UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON MARTIN WEISS
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Remote CART Captioning

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>> Sarah Reza: Good morning, everyone. Good morning. Good morning and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Sarah Reza. I work here in the museum's Levine Institute for Holocaust Education. Today I have the honor of being the host of our 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. Martin Weiss whom you will hear from in a few moments.

This 2017 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from the from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are very grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand account 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 will also be livestreamed on the museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the 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.

Marty will share his First Person account as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have time, we will have an opportunity for you to ask questions as well. The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Marty is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We've prepared a brief slide presentation to help with this introduction.

We begin here with this photo of Marty taking taken from 1946, the year after his liberation.

Marty was born in 129 in a town called Polana, in the former country of Czechoslovakia, which is highlighted here on the map.

In 1939, Germany invaded the -- sorry, occupied the eastern half of Czechoslovakia and Hungary the other half. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 conditions

in Marty's hometown worsened. By April of 1944, Marty and his family were sent to the Munkacs Ghetto, which is seen here on the map.

Five weeks after arriving at the ghetto, Marty and his family were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center, which is located here, where they were selected for slave labor.

Later, Marty and his family were sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, seen here.

This is a photo of rocks that were taken out of the quarry by slave laborers at the Mauthausen camp.

And this last document was uncovered only recently and in our archives, and was new to Marty even though this is the document that describes him as a prisoner. This document is a Prisoner Registration Card which reflects Marty's transfer from Auschwitz on May 21, 1944, to Mauthausen. His prisoner number appears here in the upper right-hand corner, along with the words Ung-Jude, which is the abbreviation for Hungarian Jew. His name, circled here, also includes his birthday, date of birth, and his city of birth and other family information as well.

After the war Marty moved to the United States where he served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, followed by a successful career in the grocery business which he retired from 19 years ago. Marty and his wife Joan, who passed away in 2013, have two children and four grandchildren.

Marty has been volunteering here at the museum for the past 18 years. And I've had the pleasure of knowing him for the past eight or nine or so. He leads tours for local students and for law enforcement, which is the program I run here at the museum. He's an active member of our Speaker's Bureau, meaning he speaks on military bases and schools across the country. Martry also contributed to our ''Echoes of Memory'' project which collects stories of museum survivor community. Following today's program, you will be able to see Marty sign copies of that book in the lobby, where you came in.

So with all of that, without any further ado, I'd like to now welcome to the stage our First Person, Mr. Martin Weiss.

>> [Applause]

>> Sarah Reza: All right. You ready?

>> Martin Weiss: Yeah.

>> Sarah Reza: Ok. Well, Marty, thank you so much for being with us today and being our First Person. There is a lot to cover but today what we're going to be looking at are sort of four big key moments in your life; so your life in Czechoslovakia before the war, after the Hungarian occupation, life in the camp, and then finally the liberation and after the war.

We're going to jump right in. Marty, tell me, tell us, about your life in Czechoslovakia, your parents, Jacob and Golda and your eight siblings. What was your family life like?

>> Martin Weiss: Well, my family life, actually, was very good. As mentioned, we lived in Czechoslovakia. Sometimes because you live in the United States, it's hard to explain about Czechoslovakia when I was a kid in the 1930s. Prior to World War I, it was the Austri-Hungarian Empire so it was something different.

By the way, one of the few countries that had democracy. At a young age, under 10 years old, I remember we were very proud. And the reason we were very proud was because next door to us was Poland. They had a dictator at the time. Hungary had a very archaic system. They didn't have a king anymore but they had a king representative. In other words,

they didn't have what I would call democracy. However, you know, both of those countries, people were able to live fairly normal but they nevertheless, didn't have what we have. Ok?

Like Sarah mentioned, I came from a family of nine children. I was number seven, so I had older brothers and sisters. Because I had older brothers and sisters, it made a big difference in my life. First of all, we were a big family and we just liked each other. We didn't have any problems with each other.

Now, my older brothers were working very hard. By the way, my father had land so we were farming. We grew our own food and so on. So my brothers, as soon as they were old enough, they all worked -- we did our own plowing, you know, the fieldings and all of that. You needed sons for that.

What I got out of it, because they were older, they looked for words like good life, hopeful. We were all, frankly -- at that age I figured -- I had it worked up in my own head that the more educated people get, the more civilized they get, and the more people are nicer. Ok? Unfortunately I was wrong. Nevertheless, because of them I did have -- to put it simply, everything was going good.

Now, in 1938, when Hitler started making noise and we kept hearing already what was happening in Germany, they were arresting people for nothing and all kinds of stuff like this. Especially the Jewish population they singled out.

By the way, it wasn't just Jews, actually. Anybody that was not what they call an Aryan race. They were very, very -- how can I put it? They had a slogan that said [Speaking Non-English Language], and it was like the Germans were above everybody. And they believed them. By the way, Hungarians did exactly the same thing. So they were very racist, to put it simply. It was their culture. The Czechs were not used to that because we were citizens, period. It didn't matter who you were.

So we kept hearing of all the things that were happening. They were arresting people. People were running away. Some were smart enough to leave. Many of them figured it was going to blow over, will have a new government and so on, in Germany. So many of them did not. It was their home. You have to remember, the Jews lived in Germany for about 500, 600 years prior to that. So it gives you an idea that we're not newcomers. The same thing happened in a lot of other countries, like France and so on.

But as time went on, in 1939, Hitler decided to go to war. And one of the first countries he was looking at -- the Czech Republic is right next to it. So he and -- the Czechs, they had a spa city a beautiful city. I lived there for a while after the war. They had a lot of Germans living there, quite a number. And they were all very successful. They had businesses. They had beautiful houses. I'm talking about villas. And they really were living on the high end of wealth. When Hitler started making a move, he said, they're German and it all should belong to me. And the Germans said, yeah, we want to belong to Germany. Just like this. They were good citizens. They had freedom. Now they wanted Hitler.

So Hitler came and took the area. That was the first step. Then after that, he kept an eye on the country and so on. So he decided, well, if this was so easy, I'll go for the rest of it. So he took the rest of the country.

Now, what happened, Czechoslovakia was the Czech part, which is Czech Republic, Slovakia, and [Indiscernible], what they called it. One of the reasons the word rus, the population in our area was mostly Russian-speaking.

>> Sarah Reza: Was it a big town or small town?

>> Martin Weiss: It was a small town. I wouldn't even call it a village. It was a good size village, actually, but not remotely a city or anything. Like I said, we lived there. Everything was good. We produced our own food. My father had a business.

So like I say, my older brothers were doing all of that work on the business and, what do you call it, in the fields. And as soon as we were big enough, we all contributed. Now, the girls did their thing, too. They did whatever they could. You have to remember, we lived in a society we still had the black-top stoves, wood, brick ovens. Everything had to be fed with wood. We had no electricity, by the way, and we didn't miss it. We were used to it. We lived like this. And everything was fine.

Anyway --

>> Sarah Reza: How old are you, about 9, 10?

>> Martin Weiss: Yeah. When we were occupied, I was 10 years old. Actually 10 years old. So this was all good up until then. Then when Hitler made the move -- what a lot of people don't realize, Hitler didn't do everything alone. He's allies. They call them the axis of powers, actually.

So what he did -- Hungary was one of them. There were others but like Hungary, Oh, my God, Romania, a number of others. Each one of them that joined, now they were able -- because he got the country, he gave our area to Hungary. So we were occupied by Hungary.

My father actually was old enough -- he served in World War I under the Austria-Hungary Empire. They said the Hungarians are not so bad, we could live with them. So, fine. We were a little complacent, I guess.

The problem was that Hungary, because they were part of the axis of powers, they adopted the same ideas what Hitler did in Germany. They took away all the civil rights. They took away -- in other words, they arrested people at ran random. They did whatever they wanted to. So when they came in, obviously we didn't like them. Because under Czechs our life was normal.

Once they occupied the area, they confiscated all the Jewish businesses. Ok? They took away the license. You had to have a license to open any business. Consequently, all of those people didn't have any income after that. So it created a problem.

This was only in the beginning. Right? In the beginning. And as time went on they kept on following all the ideas that Germany established in Germany, they were doing there. This was the beginning.

I remember, like I say, I was 10 years old and all of a sudden our whole life changed. They closed our schools right away. I went to Czech school. There were no other schools to go to. But there was a Russian school. Like I say, the population was mostly Russian. What happened, by that time, I was in fifth grade. Up to four grades I went to Czech school. We loved school. Everything was nice. The teachers, by the way, were very similar to the United States. Nice bright rooms. It was just relaxed. We all loved school.

>> Sarah Reza: Were you a good student?

>> Martin Weiss: Yeah, I was actually a good student. At that time I was. That changed.

So then they closed our school and there was no other school to go to. There was a Russian school. Why Russian? The population was Russian. They went to their own schools. So the Czech was a democracy. So they had their own school. You could have a Catholic school or whatever.

The problem was, we went to the school -- I spoke Russian. Like I say, our neighbors were Russian. Where I learned Russian, I don't know. As I grew up, I just knew Russian. Most likely because our neighbors were Russian. So I don't remember ever having, how can I call, learning time. Just spoke it.

So we had to transfer to this Russian school. And here our whole life changed. First of all, everything was miserable. Like just picture a sunny day and all of a sudden it's drizzly, cloudy, looks miserable. That's just the way you felt. The school was a complete opposite of our school.

There was a teacher, I remember, a short guy, a mean, nasty man. The minute he came in -- mind you, I spoke Russian but I didn't know the alphabet. I didn't know anything about that, about grammar, yeah. I knew how to speak it. That was no problem. He came into the class, other kids in the same class, and he didn't even give us a chance to learn the alphabet. He expected us to carry the whole workload as the others without knowing the alphabet. How can you write something if you don't know even how to write it? They have different letters, too. You know, the symbols, everything is different.

Anyway, this is the beginning. Consequently, over here, by the way, they believed in corporal punishment. So what happened, if a kid didn't know something, the teacher would take -- by the way, our rooms were always cold because we lived in a cold climate. And the heating -- they had a stove, usually in the corner, like a big -- like a tile type stove. It gave off some heat. You didn't get the rest of the room. The room was big. So people were cold. So when you sat down to write something, you couldn't hold a pencil in your hand because your fingers were so cold. This was our introduction to it. You can imagine as a kid, you don't like it. Then would go to work and if the kids didn't know something, he would take a stick, you take your fingers. When your fingers are cold, it's terrible. Somebody hits you, bam. This is normal. All of a sudden you're like in a different world. And this was our introduction to this particular school. Somehow or another, like I say, I used to love school before and I was very good. Here, take my word for it, I was not. You couldn't. Even if I wanted to.

Anyway, I went to the school. Eventually I learned how to read and write and so on. But it took a while. But for a young kid, 10 years old, that's a big deal.

>> Sarah Reza: You said a lot of things were being restricted with businesses.

>> Martin Weiss: Oh, yeah.

>> Sarah Reza: How did you have food? How did you survive?

>> Martin Weiss: They took away everybody's businesses. Somehow my father's license they overlooked. Don't ask me why. They just did. So we were able to stay in business. However, what happened, because it was war -- he was in the meat business. In order for you to get a cattle for slaughtering, ok, you had to have -- the state would give you permission how many cattle you could get. Well, guess what. They left the license but they wouldn't give us any allotment. Because we were Jews. Ok? Very simple. So we had the license. We were able to stay open but there was no way to get the product.

So guess what. We had to do things, everything during the night. Now, mind you, we lived in this town forever. We had neighbors. We got along no problem. But because during wartime you don't trust anybody. Ok you really don't even trust your neighbors. If you think they're nice neighbors, you still don't trust them. Now, they hated Hungarians as much as we did because the Hungarians looked at them as inferior. They don't like us because we're Jews but they didn't like them because they were inferior. Germans the same thing. Everybody else, any Slavic people -- by the way, I should have mentioned that. Any Slavic people, the Aryan

race, Germans, Hungarians, were so -- they decided that they were superior and the Slavic people are dumb, stupid, inferior. Very simple. So this was just the way it was.

So what happens, we still had to make a living so we did everything during the night. Believe it or not, we didn't have electricity, so believe it or not, we have to do it 1:00, 2:00 in the morning that nobody should even notice that we are doing anything. And we didn't have electricity. And that's important. We had candles. So I have would have two candles. And my brother did all of this work by two candles. We didn't have any modern equipment. Everything was done the hard way, old-fashioned way. We were getting by.

In the meantime -- we always had enough food, one thing we did. My father was very good at that, at managing -- we were able to grow all kinds of crops and everything. But like I say, we worked very hard. We did it. Sometimes my older sisters, if they were home, they would help, too, whatever they could. They would help my mother, a lot of cooking. Remember, we didn't have any gas. Everything had to be done manually. You have to bring in the water from the outside. All of these things are very difficult. But to us it was ok because we were used to it.

This went on. Later on my older sister, she went to college, to the city. That was unusual. Guess how many people from town went to college. She was the only one. I shouldn't say that. No. There were two boys. One of them was actually our neighbor. He was a nice young man. He was my sister's age. And one was -- he went on a scholarship. No, wait a minute. They were two. They went on a scholarship. So there were three of them, actually.
>> Sarah Reza: She was the only girl.
>> Martin Weiss: Right. So because she was living in the city, when she came home, she was very sophisticated. She didn't have any clothes you make at home, like with the sewing machine like my mother used to sew. A lot of people sew -- the girls wear houseware dresses type all the time. She came home she had Paris fashion. I remember looking up to her. She was more sophisticated. And because of her I got the urge to get educated. Ok? Because she had an impact on me.

So life went on. But then it was about 1942 or so, the Hungarians went to work. They picked up a number of families from different places, like from our town there were a couple of families, someplace else a couple of families. They picked them up without notice. They had to give them like a couple of hours to pack.

By the way, most of the people were poor. They didn't have any luggage. So they used pillow cases, sheets, and they put like bundles, like you see like a peasant or something and put that stuff together. They put them on trains, like boxcars, and they shipped them out to the Ukraine. Now, by that time, the Germans occupied Ukraine by that time. They shipped them out to Ukraine.

This, too, remember, our winters were very cold, a lot of snow. But the farther east you went, like Poland or Ukraine, it was much more so. And they would take them to the Ukraine and drop them off in a forest someplace, where the snow is literally this high, very, very deep. They would let them loose.

What they were doing -- by that time already, I don't know if you heard the word Einzatsgruppen. The Einzatsgruppen were soldiers that when the German Army went into Ukraine or Russia -- remember, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia are big countries, each one of them. Now, Ukraine, especially is very large. And they also have a lot of forests, a lot of mountains and so on. We lived in a mountainous area. They would take them and drop them off there and wander. They had no food, very poor clothing for the weather and so on. Once

more, the natives there were very unhospitable. They would sick their dogs at them and so on. And they would go from place to place.

The reason I'm telling you this, something you're not going to read in the history books, unfortunately, because nobody writes about it. As we kept on hearing this -- and when the Germans went in, they were merciless. They went to work like in Poland, they were brutal. Because they were Slavs. You know, they are not people. That's the way they looked at you.

One of the stories -- we used to hear all of this. And don't ask me how we got the stories. They all came through the grapevine. There was no newspaper or radio or anything like this. That people escaped.

Also, which I might add -- right in the beginning they went to work and inducted all the men military age, like from about 20 to 50 into the Hungarian not Army but all the Jewish men, I should say, because they had mobilization. And the other men went into the Army to fight. But the Jewish men were not good for the Army because politically we were undesirable. So they put them into a labor battalion.

Labor battalions were under Army supervision but they were not Army. They wore civilian clothes and so on. What did they use them for? One of the main things, cutting down the forests from our area all the way to Russia. Mind you, to Poland -- and I say Poland and Ukraine are large countries. Reason I'm telling you this, I'll tie it together later. So they were using them for that.

However, my brothers were sent on a Russian front. Now, if you want to go to hell, that's where you went, the Russian front. They used them for picking minefields and burying the dead. So thousands and thousands of them were stationed there. And they witnessed all the things that were going on.

By this time we had already heard of the massacres, like Einzatsgruppen. Troops were so successful. They took Poland in three weeks. Ok? Just to give you an example. But other part, like Ukraine, a vast country, they just went in there and Einzatsgruppen followed them. They picked up all the people, village with six families or city like Lithuania, 20,000 people could have been there, they took them to a field and just killed them, with machine guns, just killed them. In some cases they had to dig their own mass graves.

Now, all of this was going on. And we used to hear this. Again, through the grapevine and plus some people returned. So a lot of the witnesses I'm talking about were stationed there, like my brothers and my cousins and so on.

I'll get back to they were wandering around in the Ukraine. The Hungarians -- by the way, you have to remember, they were allies so they were fighting alongside the Germans but the Hungarians had their own section. When they came to a bridge, you have centuries under the four corners of the bridge. When these people came around, the Hungarian troops were bored because they were sent there, and they would take -- the stories -- I remember stories. There was a family. A woman has a child in her arms. And the soldier would rip out -- rip the child from the mother and bash his head against a rock. And only then would they throw her into the river. And all the people that were there, they threw them into the river. The river was running with bodies all day, every single day. It was called the Nestos River.

>> Sarah Reza: Marty, I want to ask about what happened. You said your brothers were on the eastern front. And then by 1944, things sort of really deteriorated, like you said, the Hungarians were there. Let's talk about going to the Munkacs Ghetto. You go on a boxcar or train?

>> Martin Weiss: Before I get to that I just want to finish something. As far as my family goes, like I say, there was nine of us. My brothers were gone. So the bottom line is, my mother, my three younger sisters died immediately in Auschwitz, as soon as we got there. My two older sisters were together. One of them died in Belsen Bergen but one survived.

So my two brothers survived. However, I had one brother, he was on the Russian front the longest, and he doing all of this stuff, the minefields and all, he was there a long time. And many of them, by the way, were able, because they were on the Russian front, able to either escape or were captured by the Russians. Let me clarify that. And once they got on the Russian side, the Russians gave them a choice to join the Czechoslovakia legion by the way, by that time they established the Czechoslovakia legion in Russia. So many of them joined, a lot of them, joined the Czechoslovakia legion. They came back as soldiers, including my brother-in-law.

But my brother wasn't so lucky. When he got to the Russian side, guess what. They accused him of being a German spy. Once they accused you, it was gone. That's the way the Russians were. So they put him into a POW camp for the German prisoners. He spend an extra two years after the war, extra two years, in a Russian prison, in the coal mines. Can you imagine? We didn't even know he was alive anymore. Anyway, about two, two and a half years, we found out he was alive. Eventually he reconnected with my brother in the Czechoslovakia and they both came out to the United States. I just wanted to clarify that.

>> Sarah Reza: That's amazing that he survived that. Tell us, again, back to you and what happened to you. So you were sent to the ghetto.

>> Martin Weiss: Ok. In our case --

>> Sarah Reza: Other people from the town were being sent to clear the mine -- or to the Einzatsgruppen.

>> Martin Weiss: No, no. Just the people that were inducted into the service. Not all the people. We were left at home. What happened is after that -- oh, the Germans asked for the Jewish population earlier in the war. And the Hungarians said no, they are our citizens, can't have them. And that was it. People think that the Germans would punish them or something. No.

By the way, Italy, Mussolini was a fascist. He did that. The Italian Jews didn't go to Auschwitz. Only after they tried to assassinate him and the German troops came in, then some of them went to Auschwitz. Just to clarify that.

But later on they asked again. This time the Hungarians said, you want them, you can have them. Just like this. They went to work and rounded up over 400,000 people. I'm talking about families, women, children. In two months, mind you, two months. Think -- a big country. think of the logistics. They only had one track going from our area to Auschwitz. They needed materiel for the troops. They tied it up with us. In two months they shipped out over 400,000 people. That's how eager they were. They announced they were going to pick you up. The police came, they arrested us. They turned us over.

Needless to say -- for the sake of time, we were there for just a few weeks, five weeks to be exact. One day they pulled up boxcars, train with boxcars. They put us on a train. We knew already -- we heard of the Einzatsgruppen killings.

By the way, more people were killed by the Einzatsgruppen than in Auschwitz itself. And the reason is they had more time to do it. And they were killing people on a daily basis. In mass graves, some 30,000, 40,000 at a clip. You can imagine. Someplace maybe 300 but there was a lot -- the Ukraine is loaded with these mass graves.

They put us on the train. Now, in our boxcar, we had 125 them in a boxcar with the bundles and lots of children, lots of old people, like grandparents and so on. In Europe, a grandparent was very old. I'm a grandparent but I don't feel that old. But I am old. But you see in Europe, it was different. The thing was, they put us in boxcars, locked the door, and they left the door a little bit open. As we're going -- we knew we were in for big trouble because by now we heard of the massacres and killings.

>> Sarah Reza: That's where you thought you were going, to a site -- not a place like Auschwitz.

>> Martin Weiss: Right. No, no. What?

>> Sarah Reza: You thought you were going to one of these sites they were going to drop you off.

>> Martin Weiss: We didn't know where we were going. We knew we were in big trouble. We knew that. They locked us in.

By the way, we went for several days, going along for about several days. I don't even know what we ate. One thing I remember, we didn't have any water. We came to Poland. We recognized where we were. We were in Poland. Then we realized we were in big trouble. Going east was not the best. We knew right from the start but each time, hope against hope it will not happen. While we were on the train, again, we tried to decide -- rumors start. Well, what's going to happen to us? By now we knew about the killings, all the real things, but nobody knew about Auschwitz. Didn't know anything about that.

We came to Poland. And I remember the train had to stop. One reason was in those days they used locomotives and they had to get water for the locomotive because they used coal. Anyway, so they would stop the train at the station. We saw the sign like Polish city. And we cried for water. Nobody would give us a drink of water. We were locked in there. Food I remember we probably didn't have any, but food you could do without. But water is something else.

We speculated the capable people would work. And because of that our families were put in a camp. Not in a country club but they will survive. It's hard labor. They will feed them. Well, this was because we were civilized people, this is how we were thinking. Obviously that was a pipe dream.

Anyway, we came to Auschwitz. We happened to come during the night. The minute we came into Auschwitz, the camp itself, they opened the doors and the minute they opened the doors there were people running around like mad men with the striped uniforms, directing you with big sticks, like broomsticks, shouting all kinds of orders in German. We understood a little bit but we didn't understand the order.

Anyway, we got off the boxcar. And by the way, the boxcars to most of us doesn't seem that high. But when you try to jump, even for a young man, it's a big jump down. And we were old, like my mother and my sisters, young sisters. It was difficult to get down. Those people, we found out were kapos, other prisoners, but that's what they had to do. If they didn't do that, they were in trouble. So they had to act mean but we didn't know that.

But because it was nighttime, they had a perimeter. We got off the train. You have to remember, there were a lot of people because it was a long train. I remember that. The train, I remember, 120 boxcars. I remember counting them. I'll tell you why. On a curve, you could see the ends of the trains. And as a kid, you do this. You count the boxcars. So they were long trains.

As soon as we disembarked, they had the flood lights surrounding us. But more than that, they had soldiers with rifles, their finger on the trigger literally. And this was our welcome to Auschwitz. All of a sudden, you know, if you thought you were afraid before, forget it. This was fear. Believe me. And the only thing I could describe, if somebody would talk about hell, believe me, hell was not as frightening that situation was. On top of it, not only did the soldiers have their finger on the trigger but they had dogs, real killer dogs, trained to kill. They were actually held back on a leash. And they were like growling. They were ready to -- if they got ahold of a person, they would tear you apart in two minutes. This is the kind of situation it was.

You have to remember, we all were innocent people. We never knew violence or anything like this. It just didn't happen. And to be in this situation, believe me, the fear of God gets into you.

You separate the men from the women immediately. We had to go to a line. At the front of the line there was an officer with shiny boots, very sharp. One thing about them, just like a Hollywood movie star. And all he would do is go like this or that. If you went to the right, you went to work. If you went to the left, you went to your death.

Now, we knew -- like I said, we all had it figured out they will take care of our family. We found out very soon it didn't work that way. So we went through the line. Before I got off the train -- because thought about working -- I was not a big kid, 14, almost 15. But I was not big. I put an extra couple of jackets on. So when I went through the line, my father and brother were in front of me. They were tall. And what do you call it, I went through and I passed. I didn't know how lucky I was that I passed. I found out later almost all my friends from the school did not. Ok? There was actually four others, five. But I was the only one born in 1929, all the kids from school, that came back, from the boys. The others were actually technically a year older. About the same size. I'm not going to make a big deal out of it. The only reason I think I made it is because I had the extra jacket because I was not big. But this is something that happened. Whatever. It's what happened.

As soon as we passed through, picked for work, they took us to a shower, a real shower. They shaved all the men, especially the grown men, all their body hair even, top to bottom. They gave us the striped clothes. I was lucky, I got wooden shoes but they had a covering, like a plastic covering over them. I didn't realize how lucky I was. Some didn't even get that. They had the Dutch shoes, you know, carved from wood like you see in the movies or a picture. Some of them didn't have that. They had these clogs that you use at the beach like with the little burlap. Some had that. This is in climate that was always cold.

Anyway, they took us to the shower. We came out of the shower. By that time it was dawn. They marched us up to the barrack. The barrack not far from there. We came to the barrack and all of a sudden we saw, like we say, it was daylight, we saw these big chimneys around, almost like a circle, five or six chimneys. We found out they were called crematoriums. We never heard of a crematorium. That's what they were doing with the bodies. We found that out very quickly.

But then they wouldn't let us into our barrack. We had to stand outside. Like I say, it was cold. The funniest thing is, the spring of the year but it was miserable. It wasn't raining but it was drizzle, very gray. With hindsight -- later on, I remember -- we had to stand outside. It was so cold. We were shivering because the clothes were very thin. 15, 20 of us would get together in a huddle just to keep our body warm, our teeth were rattling.

We saw the chimneys. We found out what the chimneys were. Of course you could smell the smoke, literally like flesh burning. And then not far, a few hundred yards away, there

was this big ditch, almost the length of a football field and the pine trees. But under the pine trees there was a fire, like the whole ditch was a flame, flames going up the height of the pine trees. Again, we asked one of the kapos what that is. He looks at us. He says, the transfer last night up in flames. The crematoriums were so overloaded, they couldn't handle the volume. So they used these pits to burn the rest of the bodies. Those are your families. Just like that. That was the first morning in Auschwitz.

Believe me, if nothing sobers you up, that does. Once you see that, you just -- I remember, you know, I was very young, and I remember -- I don't know what happened. I just remember that we were all -- nobody spoke about it. We never spoke about it to each other, nothing. We never mentioned it to each other.

Anyway, Auschwitz. About eight or 10 days. They put us on a train again. This time, believe it or not, only 50 in a train. But we had two guards inside. Why they needed two guards because we were locked in there anyway, but we had to sit like this, crossed-legged, in one position in rows. And we were not allowed to whisper, not allowed to move, not allowed to do anything.

The funny thing is, years later I remember thinking, I don't remember getting any food or water. I don't remember any of that. Isn't that funny? If we did, I would have remembered. But I don't remember. Obviously we didn't.

This time we were going westward. The reason we knew where we were going is because we came to Austria and the train stopped on a bridge. We saw Vienna not far off. Could tell from pictures, probably, that it was Vienna, the architecture and so on. We stopped there for a while.

Then later on, we didn't know what was going to happen to us. But then the train started again and we came to our destination. Now, we came to our destination and we disembarked. We found out, oh, alongside a huge, huge mountain. It turned out it was a stone quarry. It was a big, big mountain. And the camp was built on top of the stone quarry. So on top of the mountain. They marched us up down the road to the top of the camp. We came to the camp. Like I say, it was a stone quarry. Everything there Mauthausen was built from a stone quarry. The towers, the gate -- not like some of the camps but this one had towers that looked like from an old movie, from the 1500, 1600 England.

>> Sarah Reza: Like a Medieval castle.

>> Martin Weiss: Right. Plus they had a big, big gate, high gate. And the stone, all the walls were built out of stone from the quarry. We found out later Mauthausen was a huge, huge camp. It was so big they also had a lot of subcamps. I knew about 40. Lately the museum does research, they found as many as 80 or 90. I knew about 40 at one time.

The point is, they marched us up to the camp. We came into the camp. And again, here, opposite from Auschwitz, we were on top of the mountain. It was hot. And I mean hot. The sun -- it was on top of the mountain so it gets hotter. The sun was so bright that I remember.

We had to stand outside all day. At night we had to go in the barracks. And guess how we slept in the barracks. Something you would only see in a movie. They -- the barracks were like an Army barrack. You would go in -- stand outside in the sun all day. The sun was so strong I got an eye infection the first few days.

And by the way, throughout the whole time I was in camp, I had an eye infection. Every morning I got up, I had to take 10 minutes just to get the stuff out of my eyes so I could

open my eyes. I couldn't even open my eyes. It took about two, three years after the war to get rid of it. That's how infected I had.

Anyway, we walked into the barracks. I normally don't mention it for the sake of time. They lined up mattresses on both sides of the barrack. When they blew a whistle, you had to run in, I mean run, over the steps to get into the thing, line up in rows like this in good fashion, on each side of the mattress. Somebody would blow a whistle. You had to fall down. One head this way, the feet that way and the opposite. So we were laying like sardines. You had somebody else's feet in your face and I had somebody else's -- somebody else had mine. Just the way it was, just like sardines. This is the way it was.

And here's the irony of the whole thing. In the morning, again, blew the whistle. We had to be out. If you were too slow, somebody would smack you with a stick at the door. We had to stand again outside all day. And this is the way it was. When you go through this process, you say to yourself, what kind of world, what kind of people -- who are these people that they could do this? Who even thought of doing it? But that is the way it was.

I didn't stay in Mauthausen too long. Mauthausen, like I said, was very big. They had a lot of subcamps. I was sent to a camp called Melk. The irony of it is again, Melk, a beautiful, beautiful town. I'm telling you, just picture postcard town. I'll tell you why. The Danube runs right through it. The reason I remember seeing it, every day we went to work -- by the way, the work we did, most of us worked on tunnels, building tunnels under this huge mountain. When you passed through town, you could see across the Danube there was a mountain with trees and stuff. There were monasteries, castles. I'm telling you, picture postcard. Today, by the way, if somebody takes a trip on the Danube, they pass that.

This is what you saw. You said to yourself, and we are here marching like this? Our job was to dig a tunnel, tunnels, seven tunnels simultaneously. That's why the camp was there. They built a special threshold on a field but it was high above the ground. Train tracks. We went to the train, marched every day. We went to work by train. Again, we had to stand out there when it was cold, windy. That wind goes right through you, believe it or not. Just to stand out there. But you had to stand at attention.

>> Sarah Reza: Marty, I don't want to cut you off but we're running out of time. I know there's a story you want to tell about liberation and what happened there. So I want you to -- so you were in Mauthausen, building the tunnels. Then what happened? Talk us through liberation. The Russians are advancing.

>> Martin Weiss: Briefly, yeah. By the way, my father was in the same camp. However, I hardly saw him. He was on one side of the camp and I was on the other. He died there. You were old anyway. People say do you have friends? We had friends but they were always gone. You didn't have anybody that you were really friends, friends with. You were not long enough together.

The Russians were in Hungary. We heard they were in Hungary and the Americans were coming in from the west. So they shipped us back to Mauthausen. I can't give you too much detail of the other stuff. But they shipped us back to Mauthausen.

As soon as we came to Mauthausen, the first thing they did -- by the way, Melk, all mixed population. I'm talking every country had representation just about in Europe. There were Ukrainians, Russians, Pols, Greeks, Italians, you name it. They were represented. But as soon as we came to Mauthausen, guess what. And by the way, we didn't have any markings we were Jewish or anything like that. We just had marking if you were political or did a crime

like murder, rape, robbery, whatever. There were people like this. Actually, most of them were German. Yeah, there were Germans, too, I forgot to mention.

Anyway. We came back to Mauthausen. And the first thing they did, as soon as they came to Mauthausen, for first time you were singled out as Jews. They took us out of the camp. They took us to the side of the mountain. And the side of the mountain, there was nothing wrong with it but it was outside the camp itself. The area was very unhospitable. There were thorn bushes, barely a piece of grass you could lay down in or whatever.

By that time, by the way -- by the way, the food was always a problem. We were always starved, not hungry, starved. But by now, believe me, we got nothing. Again, because of time I can't give you the details. If you had 150 calories a day, believe me, it was a lot. We figured, ok, now they're going to kill us. Why would they separate us? Why would they do that? Here they could just take the machine guns and gun us down. That's it.

So we were resigned this is it. We never, never expected them to let us out alive, let's put it this way. Because then we could tell the world what happened. At least that's what we figured. So we were resigned to it.

Guess what. We were there for a certain amount of time. I don't remember exactly how long. It couldn't have been too long. By that time people were falling down, just plain, you know, looked more like the walking dead than human beings. Guess what. One day they come out, we are going on a march. Later they coined it Death March or forced march, whatever. Instead of killing us, now we were surprised they didn't kill us. Why they march us someplace else? So we started marching. Most of the time we marched on country roads. We marched from Mauthausen to -- you have to remember, again, the food was a big thing. Hunger is the very thing that possesses you. You can't think of anything else.

As we were marching, many people would just trip, tripped themselves, and they fell down or something and they couldn't get up. The guard would pick up his rifle and shoot them right there on the spot. Just like that. One -- as we were walking, there was one time there was a fellow right near me. He saw a potato on the ground. He jumped for the potato. Another fellow from the other side saw the same potato. He jumped for it as well. Guess what. They started fighting over the potato. Ok? Guess what. Again, the guard was like as close as she is to me, picked up his rifle, shot one there right in the face. Just like that.

Now, even seeing what I did, and being used to violence like this, but when you see a man do this, I don't care if you're German, what. He was an ordinary man. He was not SS. He was just ordinary Army, regular Army. And they were not supposed to be that bad. I could never understand what the heck -- who his parents were. I don't care how much of a Nazi he was.

Anyway, we came to our destination. This time it was a new camp that we came to called Gunskirchen. And there there was thousands of people there. But guess what. Only five barracks. You had to stand, again, outside all day, at night into the barrack. God forbid you should stick your head out. You would be shot.

We go in. 5,000 men in a barrack for the night. Guess how we spent the night. Standing up like sardines, upright sardines. And this is the way you spend your night. I was younger and I was able to crouch down a little bit. I was able to spend the night crouched. That was a little easier. This was our experience in Gunskirchen. People were in very, very bad shape.

Guess what happened. Mind you, 14,000, 15,000 people there. As soon as I came to Gunskirchen, I run into a cousin of mine that was in Hungary, in the Hungarian labor battalion.

Again, they were such bastards. They took those people, instead of leaving them there, the Russians were there already, and just go home, run home, they didn't. They evacuated them, brought them into Austria, turned them over to the Nazis, and they put them in this camp. I ran into my cousin.

Oddly enough, in Melk I was with his brother. When we shipped out, his brother went to a different camp. I went to this camp. His brother was there. He was about 22 or so years old. He had two other buddies. How in the world I found him, I don't know. Out of so many people. That was a big lift for me. By this time, by the way, I was a basket case. Though some people were worse, obviously. I teamed up with them. It gave me a certain lift. Because they were in pretty good shape compared to us. They had it bad but nothing what we had.

Then we went to work. We heard one day guards had left. At first we didn't believe it. Many people did walk out. We figured out it was going to be a trap, you go out the gates, they'll have machine guns waiting to mow us down. This was their M.O. Right? So we decided to spend the extra night starving in this place. We did not leave until the following day. The following day we realized, ok, it's true.

We didn't see Americans, by the way. We walked out to the highway and we saw American troops there with the tanks, the jeeps, my God. It was a beautiful, sunny day. Beautiful! It was like rebirth. But we were so hungry. So we went into a field. We found an abandoned train, Army train. It had a bunch of canned goods in there. The problem is we didn't have anything to open them with. So we got some cans, some food, so you have to have it. It was like liverwurst, spam, that kind of stuff.

By the way, that would have killed us if we ate it.

>> Sarah Reza: Yeah, if you had nothing.

>> Martin Weiss: Exactly. In the meantime, we saw this truck in a ditch, in the field. We saw this truck in a ditch. We went to investigate what was in it. Guess what. We found a tub of lard on the front seat. Just plain lard. And I said to the other guy I was with -- they were like 20, 23 years old. One of the guys -- they were still in good shape -- he took his fist right through the glass, the window, the door window. All the glass fell into the lard. Ok? This is a real story. So we took the lard, scooped it out, cleaned it up. We saved the lard. We were about to walk away and one of the guys says, let's look in the back of the truck. We go to the back of the truck, climb up there, and we struck gold. What did we find? We find leather hides all refined already for use. We got really excited. Why? We knew for love or money, not that we had either one, but shoes. Now Europe, believe or not, shoemakers still knew how to make shoes from scratch. When I was a kid, we had boots made by the Shoemaker. So we were all excited. I couldn't carry too much. I remember I was lucky I walked. But each one of us rolled up a few of the hides. We were very, very excited about it.

In the meantime, we saw a farmhouse not far away. We reached the farmhouse. One thing I will stress to you, mention, I had such hatred to me every German was a Nazi and every Nazi was a German. And if somebody said here's a pistol, shoot somebody, I remember feeling like I had such rage, such hate, such rage, that I could have done it. But here's what happened after. We came to the house. We knocked on the door. We didn't barge in. And a lady comes to the door. And she opens the door just a little bit. She asked one of the guys what we want. All I saw was her face. They were taller than I was, in front of me. So that's all I saw of her. One of the guys asked her to give us some eggs, flour and water. She went back in the kitchen, brought it to the door and gave it to us. We never entered her door.

After I started speaking, it took four, five years bring remembered this. Now I always like to include it in my closing. We took the ingredients. We didn't go into her kitchen to cook the darn stuff, mix it up and cook it. Why I don't know. But you know what we did? One of the guys says there was a barn in the backyard. In the front was one of those iron kettles they used to heat up water for the cows. They would throw sometimes stale bread, warm milk, whatever. We made a fire. We put some water in there. One of the guys mixed the ingredients and made dumplings. That was the easiest thing to make. That's why we used the lard. And the other ingredients.

Again, sometimes you get a sixth sense you know what to do without knowing. I had about three or four of them. When you're hungry, I must emphasize, if somebody gave you five-pound loaf of bread, you don't want to leave it. You want to eat the whole thing. You don't want to leave it for later. You got like an animal, just want to eat the whole thing. But somehow, something told me after four or so I stopped. The reason I point it out, there were thousands of people, when the Americans started giving them food or the British, from our camp alone, 5,000, 6,000 died the first week or two before they realized what took place. Anyway, one of the guys had an uncle. He was older, around 50. That was considered old. Not too many 50-year-olds. He ate too much and died the day or two later. So it just shows you.

Anyway, here's the clincher. After we finished eating. Remember, we're very content. Oh, my God. The first time you ate something like a human being. Besides we were very hungry. As we finished, one of the guys said, you know something, each one of us should take some of the hide and give it to the lady. And what bothered me -- I'm telling you, for four, five years bring remembered this, but I remembered it. It bothered me. What the heck is wrong with me? How come I didn't object? Give me a break! I mean, she was German. I hated her. And we never did anything to her. He says let's each give some of the hide to take to the woman. We contributed, each one, gave some of the hides. Knocked on the door and gave it to her and said thank you.

The reason I remembered it -- I got so mad at myself. How come I didn't object? They didn't go through what we did. Don't get me wrong. They didn't have it good but nothing compared to what I did. So till this day I never figured it out. But what really got me, I was really mad at myself. Then I thought a couple of things. That I learned to live with. The way we were raised, Judaic values and the way our families raised us, number one; number two, in spite the dehumanized -- we didn't feel like humans, we still acted like human beings.

I'll stop there.

>> Sarah Reza: Thank you, Marty. Thank you so much.

>> [Applause]

>> Sarah Reza: Thank you all so much for joining us today. Unfortunately we've gone over so we don't have time for questions. I do want you to stay seated for a moment. In a second, our photographer, Joel, will come up and we'll do a photo with you all in the audience. So with Marty facing this way. So just to hang tight for one more second.

First Person runs every Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. You can find out more information on the website. And before I turn back to Marty to have the last word, unless you want that to be your last word which was pretty powerful, Marty will be out in the lobby of the theater just after this to sign books. You can ask him your questions then. You can shake his hand, take a photo.

>> Martin Weiss: If anyone wants to talk to me outside, gladly.

>> Sarah Reza: We'll be outside. We will be exiting through that door and then meet everyone up there.

Marty, you do have the last word if you want it. When you're done, Joel will come up and take the photo.

>> Martin Weiss: My last word will be very simple. Don't be a bystander. When someone's house is on fire, what do you do? You try to save everybody. Right? But you call the fire department. The same thing, if somebody happens to somebody, a neighbor or somebody does something, it could be the government or somebody, don't just let it go and say, well, it has nothing to do with me, which many people did. It always has something to do with you. Because I think we are human beings and we should care.

I always tell -- I speak to school kids a lot or college, whatever. I always tell them one thing. If somebody doesn't like you because of your religion or where you came from or whatever, chances are he doesn't like somebody else if he's next to somebody else. People like this have a disease. And they think that there's obviously something wrong with somebody else but I'm perfect. In other words -- but most of all, you have to have the values of a human being rather than because somebody else is mean you have to be mean, too. If you teach your children like this, I think we're in good shape.

By the way, I will brag about the children. I've spoken to schools many, many places, whether North Carolina, Utah or in between. Every single time I went, I always come back feeling good. My experience is usually 100%. You know why? I never see it with the kids. It could be mixed kids, variety of kids from different places, different color, different -- I've never, never seen any problem with it. They all seem to be -- so that tells us a lot. We could learn from them.

And there are so many people today for the slightest reason they still -- I thought that was already forgotten, old hat. But people are still that way and that's not nice. Especially in the United States, we could do better.

That's my last word. I think we should all try to be better.

>> Sarah Reza: Thank you.

>> [Applause]