the goat.
>> David Bayer: Kozienice. That's it.
>> Bill Benson: Once the Germans occupied Poland on September 1, 1939, your life and that of your family changed swiftly and dramatically. Tell us what happened once the Germans came in.
>> David Bayer: When the Germans attacked Poland, they bombarded every little town, every big city. Everybody was running away. We run out of our house and we went to stay in the forest because our house -- our home was bombarded, the area.

After the Germans came in, September 9, they came into our town. When we came to our house, everything was opened, the doors opened, windows opened, Germans hanging around in my house and plundering, taking whatever they can. They took our food, our clothing. They took all the shoes. We had a warehouse in the backyard. Everything was ransacked.

We came in scared. The Germans were laughing and making fun of us. One German officer asked my father, “Why are you so scared;” the Jewish were scared. And said the reason we were so scared, we don't want to fight, we love everybody. We don't believe in violence. And they laughed. Made fun of us.

And then they took everything. Even my mother's linen, the linens from the house, dishes, they took the dishes. They took all the food we had. We had no food anymore. And all the stores or ransacked. And we had curfews. We couldn't go out of the house.

So I always sneaked out of the house. I tried to find food. There was a German group of soldiers, not far from our home, had a compound, a lot of German soldiers. And they had a

field kitchen. And I went there to look for food. So I took a bucket, a pot with a handle, like a bucket, and I took it out to that place where the Germans were eating and cooking their food. But when I came over, there was a lot of other young people and a lot of women, young women also with buckets, with pots, waiting for the Germans to give them leftover.

But I was the only Jew because other Jewish people were scared to go see a German. But all the people there were not Jewish, were Christian. And they were all my friends. We went to school together. We played soccer together. We were neighbors. Some of the parents were working for my father's factory. When they saw me, they pointed their finger at me, “Juden,” “Juden,” to the Germans, pointing the finger. We grew up together.

>> Bill Benson: But they were letting the Germans know you were a Jew.

>> David Bayer: But a lot of Germans came over and gave me the barley, beans soup. I take barley and beans and pork. We Jewish people were not allowed to eat pork. My father didn't want to touch it. So my grandfather, eat it because it's not a sin. To survive, you have to eat anything you can. We couldn't get to the bakery. Everything was locked up. No stores was open. They were ransacked. We had curfews, we couldn't get out. So we had to have something to eat. So this was the first.

My mother was crying, all the time crying and praying. She was praying. My father used to say God doesn't listen to her anymore.

>> Bill Benson: At some point soon after you were forced into the ghetto. Tell us about the ghetto, what that was like for you.

>> David Bayer: Well, the neighborhood was a nice Christian area. We had a nice big home. It's still there now. I don't know who owns it. I didn't claim it so the Polish government said I owe a lot of money for taxes. So somebody is living there and I don't even care for that house. I wouldn't live in Poland if they paid $1 million every day. I live here.

What happened --

>> Bill Benson: In the ghetto, yeah.

>> David Bayer: The first few days they told us to put the Star of David on our door, that we were Jewish, Jewish people live here. Then they give us an order that we had to move out. All the Jewish people who lived in the Christian area had to move to a Jewish neighborhood. They made a ghetto. The Germans put barbed-wire and they gave us one room. We used to have six, seven rooms in our house. We had a room for our maid who used to live with us. So we got one room in somebody else's apartment.

The Germans grabbed me to work every day somewhere else. One day the Germans were digging an irrigation canal about six miles out of our town. It took about 400, 500 young men from our town to work in the canal. And I was one of them working the irrigation canal, digging ditches, big shovels and wheel barrels.

The ghetto was very bad. But I was going to work to the canal, working, in an area with farmers, with a lot of food. The farmers had potatoes an everything. I used to steal the potatoes from the field. And then I went to farmers begging for bread. And then the farmers asked me if I could sell them something. So whatever the Germans give us, clothing, I sold it to the farmers for food. And then when we came home, shared with my parents, my sister and brother.

This didn't last long. It was going on until September 27, 1942, the day I was born. The Germans took all the people of my town on a train and shipped them to Treblinka, to the settlement. Actually took them there to kill to kill everybody, 8,000 people in my town, my

mother, my father, my uncles, my sister, my brother, everybody. My grandpa's dying in the ghetto from hunger, couldn't survive.

So after they did that, the Germans took us away from the canal and shipped me to a place called Pionki, a big ammunition factory in Poland not far from my hometown, maybe 20, 25 kilometers. They taught me how to make explosives for bullets. I worked in the centrifuge department for two years, making explosives. I became a chemist. I knew how to do it and it kept me alive.

>> Bill Benson: It was very dangerous work. Wasn't it, David?

>> David Bayer: The gases were eating us up. They gave us special clothing, special shoes, wooden shoes. And a lot of people died from exhaustion and from the gases.

I worked with civilians, Polish people who worked in the factory before the war. So whatever the Polish people were sharing some food with us, this helped me a lot.

I did a lot of work for a Polish man. He used to work at the factory there. He used to get paid, go to work and come home.

>> Bill Benson: The Pols were able to get paid their regular job.

>> David Bayer: Before the war and during the war Germans occupied it. But us they didn't pay. They gave us only some clothing. They killed other people to give us the clothing. And some clothing, some shoes were good, so I sold them to the Polish people I worked with and they brought me food. And this kept me going. I was healthier. Because if I had no food, I couldn't work. The gases -- we didn't have it.

>> Bill Benson: You told me there was lots of smuggling and bartering for food.

>> David Bayer: And also, we had to work with all kinds of chemicals. And also they used 100 proof alcohol to make special explosive. So who worked with the alcohol? Only Jewish people. The Germans didn't allow the Pols because the Pols were drinking.

>> [Laughter]

>> David Bayer: And Jewish people not drinking. So I stole a lot of the alcohol, put it in little bottles and exchanged with the Pols.

>> Bill Benson: David, you told me that non-smokers were lucky.

>> David Bayer: Ok. Talking about smoking. Cotton is used to make explosives, powder. The Germans didn't have cotton. So they made imitation cotton from paper. There was a department, a lot of people worked there, a lot of Jewish woman, a lot of men. There was one guy who worked especially from my department. He was putting the cotton on the conveyor. And shipped to my department, which I mixed with the chemicals. This guy was a smoker. He worked with me and three other guys. We were five people in this department. And he smoked cigarettes, food for cigarette. And sometimes he volunteered -- and I also volunteered sometimes -- to clean German offices and everything else in the factory. And we picked up butts from cigarettes that the Germans smoked. I picked it up and put it in my pocket and sold it for food. Whoever need cigarettes gave away their bread.

This guy, a smoker -- it was night shift. He worked 12 hours a day. He was tired. The cigarette fall on the conveyor. It ignited. The conveyor came in and there was a big fire. They took us out. They were going to hang us. They didn't fool around.

But what happened, there were two old men, Germans, engineers, in charge of my department. They came in. One name was Dr. Vitter and the other, Dr. Lesher. I never forget that name. I have to remember that name. The two Germans asked the Gestapo not to kill us because they needed for the factory. And they let us go. They canceled the hanging. There

was an announcement, a big splash, everybody should see that we were hanging because we did sabotage.
>> Bill Benson: You also tried escaping from Pionki several times.
>> David Bayer: Yeah. I escaped one time. I got shot. I didn't escape from the factory. I escaped from the camp. We went through the barbed-wire. We cut the barbed-wire. But poor guys. Somebody must have snitched, the Germans. They were waiting. White uniforms, machine guns. We were trying to get through, the machine guns. I got shot in my leg. I was lying in the snow. And the Germans thought I was dead. They left us lying there in the snow. And the guys from the camp came in and they took us in. A doctor sewed me up. After a while I went back to work.
>> Bill Benson: In addition to getting shot, you were also, if I remember correctly, seriously burned in a locomotive fire.
>> David Bayer: This was later on. But before that I escaped once again from the factory with a guy named Mosze Matis. He was maybe 7 feet tall to me. He was working like a gorilla. He was working for a Polish worker in factory. He was taking out the chemicals from the train, from the tankers, and put it in the building. He said to me there was a chance to escape and join the underground, Polish Army, in the forest. We could fight the Germans. So I agreed with him. We went out under the barbed-wire. We went to the forest. We walked in the villages. We saw big posters everywhere we went. "10 litres of vodka to bring in a Jew." The German give 10 liters of vodka to bring in a Jew dead or alive.

What we did? We made a u-turn and went back to the factory. I was more secure in the factory than outside. This was the other escape. And then I escaped again.
>> Bill Benson: We'll come back to that.
>> David Bayer: I survived this time.
>> Bill Benson: There you are in Pionki doing the slave labor. But the Russians were closing in. And as the Russians got closer, you were forced out of Pionki. Tell us.
>> David Bayer: The Germans took over Europe and wanted to take Russia. Russia was not so easy for the Germans to take. So winter came. And the Germans were freezing to death. And the Russians were burning all the houses, all the little towns, all the Villages, all the food. The Russian were burning everything up for the Germans to freeze to death; they couldn't fight. Everything was cold. They were losing the war. The Russians pushed the Germans back. The Germans were taking everything they could, dismantled the Pionki factory. They take us with them to Germany to work in Germany. We had to march in the snow, in the winter, in January 1945 -- 1944, December to 1945.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about leaving Pionki and going to Auschwitz.
>> David Bayer: Well, I was in a school in Virginia and one man asked me did I ever encounter a good German. I'll come to that.
>> Bill Benson: Ok.
>> David Bayer: So I told him, I said, yeah, we had a good German, a nice engineer who used to come in the factory, used to fix the pumps and the machinery. He was very polite. He said good morning. He was thank you. Really pleasant guy. He never hit us, never beat us. So that was a nice German. Ok?

But, when the Germans were fleeing and trying to escape and wanted to dismantle the machinery, this nice Germans came in to our camp and asked for volunteers. Other Germans came in, nobody wanted to go. They were hiding under the bed. They were hiding in the forest. We didn't want to go. He came in. Everybody was raising their hand and running to him

because we knew he was a nice guy. This German got confused. He thought we were running to him and hurt him because we were rushing to the gate. He pulled a pistol and shot the crowd.

And he was the good German. He killed a guy and injured another one. He was a good German, but he was still a Nazi, still pulled a gun and shot in the crowd. So this is the answer I gave him about a good German.

So what happened, they finally took us out by train and shipped us to Auschwitz. There were over 100 people in a wagon, in the freight car. No food. A lot didn't make it. We were choked inside. No water, no nothing. We came to Auschwitz -- actually, Birkenau. We walked to Auschwitz.

Talking about my burn, got injured. But before this happened I was working on a locomotive to transport the powder to make plastic rollers. A spark came out, some powder ignited and burned me in my arms, face, and my legs. So I didn't go to work anymore. I got creams on me.

When I came to Auschwitz, I still was -- crust on my face and everywhere else. There was a guy, a prisoner who helped me get out of the freight car, said to me, "What happened to you?" And I told him. So he said, "If a German ask you what happened to you, tell them that you are a chemist and you make explosives. They're going to need you."

Sure enough, a Gestapo came over and checked everybody else and pulled me aside, me and other people. And a lot of them got killed. And they took us to the gypsy camp where all the gypsies were living. There was a barrack, maybe 75, 100 of us separate people.

In the meantime, a German Jewish doctor used to come with the Red Cross band and he was giving me creams. It got clear. Other Germans, dignitaries came in and picked people. They picked us to work in the coal mine.

>> Bill Benson: And you told the Gestapo officer that you were a chemist.

>> David Bayer: Yeah. But he just put me aside in case somebody needs me. But they didn't need me to be a chemist. They took me to the coal mine. So I went with the others to work in the coal mine.

The coal mine was the worst thing in the world, underground, 12 hours a day. We had a quota. We had to make 18 wagons of coal, little small wagons. Couldn't even do that. Sometimes they left us to stay overnight in the mine.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to interrupt you for a second. Because the quota, these 18 carts that you had to do --

>> David Bayer: 18 little wagons of coal everyone had to produce.

>> Bill Benson: You found a way to trick the Germans. Right?

>> David Bayer: We tricked them. But they find -- what happened, we stole the previous shift, whoever worked before. And we put our numbers on the wagon and took theirs off. And this was going on like this. The Germans didn't have much coal. We were cheating.

Also, the mine, the people who was the regular job, we took their coal. And sometimes -- in my department we were hungry. What they gave us was very, very bad food. They used to call it a Romanian name for our soup. And the bread was sticky like glue. We didn't keep it because we were scared to lose it, keep it in my pocket or somebody steals it from you. So whenever I have a piece of bread, the morning, I ate it right away. Starving later on. Then a lot of people were hungry. In the coal mines, they have layers of coal, layers of some kind of clay, looks like margarine, like butter. Some people were eating that, just hallucinating and eating.

>> Bill Benson: Clay.
>> David Bayer: They never made it. They died.

In my department there was a young man who died that way. They took him out. The next day they replaced him with another young man, a religious Jewish boy with a little beard, tall, skinny, constantly was praying. Whenever you looked at him, he was praying. His name was Ruben. He was from Poland. He was praying all the time. We talked to each other that he's crazy. He's praying. And he had a lot of time. We said he's crazy. He said, “I'm not crazy. You kind of. I'm not crazy.” He was praying. He cited the psalm, continuously cited the psalm.

And then there was a Gestapo man, a supervisor with the uniform, walked around with a stick, like a pick, with a pick handle, made out of copper. He was hitting people over the head and killing them. He killed a lot of people. He was supposed to go around and check the coal, where to drill, you know.

In my group there was a miner, regular guy who used to come to work. He was drilling and putting the dynamite in. He put dynamite in. After you're ready to blow, you have to yell "Fire in the hole" or "Watch out" or "Achtung" to look. The miner said to us, I'm not going to call nothing. I'm not going to say fire in the hole or anything like this. You move away. The German came. He ignited the things and he blow up the German to pieces. A whole row of coal fall on him and he got covered up and killed.

Ruben came out and said, "Didn't God help us?" And I never forget it because if somebody asked me about God, I bring up that story. Because he believed 100% -- everybody shut up. Nobody said a word anymore to him. He survived and lives in Jerusalem.
>> Bill Benson: David, while you were in Auschwitz, you also had surgery while you were there.
>> David Bayer: Well, every morning when we were going to work, the roll call. We stand in the line. The Gestapo man pass by, checks everybody; a stick in his hand, he checked.
I had my glands swell up. I was covering up with my collar from my jacket, my dirty coal jacket. He noticed up. He came over, pushed away the coat, and my glands were swollen like this. He called up another kapo and they took me to a clinic.

They put me down in the clinic and they cut me without anesthetic, without anything else. They tied me up on the table. The guy, the doctor who was doing the job, was smiling at me, with a smiling face and looked at me. He cut me, no injection, no medicine, no nothing, just tied me up. And the blood was coming out. I was lying there in pain. After the operation, after their experiment, he sewed me up and left me lie on the bed.

In that clinic there was a lot of prisoners who were working --
>> Bill Benson: Like orderlies.
>> David Bayer: And nuns. There was one guy who was like an orderly. He was a nurse. He was from my hometown in Poland. He was our neighbor, lived about two blocks away from me. I knew him very well. I knew his mother. His mother was a post office director. And he saw me. He said, "They going to kill you." He called me Duvtche in Polish. My name was David. Knew me. We played soccer. He was a coach. He said, “I will try to save you.” He made a false paper in German, tied me up and everything else, and I'm able to go back to work. I walked out of the clinic, went back to my barrack and went to work.
>> Bill Benson: I think just recently you found in the archives of the museum, recently acquired, the German records of that surgery.
>> David Bayer: I got them right here because I got copies of it. And the German doctor who operated on me, there's a story about him. He was a doctor in the Russian front. He got sick.

So someone advised him to get a job in Auschwitz. So he applied and they took him in to Auschwitz. And he became a doctor in the concentration camps.

So they sent him to a camp which the coal mine was. His name was Fischer. He was a German. They gave him a home. He was doing experiments. They claim in here that he killed 70,000 people.

He escaped and was living in east Germany, under the Russians. About 10, 15 years ago, they find him and they hanged him. They had a trial and he was hanged. He was a doctor in a little town with his family like nothing happened.

And even, this is his report, his signature, and my name and what he did to me. The report. So they find this in Germany in the archives.

>> Bill Benson: Just recently.

David, in January 1945, one day while you were in the coal mines you were all pulled out of the coal mine and then forced on a Death March.

>> David Bayer: We named it Death March because the Germans told us to hook up, under arms, each other, eight in a row and march towards Germany. The main highway was full of German tanks and trucks running away from the Russians. And they told us to go into the fields, in the snow, the country roads. Whoever fell down, a bullet in the head. And thousands of thousands of people were killed like this.

I had a friend next to me who couldn't walk anymore. He fell down. A German bent over, boom, in the head. I stopped and I took his jacket and I prayed over him. I asked for forgiveness I take his jacket, he didn't need it anymore. The jacket was full of blood. I wiped it off with the snow.

>> Bill Benson: And this was the winter of 1944, 1945. Very cold.

>> David Bayer: We keep walking, keep walking. Then we walked to a place called Blechhammer, another concentration camp. There were a lot of British soldiers there, Russian prisoners. Chased us in, no food, no nothing. But there were buildings. And everybody was trying to break into the buildings. There was warehouses with a lot of food but everybody took whatever they could. I went to one warehouse, there was margarine. So I grabbed the margarine. I took margarine and I put it under my shirt, in my pants, wherever I can. It was so cold. We had nothing to eat.

The Germans were announcing to come out again, marching. We didn't want to go. So I went with two Russian prisoners to a barbed-wire. We went under the snow, went out, and went through the forest.

>> Bill Benson: So you broke out.

>> David Bayer: Of Blechhammer. We stayed in the forest for six days and six nights. We had bombardments, coming and going. We heard the war was going on. We lied in the snow under pine trees. We ate bark. The two prisoners were Russian soldiers, looking for mushrooms under the snow. We shared. I shared the margarine with them. The margarine melted. I didn't take no bath. It was so dirty. Everybody licked it like it was the best ice cream.

>> Bill Benson: And this helped you to survive.

>> David Bayer: And then we decided to get out because I was freezing to death. The Russians came. We saw Russian people with the guns.

>> Bill Benson: The Russian Army was coming.

>> David Bayer: We didn't know if they were Russian or Germans. We didn't care no more. And they were Russian. One Russian soldier picked me up, carried me. I weighed maybe 60, 70 kilos. I was nothing.

>> Bill Benson: You were half of your body weight.
>> David Bayer: I was just bones. They took me into a woman;s home, a German woman with a daughter. And the Russians said take care of me, spoke to her in German. Actually, one was a Russian Jewish officer. He spoke Jewish, too, also German but an officer.
>> Bill Benson: So he ordered these German women to take you in?
>> David Bayer: Yeah. She took care of me. She didn't have much to eat anyway. She made some kind of cream soup or something. She bathed me. She gave me some clothing, woman's clothing. No men. They must be in the Army or something. I was going to leave and she was crying. She didn't want me to go. And then the reason she didn't want me to go is because she didn't want the Russian soldiers to come. They were two women. They would have raped them. She said, “Stay, please.” She had a cow. They had nothing eat she told me but the cow in the barn.

What happened to Ruben, the young man who believed in miracles, he was going with us, with the two Russian prisoners to escape, but he got injured. Something happened to him and he was bleeding. Must be a bullet or something. He couldn't walk anymore. So we put him in a barn. And we kept going. After the war, he was found by the Russians also, and they put him in the hospital and he lived in Germany. And from Germany, the Israelis and Palestinians, Jews from Palestine came in and smuggled him to Israel. But he was caught and locked up.

After the War of Independence, he came to Israel. Then I went to Panama and then to Israel. When I came to a center who do I see? Ruben is standing there. He recognized me. A religious guy with long beard and praying. And he said, "My God. I can't believe it." That's me. I was already in Panama and I was in the Army already and everything else. And then I went to see him one time. He lives in Jerusalem. He has 11 children.
>> Bill Benson: In the little time that -- we still have some time. Once you were liberated, you decided to go back to Poland. Tell us about going back to Poland.
>> David Bayer: When I got back on the road, the German woman was crying and I was leaving her, she told me how to get to the highway. It was Russian Army and refugees. Everybody was walking out from hiding. The German houses were empty. A lot of German houses were empty because the Germans run away to escape the Russians. There was a lot of beautiful homes with beds and everything else. So on the way walking, we stopped in homes every day in a different house.
>> Bill Benson: And the next day get up and continue walking.
>> David Bayer: One house I picked up a big coat, a German officer's coat. I put it on. And the Russian saw me. I'm not a German. I'm a refugee. He said, “Take it off because we don't know who you are” I had to throw away a warm German coat.

And then one time I stopped in a home and I stole a bicycle. It was outside. I was walking with the bicycle to the highway. Two Russians with a jeep came over, knocked me off the bicycle and took it.
>> Bill Benson: They stole the bicycle from you.
>> David Bayer: No. They took it back to that woman, the Russians to the woman.
>> Bill Benson: She said you took her bicycle.
>> David Bayer: I took her bicycle. It was a hard way to go home.

And then a lot of times, the Russian soldiers stopped with the trucks and they give you a lift. But some of them were Russian women soldiers. They were worse. The women very bad. They wanted me to go with them, you know. They were the real McCoys, characters.

So finally I reached Poland, my hometown. Nobody there. I saw the home where I was born, where I lived. There were other people living there. I walked in, the Pol was scared. He said, “Here's papers. I live here now.”
>> Bill Benson: In your home.
>> David Bayer: In my house. And I recognized things. So I said, don't worry, I'm not going to take nothing. I'm not going to stay. I stayed for a few days. I went to a Polish man who used to work for my father. I walked in the house. There was all my furniture before we moved to the ghetto. They put a lot of stuff there for hiding for him, my tables, cabinets, furniture, drapes, everything of my mother's. I didn't say nothing. I didn't care for it. I was a single guy. I have nothing else. I'd rather be empty, you know? Luggage. I didn't want to be tied up with something.

So then other people come back. Other friends of mine come back. We start organizing. We went to places where people not live and we took over the house. There was a friend of mine and everybody else keep coming back. And then we got notification from the embassies who came to Europe to help us.
>> Bill Benson: To bring you to Palestine. Right?
>> David Bayer: They told us to go to Czechoslovakia, go to Germany. From there we going to transfer you to Palestine.

So we listened to them. We keep going from one place to the other. I wind up in a DP camp, displaced persons camp, in Germany. Over there the Americans came in. They gave us milk and honey, so they called. We get everything. They give us cigarettes, candy, all of the American military, Russians, were coming to us. We ate. We slept. We got homes.

But I had no money. So cigarettes, I didn't smoke. Candy, I didn't eat. Coffee, stuff Americans give us, I sold it to the Germans and started making money. I make money. I was selling in the black market, so they call. I collect some dollars. The big American dollars, 100 years old, maybe.

From there I went to France, Paris. I spent everything over there. From over there I went to Holland. I took a ship to Panama.
>> Bill Benson: And this was 1947 when you left for Panama. Why Panama?
>> David Bayer: Why? When I was in DP camp, the American Ambassador from Munich sent me a letter that somebody in Panama is looking for me. I was on a list, a survivor. He had my name, that this was a friend of mine who went to school with me and his parents emigrated to Panama before the war and they had been looking for relatives and friends. So they asked me if I wanted to come to Panama. So I agreed.
>> Bill Benson: And you went to Panama.
>> David Bayer: I could have come to United States if I had a way but takes a while. So Panama, there was a ship going to Panama from Holland. So I went to Panama.
>> Bill Benson: You spent a year in Panama at that time.
>> David Bayer: And I went to Panama. I was a while there. I was in Panama for a while. I didn't like Panama City so I went to live with the Indians. From Panama to Costa Rica. I was making leather for them. They were making shoes. They were nice people.

And over there I met a Jewish guy, Sam was his name. When he saw me, he said, Oh, you crazy. What are you doing here? Going to get married, live with the Indians? Why don't you go to Israel, plenty of independence. Threatened of war and they need young people like you. So I said, ok, I go.

There was going to be a ship in Panama was going to pick up 180 trucks in the canal zone and pick up a lot of -- you could join that ship. The ship was named for the Royal Air Force. A Greek ship, the father named the ship after the son who got killed in the Air Force. So I joined that ship. And I became in charge of the cargo. When I came to Haifa, to Israel, I joined the Army and they sent me to the desert and that's it.
>> Bill Benson: Can I get you to just say --
>> David Bayer: The war.
>> Bill Benson: Can I get you to say a little bit, David. On that journey, on that ship to Israel, you were towing a PT boat. Right? Tell us about that.
>> David Bayer: Well, when I joined that ship, there was two Mexican Jewish guys, volunteers, and the crew, and me. I joined the ship. They got a notification that we should go to Veracruz, Mexico. Why? There was a torpedo boat have to be towed to Palestine. Then all of a sudden they changed it and they said don't go anymore, go to Cuba. Why? Because two American Navy men will take that torpedo boat to Cuba. This torpedo boat was a German torpedo boat the American government got from the Germans. Two Navy men who were going to take it to Cuba, stole the torpedo boat for $80,000. The Jewish agency paid them.
>> Bill Benson: That was to become part of the Israeli Navy, right?
>> David Bayer: They stole it and took it to Cuba. First Veracruz and then Cuba. They got a load of sugar.

Well, we went to Cuba, from Panama to Cuba. In Panama they got cable to tie this torpedo boat, to tow it to Israel. That's what happened. The torpedo never made it to Israel. It went to Gibraltar, near Greece, filled with water. We had to chop off the cable. Never made it. So the first boat the Israelis were supposed to have never made it.
>> Bill Benson: But you made it and served in the Israeli Army, saw combat during the War of Independence, went back to Panama, and then came to the United States and met Adele.
>> David Bayer: I met her at the Israeli consulate in Israel. I was charged from the Army. I had nowhere to go. I had no family, no nothing. There were thousands of thousands of people coming in. There was nowhere to sleep. I was discharged. So I slept on a bench in a park. I couldn't find a job.

One day I went over to a park. I was hungry. I was going to ask the man to give me some apple cake and soda water. There was two ladies sitting there talking to each other. And one lady yelled out to the man, "Mr. Bayer, Mr. Bayer." I turned around. I thought they called me. The man behind the counter was named Bayer and it was my uncle.

I never knew I had and uncle. He was my grandfather's brother. He came to Palestine before the war from Germany. He was a German. He was a Russian soldier in the First World War. He surrendered to the Germans. He lived in Germany, met a German woman and lived in Germany until 1938. In 1938 he went to Palestine. He lived there. I didn't know I had an uncle.

He asked me who I am. So I told him, my mother, told about my cousin who went by motorcycle to Palestine. He said, yeah, he is here and lives here. I went to see him. So I got family.

So I couldn't find a job. I stayed with my uncle. I met a man from Panama. He said there was a ship going back to Panama. If you want to go to Panama for free, you can go on the ship. So I said, ok, I'll take it. I could go back and I want to.

So I went back to Panama and stayed in Panama for a while and then I came here. I stayed eight years in Panama, actually. I came here in 1955. With $9.35 in my pocket. I came

to Miami. I got off the plane. I took a bus to Washington. And that's it. I started here in Washington.
>> Bill Benson: When did you meet Adele?
>> David Bayer: I met Adele when I went to see a friend in New York, a survivor, also lived in New York. I had the address. And she introduced me to my wife. We had each other. That's it. I wanted to go back to Panama but my wife said huh-uh. We went to Panama. I went with her to Panama. And she said "Devil's Island," she called it. Too hot. It's very hot over there. And that's it.
>> Bill Benson: We have a couple of quick minutes for some questions from our audience, for a couple of questions. Do you feel up to it? A couple of questions?
>> David Bayer: Yeah. If I know the answer.
>> Bill Benson: Ok. All right.

We have microphones on either side of the aisle. Please wait until you have a microphone in your hand. Make your question as brief as you can. I'll repeat it to make sure that we hear it and everybody in the audience hears it.
>> David Bayer: Yeah, but my hearing is not so good.
>> Bill Benson: You've done great so far. I saw a hand go up somewhere.
>> I was just -- I don't know if you can speak to it or not since you were sort of younger before the war really got started. A lot people I think are drawing parallels between what was happening in the `30s in Germany and Poland to today, what's happening sort of in certain places. I'm just wondering if you see any parallels.
>> Bill Benson: For our purposes, we'd like to just stay focused on his story, if you don't mind, if that's ok.
>> Ok.
>> Bill Benson: She was asking your thoughts about the world today compared to then.
>> David Bayer: I have a lot of -- I don't want to talk about it. Why? I'm a big critic of everything. If I start talking, I will criticize half the world anyway.
>> Bill Benson: Ok. Let me just say this. When we finish, David is going to stay up on the stage. So if anybody would like to come up and ask another question, talk to him a bit more about anything, please feel free to do that there. I assure you, David has something to say about most everything.

Any other questions? Back here. Thank you.
>> Hi, David. Back here. So much of what you said is so awful as it relates to humanity. What you were able to overcome is so inspiring. I was wondering, where did you find the strength to persist and to keep going?
>> Bill Benson: David in light of all you went through, where did you find your strength to be able to persist and keep going and survive?
>> David Bayer: When I was working for the irrigation canal outside my hometown and stayed in the house, every time I walked out my mother said to me, every day, she said to me, "Don't forget you're a Jew," don't change your religion, stay a Jew, die a Jew. That's what our family was and is and should be. And I listened to my mother. I wanted to survive to show the world that I am a Jew and I have family.

The reason I didn't marry in Panama, after the war, nowhere is because I wanted to marry a Jewish woman and that's what I marry. I wanted to have a family, create a family that the Germans killed. My father was only 42 or 43 years old. He was a religious man but young. I

don't know how was religion after that. Maybe he change it. Maybe he realize God didn't listen to us. Maybe he listen now.
>> Bill Benson: And now you have a great, great -- a great grandson.
>> David Bayer: He going to live to 120 like I will. I will live to 120. You all come back 20 years from now and I will be here.
>> Bill Benson: We will have him scheduled, I promise that.

We're going to close in a moment. I'm going to turn back to David to close our program. I want to thank all of you for being here with us today, remind you that we will have a *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. When David finishes, as I said a moment ago, he will stay up on the stage. Please feel free to come up here, shake his hand and say hi, get a photo taken with him, whatever you would like to do.

On that, David, your last thought?
>> David Bayer: My last word. It couldn't be the last word because I'd have to start again.
>> Bill Benson: And we have 20 more programs to go at least.
>> David Bayer: The last word, remember. That's all you have to do is remember this could happen again and again and again. You should not allow it to happen to anybody. It does happen now and nobody even thinks about it. Nobody knows about it. But it could happen again and again. Killed so many people. Not only Jewish, all the -- in Europe wiped out, millions of Russians were wiped out.

I had a German kapo -- I don't know if you know what a kapo is. He was a murderer. He came in -- he walked around with a golf club. He knocked you down, hit you over the head and killed you. I find out that he was in jail for killing his mother and the German Nazi took him from jail and put him in the concentration camp to kill Jewish people. He was a killer. He killed anybody. He killed his own mother. He was in jail for killing his mother.

And nobody got punished. There was a Nazi, they caught him after the war. He claims that nothing happened to anybody, we didn't know what's happening, we didn't know about the concentration camps. How you can say such things? I was taken one day out from the barrack and taken to the commander's, from the camp, house, and his wife told us to dig a garden, dig the ground for a garden. And this same commander for the camp was shooting people like flies. And his wife saw it. And I saw it.

And after the war he got locked up. The wife, the family said we didn't know anything. She was living right in front of the camp. She saw the barbed-wire. She saw the people. She saw the shooting, the killing every day. Lying saying we didn't know anything. We didn't know that the Germans were killing so many people. They didn't see anything? They didn't hear anything?
>> Bill Benson: So we must remember all of this.
>> David Bayer: Remember. That's all I want you to do. It's not only me. It's all my friends, all my brothers and sisters. They die for nothing, for nothing. They didn't harm nobody. The German people listened to one man who was not normal. He was not normal. He was mentally sick. Took it from me, give it to them. Went to Poland, they took out everything from Poland, oil, coal, my mother's jewelry. Some German woman probably wearing my mother's jewelry. My mother had a lot of jewelry.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you, David.

>> David Bayer: I have to live like this all my life until I die thinking about it. And I'm dreaming about my sister, my brother every day and every night. Never goes out of my mind. Never. Always thinking about them.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you, David.
>> David Bayer: She was a beautiful girl. My sister one day -- we were still living in our house. She took a pair of boots, went to the farm. I had a Polish man give me a wooden cross. She put the wooden cross as a Christian and she wrote things and sneaked out of the barbed-wire and walked to a village about three kilometers of my town. She got groceries, food, potatoes, vegetables, everything else. I know the farmer, the farmer's son. The farmer was dead but the mother lived there. And they gave her everything. She was coming back and never come back home. She never came home. I never saw my sister again. I find out that they put her on the train to Treblinka, out in jail, then the transport was going away, they put her on the train.
>> Bill Benson: I know you wanted to tell us that earlier. I'm glad you had the chance to do that now.

Thank you, David.
>> David Bayer: The pain goes never away. Sometimes I cry. Nobody sees it. My sister was taking care of me. She was protecting me. She was good to me.

One time when I was a kid, I went away to a group to see -- not far from home, a group of gypsies. They were dancing and playing harmonica. And my mother didn't know what happened. My sister didn't know, nobody. She figured out that I must be with the gypsies. So they were scared maybe the gypsies would take me away. So my sister went to see me. She came to pick me up. I wandered away, maybe 8, 9 years old.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you, David. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

[Applause]