UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
Henry Kahn
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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 the 18th year of the first person program. And our First Person today is Mr. Henry Kahn, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2018 season of First Person is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our First Person guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue twice-weekly through mid-August. The museum's website, 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 that you'll find in your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Henry's biography so that you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Henry will share with us his "First Person" Account of his experience during the Holocaust for about 45 minutes. If time allows toward the end of our program we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Henry a few questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Henry is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. And we begin with this portrait of Henry who was born Heinz Kahn on January 18, 1923 in Boblingen, Germany. This photo shows Henry in 1946 prior to his induction in the US Army. The arrow on this map points to the town of Boblingen where Henry was born, in your lower left-hand corner.

Here we see Henry's mother Hedwig and his father Adolf who was a cattle dealer who fought for Germany in the first world war. Later Henry's father became president of a cattle dealers' association.

On November 9-10, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of violent attacks on Jewish-owned businesses and synagogues throughout Germany known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass. Henry's father was arrested and sent to Dachau concentration camp. This photograph shows Germans passing the broken window of a Jewish-owned business that was destroyed during Kristallnacht. Henry's father returned home a month later. Shortly after this, Henry left Germany through a Kindertransport, a rescue effort that brought thousands of Jewish children to Great Britain from Nazi Germany between 1938 and 1939. Henry arrived in England in February 1939.

When World War II began on September 1, 1939, British authorities required Henry to register as an enemy alien. He was sent by ship to Australia, which is highlighted in red on this map of the world. After just one night in an internment camp there, Henry and 12 other men were selected to return to England, only to end up in Bombay, India. The arrow on this map points to Bombay.

In 1946 Henry moved to the United States. After the war, Henry learned Nazi authorities had deported his parents to a Lodz ghetto in 1944. They were later murdered. We close with this photograph of Henry and Doreen Raymund on their wedding day in 1948. He met Doreen in Bombay in 1943.

Henry, just a few months after Henry's arrival in New York in 1946 he was drafted into the US Army. With tend of the draft he was honorably discharged in the spring of 1947. Henry's sweetheart from Bombay,

Doreen Raymund, arrived in the U.S. on June 9, 1948. They were married 18 days later on June 27, 1948.

After working in the export-import business, Henry went into the scrap metal business. While working full-time and raising a family he enrolled in Baruch College at the City University of New York as an evening student in 1956 earning his degree in Industrial Management in 1966. Doreen attended Queen's College getting a degree as a paralegal and worked as a paralegal in the Empire State Building. Henry remained in the scrap metal business until his 65th birthday in 1988. He then became a real estate agent. Following a diagnosis of lung cancer in 1992 Henry retired from his real estate work.

Henry and Doreen raised two sons, Ralph Ansel and Roy David. Their sons gave them two grandsons and a granddaughter. To be closer to their family Henry and Doreen moved from New York to Bethesda, Maryland in 2000. Doreen passed away in November 2012. Henry said to me, "We were very much in love right up to the end."

Henry continues to volunteer at the Montgomery County Thrift Shop where Doreen and he contributed their time together. Following his loss of Doreen, Henry became involved with this museum as a volunteer. Henry speaks to small groups at the museum. He also speaks about his Holocaust experience at local high schools and colleges. Henry is fluent in English and German. He walks regularly and said he is increasing his exercise. He also reads a lot and spends time with family and friends.

And with that, I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. Henry

Kahn.

(Applause)

Henry Kahn: I'll sit over there.

Bill Benson: Sit over here. All right. Henry, thank you so much for being with us today and being willing to be our first person. And we have so much for you to share with us in an hour, so we're going to start right away, if that's okay with you.

Henry, you were ten years old when Hitler and the Nazis came to power in 1933. Before we turn to those years and the war and the Holocaust, tell us first what you can about your family and yourself before the Nazis took control in 1933.

Henry Kahn: Well, we lived -- we lived in a small town not far from Stuttgart and my parents were very friendly with a family over there. And the husband of the family, his name was Mr. Kinsler. He was the owner of a toy factory. Excuse me. My brother who was two years younger than I was and I -- we had a lot of fun with all the presents we got from the toy factory because that was very good for us and wonderful. My parents were very friendly with the family. They went -- they went skiing with them and on -- they went -- they went skiing and played tennis and they were -- on Sunday mornings my father and Mr. Kinsler, they used to get together in a restaurant. And in fact, my father once suggested to Mr. Kinsler that he should join the party, the Nazi party, because he said in order to stay -- you have to do that. However, they also went to a masked ball on Halloween. Had two daughters and my -- my brother and I are about the same age and we played together. We had a real -- they were cooking and baking doing all sorts of things. It was very nice.

Bill Benson: Henry, you wrote in your memoir, you've written a memoir and you wrote it in, "during those years my parents lived a normal, healthy life."

Henry Kahn: Absolutely. Just like we do here, too, in the United States. There was no difference at all. Whether they were Jewish or Christian or whatever. It was all the same. And you were very friendly. We were observing Jewish but otherwise we were just about the same.

Bill Benson: As I mentioned earlier, your father fought for Germany in the first world war. What do you know about his experience?

Henry Kahn: Well, he was 19 years old. He was drafted. And his mother listened to the draft board hoping that he wouldn't be sent away too far. So she put in a word for him because he was the only one on the family who was left because her -- my father's father had already passed away and she was a widow. So to show the -- the sympathy of the officer, he didn't send her -- he didn't send my father just to next door to the -- to the cavalry which was a little while away. He told her that he has to be joining the Navy and the Navy had to serve for four years rather than three or two. And that was the kindness of the -- of the German. So my father was in the Navy for -- altogether he was in the Navy and the Army for seven years. The war was four years and he had another three years of service until the end of the -- the war ended and he got the Iron Cross which is a very good -- very good recognition. And fortunately he got that because he was under the impression that nothing could happen to him. As it turned out in the end it didn't help at all.

Bill Benson: Henry, in 1930 your family moved to Stuttgart and you attended the Waldorf School. What was the Waldorf School?

Henry Kahn: The Waldorf School was founded by the owner of a factory who wanted his employees, the children of the employees to go to a school which was modern and which was up to date. And he engaged a philosopher from Austria by the name of Steiner who -- whose

idea it was that boys and girls should be in the same class together. And in the first grade the boys learned how to knit and to sew and crochet and the girls -- the girls of course learned that too. Then in the third grade the girls learned how to do woodwork and they also were had an opportunity to learn gardening, and the boys did too. As you see it was a very progressive school. And as it turned out the progressive school didn't exactly jive with the Nazi philosophy where everything was controlled and consequently eventually 1938 the school had to -- was closed and the teachers were out of a job had to look for a job -- had to find a job. My teacher's name was Hagar, Karl Hagar. The reason I mention that is because he will come up later on.

Bill Benson: We'll make sure that comes up later on.

Henry Kahn: You bet.

Bill Benson: Your family, Henry, suffered a terrible tragedy in 1932 when your brother died.

George Pick: Yes, in 1932 my brother passed away. He passed away of a kind of -- of middle ear infection and so he couldn't -- he died. He didn't have any penicillin yet. Penicillin was developed in 1927. However, it didn't get to the hospital where my father was so that's what happened. That was the first calamity which my parents had. And of course me too, but particularly my parents because they were very unlucky later on also.

Bill Benson: Henry, in 1933, of course Hitler --

Henry Kahn: 1933 the Hitler -- Hitler came to power. And my father at that time, we lived in Stuttgart at that time. And my father was the president, as you heard before, of a cattle dealers' association. And shortly after Hitler came to power, Nazis in the uniform walked in to his office and told him "You're out." That's all there was to it. My father threw the keys ton floor and walked out. There was nothing he could do about it because they were the power and that's what's it. So then eventually my father went to Israel at this time -- at that time Palestine, and when he came back to find out how living was at that time. And when he came back, he said -- excuse me. If we live here the way we have to live in Palestine, we last a long time. Very unfortunately he was dead wrong.

Bill Benson: So he thought things would still be better -- he thought things would be better staying in Germany.

Henry Kahn: That was the indication. What's more, he figured he had the Iron Cross and that would save him or guard him.

Bill Benson: How did your father's -- how did your father support the family after he lost his job?

Henry Kahn: Well, after that, he first -- he first -- he first got some clothing and he took over not a clothing company but a retailer and that didn't last too long. And he had a partner who was experienced in that and he double crossed him. Then he decided -- hen they had an opportunity to pick -- to -- he had an opportunity to -- to take over a plywood dealership in Cologne. So we moved to Cologne. And another thing, in '38, all Jewish children had to leave the schools in Germany. And there was a Jewish school in Cologne and I was able to go there. And that was good. It worked out well for me. That was where we were at the time of Kristallnacht.

Bill Benson: Before we talk about Kristallnacht, Henry, after Hitler came to power, your mother really wanted to emigrate, didn't she?

Henry Kahn: Oh, my mother, right from the beginning, she said let's get out of Germany. But my father was persistent and at that time we were they weren't as powerful as they were today and the woman agreed with the husband and consequently, although my mother insisted

she took all sorts of courses to be prepared to get to another country. Preferably the United States. She learned how to sew ties and shirts and make candies I mean, she was very well prepared to come over here but my father wouldn't budge.

Bill Benson: But as you said, he was a decorated soldier.

Henry Kahn: He thought a decorated soldier would be okay.

Bill Benson: Henry, you learned to blow glass and make neon tubes as a youngster.

Henry Kahn: I was what?

Bill Benson: You learned to blow glass and to --

Henry Kahn: That was something I learned while I was -- while we were in Cologne. The superintendent of the building he knew how to blow glass and I learned that. And it came in very handy later on.

Bill Benson: Which we will hear about, I hope. Which we will hear about I hope, later, you learned that skill. Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, tell us what that was and what it meant for your family.

Henry Kahn: Well, I didn't know what was going on but a friend of mine who worked for a baker, he came by around 7:00 or 6:30 in the morning and told me, "Don't go to school" because there were all sorts of things going on which are not good. And I stayed home that day. There was a Thursday and then Friday morning and my father was hope the following day, which was Saturday morning. And two big fellows came to the house and said is your father -- I opened the door and they said "Is your father here?" so my father came out. And they said, "Come with me." That's all. So there were two police officers not in uniform. They were civil. And they took my father to the police station. However, ton way there, my father said what would you have done if I hadn't been home? They said well, I would have gone to your neighbor because he's also Jewish and we -- all I have to do is fill our quota. So that was the excuse for going. So you can imagine.

Bill Benson: What happened to your father after they took him away?

Henry Kahn: Well, he was away for about four weeks. And when he came back, he was in terrible shape. And he said if I go -- if I get in there again -- he was taken to Dachau which you probably are familiar with. That's a concentration camp near Munich. And when he came back, he said if ever I get there again, I won't come out alive. And that was very true.

Bill Benson: Henry, on the night of Kristallnacht, that November 9-10, hundreds of synagogues were burned across Germany but yours wasn't.

Henry Kahn: Pardon?

Bill Benson: Your synagogue wasn't burned.

Henry Kahn: No, because it was attached -- I mean, the building was attached to other buildings and they didn't -- they didn't put it on fire because they were afraid the fire would go to the next building. However, it was ransacked. Terribly ransacked. And it was a mess. What's more, my school was in the same compound. It wasn't connected to the synagogue but it was in the same compound, a special building. It was a Jewish school, as I mentioned before, and that's the way it worked. But we didn't do much learning anymore after that.

Bill Benson: And in fact, soon -- soon after Kristallnacht, your parents made the profound decision to send you away.

Henry Kahn: Well, I was very fortunate my cousin was -- was working in London or near London. And he had a girlfriend. And the girlfriend's father was a part owner of a clothing factory. And he persuaded the -- that person, whose name was London, to guarantee me, because I had to be guaranteed to get the Kindertransport. So one day we received a

telegram, sent dates of hire and his -- his address. I mean, the -- and my parents said -- sent my information. And I was lucky because it only went up to 17. I was 16 years old when I got that, that telegram. So on early February 1939 my parents took me to the -- to the railroad station and said good-bye through the window and they left at the platform. However, they came -- they came to the street, they found out that the train had been delayed by two hours -- by a half an hour, so they figured they'd spend a few more minutes with me. And the moment they came back, I knew I wasn't going to see them again. Before that I knew I would see them again. But ten minutes later, I saw them again and that was it and I never saw or heard from them again -- well, I heard -- I got some letters from them eventually in England, but otherwise, I didn't see them anymore, talk to them anymore. That was it. It was quite a shock, I can assure you. But I felt it, that this is it.

Well, the train left eventually. We came to Holland and after we had crossed the border, everybody was very relieved and indicated how relieved you are. I'd like to tell you a little story there. There was a girl, maybe ten years old, she had a newspaper, an illustrated newspaper and there was a picture of Hitler on it. The moment she was sure we were in Holland and not in Germany anymore, she took the picture of Hitler and tore it into thousands of pieces. That goes to show you how the emotions were when we got across the border. And the next day we got to -- we got to -- on a ferry through the same night we got to the ferry and we got to England. And the next day we were taken by bus from Liverpool -- no, not from Liverpool but we came from -- from the port. We were taken by bused to Liverpool station in London. There was a big hall and everybody had be signs. So -- with their -- not names but numbers on it. I knew a little English because we had learned a little bit in school, but the pronunciation was entirely different. And it wasn't quite that easy. However, I saw a nice lady walking in and I figured I'd try and help her. So I walked up to her and said, "May I help you?" and she pulled out a piece of paper and looked at it and said hmmm, Heinz Kahn. I had found my sponsor.

(Laughter)

So my cousin came with the car and we drove to their home. The first thing, well we had dinner. I met Mr. London and the daughter and Mrs. London of course I knew from the place. And the first thing we had some dinner and we had peas and meat, I don't remember what. But the important thing is the reason I mentioned it is because Mrs. London was very concerned about me eating properly. The English way. Now, you know, in the United States you eat -- you cut your -- you cut your food, you put it in the right hand and eat it in the United States. In Europe you eat with your -- you cut your food but you use your left hand to put it into your mouth. As far as peas are concerned, you just push them on the fork. In England, you have to take the fork and spear it. So you get three or four pieces of peas on it and put it in your mouth. You don't get very much.

(Laughter)

But this is the way you have to eat in England. I mean supposedly. Supposedly. Well, I had my own room and I -- and then Mr. London asked me, "Do you want to go to school?" I said I would prefer to work. The reason I said that is A, I had no money at all, and B, more importantly, I wanted to learn something so when I get to the United States, which I had in my mind all the time, I'd have something to show that I would be able to make a living.

Well, as it turned out, I was in a glorified prison actually. Mr. London took me to his work every morning, brought me back every after -- evening, and I had lunch with the staff and that was it. I was getting bored with that. I mean, I learned how to make knots and how to put tags on the pants, but this is no profession. So I asked him, can I please work in the sewing -- on

the sewing machine. So of course that wasn't appropriate for the prodigy of the -- of a factory owner to work with those common people. I mean, that was not right. Couldn't do it

Bill Benson: Because he was the owner of the factory.

Henry Kahn: He was the owner, exactly. The owner of the factory. His prodigy should work as a -- no, that didn't go. Well, I was disappointed, but things changed pretty soon. As I said, I arrived in February and in September --

Bill Benson: Henry, can I ask you one question before you go there? At some point -- well, soon after you got there, you changed your name from Heinz.

Henry Kahn: Oh, yeah, that was another thing. Mr. and Mrs. London, or Mr. London, I don't know who, they said to me, well, Heinz is not really a good name. Although there's Heinz 57, you know, the ketchup.

(Laughter)

But no, that's not good. You have to change your name. So I figured well, a criminal that I read in books. I mean, I was 16 years old, the criminals they usually chased the same initial, I didn't want to do that. So consequently I chose Peter. Peter is a name in English as well as in German and consequently it suited me. So I chose it. When my mother heard about it, she said I don't like this at all. But I guess if Mrs. London wants it, then it has to be. I couldn't answer that, but it wasn't that way.

Bill Benson: And Henry, of course, at that time you were able to write to your parents and they wrote to you.

Henry Kahn: Yes, yes, that I could do. The war hadn't started yet.

Bill Benson: And then of course in September of 1939, the war begins.

Henry Kahn: I know, I know. Well, this is another thing. In September '39 the war began and immediately Mr. London told me he's going to evacuate the family. And since I -- oh, yeah, then I got a permit -- he got a permit -- a worker's permit, apprentice permit and I was getting one pound a week, which is 20 shillings. I said to him, don't give me that much. I live in your house and all that, I don't need that much money now. He said oh, that's okay. 20 shillings, it's okay. I guess it was the law in England. I didn't know. So the war broke out and the family, we evacuated. And he -- Mr. London told me, since you are working, you have to look for a place. So I found a place, we lived in Hampstead Garden, which is a fancy neighborhood, they had their own private home, et cetera, et cetera, and it wasn't far from Hampstead Heath a big meadow where I went quite often and just dreamt. I had no money, as I mentioned before, although I got a little bit there, a pound a week and I saved it very conscientiously because I knew I needed money to get to the United States. I had to look for a place and I went to Finsbury Park. It was a middle class type of neighborhood. The school was not far away from where I lived. There was a synagogue not far from where I lived, so that was very convenient. And across the street I met a fellow with who I was friendly until he passed away a few years ago. His name was Lou. So now that I had to move, I said to Mr. London, now you -- I like to work in the sewing -- in the sewing room. And this time he couldn't say no because, you know -- but on the other hand I also asked him to give me some more money. Oh, no, you can't have that because other boys your age don't get any more either. Now, it was different if you live with them for nothing or if you have to have your own room. What I had to pay was 14 shillings and six cents a week.

Bill Benson: Out of your 20. Out of your 20 shillings, you had to pay 14 shillings out of your 20 shillings.

Henry Kahn: Yeah out of 20. So that wasn't exactly good either. So I had to get -- so I

learned how to sew. And after a short time I figured I'd go into piecework to work to pay for each piece which I complete. And there I was able to make 30 shillings, 50% more than what I had before. And that was already a little bit better.

Bill Benson: Henry, can I jump in and read something that you shared with me? During that time you were called before a tribunal and your record said the holder of this certificate is to be exempted from further order from internment because you were from Germany and from the special restrictions applicable to enemy aliens, because you were from Germany, under the aliens order. And then they added, in late 1939 they added that you were a refugee from Nazi oppression. So that should have protected you.

Henry Kahn: Okay. But when well, that was a little later. It wasn't right after the war broke out because first I was really quiet and nothing much happened, although there was an area allowed but right after Mr. Chamberlain had declared war on Germany.

After the war Churchill had written five volumes, the second world war and in one of the volumes he showed how the precarious the situation was in England and the Britts didn't get scared, they got panicky. And when they got panicky, then they decided to intern the lot, including refugees from Nazi oppression. Now, I'd like to give you an idea what it was like by read ago little excerpt by Winston Churchill had written at the time. Between 1940 and '45 Winston Churchill had collected his memoir and notes and letters and used it to write six volumes on the second world war and now I'm quoting. "We could not regard the state of without uneasiness. We knew that disguised merchant ships in unknown numbers were preying on all borders. The enormous disproportion between the number of riders and the force of the Admiralty had to deploy to cordon them and guard -- guard the immense traffic that had been displayed previously. Had to be ready at many points and give protection to thousands of merchant vessels and could give no guarantee against occasional lamentable disasters. A far greater danger was added to these problems. The only thing that ever really frightened me, and that was Mr. Churchill saying that, was during the world war now our lifeline even across the broad oceans and especially the entrance to the island were endangered. How much would -- how much would U-boats influence our port and shipping. Only the lines and charts would show potential triangulations. The high and faithful spirit of the people and the bleak domain either the food supplies from the new world as the empire arrived across the ocean or they failed. So now you see why they got panicky over there. In any case, this was after Dunkirk where the British Expeditionary Force had been encircled by the Germans and all 300,000 British soldiers and French were able to get to England. However, all the equipment was lost and you can imagine how -- how the people felt. Of course everything was rationed and there was very, very, very, very strongly rationed and they had very little to eat.

Bill Benson: Henry, after -- after the Nazis took France and Holland and the lowlands, you heard on the radio an announcement that aliens should report to the police. You heard that.

Henry Kahn: Oh, yes.

Bill Benson: So what did that mean for you?

Henry Kahn: It was written, it's a two-day holiday in England and I decided since I hadn't seen anything of England except going -- coming to work, I decided to go on a bicycle trip to Oxford. And I got there, but everything was closed. So I went into a bed and breakfast place and stayed there for one night. I wanted to meet a friend of mine who lived outside of Oxford. So that's what I did. That's what I came for.

I slept in that house -- in that boarding house for one night, and the next morning I heard

on the radio all aliens have to report to the police. So I asked the -- the lady where the police station was. So she said why? I told her. So she said to me, well, I thought you were Irish.

(Laughter)

But I wasn't. And I went to the police. I told them what the problem was. They told me just go back and it will be all right. All right. So I rode back. Then I found out that a lot of acquaintances of mine were being interned and I felt my turn was going to come also. So what I did, I took all the money which I had, I took it to the Bloomsbury House, it was responsible for the Kindertransport and the kids in the Kindertransport and I told them, this is all the money I have. Please get me out as fast as possible and get me -- get me a ticket to get to the United States. So she told me, well, it isn't quite enough, but we'll make up the difference, which was great.

Well, it turned out a little different. I went back. I insisted that I get a certificate for my -- from the company I worked for, the name of the company was London house. I got the certificate after pushing. I came home -- sure enough, I just got the certificate and I just came home and the land lady told me the police were just here, you should come and get your stuff and go tomorrow to the police station. Well, tomorrow I went to the police station with all my stuff. I have a suitcase. I was immediately interned. Now, that was the 3rd of July, 1940. We were -- all the people who were interned slept one night in a race course outside of London, also in tent camps, of course, and then the next day we were given a big piece of cheese and put on the train. All day long we were on that train until we finally landed in Liverpool, the West Coast port in England. We were taken off and landed in a camp, in a tent camp which from the air looks like -- like enemy Army camp of course except there was barbed wire around it.

Then we were told the week before Liverpool had been bombed and also that the Arandora star, it was a ship that had taken prisoners into Canada had been torpedoed and shot. And after that news we were asked who wants to volunteer to go to an overseas dominion. I had no idea what an overseas domain I don't know was. I figured if it was Canada they would have said so. And then I scratched my head and wondered, should I take a chance with a torpedo or should I stay here and take a chance in the -- in the Nazis coming over and bombing us and all that? So I decided I'd take a chance with the torpedo wouldn't last too long.

Well, I took a chance. And I decided. And so for six -- five days after we arrived in the camp, we were taken on HMT Dunera which was a ship that provided facilities for 1,500 soldiers. The prisoners of war was over 2,500, so you can imagine what the situation was like. We got aboard the ship and all our luggage was put on the center of the top deck and a canvas was put over it. I was in the bottom -- bottom deck. In the front of the ship. The ship left -- left the port the very same night and was pitching and rolling like crazy. And I didn't think there was any storm but I couldn't tell you. Had no way of looking out or anything. As it turned out, the ship tried to avoid torpedoes. That's why they were pitching and rolling. A torpedo hit, made a dent into the ship, but did not explode. So you can imagine. Well of course I didn't know that immediately, but I found it out eventually.

Now quickly, 22 years later my wife, my two sons, and I met my former teacher from the Waldorf School in New York. And after meeting him several times, he told me, you know in '38 when we were fired from the Waldorf School I got a job in a torpedo factory and once in a while I put sand in the -- into the canisters. I said what made you take such a chance? I wanted to play a trick on the Nazis. So thank you, Mr. Hagar.

Bill Benson: You know, Henry, our time is getting short and there's -- I know there's things you want to share with us and there's some things I want to make sure you tell us. If you

don't mind, you mentioned a few minutes ago that all of your luggage was piled in the middle.

Henry Kahn: Yeah.

Bill Benson: And that included the letters you had gotten from your parents.

Henry Kahn: Oh, yes.

Bill Benson: So tell us what happened to the luggage.

Henry Kahn: Well, every day all of us went for a walk, walk or running on the deck back and forth, machine gun on either side to put -- to protect. The canvas had been taken off and the soldiers helped themselves to whatever they wanted because these soldiers who were guarding us were not exactly the cream of the crop because they were needed in England. So they threw stuff overboard as much as possible. And it so happened that another torpedo boat was following us and the captain asked to pick up some of the debris that was thrown overboard and there were German letters so they left us alone. So there was another good incident. It was a criminal offense. They eventually got court-martialed.

Bill Benson: The crew, yeah, the officers of your ship got court-martialed.

Henry Kahn: The officer who was in charge of the soldiers got court-martialed after the war.

Bill Benson: And Henry, the ship, as I remember, the ship sailed towards Canada, got close to Canada.

Henry Kahn: Yes.

Bill Benson: And then reversed itself.

Henry Kahn: Then it went south around the Cape of Good Hope and landed after one and a half months in Sydney, Australia. We were taken off over there and taken 18 hours into the interior. After -- after having taken -- after having arrived in a new camp, it was brand new, the sand was blowing like crazy, and we were sandblasted. We wore shorts. We felt the sand blowing against our legs. The next morning out of 2,500, 13 names were called out and mine was the first one on that list. And when we got back -- when we -- we were called to the orderly room and we were told we go back to Sydney. And somebody told us -- one of the soldiers talked, these chaps are going back to England. Well, that was not our choice, but I had no control over it. Well, it took us one and a half -- well, the ship left ten days later.

Bill Benson: Did you know why you were going back to England after all that journey?

Henry Kahn: No, I didn't.

Bill Benson: You did not know. Okay.

Henry Kahn: I didn't know at all. So after two weeks, I mean it took us one and a half months to get to Australia. After two weeks we were taken off the ship, the 13 of us, and we were taken to the police station and everyone was being interviewed by a police officer. And the fellow asked me all sorts of stupid questions. The last question he asked, where do you live? I said I don't even know where I am and you ask me where I live? Well, he had to find out. And they found out that we were going to live in the Jewish Relief Association in Bombay, India. So that's where we were. And the reason that happened was because the release which I had tried to organize before I was interned came too late to stop it from being sent on the ship -- put on the ship but it reached me when I finally was in Australia and that's how I got out. I lived in India until the end of the war and came to the States in '46.

Bill Benson: So when you left Australia, it was to go back to England but instead they dropped you off in Bombay, India.

Henry Kahn: Right. Well, the reason they did that was because there was a troop ship and the troop ship had to accommodate soldiers to go to the Middle East to fight.

Bill Benson: So they just dumped you off in India and --

Henry Kahn: Exactly.

Bill Benson: So what was it like to just find yourself in India?

Henry Kahn: Exactly.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: So then you had to make a living and support yourself. You were living in India.

Henry Kahn: Well, no, I didn't have to do that. The Jewish Relief Association, they -- they fed us and we lived there, four -- four of the boys, four of us boys lived in one bedroom and it was quite an interesting experience, I can assure you. And eventually I got a job, a night shift foreman. But there were lots of other stories in between. But that takes too long though.

Bill Benson: One I want you to tell us is that you, of course, once the war began, you had lost all contact with your parents.

Henry Kahn: Oh, yes, I couldn't get anything. I only found out when I worked at the Holocaust Museum what happened to my -- what probably happened to my parents. My father, I know. They kept very good records of it. But my mother, I have no idea. Actually I do have an idea. She lived till '44 and was force marched to -- they interned in Poland and they had a forced march going -- when the Russian troops came, they forced -- the Germans forced internees, the prisoners to walk back towards Germany. But before they got to Germany, that I found out from the Holocaust Museum, they were -- they stopped before they crossed the German border. They were forced to dig their own graves and then they were killed, shot. That was -- that's what happened to my mother, most likely. And she was the one who was orthodox. That turned somehow.

Bill Benson: Henry, if I remember correctly, at some point before your mother and father were sent to Lodz they got word that you were okay from a friend of yours.

Henry Kahn: Oh, yes. Well, in '35 I -- that was before all the problems. I was in a summer home in Germany and there I met a boy who was -- who I became very friendly. And I liked him very much. And we were in constant touch. I met him again in the States. I met him in England, India, because he was a soldier by then and he was -- he was sent to India. And while I met him, I met him for three days, he found out that his mother had died. So it's bad. But anyway, this boy, when I came to India, a gentleman in the home, he was leaving for the United States and I asked him to contact my friend Eric, which he did. And Eric on his own wrote a letter to my parents to let them know that I'm okay because they had completely lost touch with me because they knew I wasn't in England anymore but they didn't know what had happened to me. So that's it.

Bill Benson: So they at least knew that you were -- they at least knew you were safe somewhere.

Henry Kahn: That's right. I was alive somewhere, that they could know, that's right.

Bill Benson: So Henry, you would spend the rest of the war in India.

Henry Kahn: Yes, until '46. But while I was in India, I met my -- a friend of mine took me to -- to a sports club, Maccabi sports club in Bombay. And there was a young lady who played Ping-Pong. And I liked to play Ping-Pong, too. But she beat me almost all the time.

(Laughter)

So I had to get even with her. So what do you think I did? Right. But that took a long time and was very difficult because she was born in India. She -- her parents came from

Europe, too. But she was born in India and as such she didn't have a possibility of getting a Visa to get -- to live here. So while I was in uniform I went to the State Department and asked them -- I learned in the -- in the Army there are three ways of doing things. The right way, the wrong way, and the Army way. And the Army way is the way it goes. So I said to them after we went through all the possibilities, I was married, I was an American citizen at that time. I said maybe you can do something to get my wife over here. Sure enough, very shortly thereafter, she was asked to come to the consulate in Bombay. She was working across the street from there. And they asked her, do you want to go to the United States? They said oh, yes. Her Visa -- her affidavit had expired, but all of a sudden this was washed away and then the next day she was -- she said yes, I still want to go to the United States. The next day she was called over again. When do you want to go? So she said well, I have to give notice first. So she did. And after two and a half years of having written 117 letters to each other, both of us, she arrived on the 9th of June, 1948, and on the 27th we became husband and wife. And lived happily ever after.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: And the only reason you went two weeks is because you had to go to a wedding in between those two weeks, right?

Henry Kahn: Yes.

Bill Benson: So that was the only reason you delayed two weeks.

Henry Kahn: That's why it took two weeks.

Bill Benson: When you came to the United States you had had $10. Is that right?

Henry Kahn: Yes, I had -- I owned $10. But I had $50 with me. My friend had given to me to give to his brother. So I had that money available. And I had to use --

(Laughter)

I had to use it but eventually I gave it back to his brother, of course. But the $10 the fellow -- the fellow on the ship that took us exactly one month to come from India to the United States on the ship. We landed in -- in New Jersey and there was one fellow who always served us food. I felt I had to give some tip. So I gave him 5 bucks to --

Bill Benson: Half your money.

Henry Kahn: Yeah, and then somebody -- somebody helped me with my -- with my bag. I had -- I had a couple of bags and then I got -- I got onshore I had to give them a tip, too. But I had no money -- I didn't want to give any money so I gave him my helmet and he was very happy with it.

Bill Benson: Henry, I think we might have time for one or two questions before we close. Is that okay? We'll take one or two questions. And we have a microphones, one on each side. We ask if you have a question, wait until you have a microphone. Make your question -- please, if you can -- as brief as you can. I will repeat it so that Henry and everybody else can hear it and then he'll respond to your question. So I saw some hands back there. There we go.

Audience Member: You said you had changed your name from Heinz to Peter. But now you go by Henry. So when did you change from Peter to Henry?

Bill Benson: Henry, you changed your name from Heinz to Peter but you're Henry today. When did you leave Peter behind?

Henry Kahn: Well, Peter I didn't -- once I got out of England, I didn't call myself Peter anymore. Then you called myself Henry. That's all. It was quite simple.

(Laughter)

Bill Benson: Been Henry ever since. Okay. Thank you. Do we have one more? There we go. We've got a couple in the back. Okay.

Audience Member: Henry --

Henry Kahn: You want to ask me any question afterwards, you can come up.

Bill Benson: Yes, yes, thank you, Henry. Henry's going to stay when we're finished. We're not quite there yet. He will stay on the stage. So anybody who wants to come up and ask him a question, shake his hand or whatever, please know that you're welcome to do that when we finish. Hold those other questions.

Audience Member: Henry, you mentioned what you believe happened to your mother. What happened to your father?

Bill Benson: Henry, you told us what you believe happened to your mother. What do you believe happened to your father? What do you believe happened to your father?

Henry Kahn: My father -- they kept very good records. He was in Lodz also but he got sick. He went to the hospital and he died there. I don't know exactly what happened, but this is what I was told in the -- in the Holocaust Museum, right here.

Bill Benson: And that was after he was forced into the Lodz ghetto. He was forced into the Lodz ghetto and there he died in the Lodz ghetto.

Henry Kahn: Yes. Okay.

Bill Benson: Thank you.

Henry Kahn: Now I have a -- want to say something.

Bill Benson: Okay. Your last word? We're not there yet, quite yet. We'll go one more question and then we'll get there.

(Laughter)

We're almost there. You're punctual.

Henry Kahn: All right.

(Laughter)

Audience Member: Thank you, Henry, for sharing with us. Question about your father being released after one month. Why do you think he was released after one month from Dachau?

Bill Benson: The question is why do you think your father was released after one month from Dachau? Why was he released?

Henry Kahn: Well, lots of people were released at that time. It was just initially to give them a shock, I guess. And encourage people to get out of Germany. I don't know why it was. But it was -- it wasn't that terrible yet. It got worse by the day.

Bill Benson: And Henry used the word "encourage." Many of those who were released after Kristallnacht were basically told, we'll release you but you have to leave Germany. And so many, of course, tried to find ways to do that. I want to remind you that we will have a *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August, so hope that you can return and join us at that time. Henry's going to give us his last word in the moment because it's our tradition that our *First Person* has the last word. But I would like you to wait until you leave because our photograph Joel is going to come up on the stage and take some video of Henry with you in the background so that will be very exciting for him to have. So please bear with us for that. So as I said, it's our tradition that our *First Person* has the last word.

Henry Kahn: Okay. If you know somebody who you hate, you have very good reason to hate that person and do not make the mistake of generalizing. In other words, the

same -- person with the same background is not necessarily the same type of person and it's very important. You see, I could hate, and I do hate the Nazis, as you can well imagine, but if it had -- but it is for Mr. Hagar to show you that there were very good people in Germany, too. And you do not generalize by saying well, all the Germans are terrible or stuff like that. And I want you to bear this in mind whether they're Muslims or Hindus or whatever. So please, please, don't discriminate. Be judicious and take every person the way he is, he or she is. Thank you.

(Cheers and Applause)

Bill Benson: Henry is going to stay up here for a while. If you want to come up and have a photo with him, do that. I'm going to get Henry situated so he can sit down. Come over here, Henry.