United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
First Person: Conversations with Holocaust Survivors
First Person Josiane Traum
Thursday, July 27, 2017
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Remote CART Captioning

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings.
This transcript is being provided in rough-draft format.

HOME TEAM CAPTIONS
www.captionfamily.com

>> Bill Benson: Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. Thank you for joining us today. We are in our 18th year of *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Josie Traum, whom you shall meet shortly.

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

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. The museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests. We will have programs next week and the following week and end our 2017 year on August 10.

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

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

We begin with this portrait of Josianne Aizenberg walking on a street in Brussels. Josie was born March 21, 1939, in Brussels, Belgium, to Jacques and Fanny Aizenberg. The arrow on this map of Belgium points to Brussels.

The German Army conquered and occupied Belgium in May 1940. Shortly before the occupation, Josie's father left Belgium to join the British Army. In this photo we see Josie with her parents in Brussels.

In 1942, Josie's mother, Fanny, was able to secure a hiding place for Josie in a convent in Brugges, Belgium. Here we see Josie and Fanny, shortly before Josie went into hiding. Soon thereafter, Fanny, who worked with the Belgian Underground, the resistance, was denounced and she was deported to Auschwitz.

After six months of hiding in the convent and growing Nazi suspicion, the Belgian Underground relocated Josie to hide with the Debrackalaers, a Christian family in Brussels. Here we see Josie with the Debrackalaers Mr. and Mrs. Debrackalaer are on the right. To their left are neighbors of Josie's grandparents. Their grandson is in the front in the middle with Josie to the right. The Debrackalaer's daughter is on the left.

Allied Forces liberated Belgium in September, 1944. Soon after, Josie was found by one of her aunts, who was one of Fanny's sisters. Here we see Josie, Jacques, and Fanny after they were reunited in Belgium.

Josie would eventually marry Freddie Traum, also a Holocaust survivor. We close with this wedding portrait of Josie and Freddie.

After moving to the United States with her parents in 1949 and then completing her schooling in Patterson, New Jersey, Josie went to Israel to study for a year. On the return trip on a ship she met Freddie Traum, the ship's Chief Radio Officer, who was also a Holocaust survivor. Upon her return to the U.S., Josie attended Montclair State Teachers' College for one year. Josie and Freddie were married on his ship a year after she met him and she moved to Israel where they lived for five years. While in Israel, the Traum's son, Michael, and daughter, Yael, were born.

Upon the advice of medical experts in Israel, the Traums re-located to the United States in 1963 to obtain medical care for their disabled son, Michael. Their third child, Jonathan, who also is disabled, was born in the U.S. Eventually, Freddie's work brought them to Vienna, Virginia. Josie returned to school and graduated from the Catholic University of America School of Social Work and began her career in social welfare. She retired in 2007 from her work as a clinical social worker for abused children for Montgomery County, Maryland.

Today, Josie and Freddie live in Silver Spring, Maryland. Josie's volunteer work at this museum includes leading tours of the Permanent Exhibition for law enforcement including police officers, the FBI, judges and others. Josie speaks publicly about her experience as a Holocaust survivor in various settings especially local synagogues and schools in Maryland and Virginia. In 2016, Josie and two fellow Holocaust Survivors joined me at the American Society on Aging's annual conference to speak about resiliency and aging. I'm pleased to let you know that Freddie is here with Josie today.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Josie Traum. [Applause]

>> Josie Traum: Hi. I made it.

>> Bill Benson: Josie, thank you so much for joining us today and being willing to be our First Person. And in two weeks we'll have Freddie as our First Person as we close out our program.

We have, as you know, a short time, so we'll start right away. Your parents, Fanny and Jacques Aizenberg, were married in early 1938 and you were born in March 1939, just months before Germany and Russia invaded Poland to start World War II. Before we turn to the war and the Holocaust, tell us about your parents, your family, what their life was like before the war began.

>> Josie Traum: Well, my parents -- please excuse my throat. My parents were really newlyweds. They both had professions they, I think, entered marriage and wanted to have a good life.

In Belgium, the Jews assimilated quite well. Their relationship with their neighbors and with everyone, and with their families, seemed to be very, very good. And, of course, they

really didn't know of the impending doom that would happen very, very soon.

My mother was a dressmaker. She had gone to a special textile vocational school. And apparently when they graduated, the royal family in Belgium would come and pick out a few students to work at the Royal Household. So my mother was actually working for the royal household.

>> Bill Benson: Which was a huge honor.

>> Josie Traum: It was a big deal. My mom was thrilled. She really was. I mean, she was a young person and just working for the royal family was really something very special.

My dad was a tailor. We had a shop. We lived in a four-story apartment building. We lived on the bottom floor. And part of the bottom floor there was a store, a tailoring store which my dad ran. And in those days you couldn't just go and buy a suit ready-made. My father had lots of bolts of material. So a person would come in, choose the material they wanted for a suit, and then my dad would make a pattern and measure him and fit him. You know, making a suit for someone wasn't just a short deal. It took weeks and weeks. The customer would keep coming back being measured and fitted. So my dad was a tailor and my mom was in the dressmaking business.

>> Bill Benson: Being a tailor, though, was not your father's first occupation. You know I'm going to ask you to tell us that.

>> Josie Traum: Yes. My dad -- believe it or not, in the `20s and `30s, the movies -- they had silent movies. There were not talkies so because of that, in Europe, or in Belgium, anyhow, different movie houses hired quartets, violin, cello, viola, for people to play while the film was showing. So my dad was a violin player. And when the talkies came in the late `30s, my dad lost his job. So -- in fact, all the musicians lost their jobs. So my dad went to tailoring school, became a tailor. So that was really his second profession.

>> Bill Benson: I just love having you tell us that.

Your parents were married in 1938. Nazi power in Germany and Austria took an even more ominous turn, also in 1938, with Kristallnacht or Night of Broken Glass in late November. You were born March 1939, just months before Germany and Russia invaded Poland to begin the war. Given the political circumstances and the rise of Nazism, did you learn later, did you know if for your parents -- how do you in the midst of that environment -- was that something that was very worrisome to them?

>> Josie Traum: You know, I imagine it was. Of course I don't recall them talking about it because I was so young. But I think they were very concerned. They were very worried. They would listen to the radio continuously, mainly to the BBC, to hear what was going on in the world. It was scary. I think they were worried how far Germans would come in Europe, how far to the west. So I think it was very worrisome.

>> Bill Benson: In late November, Kristallnacht, Night of Broken Glass, when all over Germany and Austria, parts of Czechoslovakia, I believe, there was a horrific fight of violence and vandalism against Jews and against their businesses. Your parents, soon after that, I think they took in a child for a period of time. Tell us what you know about that.

>> Josie Traum: As far as I know, my mom -- my parents -- actually, my dad had already left. My mom took in a Jewish child that had been caught where Kristallnacht, where the Germans were. So my grandparents, actually, and my mother took in this little girl to stay with us until she found a safer place with some family. It was very worrisome for Jews. Jews were trying to get away from where the Germans had already invaded. So it was very, very worrisome and very scary.

>> Bill Benson: And, of course, a year or so later in May 1940, eight months after Germany attacked Poland, they invaded what we call the low countries, Belgium, the Netherlands and France. Your father left to join the British Army just before the Germans launched their invasion. Tell us what your father did and then what that meant for your mother and for you.
>> Josie Traum: Sure. As I mentioned, my parents would listen to the radio all the time. They heard calls from Britain asking people to volunteer to join the British Army. My dad, actually and his brother, both decided that they would volunteer and try and get to Britain to join the British Army. Both of them were tailors. My uncle, my dad's brother, was also a tailor. And they both decided to actually go to England. They left Belgium. My dad left when I was 13 months old. And they got to England, which was very, very dangerous at the time because the Germans were actually torpedoing boats crossing the channel.

So my dad did get to England. And the British government or Army decided, What could they do with these two guys? They were both tailors. And what they did is they put them in a factory making British uniforms for the Army, which was the best place my dad could be. So but he did leave. And my mom and I and my maternal grandparents, my mom's parents, we all stayed together.
>> Bill Benson: And in light of a current film, "Dunkirk" -- I was thinking about you as this film came out because your father left from Dunkirk and I think he left on one of the last ships that got out before the Germans arrived.
>> Josie Traum: Yes. He did. Actually, he got to England and my mom never knew whether he actually got there or not. Because there was no communication at all. War had already started.
>> Bill Benson: So once he left --
>> Josie Traum: That was it. Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: So what -- to your knowledge, what did your mother do now? You're 13 months old, it's just the two of you plus your grandparents.
>> Josie Traum: Well, things were very limited as far as food was concerned, care. My mother always used to tell me that in Belgium and many other countries in Europe they have special places where you take newborns and you get care, immunizations and all kinds of care from the doctors. And once the war started, that really stopped. So my mom in a way -- it's not that she was stuck with me but she didn't really have any outside service that she could use. And she was with her parents, who were living with us. And we were pretty much to ourselves.

At that time, also, the Germans, when they invaded, everybody had to carry an identity card. And in it actually stated if you were Jewish or not. And you had to carry that card wherever you went, on the streets. And, of course, you could be stopped at any time by a German. They would say give me your identity card and you had to give it and they decided what they would do. So I think my mom and I, and my grandparents, were in a very precarious position. Things were very limited. And we kind of relied on ourselves.
>> Bill Benson: And you would remain in those circumstances, under Nazi occupation, until 1942, which is when your mother made the really profound decision to place you into hiding. Tell us about the events that led up to your mother's decision to have you hidden but also during that period of time, two years, really, that you were existing in the circumstances you described. What was your life like? What was life like for your mom during that time?
>> Josie Traum: Well, my mom, actually, she was part of the underground.
>> Bill Benson: Part of the resistance?
>> Josie Traum: Part of the resistance. She would deliver leaflets for meetings that the underground -- where they were meeting. She would also take in Jews who would flee from

countries where the Germans had already invaded. So we very often had people sleeping at our house until they would go to another safe place.

Because my mother was part of the underground, she kind of had -- there was a whole network. And she was able to get someone to pick me up, two women to pick me up and put me into hiding.

Now, to me, that's probably one of the hardest decisions I think that she could have made. When they put a child in hiding, they weren't able to tell the parents where they were being placed because they knew when the Germans would come to your apartment to see who was there or to try to arrest you, they would say where's rest of your family, where are your children, where's your husband, and they would torture you until they got it out of you. So they decided, the underground, when they would take children and put them in hiding, they would not tell the parents where they were being placed.

>> Bill Benson: So your mother doesn't know anything about her husband.

>> Josie Traum: No.

>> Bill Benson: Your father. Now you're gone. She knows nothing about you.

Before we come back to your time in hiding, a couple of other things I want to ask you about. You mentioned having to carry I.D. cards that said Jew on it. Although you were very young, you shared with me a fleeting memory you have about being on a bus with your mother before you went into hiding.

>> Josie Traum: Yeah. We kept very much to ourselves but once in a while I did have an outing with my mom. On one such day, we took a bus ride to go -- I can't remember even where we went. But my mom and I got on the bus. We didn't have buses in Belgium. We used trams, which were electrically --

>> Bill Benson: Electrical trolleys.

>> Josie Traum: Trolleys. So my mom and I got on the bus. We sat on the last row on the bus, all the way at the end. While we were riding on this tram, a German officer came on the tram and asked everybody for their I.D. cards. And he went row by row by row. My mother was shaking. I didn't understand why but this German officer went from row to row. And he got to the last row and he turned around and he never asked us for our I.D., which somebody was looking over on us because it was a pretty close call. My mother stopped shaking. And, of course, I never connected it. I didn't realize that she was so afraid of what might happen. But I was saved then.

>> Bill Benson: And one of the things that might have happened, certainly beginning in 1942, were deportations to Auschwitz.

>> Josie Traum: Exactly. That's when Belgium Jews were actually started to be deported, in 1942.

>> Bill Benson: Your grandparents and your great grandparents, tell us what happened to them during that time.

>> Josie Traum: Well, actually, first I must say I was placed -- I was put in hiding. Two ladies came to pick me up, two strange ladies who I didn't know. And as I mentioned before, my mother was not allowed to know where I was going. They came to pick me up. They took me to a beautiful little city in Belgium called Brugges. It was full of convents. They took me to this convent. My mother, of course, as I mentioned, didn't know where I was going. And they took me to this convent, full of nuns. Nuns not as you see today, dressed in modern clothing but very much like the nuns in "The Sound of Music", very stiff gear, very stiff. The nuns were also very strict. But they placed me in hiding, which was wonderful. It was a convent but it was

more like an orphanage. People -- because there was no food, very little food, and it was during war, so people would put their kids in a convent, like an orphanage, and hope they would pick them up when things got easier for them. So that's where I actually was.
>> Bill Benson: That's where you were.
>> Josie Traum: However, in the meantime, I think I was placed really just in time because soon after that my mom and her parents were deported. They were actually arrested, deported, and taken to Auschwitz.
>> Bill Benson: And in your mother's case, she was denounced by somebody. Somebody told on her, informed.
>> Josie Traum: One of her neighbors. There were many wonderful people in Belgium. I mean, people helped me. I'm here today because of them. But there were also many people who got money from the Germans if they would tell them where the Jews were. So actually our neighbor is the one who denounced my mom and her parents. Because they were taken to Auschwitz.
>> Bill Benson: And, of course, we're going to talk more about your mother later. Your grandparents perished at Auschwitz.
>> Josie Traum: Yes, they did. My grandfather died on one of the trains, getting to Auschwitz. And my grandmother and mother were separated as soon as they got to Auschwitz.

You know, there were selections. Most concentration camps, when you got there, they were killing centers, you got there and they killed you. Auschwitz had a subcamp, a labor camp, where they made ammunition. And Germany was very interested in gearing up their ammunition production for the war. So in Auschwitz they had a factory, Birkenau, which was actually a labor camp. And as soon as you got off the train, there was what they called a selection. The older folks, handicapped, or children would be put in one line and the stronger people, the younger people like my mom who was in her early 20s, would be put on another line.

So there was a selection, and immediately my mom and her mother were separated. My mother wanted to be with her mother, so she went into the line where her mother was and the German actually hit her and told her that you go where you're told to go. She actually never saw her mother again. So my grandparents perished very, very soon. Well, my grandfather died right on the train and my grandmother as soon as she got there.
>> Bill Benson: So with your mother at Auschwitz, you're in this convent. And you would be in the convent for about a year. Tell us about what you can about your time in that convent and then what led to the decision to then move you live with a Christian family. In the comment, as you said, the nuns looked like "The Sound of Music" but they were very, very strict.
>> Josie Traum: And they didn't sing.
>> [Laughter]
>> Bill Benson: But they were very strict. To the extent you know, what was your life like in that convent?
>> Josie Traum: I can't compare to other convents. I don't think I've been in another one. But this a very large courtyard, kind of inside the convent. It was out in the open. And the children would really -- we would all play together. We would say our Rosaries, many times a day. I would say mine in French. I didn't know what I was saying but I would say my rose Rosaries. And we would play.

And by the way, I was in the convent for, I believe, a little bit more than six months. And unbeknownst to me, there were three other Jewish children there being hidden. The

convent was full of kids but there were four Jewish kids there being hidden.

You know, in Belgium, probably most countries in Europe, if you were hiding a Jew, you were really risking your life because if the Germans found you, they would just shoot you on the street, no questions asked. They would just shoot you. So these nuns, however strict they were with me, they saved my life.

The reason I was moved out --

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us that, while you were in the convent, I think, your name was changed.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what name you were given. And there's some significance about that name. Right?

>> Josie Traum: Well, the name -- my first name remained the same because it was a French name but my last name which was I guess a Jewish name, they changed my last name on my documents to more of a Flemish/Dutch name, which was Von Berg. And I had that name.

>> Bill Benson: And you were in an area that was more Flemish?

>> Josie Traum: Yeah. Near the Dutch border.

>> Bill Benson: So you could hide easier, is the notion behind that.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: So as you said, you were moved to the Debrackalaers. You were about to tell us that. What led to the decision to move you to their home?

>> Josie Traum: Apparently the nuns found out that the Germans were going to come, the Nazis were going to come, and pick up the four Jewish children.

>> Bill Benson: So, again, somebody probably informed them.

>> Josie Traum: Yes. And I heard this happened quite a few times in Belgium. The nuns would find out that the Germans were going to come and pick up Jewish children and they would always tell the Germans the kids aren't ready yet; let us get their clothes ready and come back tomorrow morning. And that's what they did. They would come back. But in the meantime, the nuns actually smuggled the four of us out of the convent and brought us all to Brussels, which is where I was originally from. And they placed me with a Catholic family, a mother, father, and a little girl. And I stayed with them really for the duration of the war.

>> Bill Benson: Until September 1944. ****

>> Josie Traum: When Belgium was liberated. The man, by the way, was part of the underground also.

>> Bill Benson: Mr. Debrackalaer.

>> Josie Traum: They would very often take him out and interrogate him at night, the Nazis. He would come back black and blue. He did all kinds of things in the underground, I guess to upset whatever the Germans were doing. But he never told on me. I stayed with them, as I said, really for the rest of the duration of the war.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know how they explained your presence in their home?

>> Josie Traum: I hardly went out so there was really no -- I don't think there was much explaining. I didn't go out very much. I didn't see people.

You know, in Belgium, food was rationed. You would pick up your ration once a week at a special center to however many people were registered. And they were registered for three people, the mother, father, and little girl. I was there illegally so they would pick up the food once a week but share it with me. So in a way, they really did risk their lives in every way. We very much kept to ourselves and I really didn't see very many other people.

>> Bill Benson: Pretty much stayed indoors during that whole time. Tell us, as best you know, what that was like for you to be not only in their household with their family but really restricted in terms of not being able to go out. So you're there all the time. What do you recall of what that was like for you? A little girl, Josianne, what was that like for you?
>> Josie Traum: Well, what I remember, I used to play with the little girl all the time.
>> Bill Benson: Their daughter?
>> Josie Traum: With their daughter. But I do remember they were very close unit. They were a family and however wonderful they were with me, I wasn't part of the unit. And I guess I felt that as a little girl. I don't think they meant to make me feel that way but I didn't feel part of that family unit.
>> Bill Benson: Josie, one of the things that you shared with me was they obviously risked their lives to protect you. They took care of you. They fed you. But as you said, they didn't hug you. They didn't kiss you to sleep. And as a little girl, you felt that.
>> Josie Traum: I did.
>> Bill Benson: And you've been very eloquent --
>> Josie Traum: And I feel very fortunate, you know, feel very strongly, psychologically, that the first three years of life if you bond with someone, a caregiver that is important to you, it really establishes a certain well-being that carries you throughout life. And I felt I had that for the first three years of my life with my grandma and my mother. So although I missed it later on, I think I still had the memories of how that was.
>> Bill Benson: So that solid grounding in family.

Belgium was liberated in 1944, in the fall of 1944. When the war ended for Belgium -- the war was still going on elsewhere in Europe -- your Aunt Theresa was able to find you and she brought you to her home. How did that happen? For example, no one knew where you were because of what you explained. So how did your aunt find you and what was it like for them to take you from the Debrackalaers to their home?
>> Josie Traum: My mom had to sisters. My two aunts. And they were also hidden through the underground in churches. So really Belgium did a lot as far as saving many of their Jews because my aunt -- the older aunt had three sons, my three cousins. And they were all hidden in a church. But because they were part of the underground, there was a network and they found me. They found me at the Debrackalaers and they came to pick me up, which was absolutely wonderful. They took me to their home. And I was with them. And my three cousins, who were just a few years older than me, they were three brothers. They spoiled me rotten. It was great. They treated me like their mascot. It was just wonderful being with family again. It really was. I felt a difference.
>> Bill Benson: You had been in a Catholic convent, an orphanage. You were with a Christian family. Now you're back with the Jewish family. Was there any change for you in terms of awareness of being Jewish that you hadn't had up until that point?
>> Josie Traum: Well, I'm -- there was. My aunt would light candles Friday night. We had, you know, Sabbath dinners. They had many of the traditions. Although I don't remember them very much at home because I left so young. But we did have some of that with my aunt. It was just wonderful being with family.
>> Bill Benson: Getting that love and affection that you had missed.

You told me a story about your uncle who after the war was recognized. Tell us.
>> Josie Traum: Yes. My aunt's husband, my uncle, he was a very shy, meek, man. After the war he was actually decorated and honored for having been brave and killed many Nazi

soldiers. It was unbelievable because this was such a quiet, shy, meek man. I think no one in the family could believe it. But he was awarded and decorated, which is really something.
>> Bill Benson: And, of course, during the immediate aftermath of the war in Belgium -- and, again, this is late summer/fall of 1944, the Battle of the Bulge would happen.
>> Josie Traum: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Belgium is pretty much shattered. What was it like for your aunts to begin to rebuild their lives and you're part of that?
>> Josie Traum: Well, I think it was very hard. In Belgium they -- part of their apartment, also on the ground floor, they had a store, a leatherwoods store. So of course as soon as the war ended, they moved back to their place, opened the store, and life really changed for them. I can't say it was back to normal but somehow things regained much more normalcy. So I think it was hard for them. They worked hard, but at least they were all together.
>> Bill Benson: Right. In what must have seemed to everybody, your mother's sisters, to everybody it must have seemed like an incredible miracle, your mother, Fanny, survived Auschwitz. She returned to Brussels after her liberation in April of 1945. And then she was reunited with her sisters. You were 6. What do you recall of your mother sort of just reappearing when probably people thought she was dead?
>> Josie Traum: Yes. I think we all thought she was dead. When my mom was liberated, she was a pretty sick woman. She had Typhus and meningitis. She eventually made her way down, with the Red Cross actually, brought her back down to Belgium. You know, my mom, first place she went was her sister's apartment. She knocked on the door and there I was. So we were reunited. And many of the things that I recall from that, I think are things that my mom told me because many things I don't remember. I mean, I was 6 years old. And I really don't remember many of the things. But it was wonderful seeing her again.
>> Bill Benson: Soon after she came back and you were reunited she would take you and move back into what had been her home in June of 1945. Knowing -- I know a lot about your mother's -- what happened to your mother. As you said, she had been not only incredibly sick and disabled but she had been through a horrific ordeal. Do you know what it was like for her to sort of -- and, of course, she still has no idea about your father -- how she managed to both take care of you and try to rebuild her life at that point?
>> Josie Traum: It must have been so difficult. I think she relied a lot on her two sisters. And I think the family became very, very close. And my mom kind of relied on whatever services she could get. It wasn't until a year later in 1947 that my dad actually returned from England to Belgium. But it was hard for my mom to manage.
>> Bill Benson: And when your father came back, I think it was 1946, I think, a year after the war.
>> Josie Traum: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that. Because you remember that.
>> Josie Traum: I do remember that. My dad couldn't come back right after the war because the apartment he was living in, in London -- you know, there was so much bombing in London during the blitz and everything else. The house he was living in was bombed. And he spent two years in the hospital. So he was injured pretty badly.

So when he did come back, when eventually my mom and he would connect and write and we knew that he was coming back, I remember going to the port city of Belgium, where the ships come in, my mom and I waiting there and my dad coming down the stairs. I, of course, didn't know who he was but my mom actually pointed to him and said, "There's your

father." And I had no idea who this man was. You know, it was hard because the three of us went through such very different experiences. My mom went through hell. My dad had a pretty hard time. And I was just, you know, a child in the middle. So it was hard.
>> Bill Benson: It was hard. Were they both able to resume their work lives at that time?
>> Josie Traum: They were. My dad eventually worked again in his shop. And we lived in the same apartment, because it was my parents' apartment building. So we tried to resume life as much as we could. However, my parents decided they really needed to leave Europe and so they decided to apply for visas and papers to come to the United States. And we eventually did in 1949. We had to wait for a number of years for the quotas, for our names to come up.
>> Bill Benson: So that was it. You had to simply just wait until the numbers came up.
>> Josie Traum: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: So it would take four years after the war, three years after your father came back.
>> Josie Traum: And my dad and my mom and I came to the United States along with his brother and his wife and two girls. So the two families really came to the United States together.
>> Bill Benson: So here they come to the United States. You're 10 years old. And now it's to begin a whole new life, for each of you. What do you remember about that for yourself? What was it like at 10 years old to arrive here and become an American?
>> Josie Traum: Well, first of all, I spoke no English. They put me in first grade. I was never told to begin with. So, you know, when you measure the kids --
>> Bill Benson: Tell us why you were put in first grade.
>> Josie Traum: Because I knew no English. First grade, you know no English, you don't understand, first grade. The reason I was saying I was never really tall, first grade I didn't stand out that much.
>> Bill Benson: The desks.
>> Josie Traum: Right. It took me a few days, a few weeks to learn a few words of English. And then they put me in second grade. And so on it went for a few weeks until I finally left elementary school with my grade.
>> Bill Benson: So for a few weeks you're put into a new grade.
>> Josie Traum: Exactly. The thing is, now I can't remember not speaking English. Because it's become so naturally. But at the beginning it was very -- it was really difficult.
>> Bill Benson: And your father spoke English because he had been in England.
>> Josie Traum: He did but his English was not that great.
>> Bill Benson: What about your mother's adjustment?
>> Josie Traum: My mom spoke no English and it's interesting because when I came back home, we spoke French or my parents spoke Yiddish to each other. And they learned -- went to night school as soon as they came to the United States. They wanted so much to become Americans. So they attended night school. They learned English. They learned all the capitals, states, presidents. And when I would come home, they wouldn't speak French to me. They would only speak English because they wanted so much to learn English.
>> Bill Benson: You described it at one time as they were passionate aggressive about becoming Americans.
>> Josie Traum: They were. Absolutely. They took the test. You know -- I don't think they have that today where you really have to pass a test.
>> Bill Benson: They still do for citizenship. Yup. I don't know if it's the same test but.

>> Josie Traum: Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: So soon after you arrived, though, you had a bad incident. You were in New Jersey. You were beaten up by --
>> Josie Traum: A bunch of kids. A bunch of girls.
>> Bill Benson: A bunch of girls beat you up.
>> Josie Traum: Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: Will you say a little about that?
>> Josie Traum: Actually, I think it was first week I was in school. When I came out of school, at the end of day, when it was finished, there was a group of girls waiting for me. And they actually beat me up. And I had no idea why. My mother went to school the next day, which I thought was pretty brave of her, not speaking very much English, and she wanted to know what had happened. Why did they beat me up? And the principal said to her, well, the children thought that your daughter was German. I don't know what baring that has to do with it. I don't think kids at that time really differentiated or knew what a German was. But, I wasn't beaten up again. So that's good.
>> Bill Benson: That was good, yes. That was good. Josie, did your aunts remain -- do they remain in Belgium?
>> Josie Traum: They do not. My aunt with her three boys went to Israel and settled there with her three sons. And my younger aunt came to the United States and lived in New York.
>> Bill Benson: About the same time?
>> Josie Traum: A little bit later. She waited a few years and got a job, was working. We were pretty close.
>> Bill Benson: Do you know how many of your extended family perished through the Holocaust?
>> Josie Traum: Well, I would say my grandparents, they had brothers and sisters. My father, one of his brother's perished, children. So there were quite a few people. I'm lucky I'm here.
>> Bill Benson: Absolutely. And later you would meet another Holocaust survivor. Tell us about meeting Freddie.
>> Josie Traum: Ok. I went to Israel for a year to study. In the `50s -- it wasn't that long ago -- but in those days you didn't travel by plane. Planes were very expensive. So you went by ship. I was in Israel for a year. I went with a group of students. It was really a wonderful experience. And coming on the way home on the ship, I met this officer. He was a chief radio officer on the Israeli passenger liner. And he was obviously socializing with the passengers.
>> [Laughter]
>> Josie Traum: Me being one of them. And we were married a year later.
>> Bill Benson: On the ship.
>> Josie Traum: On the ship. The ship was in port. You know, we had the band, the food, everything was there, like a very special place. We had our guests. It was just wonderful.
>> Bill Benson: Josie, your mother, Fanny, your husband, Freddie, and you are each Holocaust survivors and are part of our *First Person* program. Your mother, Fanny, was with us to start this 2017 year of *First Person* in March at age 100. We look forward to her return in March 2018 when she's 101. I think our audience should know that, and just how extraordinary it is that each of you, each of you, continue to speak publicly about what you experienced. What is this like for you to do this? What's it like for you and for your family to do this?
>> Josie Traum: For me, personally, I can say that it makes me feel good that people are interested and want to know what happened. The only way you can really avoid some of these

things happening again is by knowing the history and what did happen. I feel very good, especially going to schools I go to middle schools, Catholic schools, high schools. It really does make me feel very good to hear that people are interested. They want to know. They really do.
>> Bill Benson: You spoke at my son's middle school. For those kids, it was a profound experience.
>> Josie Traum: They were lovely.
>> Bill Benson: Josie, we have time to turn to our audience for a few questions. Shall we do that?
>> Josie Traum: Sure.
>> Bill Benson: Ok. We have a hand going up already. We're going to have two mics, one down each aisle. We're going to ask you to wait until you have the mic in your hand so that we can all hear it. Try to make your question -- we have two I think right up front. Try to make your question as brief as you can. I'll do my best to repeat it just to make sure we hear it correctly, and then Josie will respond to it.

I know two hands shot up down here. Right here in the third row, I believe. There we go.
>> Did you ever reunite with either the nuns or the family that took care of you?
>> Bill Benson: The question is, Did you ever reunite with either the nuns or the family that took care of you?
>> Josie Traum: Yeah. The family, the Debrackalaers -- my husband and I were in Belgium in 1989, and we tried to find them, the family. They had all died, including the little girl who was my age.

The nuns, I wrote to the Belgian government because I really feel it's important to get them recognized, to acknowledge what they did. The order is no longer in existence. And from what I understand, what I've been told by other churches, organizations, that when an order diminishes or people die, they very often join another order. So I have not been able to find the nuns. That particular order is no longer in existence.
>> And do you think that maybe a reason they didn't get emotionally attached to you was for protection for you and for them?
>> Bill Benson: The follow-up question is, Do you think the reason that they did not get attached to you emotionally was a protective thing?
>> Josie Traum: I don't know. That I really don't know. You know, it wasn't just with me. It was with all the kids. They were rather strict. I don't know if that's a demeanor in general of nuns. I'm not really sure.
>> [Inaudible]
>> Bill Benson: And the Debrackalaers, too.
>> Josie Traum: The Debrackalaers, yeah, also.
>> Bill Benson: Ok. Did we have a question here? Maybe not. Ok.

Do we have another question? We have a hand up behind you, Jocelyn. I'm sorry. Then there's one behind you as well.
>> Do you still speak French or Yiddish?
>> Bill Benson: Do you still speak French or Yiddish?
>> Josie Traum: Not Yiddish. I never spoke Yiddish. But I speak French and Hebrew.
>> And you and Freddie, what do you speak with each other?
>> Josie Traum: English.

>> Bill Benson: In fact, I might mention that Freddie was rescued through what's known as a Kindertransport and ended up in England, so spent many years in England before going on to Israel.

We had a hand back there.

>> I was just wondering if there was repercussions for the nuns when they came to get the Jewish children and they weren't there.

>> Bill Benson: The question is, When the nuns would, you know, delay to be able to hide the children, were there repercussions for them?

>> Josie Traum: You know, that I never found out. But I know there are many stories and essays that I read in books of nuns doing that. I mean that's the ultimate risk, you know, telling the Germans come back tomorrow, we're not ready with the kids yet. I don't know if the Germans ever came back and didn't see the kids and whether the nuns were punished. I really don't know that.

>> Bill Benson: While anybody's thinking about another question -- there we go.

>> So your mom was told on by your neighbor. Did your mom have trust issues after that? How did she deal with that?

>> Bill Benson: The question is since your mother and your grandparents were denounced by a neighbor, after, later, did your mother have trust issues around other people because of having had that happen to her?

>> Josie Traum: Well, you know, I really don't know that because we did leave Belgium. We left Europe. I think that in itself told a lot because my parents did not want to remain there, and probably because there were trust issues. You know, what if it happened again? What if neighbors did something again? So I've never spoken about that to my mom but it's probably a very interesting issue.

>> Bill Benson: I suppose you have no idea whatever happened to that neighbor either.

>> Josie Traum: No. No, I really do not.

By the way, you know, my mom, as Bill mentioned, is 100 and she volunteers here every Sunday. She sits at the survivor desk and talks to whoever wants to listen to her.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: And it is well worth spending some time, I can tell you that.

Do we have another question? One right here. Thank you.

>> That was part of my question. I was like, oh, man, 100. I want to meet her. I can't wait until next year.

We're a Catholic youth group here. I was just wondering -- we're actually going to help some nuns next week. Have you ever been invited by any other nuns -- you said you had never been to another a convent to compare what other nuns are like, I guess. I was just like, huh. I'm interested also in, like, have you prayed the Rosary since then or did you ever learn anything about Catholics versus Jewish? And also do you speak to youth groups other than just schools?

>> Bill Benson: The question is, Do you speak to youth groups? Have you been invited to go to another convent and speak at a convent to see a difference -- arrangement?

>> Josie Traum: I haven't been to a convent but I have been to quite a few Catholic schools. I've been in Maryland, in Virginia, to many of them. They're very, very interested in the history. And I'm always surprised how much they do know, very impressive. They read really a lot of books on the subject. Before -- when I talk to kids in a school, I usually ask them what have you read what do you know so that I know from what angle to begin. And I'm always surprised

that they've read so much of the literature which is written for children about the Holocaust. Very impressive what the teachers do with them. Really.
>> Bill Benson: We have time for one more question and then we're going to wrap up with Josie concluding our program. So stay with us for a couple of minutes. We have one more here.

For those of you who just raised your hands, Josie will remain on the stage after she finishes so we invite you to come up here and ask her your question. She'll stay as long as you have a question to ask her. So please do come up here and do that.

One question here.
>> Him. I wonder if -- how your mom handled the situation after the concentration camp. Was she angry? Did she forgive? When did she feel peace?
>> Bill Benson: The question, if I'm hearing correctly, is how your mother, after going through what she went through, how did she handle it afterwards. Did she find peace at some point with what she went through? I think that's the question. Or a sense of forgiveness. What was your mother's response over the years?

And before you answer, you shared with me that as a child, you remember her having horrible nightmares.
>> Josie Traum: I think it's been extremely difficult for my mom. I don't think she's ever really been able to totally understand and forgive what has happened. While she was in Auschwitz, they did medical experiments on her. So this is something also that she lived through. I think it's haunted her, really, her whole life. It's been very, very difficult for her. It really has.
>> Bill Benson: We're going to close our program in a moment. Stay with us for just a couple moments more because we're going to hear, again, from Josie to close our program.

I want to thank all of you for being with us. We have four more programs, Wednesday and Thursday of next week and the following week, and then we'll resume again in March 2018. The museum's website will provide information about our 2018 program. So we hope that you might have the opportunity to come back and join us at another time.

We'd also like to mention that our programs are now available through the museum's website, through a YouTube Channel. So you'll be able to see Josie's program as well as others on the museum's website.

It's our tradition at *First Person*, that our First Person has the last word. So Josie will give us her last word. When she's done, Lolita, our photographer, will come up on stage, take a picture of Josie with you as the background. So stay with us, if you would. It makes for a terrific photograph. And then, as I mentioned a moment ago, Josie will remain on the stage. We invite any of you who want to, to come up and ask another question or just say hi or have your picture taken or whatever you would like to do.

All right. Josie?
>> Josie Traum: As Bill mentioned, at the end of the program the survivor or the person who is the First Person always has the last word. I always read the same quote because to me it's one of the most important things in this museum. I don't know if any of you have gone through the museum yet but if you haven't, when you get to the second floor, at the end, as you leave the second floor exhibit, there's a saying on the wall and it's written by a Lutheran minister, Martin Niemoller. And to me it is so significant that I always read it at the end because it's so meaningful. Let me read it you.

By the way, Martin Niemoller was very, very pro Hitler at the beginning of the war. You know, Hitler promised so many wonderful things. And then when he did see what Hitler

was doing, he was very much against him and he actually was imprisoned. Martin Niemoller did not die in prison. He died in the 1980's. But this is what he wrote.

"First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me."

To me, this is what, in a way, this museum is about. When you see injustice, you see people inflicting pain on other people, you've got to say something. You can really, one person, can make a big difference. That's why I'm here. People took a chance and they spoke out and they helped.

Thank you.

>> [Applause]