UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON HENRY GREENBAUM
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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. Henry Greenbaum, whom you 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 through mid-August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Henry 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 Henry questions.

Today's program will be livestreamed on the Museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the museum's website and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. Recordings of all First Person programs will be made available on the museum's YouTube page. We are also accepting questions from our web audience today on Twitter. Please use #USHMM.

And we invite those who are here in the auditorium today to also join us on the web when the rest of our programs in April and early May will be livestreamed. Please visit the First Person website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

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.

We begin with this photograph of Henry which was taken in 1946, about a year after the war. Henry was born April 1, 1928, in a small, one-story house that served as both his family's residence and a tailor shop. He was the youngest of nine children.

Our first map shows Europe. Our second map shows Poland. The arrow indicates the approximate location of Henry's hometown of Starachowice.

Here we see two of Henry's five sisters. Ita is on the left and Rozia is on the right.

In this photo, we see another of Henry's sisters, Fagia, and her daughter.

The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. By 1942, at the age of 13, Henry was sent with his family to do forced labor in a munitions factory. He was deported to Buna-Monowitz labor camp at Auschwitz and later to the Flossenburg camp in Germany. On this map of major Nazi camps in Europe, the first arrow points to Buna-Monowitz and the second to Flossenburg.

At age 17, Henry was liberated and one year later he emigrated to the United States.

Henry, who lives in the Washington, D.C. area, lost his wife, Shirley, in 2011, after nearly 64 years of marriage. Henry and Shirley had four children: three sons and one daughter, who have provided 12 grandchildren. And now there are seven great grandchildren, ranging from 6 months to 7 years old. Henry notes that all but one are girls.

Henry retired from his dry cleaning business 20 years ago and has been associated with this museum since its beginning. He volunteers at the Donors Desk where you will find him on Fridays.

Over the past 36 years Henry has spoken to many groups locally and across the country. As examples, he recently traveled to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and spoke to over 1,000 students at a Catholic boys' school and 900 at a Catholic girls' school, as well as at a Jewish Film Festival. He has also spoken to sailors aboard the U.S.S. Truman in Norfolk, Virginia, Ft. Detrick Army Base in Maryland, and to the National Guard in Arlington, Virginia. He has also been a guest on Fox Radio with a live audience, and on "The Larry King Show. "

In January 2014, Henry took his three sons to Germany and Poland at the invitation of the City of Flossenburg, site of the Flossenburg concentration camp. They went to Auschwitz-Birkenau and visited Henry's home town. And in January 2015, Henry went to Poland as part of this museum's delegation to the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Henry is accompanied today by his daughter-in-law, Jackie and her daughters and friends. We welcome all of you who are in the first two rose.

Our first *First Person* program was in March 2000 and our very first First Person was Henry. With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Henry Greenbaum.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: There we go. We're set, Henry.

Thank you, Henry, for joining us and for being willing to be our first person after having done this with us each year for 18 years.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Unbelievable. That's right.

>> Bill Benson: So you have so much to share with us and we have a little time, just an hour. We'll start right away.

Henry, you were 11 years old when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. Before we turn to the war and the Holocaust, first tell us a little bit about your family and you and your community before the war.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Well, we were Orthodox. We lived near the synagogue, about five houses away from it. I think my father was -- he opened and closed the synagogue because he was so close to it. And we were Orthodox, Jewish. And I was the youngest of the nine. I went to public school. I went to Hebrew school. I had chores around the house. But I never gave up

soccer playing with the other kids. We always had soccer games, always, and other things that people were playing, play games children would play.
>> Bill Benson: Henry, by the time the war began, several of your brother and sisters had already left. Where had they gone? Where had your brother and sisters gone?
>> Henry Greenbaum: Zachery was my brother. He was 10 years older than I was. He went to the Polish Army. He was drafted, I think. Whether he enlisted, I don't know, but he served three years. And during the war, he was fighting the Nazi soldiers. They somehow wound up being in Lithuania. And then the other brother, my mom left and my father passed away two months before the war. My mom was very protective.
>> Bill Benson: Passed away in the summer.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Yes. She was very protective. She got the neighbors, by horse and buggy -- you know, we didn't have cars or motorcycles. The horse and buggy was the popular ride, horse and buggy. She took us to a farmer that they knew. He either was a client or he brought in some stuff we would buy from them, eggs, whatever, they would bring on Thursday, and once before the Sabbath would come in, they would bring goodies in.

Anyway, that man housed us for three days. And who went there? Not my married sisters. My mom, my older brother, David, Zachery was already fighting the war with Germany. The married sisters didn't live close to us. They lived in the outskirts of the town. So where they were I don't remember. I don't remember the husbands.

Anyway, all I know is that one of the sisters that you saw, Faige, she gave up that little girl to go with grandma because her husband was already in America. He came before the war. He was supposed to set up shop, business. There he was a meat man, in Poland, a meat man selling meat to the Polish Army. But when he came here -- and I happened to meet him after the war. He bought himself a shoe factory in Brooklyn, ladies shoes. Can you imagine that how happy my sister would have been? She would have changed shoes every hour. Ladies shoes.
>> Bill Benson: Henry, I think you also had a sister who had come to the United States. Right?
>> Henry Greenbaum: Yes. That's how I got here. My sister came here in 1937. And my father's two brothers and a sister settled in New York, one settled here in Washington. Between these families, three families, they were only able to get only one girl down here because the immigration laws were very tough. You just could not go -- every time you went to Warsaw, to the consul, they said next year, next year. And then --
>> Bill Benson: And then it was too late.
>> Henry Greenbaum: And my oldest brother tried. Next year, next year. So my sister left first.
>> Bill Benson: Henry, your father died in the summer of 1939. September 1, Germany invaded Poland.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about what happened to you and your family in that first period of time after Germans came.
>> Henry Greenbaum: In a short while they marked us all with the yellow Star of David, one in the front and in the back. We had to wear that. To be honest with you, we were dressed like Jews except for the black pants. We didn't have the beard. We definitely had the tassels sticking out. Never bareheaded. They still insisted you wear the yellow star.
>> Bill Benson: On the front and the back?
>> Henry Greenbaum: On the back, yes. From a baby on up to whatever age it is. So if you happened to walk on the sidewalk, face-to-face with a soldier, the order was for you to step off

the sidewalk, take your hat off, stay attention until the soldier walks through. Whenever he walks through, you can go back on the sidewalk.

If I went to see my sister -- she lived somewhere else. They also had a tailor shop in the outskirts. I must have gotten off the sidewalk about four, five times. Every five minutes, another soldier, another soldier.

>> Bill Benson: And you had to step off into the road.

>> Henry Greenbaum: If you didn't -- I saw one guy get beat up. He was kicked off. And those boots, I will guarantee you, doesn't tickle when they hit you on the ribs or hit you with their rifle butt. Off you go on the street. So once we saw that, you obeyed it so we wouldn't get hurt.

>> Bill Benson: Henry, tell us about soon after the invasion you were with your brother and you came across what you called a ragged group of Polish soldiers. I think you were with your brother David.

>> Henry Greenbaum: We did not have a whole bunch of soldiers. Only one soldier.

>> Bill Benson: One soldier.

>> Henry Greenbaum: The farmer gave us a piece of bread and butter. He says, Go get yourself a tomato off the vine. What do you call them? Clusters of tomatoes, those big ones. We took a tomato off and we were eating. David was supposed to get a glass of milk.

In the meantime we saw somebody approaching us, a single man in a uniform, dragging along a bike, broken bike. As he got close enough, my brother happened to know him. He knew my brother. Whether he was a customer in the tailor shop, that I don't know, or either he went to school with the guy. He somehow knew him. They called each other by first name. He says, “Where are you running away from?” He said, “I'm running from the German Army. I just escaped from them and I'm running in the wrong direction.” The opposite direction he was running.

My brother, Dave, out of nowhere, I could not believe what I heard, he says, "Ok if I go along with you?" He says, "Of course, you're my friend." He was not Jewish but they knew each other either from a customer standpoint or school. The guy says, yeah, come along. I didn't like what I heard. I says, “You're going to leave me with the three sisters and mom to protect me?” I thought the big brother was supposed to protect you. The older brother. And so happened he ran away with that soldier, Polish soldier. I followed them for a couple of miles, hiding behind bushes. After I lifted my head, he turned around to see if I'm following, "Go back to your mother," "Go back to your mother."

>> Bill Benson: And you did.

>> Henry Greenbaum: And eventually the Polish soldier yelled at me, "Go back to your mother. You're too young to go with us." I left them alone. The next time I saw them was in America.

>> Bill Benson: And we'll talk about that later.

Henry, it wasn't long after the German invasion that you and the family and the other Jews in town were forced into a ghetto.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Well, if you did not live near the synagogue, that was part of the ghetto. They took three short little blocks, very short, not long blocks. And the intersections were blocked off. Whoever lived behind that had to move into that order. 6,000 I think were there at the time. They all had to move in where we were, near the synagogue. And they formed what they called the ghetto.

>> Bill Benson: 6,000 of you moved into a couple of blocks.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Three blocks. And we had to put up two sisters and their children, so we had no room. We had the tailor shop in the front. But even if they were not related to you, you still were able to save them, give them somewhere to sleep, safe.
>> Bill Benson: Henry, if I remember right, just before you were forced into the ghetto, you and your sisters went to work in an ammunition factory.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Yes. Before the ghetto started we already had jobs in the ammunition factory. It was Faige, Ita, and Hia. They had jobs in the factory, including me. And my father arranged that before he passed away. One of our customers happened to be either a manager or he had something to do, some big wheel in the factory. And my father approached him. He heard the rumors that that's what the Nazis liked, tailor shop, shoe shop, carpenter, they don't care about that. But if you worked in a factory, especially a munition factory, they loved that because you helped along with the war machinery.
>> Bill Benson: So you're in there making bullets at age 11.
>> Henry Greenbaum: We were producing antiaircraft shells, heavy duty springs, melting down scrap metal, and shaving out the barrels from the tanks. So little slinkies. And some people had to do this job. Every week they made you change your job. Also the hours changed from 7:00 to 3:00, from 3:00 to 11:00, and from 11:00 to 7:00 in the morning.
>> Bill Benson: Once you were in the ghetto, did you continue working in the ammunition factory?
>> Henry Greenbaum: Yes. But then the factory name was -- before was called, in Polish, [Speaking Non-English Language] but then when the Germans invaded us, it became Henry [Indiscernible] workers, his name on it.
>> Bill Benson: During that time, you ended up living in the ghetto for almost three years.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Almost two years in the ghetto. And then they decided to have a selection.
>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about this, tell us more about the conditions in the ghetto for you. How were you able to get food?
>> Henry Greenbaum: Food was scarce. We could not get any food. We ran out of food. And all the stores were looted on the outside. There was no food around. The only way you could get extra food would be if you bribed a soldier. Now, you couldn't bribe the Germans but the Ukrainians, if you gave them a watch, a bracelet, a necklace, he would bring you some bread. But it so happened that they changed so often, every time two weeks are up, a new one coming in. And you only have so much to bribe away. You're not going to give everything away. So they were bribing and then it stopped.

They would bring in once a week, rations. That was it. We were dirty, filthy. They wouldn't give us any soap to wash, no laundry washing, not yourself to take a shower even. We were filthy dirty. For three years we didn't wash. You wore the same clothes for three years.
>> Bill Benson: For three years.
>> Henry Greenbaum: The same clothes that you wore when they invaded our town, you wore the same clothes. In the summer time, the man could undress from the waste up. They used to take the dirt from the ground and put it all over you, like a mud bath. And the next would pump the water and clean you off a little bit.
>> Bill Benson: With dirt.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Yes. It came off, eventually, you know, the mud came off.

>> Bill Benson: You would stay in those conditions in the ghetto until 1942, almost three years. What happened to you then? When did you leave the ghetto? Tell us about leaving the ghetto.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Oh, leaving the ghetto. There was a selection. The order was 24 hours where no one could go to work at all. So everybody was under one roof, so to speak. They got extra soldiers, extra guards, extra dogs, and they put us -- they chased us out of the ghetto area to a open field. There was three or four soldiers directing traffic.

I'll give you an example, my family walked up, so I walked up, my mom walked up, my two married sisters walked up, my grandma had the little baby from Faige, also walked up there. And right away that we showed our ID cards that we worked in the factory, we went over to one side. And then if you didn't have an ID, you were unattached, you didn't have any family or children, they'd push you over with us, the working people, able-bodied people, whether a man or woman, they saved all of those. And they took away some people away from us. We didn't know where they were taking them, handicapped, pregnant women, women with children, elderly people, grandmas, grandpas, they took them away. We looked for them after the war but we were told not to bother looking for them because they were murdered two days after that.
>> Bill Benson: Two days after that.
>> Henry Greenbaum: After we were separated in a place called Treblinka, killing center. They got off the train, were ordered to a shower. Instead of water, you had the gas killing them. They were cremated, too. Treblinka, nothing but a killing center. They got off the train, were ordered to take a shower. Instead of water, you had the gas killing them. They were cremated, too.
>> Bill Benson: And that's what happened to your mother?
>> Henry Greenbaum: My mom, my two married sisters, three little nieces, and two nephews. I don't think they were even 7, 8 years old.
>> Bill Benson: Then what happened to you, for those of you who were selected?
>> Henry Greenbaum: They took them away from us. We heard yellings going on, on the way to the train station. There was either shooting in the air. We could not see. Eventually they walked away. We could not see. We could only hear the noise, screams a lot of screams and a lot of shouts we heard. Whether they were shoot in the air or killing people we don't know. Then they turned around to us, the able-bodied people, the people that have ID cards, turned around to them, and also the people who they saved that was not with ID, they did other things, maybe shoe makers, maybe carpenters, maybe bakers, who knows, but the able-bodied looking people that were able to work so they saved them.
>> Bill Benson: I might add, I think at this point you're 14 years of age.
>> Henry Greenbaum: I'm already close to --
>> Bill Benson: Close to 14.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Yes. So what happened, they chased us back to the place but they didn't let us go back into the ghetto area. If you left anything, valuables, in the ghetto, stayed in the ghetto. You could not retrieve anything. They chased us for six kilometers uphill. By the time we got to the stone quarry on the top of a hill, it was overlooking the town, the whole camp -- the whole stone quarry was overlooking the town.

They built for us barracks and it was a slave labor camp. The barracks were on stilts. There was 100 to a barrack. There were three to a shelf, three men or three women, separate from the men. The shelf was just like the floor. It was not a rug on there. There was not padded with any straw or hay or anything, just plain wood. And we slept in our clothes, dirty, filthy, already two years old.

And then what happened, we all got on the top of the stone quarry. The loudspeaker came on, attention, attention, you must empty all your pockets, all your belongings. So you didn't bring away anything. If you had stuff with you, some money, some people did, some bracelets or gold chains, whatever they had, they had to throw them into a box. We were threatened if you don't put them in this box and you come through this gate and we search you and we find things on you, you will be killed on the spot. So everybody was scared. They took everything out, whatever they had that they didn't bribe away, they threw it in there.

Then there was one at the gate and one at the barrack. They were giving each other signals. If the barrack was full, they went over to another barrack and another barrack. And they did the same with the women.

We stayed there. And then the only thing they did is when we got to the slave labor camp, they formed a tailor shop. Over 100 tailors working on the German uniforms. A high-ranking officer came into the tailor shop. He says, You got a few months to do this operation, new stuff, and you must have it by that time and we will let you know a little before that when the selection or when the deportation will start again.

That man came in. By that time we were all sick already. We took it over from the ghetto. Goes from the dirt and filth, we got all lice infested. And lice breeds Typhoid and the Typhoid epidemic broke out, a very contagious sickness. You sleep in such close quarters, three guys or three women together, one gets sick, you are sure the others are going to get sick, too.

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely no medical care.

>> Henry Greenbaum: No. No medical care. The only thing saved us, if you had a high fever, done right there. If you had low fever, you could fake it to go to work. You were a little dizzy. I had a low fever and Faige, the one that gave up the little girl, she had low fever. So the two of us. But she was working in the tailor shop already, Faige. The other two were still in the ammunition factory.

>> Bill Benson: And where were you working at that time? Where did they make you work?

>> Henry Greenbaum: I was in the factory, still producing the antiaircraft shells. Yup.

>> Bill Benson: While you were there at that slave labor camp, you were involved in an escape attempt. Will you tell us about that?

>> Henry Greenbaum: What?

>> Bill Benson: An escape attempt.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Oh, yes. The high-ranking officer walked in the tailor shop and said in two weeks you must have all of this stuff ready because all of you are going to be deported. So the tailors didn't like what they heard and they organized an escape among themselves, including my sister was there. They were afraid to tell everybody. It's impossible a whole camp should disappear. Some people can get out if they plan it right.

So my sister, Faige, told me about the escape only the day before, one afternoon before. My shift was from 3:00 to 11:00. When I get back tomorrow at 11:00, be ready, we are going to escape.

I was already 15 years old at that time. We were going to escape. I liked it. I heard to get out of this hell place. I was a really happy young man. I was thinking, God, it's about time we do something to get out.

And these tailors were spreading the news among only their friends or relatives. So it was more than just the tailors. And we lined up. My sister came by. She was with a Jewish policeman at night, at 11:00. At 11:00 I got off from the factory. I came back and she says,

"When you come tomorrow, do not go into the barrack. Wait for me outside and I'm going to come and get you". She came by close to 12:00. I don't know, didn't have any watches, but we approximately knew what time they let us out of the factory.

Then she was holding the Jewish policeman by his hand. She grabbed my hand. All three were running. And they set it up so there was 10 in a group, 10 in a line. And only 10 can approach the hole.

>> Bill Benson: There was a hole cut in the fence. Right?

>> Henry Greenbaum: The hole had been cut in the wire fence and also a wooden fence on the outside. They cut the wire fence, didn't make any noise. The third party of 10 arrived. Three times 10 got there. And they cut the hole open bigger.

And then they started fooling around with the wooden fence. Breaking wood causes noise making. And that caused the German Shepherd dogs to bark and growl and made attention to the guards up in the tower. They put the flood lights on, on the tower, and they saw people were running towards the escape route. Of course they were shooting at them. There were two of them. And the search light was on them. Quite a few were still waiting in line. I was waiting. I was supposed to be after the third to go.

>> Bill Benson: So you hadn't had a chance to run to the fence yet.

>> Henry Greenbaum: No. I stayed in the group waiting for my next.

So whenever they stopped with the flood lights, people started running out. Then they put the lights on around crazy to see if anybody was on the camp so to speak, running. We were still standing in the group like a deer on the highway. The search lights, the flood lights, get the deer to freeze. They don't know which way to go. So we asked the policeman, some people did. He said, “What would you do?” He says run in different directions and run towards your barrack. He can only shoot one at a time. Only had the rifle.

>> Bill Benson: So go back to your barracks.

>> Henry Greenbaum: And then run back to the barracks. So while doing this, we started running. Maybe the policeman told my sister to run towards the hole. All of a sudden they put the flood lights on her and the flood lights were shining on us. They started shooting. I caught a bullet, struck the back of my head, grazed me and knocked me out. I came back a few seconds later and I didn't see my sister, Faige, or the policeman. I didn't see anybody around me. Everybody was already in the places where they were going.

Then I decided, Dear Lord, you have to help me. You left me all alone so I could see my sister in America. And I lowered my head. I do remember counting 15. There was a purpose of this counting because the lights, the search lights, were going around. When I hit 15, it was on me. So I had to count 15, before 15, and run towards the women barracks. I didn't want to get into my barracks. I wanted to go to the women's barracks looking for my sister, Faige. I thought maybe she changed her mind and made it, like the policeman said, run back. Instead, he took her. Saw I got hit, and run towards the hole.

>> Bill Benson: Still tried to get out.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Still tried to get out. When I got into the woman's barracks, the woman knew me by name. I knew her name, too. She was my neighbor. "You can't come in here. You're full of blood. You're going to get us all killed." “I'm not going to get you killed. I almost got killed myself,” I said. “No, you can't stay here.”

So I sat down and said she's not going to get me out of here. I sat down on the doorway, one foot out and one foot in. She was a little weaker than I was. She couldn't push me nowhere. And when everybody stopped running, totally running, the two guards were very

angry and randomly they picked different barracks to shoot inside. Shots came into the women's barracks. All the women were frightened. I don't know if anybody got killed. I don't know. They all jumped off their bunks, on the ground they went.

So I was on the ground myself. So I was eye level with them. And I still searching for my sister, Faige. And I ran across a cousin, a first cousin, Ida. She was not aware of the escape. Nobody told her about the escape. “What are you looking for?” “I'm looking for my sister, Faige.” "She is not here. I know what bunk she is." When I heard bunk, well, she probably knew. They must have been corresponding together. Maybe she didn't tell her about the escape. That I don't know the reason.

Anyway, she says, "What happened to you?" I said I was injured, can you help me. She took the water that they had in the barrack and she took old rag and cleaned me off in the back. Blood was running down my shirt, furiously, like you cut open the skin with the knife, two-inch. Never bothered the skull, thank God. If that would have been a smidge deeper, I wouldn't be here talking to you. I would be over there burnt up somewhere or probably buried. They didn't have what do you call --

>> Bill Benson: No crematorium where you were.

>> Henry Greenbaum: No burning bodies, no gassing, either. Hanging, yes, shooting, yes, hit with you the rifle over the head, yes.

>> Bill Benson: When did you find out what happened to Faige?

>> Henry Greenbaum: When I finally decided, after she cleaned me up a little bit, put the rags on here, took the beret off her head and put it on mine. "Wear the beret. Let the rag stop the bleeding." I lowered my head. The search light was still running around. I lowered my head. My place was in the opposite direction. I lowered my head and I made it into my barrack where I belonged.

The next morning, roll call. We had to line up for work. So a lot of people were missing in that group from the barrack. And mostly the tailors, the biggest because some of them got out earlier. I don't know. Maybe there were 75 instead of 100. So 25 was missing. So they got to be somewhere. They either in the barrack, under the stilts. So they left the dogs underneath the barrack to see if anybody was hiding there.

Then all of a sudden they took the two guards with the dogs and went inside. Inside they found people. They were sick. Some of them were not injured but sick from the Typhoid. They found some.

So the only way, they either escaped, they were wounded at the hole, or they escaped. And that's when they told us to face the area where the hole is. We looked at the hole and there was people moaning and groaning, wounded people. One of them was the policeman. He was on the ground, upright position. He had his cap on, his arm band on. He was still sitting down moaning and groaning. Where he was hit, I don't know. I didn't see any blood.

As soon as they shot all the wounded people in front of our faces -- this is what will happen to you should you ever get an idea escaping again, we will kill you -- and that's when as soon as the policeman dropped, then I saw my sister, with the blond hair, stretched out by his legs. I said, Dear Lord, now I'm all alone. You have to double watch me now so I can make it to America to see my sister.

>> Henry Greenbaum: And now you are completely alone at this point.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Yes. I was all alone. The earlier ones, I didn't know if they killed them yet, till after the war, when they took them to Treblinka.

>> Bill Benson: There's so much more to tell us and we're running out of time. From there you would be taken to Auschwitz. Tell us about going to Auschwitz.
>> Henry Greenbaum: The date came by when all the uniforms were ready, the magic day came by. They chased us towards the railroad station. The whole slave labor camp was emptied out. We all got on those cattle cars. Must have put at least 100 people into a train. And no water, no bathroom, no water or food at all, just stuck us in and locked it from the outside. And when all the cars were full, women and men, we all went on a journey. We didn't know where they were taking us. They wouldn't tell us. We were riding, every stop we stopped, in unison we were screaming, "Water, water." We didn't ask for food. We didn't ask for bathrooms. We just screamed for water. The thirst is the worst when you're thirsty. They did not give us any water.

I remember watching the film, whatever, hose, a water hose came in through that little window but they didn't do that to us. We screamed in different languages, in unison, "Water! Water!" Loud and clear. They could hear us far away.
>> Bill Benson: And no water.
>> Henry Greenbaum: No water was given to us. We finally arrived at our destination. It was Auschwitz-Birkenau. They opened the cars from the outside and we got off. And right away another selection, left, right, left, right. We all looked alike. We all felt alike. We all had the same strength.

I think they had an order -- they had to know how many they needed to dispose of that day. I don't think they had -- some people said maybe they didn't have any room. I didn't care. They could sleep on top of each other, they don't care. But I think they had an order how many to kill that night and half of our transport went straight to crematorium. They went straight to the gas chamber.

How did we know that? We asked the elderly people, the elder people that were there before us. What did they do with people when they were separated? They said already the smokestacks. You see the ashes flying around. It was from them. He says "You were pretty lucky." Why was I lucky? Because they had me on the opposite side.

My first stop was a haircut. The barber was Jewish. So we conversed in Jewish. He asked me what the wound was on top of my head. It did not heal up yet. I didn't have any bandages on. Everything was off. But there was still -- I had a scab, underneath was infected.

So the next one was the tattooing the number. My number on the arm, on the left arm, A18991. And I believe they got the inmates -- they taught the inmates how to do that, in Auschwitz, how to do tattooing, because they didn't want to touch you. So this way the inmates did it.

Then my third one was a shower. And mind you, we didn't clean up for three years, the same clothes. We were dirty filthy, still with lice, still a touch of that Typhoid. Because if you had high fever, you never made it to Auschwitz anymore. Because the Einsatzgruppen, killing unit, would come. If you didn't line up for work, you were on the bunk, they would put you on the trucks and if the truck was full, they would take you to the outskirts of the town and there -- we dug those trenches when we were put the yellow Star of David. They would catch us in the street. Even if you showed them that you due at 3:00 for work. He says, “You're not due till 3:00. This is 10:00 in the morning. You go work for us. We'll take you to the factory.” And they did. Only once I pulled a double shift. That's all I did, one time only.

So the holes were made. They told us this is for military tanks to fall in. Zigzag shape. But they used those graves for graves, for the people they had undress in front of them, undress in front of the ditch, and they were shot in the back of the head and in they went.
>> Bill Benson: So Henry, for you at Auschwitz, you were selected for slave labor, to continue doing more slave labor. What were you forced to do once you were selected for labor at Auschwitz?
>> Henry Greenbaum: You mean, the German man, a civilian, came into Auschwitz-Birkenau looking for free labor, came in with two dogs and two guards. He chased us out of our barrack in the front of him. He looked you over, whether he liked you. Those ID cards did not help you in Auschwitz. He looked at your face and how you look. If you were not undernourished or could still do some work. And it was left, right, left, right. And that's when they killed half of my transport.

And then that man took 50 of us out of there. He marched us for three kilometers uphill. I thought it was uphill, towards Buna-Monowitz, a subcamp of Auschwitz. And that man was either manager or owner of a IG Farben Company, producers of cyclone gas and bug sprays, automobile tires, synthetic fuel. But that man that picked 50 of us for one reason only. He wanted us to build a road with the cobblestone, a road that the big trucks could go on so they wouldn't have only the rail because the rail was bombarded by the American Air Force. It was knocked out.

So they started actually, the road too late. It was only three months. You could only do so much with 50 people, in the wintertime, no gloves, handling stones, all kinds of shovels. Then if they would pay you a visit, the Air Force would come, they would always bomb ahead of the locomotive so when the locomotive gets to that spot, they can't go nowhere.

I remember from there we went to -- what do you call it -- the Air Force came and they were more aggressive. They had a bunker on the premises of the IG Farben Company. They had a bunker. The bunker was not for the Jews. They were for the dogs, guards, and non-Jews. Every time the air raid would come, they would run for the bunker.
>> Bill Benson: What would happen to you?
>> Henry Greenbaum: We had to work through. We could never stop. Maybe those soldiers saw us in the stripes because by that time, in Auschwitz after the shower, they gave us stripes. We had striped jacket, pants, wooden bottom shoes, canvas socks.
>> Bill Benson: You were sent to Auschwitz in 1944, as you just described.
>> Henry Greenbaum: The end of `44.
>> Bill Benson: Late `44. You were put on a hard labor crew to build the road. In January of 1945, as the Russians got closers are, you were forced out of there and sent on a death march. In the time we have left, Henry, tell us about the march you were sent on and about your liberation.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Well, not really -- we didn't go from Auschwitz. I went to Flossenburg. I stayed there a few months. And then we heard rumors that the Russians were coming to liberate Flossenburg. We thought maybe that's possible but then they changed their mind, the rumors. It was the Americans approaching Flossenburg.

The Germans are not stupid. Three days before they load us up on trucks. They wanted to hurry. They didn't want us to march. On truck they took us to the rail, stuck us in the trains. They only left 10 people to clean up the area, and to hide the evidence will to be hidden.

In Flossenburg, the only work we did, my group that came, was bundling up the uniforms or clothing from people who they killed, coats, coats, pants, pants, shoes, shoes. They would send them back to Germany for recycling.

Right there we were riding the trains and the Air Force started getting more aggressive. They knocked down to pieces the IG Farben Company, including the bunker. I know civilians were in there but guards, too. And they knocked out the whole factory. They even upside down the road for three months we were building. Everything was upside down. The freight cars were sitting with supplies, upside down. The wheels were on top. They tore the place apart.

Then we started marching after that. We came with the train to a place called the black field. We came there and one car was full of SS guys, or Gestapo, full of them. They all had rifles with them, guns, whatever. We were riding through the countryside, quietly. You could hear the locomotive. You heard -- why they didn't go to sleep is beyond me. All they were doing was singing German songs, loud and clear. Then we didn't know where it come from. We thought it was a record maybe, play -- one of those things.

>> Bill Benson: But it was the SS soldiers.

>> Henry Greenbaum: The airplanes came through the field. The Air Force probably knew, or maybe not probably but 100% sure. At first they lowered themselves, low-flying, a little low flying. They give these guy as a chance. They knew it was the American Air Force. They opened the cars and made us run into the woods. And if any of the Germans soldiers went into the woods, they had like a tripod, like a camera sits on, laying, stretched out on the ground, and facing where we would run. You could only run about 10 feet, you had to drop. 10 feet and drop.

Anyway, that Air Force tore apart the locomotive until the last car. Everything was torn apart with bombs. And from then on we had to march. The march took a toll on us because we didn't get that piece of bread, a little black imitation coffee. At nighttime they gave us cabbage water soup. I had a spoon tied up to my pants, never took that spoon off. They never gave me any food that you need a spoon.

>> Bill Benson: By that time, Henry, where did you think they were taking you?

>> Henry Greenbaum: We didn't know. We didn't know where they were taking us. Because they kept marching. And the only way that we stopped, if the two guards were hungry and they run out of supplies for soldiers, the guards, they wound up on the farm. The farmers, German. They had themselves a 10-course meal. Who knows what they ate. And us, one raw potato and some water to drink. You were so hungry, you could eat five or 10 potatoes and it wouldn't be enough. Only one. If you want to sneak in the line and get another one, if they recognize you, I guarantee you that's the last potato you would have.

>> Bill Benson: Henry, I know we're skipping over so much that you could share with us. Tell us how you were liberated.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Well, those two guards were marching us. When we got close to a small town in Bavaria, the two guards let us stop. It was a wooded area. We could see the highway full of American pieces you fight a war with. We didn't know if they were Americans. We figured out the planes are because when those planes got low, you run into the woods. They were trying to save us, all of a sudden they became kind. They let us stay for liberation. They became good.

So they left us right there. They ran away themselves, the two guards. They left us by ourselves. By that time it was already half of the marchers, half of the people that marched,

was already dead. Some of them died on their own. Some of them they couldn't keep up with the march, they shot them or they hit them with the rifle over the head. There was no cremation, no gasoline. They had to be buried, the bodies had to be buried there.

Then all of a sudden we got mad. Why did you leave us all alone here? Anybody could come over here and kill us now. But they ran away. We ran into the woods if you see the plane.

Then we saw the Army. You could see with the naked eye. You don't need binoculars on the highway that this American Army was coming through. And one of those tanks took off from the main road from that column --

>> Bill Benson: Towards you.

>> Henry Greenbaum: They came towards us. We said for sure they're going to kill us now. We still thought it was Germans. We didn't know it was Americans. And they stopped the tank. Stopped about five feet away. And the beautiful American soldier came out, crew cut, America written here, came out of the hatch. He was a little skinny to fit in that hatch. He had trouble getting up. Anyway. He put his hands on his mouth and he said, "We are Americans and all of you are free." I was that time 17 years old. When I heard that word "free," I said -- when I heard that from the soldier, say that you are free, I said, Dear Lord, thank you for leading those soldiers to us and give us our freedom but why did it take you so long? Five years.

>> Bill Benson: Five years.

>> Henry Greenbaum: For us to be free. The same soldier yelled to his other soldier, "Empty all the rations" on the tank. They dumped them out. We were fighting like animals of the jungle that kill animals. We were almost killing each other.

And somebody spoke a little English in my group to understand all of that. He relayed it to us in Yiddish, in Jewish, what he wanted. He told us to follow him. He took us out of the wooded area, across the field, across the road into a farmhouse. We got into the farmhouse. Instead -- one jumped to the door, had the door of the farmer's house open, and the other for us to go in. We were five years hungry. We saw three big dishes of potato peelings and white flour. We left our two angels alone for a minute. We cleaned those trays up.

>> Bill Benson: Of the potato peelings.

>> Henry Greenbaum: And the white flour that was animal feed. But when you're hungry, you don't designate animal feed from regular food. You're hungry. You eat what you can.

Once we cleaned those dishes out and we went inside, we didn't think it was going to be food. That's why we ate outside because we didn't know. Five years of mistreating you and don't give you any food. All of a sudden, now what I should have thought that this is America. The soldiers, they had for us a spread inside. You can't believe it, with all kinds of food, goodies in there.

But they wouldn't let us eat anymore. Drink lots of water. You ate up all the peelings. You're not hungry. We have more hungry but we listened to them. And why we were drinking the water? We heard voices in the same house, "Help, help. Doctor, help." There was a group of survivors there that survived the Death March and they wound up in the same farmhouse. Not with these two soldiers. And so the soldiers went in to see what's wrong. They ate that good food. They probably overate and their stomach wouldn't agree with them and they probably messed up their stomach. They think maybe their stomach wouldn't accept the normal food. But I think they overate.

Those two angels, dialed their number, they got the medics to come. Three hours later the medics came and gave each other medicine, the room with stomach problems. I showed

one the wound on my head. I had a scab, underneath infected. He cleaned it up for me. He bandaged it up nicely. He cut hair around it.

I was a human being to him, not those animals. Those animals would see I was wounded, I wouldn't be here speaking to you.

>> Bill Benson: Henry, we are at the end of our time. I wish we had another hour or two or three.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Oh, yes.

>> Bill Benson: It would be a year later when you made it to the United States. And you were able to reunite with your brother who had left you in the woods.

>> Henry Greenbaum: But I didn't know where that brother was. And I didn't know where the Army brother was, Zachery. This was Dave. He ran away with the soldier. I don't know whether he was with the soldier or himself to Lithuania. They had a Japanese Ambassador. He was helping the Jews. My brother didn't have the beard, but --

>> Bill Benson: He got him to the United States.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Yeah. Anyway, he made a false passport to get to Manjula. Then a telegram to my sister in Washington. He came in 1941. I met up with my other brother. He was liberated in Poland. And I was liberated in Germany, through that cousin, Ida. She left for Poland to look for her brother. She found her brother in a displaced persons camp in Lodz, Poland. And her brother knew my brother. He traveled from Lithuania -- the Nazis caught him as a war prisoner. They didn't put him in with the military people as a soldier because he was Jewish. They put him into a Jewish ghetto in Lithuania. So when the Russians left Poland, he went back to Poland. He wound up in that same displaced persons camp where my cousin was.

When the two of us came to America, and I was expecting my sister, a female to come pick us up, we see a man coming closer. When he got closer, I said, “I'll be darned, Dave? What the heck are you doing here?” “Oh, I came here in 1941.” I said, “You did?” I said, “I didn't get here until `46.” I said, “Do you remember once upon a time you left me with the Polish soldier, you ran away with him and you left me by myself? Well, I was the only one alive.” I said my five sisters are gone. I said you're looking at me, and my brother is here with me. So it's the three brothers, and the sister in America. And I was free. That was it.

>> Bill Benson: Henry -- I wish we had time for you to ask questions of Henry. I don't think we have time for a question. So I think we're going to have to stop for now. Henry is going to stay on the stage, however, after we finish. So we're not done quite yet. Anybody who wants to come up on stage and meet Henry, ask him a question, get your photo taken with him, please, absolutely feel free to do that.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person does have the last word. So I'm going to turn back to Henry to close the program. Before I do, just a couple of things. We'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August. So we hope that you will come back. And in just a moment, as soon as Henry's finished, Joel, our photographer, is going to come up on the stage and he's going to take a picture of Henry with you as the backdrop, the background. So if you don't mind, stay with us for that. As soon as Henry is finished with his last word. And, again, absolutely feel free to come up and meet Henry when we're done.

I turn it back to you, Henry, to close our program.

>> Henry Greenbaum: Ok.

>> Bill Benson: What would you like to close our program with?

>> Henry Greenbaum: Oh, you mean, to leave with the audience?
>> Bill Benson: Yes.
>> Henry Greenbaum: Ok. I don't want you to be a bystander. Whenever you see any injustices done to any human being, speak out. If you can't do it yourself, get some help. Get your parents, school teacher, principal, rabbi, or priest to help you but don't leave that person unattended.

hey all grown up so no school here. But I always tell the children, don't bully anybody. Don't bully. The person can't help the way they were born. They have enough trouble looking in the mirror themselves. So you treat them a little kinder. If you don't feel like marrying them, it's up to you. It's up to you. But treat them a little kinder.

Don't be a bystander. Speak out. And maybe the young people -- I don't think the world is going to stop killing one another by our time, the survivors. We are passing on to the young ones. We hope by the time the young ones get our age, people will stop killing one another, they will be kinder to one another.
>> [Applause]
>> Henry Greenbaum: Thank you very much.