UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
Bob Behr
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Remote CART Captioning

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Jen Ciardelli: Great. Good morning. Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Jennifer Ciardelli, and I work in the Levine Institute for Holocaust Education. I am the host of today's public program, First Person. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 18th season of the First Person program. Our first person today is Mr. Bob Behr, and we'll get to meet him 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, and we're honored that Mr. Smith is actually with us today. Mr. Smith, if you could raise your hand and stand. Thank you so much for making this possible.

First Person is a series of conversations with Survivors of the Holocaust who are here to share 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, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

Today's program is being livestreamed via a link on the website. This means we have people watching from around the country and around the world. So welcome. Recordings of all *First Person* language will be made available on the museum's YouTube station. And we're also accepting questions from our web audience today on Twitter. Please use the hashtag USHMM.

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

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

So Robert Behr was born in Berlin, Germany on March 1, 1922. He turned 95 this year. Here we see him walking the family dog.

Here we see a map of Europe, with Germany highlighted. Then we see a map of

Germany with the city of Berlin circled. Where Bob was born. Bob was the only child of Alfred and Lilly Behr and Bob's father served in the German Army in World War I. Here we see a photograph of Bob's father, Alfred Behr, in his World War I uniform.

This photograph shows Bob's mother and father at the beach in 1921 or 1922. Life changed dramatically for Bob Behr and his family and all Jews in Germany when the Nazis came to power in 1933. During the 1938 pogrom, Bob's father was arrested and sent to a camp. Later in 1942 Bob and his mother and stepfather were arrested and sent to Czechoslovakia.which we see oven this map.

He was interned in trees, also called Terezin and this points to trees. Here we see a map of trees itself. Later in 1924 Bob was sent to a satellite camp in Wulkow, Germany ,where he worked to rebuild the SS general headquarters destroyed by the Allies. Bob was liberated by the Soviet Army in May, 1945.

In 1947, Robert immigrated to the United States where he enlisted in the United States Army, hoping to be assigned to Berlin so he could care for his mother. He was placed in Germany, and we close with this photo of Bob and his mother in Berlin. Today Bob and his wife Marie Therese live in the Washington, DC area. After serving in the US Army from 1947 to '52, Bob worked here in Washington, DC until he went to work for the US Air Force as an intelligence officer, living in Germany from 1954 to 1961. Bob continued his civilian career with the Air Force at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio until his retirement in 1988. And after earning his master's degree in modern European history, Bob was a college professor teaching history about World War II and the Holocaust. And Bob has spoken in many, many settings. For example, Bob speaks here at the museum to military personnel. He's spoken to personnel in Germany. And he even spoke to a group of German school children in Germany where Bob spoke in German for the whole presentation.

In 2000 Bob and Marie Therese moved to nearby Rockville to be closer to their daughter, and they have two daughters, four grandchildren. Bob has a passion for history and for learning. He volunteers at the museum's Visitor Services and you can find him here every Friday. And with that, I would like to invite you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Bob Behr.

(Applause)

(no audio)

Bob Behr: If anybody ever tells you that old age is a blessing because you don't have to work anymore, you don't have to do this anymore, that anymore, tell them to go to hell because it isn't true.

(Laughter).

(Applause).

Old age is a pain. And I'm grateful that you are coming to listen to me and I'll turn it back over to my mentor.

Jen Ciardelli: Well, Bob, we thank you for joining us today. And Bob, your story, you have so many stories to tell us. We have such a short period of time. If it's okay with you, I say we jump right into it. And I wonder, you were born in Berlin in 1922. Can you tell us, start us off by talking about life in Germany before 1933, before the Nazis came to power.

Bob Behr: Well, I was a kid. I just grew up. I didn't understand the political ramifications of the lost war, World War I I'm talking about that Germany had lost. But personally, it didn't really affect us. My father, my parents, were middle class. My father was a doctor, my mother was a housewife who never went to university. She just raised me and -- but life before the Nazis was difficult but not impossible. What do I mean by that. What I mean by that is simply that Germany, for the first time, had a Constitution and if you want to know more about it, see me later. But Germany never had a Constitution because the emperor was running the show and now they had and we were -- maybe I should say I had no siblings, no mother and father -- no brothers and sisters and the story I was told why this happened, that when I was born my mother took the first look at me as a baby. She said oh, my God, enough is enough, and let it go at that and she meant it. She never had a brother, never had a sister. I was the only child.

I grew up in the 1920s. None of you was even -- your grandfathers are living at that time. So it was a time where Berlin was recuperating from a lost war. It was a very vibrant city, very lively city and I grew up with a normal kids growing up in the big city and nothing special. But there were things which is it all right for me to mention the Holocaust radio?

Jen Ciardelli: Well, yeah. Do you want to go when Hitler was appointed Chancellor and talk about how things --

Bob Behr: That comes later.

Jen Ciardelli: Okay.

Bob Behr: I just wanted to tell you my first acquaintance -- you got to excuse us, we are old friends so we don't -- we don't hate each other.

(Laughter)

Even if we interrupt each other. But no, the reason I mention it is that I'm a kid. I grew up. I know nothing about politics and so forth. But you know, there is something in your subconscious which begins to nag on you. Now, let me explain what I mean by this. I have a Jewish mother, I have a Jewish father, and obviously I was Jewish. And that in the beginning didn't bother me very much. My parents and -- it might interest you to know, they were more German than Jewish. Like I say to other audiences, we were first of all my parents were Germans and secondly they were Germans and thirdly they were Germans and only then when they Jewish. So you see the priority this. And I grew up with the idea that Germany was a wonderful country. It may have lost the war -- war but basically it was a -- not only landscape-wise beautiful, it had a culture, it had a entertainment, it was a very vibrant city which, of course, I couldn't enjoy. I was much too young. And yet you know, Ladies and Gentlemen, when I think back 75 years, then I remember things which are today -- no, normally I ask the audience, but you guys are smart. You know the answer. What was the means of mass communication in the 1920s? I give you two. I give you the first one, which were newspapers. What's the second one? Ma'am, any idea what was mass communications in 1923? Radio. Of course you all knew that. Radio was what TV is for today. It was a means where people could buy a cheap radio, get the news and so forth. And me, growing up in Berlin, listening to the radio which my father had on constantly. He was very interested in the -- the world around him, including politics, I heard things which despaired me. And those things were anti-Jewish. There was a man out of the loudspeaker of my father's radio about the Jews having caused the loss of World War I. The Jews made -- signed the Treaty of Versailles. I mean, it went on and on and on. And I went to my mother and said, "What's Dad listening to?" My mother said, "Don't

you pay any attention to him. If your father --" and that's a quote, Ladies and Gentlemen -- "If your father is dumb enough to want to listen to some politician who sits God knows where between you and I and Munich, and he was making anti-Jewish speeches." And my mother in her own way tried to calm me down she knew I was upset and she knew I was Jewish and why is the man constantly harping against the Jews. She said don't worry about it. And she made a famous sentence which to this day sits in my mind, and she said, "You have nothing to worry about." And she explained in her own motherly way that we lived in a democracy, that Germany now has a new Constitution and that we are protected by the police and the best thing I can do is not to worry. Don't pay any attention what your father gets out of the radio. You have nothing to worry about it. Now I want to do a jump.

What happens?

Jen Ciardelli: And so now you're talking, so Adolf Hitler is appointed Chancellor in 1933, and you're 11 years old at this time.

Bob Behr: Yes.

Jen Ciardelli: And life changes.

Bob Behr: I was 11 years old when something so drastic, so enormous happened that it took years for the world to understand it. What happened is a simple administratively act. The Nazi party was the largest party in Germany. Our very -- excuse me. Our very old and senile president had no choice. He needed to appoint the leader of the party as the Chancellor of Germany and his name was Adolf Hitler. And I just mentioned Chancellor this is why I like to talk to adults. This is why I'm grateful you are coming. I don't like to talk to eighth graders. Not that the kids are not smart, but if you say Hitler became a Chancellor, they haven't got the vaguest notion what a Chancellor is. But you do so I don't have to explain that. But anyway, Hitler suddenly at 11:00 on a Saturday, he became the Chancellor. And with this, remember my mother's famous words, you don't have to worry about anything, we are protected by the police, all of this went out of the window. It is almost difficult for me 70-some years later to describe to you Americans, born and raised in a free country. Not a perfect one but at least a free and honest country and to explain how -- with literally within 24 hours life changed so drastically. And with Hitler as the Chancellor, he could now implement the very thing my mother had told me don't you worry about. You have nothing to worry about. So we had something to worry about. He -- Hitler went into politics with a one major objective and this is to destroy the Jews. In those days we're talking about 1933, and he didn't talk about killing, but he talked about eliminating them from the economic, the scientific, the arts, wherever Jews were, they are to be eliminated from the German life. And guess what? He did. He did with a bang. I mean, life is difficult for me to describe. Can -- I don't know anything about your hometown, nor do I need to know. But imagine your hometown suddenly having signs all over. I usually go and ask somebody what his favorite sport is. I'm sitting a little farther away so I'll skip that. I ask and the guy says football. So I said football. American football or German football known as soccer? And he said European, soccer. And said what do you need to play soccer? Well, the kid looks at me and says I need a ball. I say yes, you do. What else you need? I need goals. I need two goals. One on each end of the field. So what's the big problem? Well, the problem is the Nazis decreed that no Jews could play on this field. We were eliminated. My favorite sport in those days when I grew up was swimming. I just loved to swim. The problem that we have no water? No, we had

plenty of water. What we didn't have was a pool where the water goes in because the pool had a big sign saying, "No Jews should swim in this pool." And so it went. The city went from a very sophisticated, modern city into an absolute abyss where everything was bad. Jews were something which the Nazis detested and wanted to eliminate. In the 1930s when Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 -- don't worry, you're not going to get a test on it, but just remember 1933, that's when Hitler came. And within months he had radicalized what we call today, he had radicalized the German people. I still, being as old as I am, cannot understand how German educated people, sophisticated people, could suddenly fall for a rabble-rouser. Of course there's an explanation. But guess what, I don't have time to give it to you because I have more to tell you. So just take my word for it. It was a city -- Berlin became a city which -- where Jews were not wanted, where Jews were disliked, where Jews were chased away.

There were traces all over with signs on it, Jews not wanted. I can just give you one example. Where we lived, we lived in an apartment. We didn't have enough money to buy a house. We lived in an apartment on the third floor. No elevator, but we had a home. And on the bottom on the street where we lived there was a little ice cream parlor. Just an ordinary and we kids used to spend our pocket money in that ice cream parlor in summertime and enjoy their merchandise. Now they had a big sign suddenly, "We do not serve Jews." I don't know how many of you -- let me see your hands -- have already been upstairs.

Jen Ciardelli: Probably -- oh, a few. Probably just a few and more will go up after they hear you speak.

Bob Behr: Good. You will go upstairs. Let me, if I may, alert you to something. On the fourth floor where you will arrive there is all sorts of dynamic exhibits and among them is a very small television screen which has nothing spectacular about it. It has no music. It has no margins. It has no flicks. It was just a rolling band of information on the fourth floor. And the reason I mention it, because to me, this is one of the most devastating exhibits in that whole museum here. Why? What does it show? Did it show murder or anything? No. It just had words written in it. And that little screen, if you take a few minutes to stand there, listed all the anti-Jewish laws that the Nazis passed where we lived. Let me give you some examples. 1933, Hitler came to power. 1934, the year during a big rally if the city of Nuremburg the Nazis released some laws which were mandatory for the Germans. One of the laws which they released during the festival in September of 1934 was they took away our citizenship. Now, think about it. All of you have or are entitled to probably American passports. The American passport is derived from your birth in America. You are an American citizen. And with that you have the rights and privileges of an American citizen. We, my parents, had the right and privileges of German citizens which included of course all the civil rights. With one stroke of a pen in September of 1934, only one year after Hitler came to power, we were not -- they took away our citizenship. Hitler declared that no Jews, regardless where he was born, that no Jews could be a citizen.

Jen Ciardelli: Bob, and I know that there are through this time, right T Nazis increasingly put in these restrictions that in 1938 really culminated in a pogrom that targeted the Jewish people particularly.

Bob Behr: Yeah. From that time on, after our citizen was taken away, the screws were tighter and tighter. That screen I was telling you, you cannot imagine the things the

Nazis prohibited. We weren't allowed to have a pet. Can you imagine that? We were not allowed to have a dog or a cat. We were not allowed to have an automobile. Not allowed to have a telephone. Not allowed to have a radio and so forth. And the -- the Nazis were bound and determined and to some degree successful as to eliminate the Jewish people from the life in Germany.

Let me give you a figure, which I don't mention very often. Germany in those days had 65 million people in the 1930s. How many of those were Jews? 500,000. That was the entire -- those 500,000 became to quote Adolf Hitler, an eternal enemy of Germany. Those 500,000 people were bound and determined to destroy Germany. So you need to do this trying to understand. It's difficult. I agree with you, it's very difficult to understand to lead a life where you're an outcast and you are an outcast simply because not what you did but what you are. And there's a fundamental difference. You are born Jewish and therefore you are bad people. Let me just do one thing. Most people think that the Germans were so anti-Jewish because of religion. That is not true. I don't care who tells you that. Religion was not the reason. Why? Because you can change your religion. You can go to a priest and say Father, I would like to become a Catholic and the Father will take you, teach you, and make you a Catholic. The Nazi philosophy, what they hated about Jews, was their blood. And that was the difficult thing to change. You don't change your blood. You were born with bad blood and therefore you were a bad person. So you get an idea the life you're living. People hate you, people don't like you, people don't want anything to do with you simply because you got bad blood.

Now, put that in your pipe and smoke it. You can see what it is

Jen Ciardelli: Well, in -- I think you're gathering here, even from our short conversation, we could be here for the rest of the people I think hearing about so many different aspects of what you experienced. And there's not enough time. In 1938 this violence against the Jewish population was expressed through an evening of violence that targeted shops and businesses. Can you tell us how that event, Kristallnacht, affected your family in 1938?

Bob Behr: You going to give me another 30 minutes?

(Laughter)

Now you're going to do that. You want to get going. What happened is in essence there's a lot more behind it, but I'll tell you that privately after the show is over. What happened on that -- at this time N November of 1938, that a Jewish fellow shot a German embassy official, killed him. And the Nazis it -- there's a long story about it, but we just simply don't have the time. Anyway, the Jewish fellow when that happened in Paris, France, the Jewish fellow shot the German embassy official and the Nazis used that assassination of the German official who was of course a Nazi and he -- they used that occasion to have a enormous time of destruction. That was a time when the synagogues were burned. We lived not far away from one synagogue and I could see some of it. They put fire, they took the holy Scripture of the Jews, throw them on the floor, made the Germans walk across. They told the firemen not to extinguish the fires in the synagogues. Let them burn. Just be sure that the Christian buildings around it are protected. It was then. But what is mostly concerns me originally is that that same night, the night from 8:00 to 9:00 November, 1938, they arrested 30,000 Jews. Eenie, meenie, minie, mo, you go to the concentration camp. They had not done anything. They had not broken any laws, nothing. But they were Jews and they had bad blood and they needed to be punished for

something which happened in Paris when a total stranger shot a German embassy official. That's what my father had to pay for. And he was put in Buchenwald Concentration Camp. And it was very difficult. I may have omitted to tell you that my parents got divorced, so it was my -- my mother remarried and I had a stepfather. But the arrest of my -- was my real biological father, and he was the one who went to the concentration camp, simply because he was Jewish, simply because that meant he had bad blood, and simply it meant we need to get rid of him. And so we -- we had to live with a stigma of the bad blood. And from then on things -- we thought that things between 1933 and 1938 were bad. They got a lot worse. Everything we liked, everything we enjoyed was forbidden. We weren't allowed to go and see a movie. We weren't allowed to go and go to theater. We weren't allowed to do anything. You became embraced by hatred of people that didn't like you. So --

Jen Ciardelli: And there was also, during that period, after Kristallnacht, maybe in '39, where you experienced forced labor, where you had to start --

Bob Behr: Well, personally, the Nazis found laws or established laws which made life even more difficult. For example, they initiated a rule that anybody between the age of 15 and I think it was 65 had to go and work. And the way this works, it's not that you work in order to earn a living. That was not the Nazi purpose. They wanted free labor. We had to report -- I was, what, 17 years old. I had to report to an office every morning and they assigned you work which you had to do. Usually labor, heavy manual labor. I remember two things I had to do. I got a sack of coal and had to bring them to the buildings where they had central heating from the truck to the building and the -- but the other one, I was much worse. We had to take bricks and bring them to construction sites. We didn't have in the 1930s all those trains you see today. In those days it was manual labor who brought the material which the masons needed by hand and Jews were the ones who immediately did that. And then something happens. I'm going to jump now.

Jen Ciardelli: Please.

Bob Behr: And that is anybody know what happened in September of 1939? Thank you very much. Yes, yes.

Jen Ciardelli: Invasion of Poland.

Bob Behr: The war broke out. The Germans marched into Poland in September of 1939. Why they did this and how they did this, I really don't have time to go into this. Suffice it to say that the Germans marched into Poland and the free Polish country was suddenly a German colony, with all the laws and they had enormous amount of Jewish people there who were now all saddled with the -- the anti-Jewish laws which the German Jews had already experienced for a number of years. And so the -- but you know how people are -- let me give you my parents, my stepfather and my mother, when they heard that the Germans marched into Poland, they also heard on -- and read in the newspapers or heard from friends that the British and the French told the Germans if they don't get out of Poland in 24 hours, we're going to be in a state of war between Germany and Britain and France. And of course the Germans didn't get out, and by 4:00 in the afternoon on the 3rd of September, 1939, we were at war. And my parents were happy. Oh, my gosh, I remember them, they were saying, that is the best thing since green grass that we were at war. You will see the -- I was wondering, I was old enough to understand, but I didn't know why they were so happy about a war. They said well, because the British and the French will destroy Germany and six months from now Hitler will be history. Well, you

know and I know and she knows that it was -- Hitler began to win every battle. By the time 1942, 80% of Europe, 80% were all German occupied, whether it was Greece, Bulgaria, it was -- Hitler began to win everywhere and our life became considerably worse. For the first time I was hungry. Before that, there was always enough food. But now that the war had started, we had Ration cards. And potatoes were rationed and bread were rationed and the Jews got some Ration cards. But if the Germans got four eggs a week, the Jews got two. If the Germans got one pound of butter a week, we got 250 grams. And so it was a time where we began to physically suffer. Before that, you suffered mentally. But now you began to also suffer physically. It was very bad.

Jen Ciardelli: And -- and you mentioned 1942. And again, so many stories. If I may move us in 1942, July of 1942, things got worse for your family. Your family was arrested.

Bob Behr: Yeah. My -- in 1942 my family, the Gestapo became and arrested all of us. It's a very -- they didn't come because we were Jewish. That's not why they came. They had good reasons. What happened is that my mother helped somebody escape from Germany. That was a thing punishable very harshly, if you help somebody to escape. There were only about three of four neutral countries. Everybody else was involved in the war. And it so happened that my mother knew a priest who lived in -- who lived in the area of Constance and if you look at the German map, you see that Constance is within spitting distance of Switzerland, which Switzerland, of course, was neutral and so to make a long story short, that -- my mother had an address and she gave that woman the address. The woman made it to Switzerland, sits down, writes a postcard and writes on the postcard on the bottom and says, "If it wouldn't be for you, I wouldn't be here. I am free and I have beautiful sunshine and life is great." Okay? Of course, the Gestapo reads that and says aha, Mrs. Behr is the one who helped that woman escape to Switzerland and here they were. And so in July of 1942 they came and arrested all of us.

Now, at that time the killing in the gas chamber has already started. The killing of the Jews in the gas chamber started in 1941, the year before. All my relatives --

Jen Ciardelli: That was your cane. Here, I'll get it.

Bob Behr: You have to help me.

Jen Ciardelli: Here we go.

Bob Behr: All my relatives are killed. The deportation started in '41 when they shipped the people to Auschwitz and gassed them. And so by '42 it was already standard practice, but we were not sent to Auschwitz to the gas chambers. Neither my father, my stepfather, my mother, nor I. The reason for this was very simple. Since my father, my biological father, had been a volunteer for the emperor in 1914, they would not gas those relatives -- veterans and/or his relatives. So we were saved by the very fact that my father -- father, who when he volunteered for the emperor in World War I, had no idea that he would save -- that this action would save his -- our lives. Of course it was years later. Anyway, the bottom line is we were not sent to Auschwitz. We were sent to a little town in a country that doesn't exist anymore. It's now called Terezin and the city is called Terezin and the country is the Czech Republic. It used to be Czechoslovakia. But that's another long story. It doesn't exist anymore. And so here we were suddenly in a concentration camp.

Now, there are tons of books written about concentration camp. Some were bad, some were worse, some were impossible. It was -- suddenly you are taken out of -- just

take yourself out of your normal life. You go to work, you fix your dinner, you lead a normal life. In the concentration camp there's nothing normal because you don't have anything to say. There were tons of Jewish people in that concentration camp but the power rested with the seven SS guys. Those seven guys ran the show. Couldn't you? No, you couldn't because they had weapons. And we had nothing. And so those seven SS guys ran the show of 60,000 people. Now, permit me to give you a -- a couple of words about the 60,000.

Theresienstadt used to be Austria Hungarian garrison town. Austria Hungary didn't exist anymore. It became part of Czechoslovakia that didn't exist anymore because Hitler occupied it in March of 1939. He took the freedom of the Czech's away. And so that whole area was free for the Germans to do what they want and they did and they made a concentration camp out of it. Specifically for older people, people over 65. And some of the younger people who were especially deserving. And we were especially deserving because my father volunteered to fight for temp rear. That saved my life because it eliminated the gas chamber for my family because of the action my father took when he volunteered to fight the war and had no idea that years later it would save his life.

Anyway --

Jen Ciardelli: And conditions were quite hard, but there was an opportunity to -- there was a work opportunity that came up. Can you tell us about that?

Bob Behr: Yes, yes, I can. What happened is that the war was going on. The Air Force, the American and British Air Force were bombing the hell out of Germany. Berlin was hit very badly. And among the buildings which was hit was the headquarters of the SS. The very people who were bound and determined to eliminate the Jews. Their headquarters was totally destroyed. I can give you the address. Wouldn't mean anything to you. And so the leader of that SS, a guy with the name of Heinrich Himmler went to the German authorities and said hey, they destroyed the -- the Americans destroyed my headquarters. I need an office. And can you give me a piece of land? And to make a long story short, the Germans give him a piece of land and saying here, you can build yourselves a new headquarters, barracks and then there's -- the guy said thank you, that's what I wanted. And then they came to Theresienstadt, to the concentration camp where my family and I were, and said we need some volunteers to go there and build that guy a new headquarters. And then they added a sentence. And for that sentence is the reason I'm sitting here with you because they said, "If you volunteer to go to that place where they build the new headquarters, if you volunteer to go, we will not evacuate you." Now, in parentheses everybody knew what the word "evacuate" meant. It meant death. It's another long story. You'll have to come back. Anyway, everybody said if you want to be evacuated from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, that means they're going to kill you.

So I volunteered. I volunteered and they said we will not evacuate your folks. I thought well, that's my chance to do this. So I volunteered. And that was the worst time in all these years, since 1933, that I experienced. It was so bad, so hard, so difficult that for the first time I gave up. I was willing to die. I got very sick. It was 1944, bitter cold in winter in 1944, I had a vitamin deficiency disease called impetigo and then accompanied by high temperatures and you feel just about as bad as you can imagine. And I didn't want to live anymore. I didn't want to live anymore.

It is now '44. I had it for 11 years already that I lived under this Hitler and my bad blood and no chance to ever get out and in '44T war we knew, but we didn't have any

details because the Jews were not allowed to have any means of communication.

So I was standing on the barbed wire fence one -- that was late -- either late November or early January, I don't really remember. I think it was early January. And anybody who is ever been to Europe in January knows it can be pretty lousy weather. But we were standing there in the inside the barbed wire and we looked out and there was another guy and I. It was a Sunday because on Sunday we didn't have to work. And what we saw there was something very unbelievable. We saw a huge trek of people with every kind of moveable furniture, wagons, baby carriage, anything, and these people were going outside the concentration camp. God knows where they were going, but it wasn't very difficult to figure out, and I'll tell new a minute. And I looked and I asked this colleague of mine, the prisoner who was with me, "Who are these people." He said those are Germans. Well, yeah, they're Germans. But I don't have all the time in the world, but I will tell you, what was remarkable was where they going, where they're coming from. These people were outside who were German nationals were going from east to west. Now, that doesn't mean anything to you. So let me explain this to you. In 1941 Hitler attacked the Soviet Union and the Germans occupied marching from west to east occupied. Now all of a sudden these people which we saw walking, they were going from east to west towards the American, towards the British, towards freedom. They didn't want to be captured by the Russians. And the guy who explain that had to me and said don't you see, the Germans are fleeing from the Russians. They're going from east to west, from Moscow to Frankfurt and like that. And I thought by myself, you know what? Maybe you ought to live a little bit longer. If it's that close that the Russians are already coming and chasing the Germans away, then maybe the war will be over very shortly. And in closing, I can tell you yes, that was -- we were evacuated from our concentration camp in problem February 1945. We were returned to Theresienstadt to our base camp. And on the 5th of March, the Soviet Army liberated the camp and we were suddenly free. My parents, due to my volunteer work, survived the concentration camp. They died shortly after, but at that time they were still alive from my volunteering to go there saved their life. And the war was over and we were freed. And that's the story.

Jen Ciardelli: Bob, I -- I wonder if you can -- you mention your biological father who was forced to flee Germany in order to get out of Buchenwald. At the end of the war he ultimately ended up in the United States and at the end of the war you tried to reconnect with him. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Bob Behr: Yeah. The war was over. It was 1946 when President Truman arranged -- I don't have time to explain to you the American immigration law which is not a very good law. It's a pretty bitter law. Lots of restrictions. But anyway, during the war it was almost impossible to go to America because they had a new rule -- had a new rule that every German Jew needs to have a sponsor. Well, a sponsor, that's a guy with a family who is responsible let's say for the Behr family if we came to America from soup to nuts, everything. Whether that's medical, education, you name it. And to get a sponsor was the only way you could get an authorization to come to the United States. Well, I went to the embassy, the American Embassy in about 1939, after Kristallnacht and tried to get -- and persuaded my mother and I and my stepfather could go to America but we didn't have a sponsor and to sex offender that fell flat. So what did you ask me?

Jen Ciardelli: So your father made it to the United States after the war.

Bob Behr: Yeah, my father got -- I think I told you, on Kristallnacht he was one of

the 30,000 Jews who got arrested, put in the concentration camp and he got out. And the way he got out is that not the Germans who stopped him from getting out. It's the country letting them in. And he was lucky he got permission to leave for Cuba, and he did.

Jen Ciardelli: Great. So we're going to close the program now. There's never enough time to hear all of the stories and experiences you have. It is our tradition in *First Person* that we always give our *First Person* the last word. So in just a minute I'll turn back to Bob for his final words. But when he finishes, we're going to have Joel come and join us for a photograph where Bob will be on the stage and the whole group will be behind. So we invite you to stay for that. And also, if you have a question for Bob or would just like to come up and shake his hand or say hi, please stay after and Bob will be here and you can come and check in with him.

Obviously there's so much that we didn't cover. You returned to Germany after as an intelligence officer and there are many stories about Texas and cowboy hats and lots of things. So go online, you can read more about him. But I'd like to thank all of you very much for being here. We hope that you can come back and visit another *First Person* program. Again, they run every Wednesday and Thursday. And Bob, I have known you now for close to ten years. You are an amazing individual and I learn something every time I hear you speak. And the power -- the experiences you share I think are powerful and especially during this, which is the week of Days of Remembrance, it's just a real blessing that you've been able to share your story with us. So on that note, I'm going to turn it back to you for our final words.

Bob Behr: Well, my final word is really very simple. What you see in front of you is an old used 95-year-old man and -- who drags himself from his home to the museum to talk to you. Why do I do this? Why do I sit here instead of being in a warm, nice apartment where we live and talking to you? Well, I'll tell you. We won't live much longer. We are marked. All the people who are survivors will be gone in a short time. So who's going to take over? Who's going to be the one who spreads my story, anyone's, survivor's story? It's you. We are totally, utterly dependent on you. And it's a great job what you need to do. When you see something which is wrong, don't go away and say it's not my problem. If you see something, in my case anti-Semitic, somebody who uses spray paint to write something on a synagogue, don't say that there's nothing I can do about it. Go up, have the guts and say, "Don't do that." Don't do that. That's my mission to you. I'm going to saddle you with a job to do, to defend liberty, freedom, and happiness on our behalf. We won't be there. We won't -- will not live that long. So if you can, if you will, follow the lead and defend what's good and right. And that's the reason I'm here.

Jen Ciardelli: Thank you. Thank you.

(Applause).