

REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON FRED FLATOW
APRIL 19, 2018

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>> Bill Benson: Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson. I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*. We are in our 19th year of the *First Person* program. Thank you for joining us. Our First Person today is Mr. Fred Flatow, whom you shall meet shortly.

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

First Person is a series of twice-weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Fred will share with us his "*First Person*" account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows we will have an opportunity for you to ask Fred a few questions. If we do not get to your question today, please join us in our online conversation: *Never Stop Asking Why*. The conversation aims to inspire individuals and new generations to ask the important questions that Holocaust history raises, and what this

history means for societies today. To join the *Never Stop Asking Why* conversation, you can ask your question and tag the Museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and #AskWhy. You can find the hashtag on the back of your program, as well.

Today's program will be livestreamed on the Museum's website. This means people will be joining the program via a link from the museum's website and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. A recording of this program will be made available on the museum's YouTube page. And we invite those who are here in the audience today to also join us on the web for our *First Person* program streams throughout the month of April. Please visit the *First Person* website listed on the back of your program for more details.

What you are about to hear from Fred is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

Fred Flatow was born Siegfried Friedel Ernst Flatow on May 16, 1928, to Jewish parents in Königsberg, East Prussia. East Prussia was a part of Germany. Today it is Kaliningrad, Russia. This photo is from Fred's Nazi-issued identity card.

The arrow on this map of Europe points to East Prussia.

The arrow on this map of Germany in 1933 shows the location of Königsberg in East Prussia.

Here we see Fred's parents, Erich and Malwine. They opened a rainwear factory in 1924 and also operated a small fur coat business started by Fred's grandparents.

Fred had one older brother, Manfred, born in 1925. Here we see a photograph of Fred on the left and Manfred on the right taken in 1932.

Fred began first grade at an all-boys German public school in 1934, one year after Adolf Hitler came to power. Here we see Fred on his first day of school holding a cone filled with sweets, a German tradition for the first day of school. He was the only Jewish boy in his class and his classmates bullied him. His parents withdrew him the next year and enrolled him in an all-Jewish school in Königsberg.

On November 9, 1938, during Kristallnacht or "Night of Broken Glass," the Gestapo arrested and jailed 450 Jewish men in Königsberg, including Fred's father, Erich. Erich was released from jail a few days later. This photo shows the family's synagogue in Königsberg destroyed by fire on Kristallnacht. Fred's parents decided it was unsafe for their children to remain in school in Königsberg and sent them to stay with family friends in Hamburg, Germany, where Fred enrolled in a Jewish school.

On this map of Germany, the arrow on the left points to Hamburg and the arrow on the right points to Königsberg. In 1939, the chief factory clerk betrayed Fred's parents to German authorities and they were forced to surrender their factory. Erich was told to report to the Gestapo headquarters in two days for a hearing. At the hearing, he was given two months to organize his emigration from Germany or be sent to a concentration camp. With help from the Königsberg's Jewish community, Erich arranged for the family's immigration to Chile.

On this world map, Chile is highlighted in red on the left side of South America and East Prussia is circled in red on Europe.

After the Flatow's move to Chile in 1939, Fred spent the next 10 years living in Santiago, Chile, where he met his future wife Sue, who is a Holocaust survivor from Berlin, Germany. They married in October 1948. Fred and Sue came to the U.S. in 1949 with plans to move to Israel but ended up making their home here. Although they had stopped going to school in Chile at a young age in order to work, they resumed their educations in the United

States both earning graduate degrees, with Fred's in engineering and Sue's in microbiology. They have lived in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area since 1959. Sue is here today with Fred.

After working for the U.S. Navy as a civilian including a three-year stint in Malta, Fred went to work for NASA, from which he retired in 1988. When he retired, he headed up a project using satellite technology to locate crashed planes and sunken ships, which is now credited with having saved 40,000 lives. After retiring from NASA, Fred worked in private industry including as an independent consultant. Sue retired from the National Cancer Institute in 2000, where she was a research scientist.

Fred and Sue have three children: Ruth, Steven, and Daniel. Ruth works with her husband who is an engineer, Steven earned a MBA and works in marketing, and Daniel is a mathematician at the National Institutes of Health. Fred and Sue have five grandchildren. I'm pleased to say their daughter, Ruth is here in the front row and son, Steven is listening to the livestream at this moment from elsewhere.

They love to travel and are opera buffs. Fred reads a lot in English, Spanish and German, especially history. Fred wrote a memoir, *Loss & Restoration: Stories from Three Continents*, which was published in 1998, available on Amazon.

Fred volunteers with this museum's research section, translating articles and letters written in German and Spanish.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Fred Flatow. Fred, please join us.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Fred, thank you so much for joining us today and being willing to be our First Person. As your book implies, three continents and many years. You have a great deal to tell us, so we're going to start right away if that's ok.

You were born five years before Hitler came to power and a little over 11 years before World War II began. Before we turn to life under the Nazis and your family leaving Germany, tell us about your family and you in the years before 1933, before Hitler came to power.

>> Fred Flatow: Well, I was too young to know much. But my parents had a business and a factory. Like many, they considered themselves Germans just like all of you here, Americans, you may be Christian, Jewish, Muslim. My parents at that time were German. They were Jewish. Again there were Christians. Probably no Muslims, or not many. Germany didn't have many Muslims. But they were just ordinary citizens until Hitler came to power and we were no longer ordinary citizens or citizens at all.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to that time, Fred, a couple of questions. Your family lived in the Konigsberg area for many years.

>> Fred Flatow: Oh, yeah. You know, I've always tried to find out in what generation how many decades or even centuries ago my family came to Konigsberg. I have not been able to find out. But it was several generations.

>> Bill Benson: At least 100 years.

>> Fred Flatow: I'm pretty sure, yes.

>> Bill Benson: And in your town of Konigsberg, how large was the Jewish population there?

>> Fred Flatow: It was probably never more than 5,000 Jews. We had a large synagogue.

>> Bill Benson: We saw a picture of it earlier.

>> Fred Flatow: You saw a picture. That was one of several synagogues. There were religious

ones, not so religious ones. The Jewish community in Konigsberg was quite active. It participated in the lives long before Nazis came to power.

>> Bill Benson: Your father was a veteran of the First World War. What do you know about his service?

>> Fred Flatow: Very little. He was probably a health officer or something like that. But I know very little. He never talked about it.

>> Bill Benson: If I remember right, Sue's father was also a veteran in the First World War as a medic.

>> Fred Flatow: A doctor, yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell me a little bit about your father's business. I mentioned earlier that they had a fur business and made raincoats. Tell us about their clients.

>> Fred Flatow: I'm afraid I don't know much about their clients. There were other companies, businesses, but I was a child at that time. When I left Germany in 1938 or 1939, I was 10 or 11 years old. So during the time that they had their factory -- I was often in the factory but who their clients were and what the operation was I really don't --

>> Bill Benson: If I remember right, though, one of the clients was the German Army.

>> Fred Flatow: Oh, yes. That's an interesting thing. The German government started boycotting Jewish businesses around 1936 to 1937. But the factory my parents had in East Prussia was so important that the Army kept buying from them until 1938 or possibly even the early 1939.

>> Bill Benson: Despite the boycotting.

>> Fred Flatow: Despite. They couldn't do without them.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind, tell us why your parents named you Siegfried.

>> Fred Flatow: The interesting thing is that the German Jews, many of them, felt themselves so German that their children were named after German heroes. Siegfried is a quintessential hero of Germany, and so I was called Siegfried. My older brother was called Manfred, another hero in Germany. But they wanted to make sure their children were identified as real, quote/unquote, real Germans.

>> Bill Benson: Fully enculturated.

>> Fred Flatow: Absolutely. Again, I can only compare this to American Jews who are Americans.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Fred Flatow: Before my parents were made aware -- now, I have to say that there was always a fair amount of anti-Semitism in Germany, in East Prussia possibly even more so, but it wasn't active. It was there but it didn't impinge on their lives in any way. We knew it was there but it didn't impinge on their lives.

>> Bill Benson: And, of course, all of that would change. In 1934, the year after Hitler came to power, you started school just before your 6th birthday. You wrote in your book, quote, that after a few weeks it was clear to me that I was different; I was an outsider, end quote. Tell us about that.

>> Fred Flatow: Almost the first day I came to school -- I was the only Jewish child in my class. And I was if not attacked, I was -- yeah, in some ways verbally attacked right from the very beginning. One particular child, I was sitting next to him and he was the ring leader, if you will. But I felt my difference in the class all that year.

>> Bill Benson: This you remember even though you were very young.

>> Fred Flatow: Very much so. In fact, my mother was called to school twice or three times

because of my reactions towards the class based on that. Yeah, I remember that very well.
>> Bill Benson: I was struck when you shared with me that as early as 6 years old, classmates were already members of Nazi youth organizations.

>> Fred Flatow: I don't know if they were members or not. Probably they were but certainly indoctrinated by their parents that we were inferior that we were no good. Not all of them, obviously. In fact, I have to say there was one child in my first class that was about 6 years old with whom I was -- he was nice to me. We were nice to each other. But for a Jewish child to have a non-Jewish friend in school was absolutely impossible. So I knew he was there and that was about it. He couldn't be my real friend.

>> Bill Benson: You wrote also in your book that each day classes started with a Hitler salute and the whole class shouted "Heil Hitler" but that you didn't participate which seems very courageous. What were the consequences?

>> Fred Flatow: Well, the consequences were no different in that I was Jewish and I was different, all year. And the fact that I didn't say "Heil Hitler" was one more thing. But the whole class said "Heil Hitler" every morning.

>> Bill Benson: You said earlier that anti-Semitism may have been worse in East Prussia than even elsewhere in Germany. Besides what you experienced in that first year of school, during that time right after Hitler came to power, what was life like for adult Jews in Konigsberg like your parents? What began to change for them?

>> Fred Flatow: Well, for one thing, we happened to live on the main street in Konigsberg. And practically every day there were marches, sometimes children, sometimes youngsters, sometimes adults and their songs were always of two kinds, one is "Today Germany is ours, very soon the whole world," and the other was "When we can eliminate the Jews, life will be so much better." And I heard that. I heard it from the very beginning. I stood on the balcony with our maid. I have to say something else about that in a moment. But our maid, I don't know if she was in agreement with that or not in agreement with that. She held my hand.

Now, when I said I have to say something about it, after maybe 1936 or 1938, I forget, Jews were no longer allowed to have maids. Why? Because I suppose they felt a maid in the house would impregnate them and there would be half-Jews born or whatever. But this maid that we had, she left in, I would say, 1936, '37, and after that we still had an employee but he was male.

>> Bill Benson: So that was permitted?

>> Fred Flatow: The male was permitted, obviously. But the woman was not permitted to work in a Jewish household.

>> Bill Benson: You were on the main street and you were sharing one of your earliest memories was watching the May Day Parade in 1934. What do you remember about that?

>> Fred Flatow: I just remember the masses of people marching along and singing these anti-Jewish songs and the pronationalist German songs. Again, the main song was "Today Germany belongs to us but tomorrow the whole world." How much they meant, well, I guess they meant it. It never came to pass, fortunately, but that was the aim.

>> Bill Benson: Your parents took you out of public school, as we noted earlier, and put you into a newly founded Jewish school. What was that like for you?

>> Fred Flatow: It was wonderful. The teachers were understanding. They tried to make us feel secure. They were obviously Jewish teachers. And the school was launched in a big synagogue. You either have seen a picture or you may have seen a picture of the main synagogue. That's where the school was newly founded Jewish school. We felt perfectly,

perfectly secure, which I had never done in the one year I spent in public school.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind, tell us about the school -- I'm sorry, the organist at your synagogue, I think Jacobus. Tell us about him.

>> Fred Flatow: I don't know much about him. He was the organist in our synagogue as far as I remember, when I was about 5, 6 years old. Sometimes he would invite us children to come up and watch him when he was playing the organ. It was always very nice. What his personal situation was I really don't know.

>> Bill Benson: I remember you sharing with me that I think at one time -- he was a Christian, if I remember right, and Nazi Storm Troopers came in, in front of the kids, and began terrorizing. I guess --

>> Fred Flatow: Yes. The organ was up above the altar in the synagogue. They went up there and harassed him. You know, this non-Jew working in a Jewish organization at the time was not acceptable.

You know, thinking back and looking how children, Jewish children, grow up in America as ordinary children, ordinary citizens, not having to contend with all of these problems, harassment that I had -- but I was not the only one, mind you. I'm talking of my own experience but all of my friends and so on had the same experience.

And I have to say again -- I said this earlier. I lived in East Prussia. The German Nazi Party had leaders of the Nazi Parties, Gauleiters, in each part of the country. And the party in Konigsberg was one of the most rowdy anti-Semites in Germany. And the city reflected that. The party was extremely influential. The Gauleiters at one time began to run the city. There was a lot of anti-Semitism in my city.

I have to say also later at one point my parents felt it was too dangerous in some ways for me and my older brother to live in Konigsberg and they sent us to Hamburg where they had acquaintances, friends. And then all of my time in Hamburg, which was close to a year, I never, never, ever, ever had an anti-Semitic incident. The difference was the Gauleiter in each particular city. And Hamburg was quiet, peaceful. Again, I never had any incident in Hamburg.

>> Bill Benson: So dramatically different than Konigsberg.

>> Fred Flatow: Absolutely like day and night.

>> Bill Benson: You wrote in your book that in the early years of Nazi power, during those years in Konigsberg, there were always people leaving. The circle of family and friends grew ever smaller. Will you tell us more about that?

>> Fred Flatow: Well, children, school, disappeared, they were gone. For my parents, the same way. They had friends, adult friends and suddenly they were no longer there. They became, I guess -- how shall I say it? You start losing your friends. Luckily, luckily, luckily, we were able to leave, too.

>> Bill Benson: Before they left you said the key issue for all Jews, in Germany generally but certainly in Konigsberg, was should we stay or should we leave. How did your parents weigh that question?

>> Fred Flatow: My parents really didn't want to leave. I forget which one of them wanted to leave the other one said no. But imagine this now. My parents, they were not wealthy but they had a factory in Konigsberg which gave them a good living, upper middle class, maybe, if I can characterize it that way. When they had to leave, in our case, they went to a country where the language was not German but was Spanish. They didn't know how to earn a living. They had two children, me and my brother who was a little older. And we came to this new country, didn't

know the language, didn't know the culture. They had no way to earn a living. It must have been frightening for them.

So I guess they had an idea what would happen if they left Germany. They were extremely reluctant to leave Germany and in some ways we were forced to leave. And luckily for us they had an employee in their business who tried to -- literally kill my father because he had embezzled a lot of money. In some ways the Jewish community helped my parents to leave and us, the family to leave. Had it not been for that, we would have stayed in Konigsberg and would have been killed in the Holocaust. So the intent to get rid of us saved our lives.

>> Bill Benson: I want to come back to that in a minute. As awful as things were and got worse and worse with each passing year, as it was for your family after Hitler came to power, 1933, things became even far worse with and after Kristallnacht or Night of Broken Glass which took place in November 1938. On that night, Jewish businesses and homes were ransacked, vandalized, synagogues were burned all over Germany. What happened to your family as a result of Kristallnacht?

>> Fred Flatow: My father was imprisoned. He was imprisoned for I don't know how long a time, probably several weeks. And we were lucky because all other Germany Jewish men were sent to concentration camps. And concentration camps, many of them lost their health, sometimes their lives. When they came out, oftentimes physically severely damaged.

Konigsberg was too far from the closest concentration camp and the cities themselves apparently had to pay for the transportation of Jews to the closest concentration camp. Konigsberg didn't have the money for that.

So what they is they jailed the men. There were, I don't know, I understand up to six in one cell but they were undercover. They were not out in the open. And none of the Jews were incarcerated were physically damaged in jail. They came out -- those who had ways to leave came out sooner than those who didn't have any means to leave yet or leave at all and they stayed for many weeks, maybe a couple of months. But my father, again, was lucky that he wasn't sent to a concentration camp.

>> Bill Benson: If I understood correctly, along with your father a young cousin of yours was jailed, a 14-year-old cousin.

>> Fred Flatow: Yeah, that was also -- I had a cousin who lived in a small village near Konigsberg, where I was born. And on Kristallnacht, the boy was jailed, 14 years old. The Germans tried to jail all the men on Kristallnacht. In this case they jailed a 14-year-old boy. He was sent to us in Konigsberg from the village where he was living to keep him safe.

What happened is my parents had tried to send me to what's called a Kindertransport, a children's transport. The British, the English, accepted children on these transports to get them out of Germany and keep them safe. And I was slated to go on one of those. But my cousin was so much in danger that my parents yielded my place to him on this particular transport. So he went to England; I stayed in Germany until my family luckily was able to leave.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us, Fred, about your own memories of the morning of November 10, after that night of terror of Kristallnacht.

>> Fred Flatow: Well, first of all, the first thing I noticed was that somebody -- first of all, let me say what happened. Many of the apartments, buildings, businesses, and synagogues were ransacked, oftentimes completely destroyed. In my case, my family was lucky. The Nazis came into our apartment and did no damage. Why? I don't know. But they arrested my father like they arrested all males that they could get hold of.

The first thing I remember is that I was woken up by two strange men who came into my room, looked at me and I guess my brother, too, was still there, and closed the door and left. But when I woke up and I looked out the window, the street was full of broken glass, hence this is called crystal night. The street was full of broken glass as they had invaded other buildings, apartments, broken the windows, and destroyed many things.

We escaped it. We were lucky. Nothing happened in our apartment. Our windows were still there. But that was the first thing I remember. I went out and walked to our synagogue, I don't know, maybe half an hour walk or so. The Jewish school had been destroyed, set afire. And this is how I experienced the Kristallnacht.

>> Bill Benson: What did your mother do after your father was jailed?

>> Fred Flatow: She worried. But the main thing was -- again, the men in Konigsberg were just in jail not in concentration camps; so the women were able to collect blankets for them and took them to jail and made their stay in jail easier that way. That was, I guess, the only thing they could do. There was nothing else they could do.

>> Bill Benson: After that night your synagogue was burned, you shared with me and I think you wrote about this in your book, too, that you, you're a 10-year-old boy, would make trips to the ruins of the synagogue.

>> Fred Flatow: Yeah. I have to tell you that the synagogue was essentially destroyed and the school that functioned in the synagogue no longer was able to function there. Next to the synagogue, almost across -- no, next building was a Jewish orphan orphanage. And the school was located from that day on in the Jewish orphanage. But the orphanage that was -- there was a patio in front of it and there was a fence and the fence led into the synagogue. But the fence had a hole. So for some reason that I really today don't understand why, I oftentimes went from the orphanage, climbed through that hole, and went into the synagogue.

>> Bill Benson: By yourself?

>> Fred Flatow: By myself. I never found anybody else there. But the synagogue, the roof was totally destroyed. There was a lot of water all over because when the synagogue had been set afire, the people who tried to fight the fire, put out the fire, the firemen came and there was a lot of water. But for some reason I do not know. I was 11 years old, 10 years, 10 years old. I don't know what attracted me to go there.

Now, something very important happened to me there. I don't know if you know what the Torah is. The Torah is the five books of Moses written on a scroll. The scroll is handwritten, must be handwritten. It's about three, four feet high. I have a children's Torah. I found this Torah in the rubble of the synagogue. I picked it up, took it away. I mean, nobody else was in the synagogue. Nobody else was looking for anything. I took it and I kept it to this day. It's a very important memory of my life in Konigsberg and what happened after and after Kristallnacht.

So this Torah -- I'll try to see if I can open it for you to see if you have never seen a Torah. The real Yptsjd, again, are handwritten, three feet or so high. And every synagogue has to have one. Without a Torah in the synagogue, there is no synagogue. I don't know if you can see. It's written in Hebrew. The real ones are handwritten in Hebrew. And, again, this is a very important memory for me of that time. And I guard it very safely. I bring it out to locations like this.

>> Bill Benson: It's traveled a long way with you.

>> Fred Flatow: It has traveled a long way with me.

>> Bill Benson: After that night, after Kristallnacht, you had said that there was no question

then for your family you had to get out of Germany. So your parents started making serious plans to emigrate to Chile after that. But those plans that they had made to leave did not work out and those plans seemed to come to an end when Germany invaded Poland September 1, 1939, and World War II began. Tell us about the family's efforts to try to go to Chile and then it didn't happen and you felt, as you put it, felt trapped.

>> Fred Flatow: At the time, at the time when the need was greatest, most of the countries in the world closed their doors to Jewish refugees and when you say that my parents made efforts to go to Chile, it's not quite true. They made efforts to go anywhere, wherever they could go. As it turned out, the Jewish -- my parents had been great philanthropists in the Jewish community. In any case, there was this man who tried to put my father in jail. That's another interesting thing.

On Kristallnacht, the Jews were forbidden to own firearms. And one day after Kristallnacht, the men who wanted to get rid of my father and the business opened his safe in the presence of witnesses and lo and behold there was a gun in the safe. Now, that would have been an immediate cause for the Gestapo, the secret police, to send my father to a concentration camp. My father was cited to the Gestapo for a hearing two days after this event. And strangely enough, in a rare case, the Gestapo officer says I don't believe -- the man who tried to accuse my father was called Myer, I don't believe Myer. He's framed you for some reason. Why was he framing my father? Because he had embezzled a whole lot of money from the factory and, of course, he didn't want to be found out.

>> Bill Benson: So he sticks a gun in the safe.

>> Fred Flatow: Sticks a gun in the safe, trying to get rid of my father because my father would be sent to a concentration camp. The Gestapo officer interviewed my father two days later says I don't believe Mr. Myer, I don't think the gun was yours. But he had no choice. He had to give my father a time to leave Germany. He could no longer just sweep it under the carpet. So he gave my father a number of months to leave Germany.

My father appealed to the Jewish community. This was mid-1939. The Jewish community agreed to help my family to leave Germany. Again, most of the countries in the world had closed their doors to Jewish refugees. Some countries in this case Chile, South America, their doors weren't wide open but they accepted some refugees and the Jewish community -- actually it wasn't really my parents but the Jewish community arranged for our leaving Germany. They got the visas, tickets for the ship. And this attempt to get rid of my father saved our lives. Without that, we would have stayed in Germany and would have been caught up in the Holocaust and killed as so many other Jews were in the Holocaust.

>> Bill Benson: So with those plans made, unfortunately on September 1, when Germany invaded Poland, the war began and you weren't able to go to Chile at that time. Did you believe -- when that happened, did you believe that your hopes to go to Chile were anywhere --

>> Fred Flatow: Absolutely. Absolutely. My parents had hired a teacher to teach me and, again my older brother, Spanish. Chile was not necessarily on the horizon but South America was. When that happened, the lessons stopped and we were sure we would no longer be able to leave Germany. Even I as a child -- how old was I? 1938, I was 10 years old. I knew we were trapped in Germany and we would never be able to leave.

>> Bill Benson: So you, yourself, felt that sense of loss of hope?

>> Fred Flatow: Absolutely. Absolutely. The anti-Semitism, the attacks and so on, were so pervasive, so every day, that even we as children participated in the fear of what would

happen to us in Germany.

Of course, the Holocaust itself was in the future. Nobody knew what really would happen. Now there's a place Auschwitz but many camps like Auschwitz, Treblinka and others, that was all in the future. Nobody, nobody, nobody could have imagined that a civilized country like Germany would implement and establish these extermination camps. It was simply unheard of. It never happened in history. It never happened in the world that a country like Germany, cultural country like Germany, would establish these camps in one way or another and kill five million to six million Jews. It was unimaginable. And while there was a lot of anti-Semitism and what not, nobody could imagine this.

So then we left when we were able to leave in 1939, we didn't really know what we were escaping.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to your actual leaving, I was really struck when you said to me that once the war began and you thought that was it -- you wouldn't get out and you had lost hope, you then turned your attention to preparing for war. Here you are an 11-year-old boy. What do you remember what that meant for you?

>> Fred Flatow: Well, for me it meant mostly to buy food. I didn't know the larger implications of this but the thought was if war came, there would be a scarcity of everything. So I tried to, with my child's money, whatever I had, buy as much food as I could and bring it home.

>> Bill Benson: You also shared with me that you, with your little bit of money as a child, you bought a flashlight.

>> Fred Flatow: Yes. That was also important to me. If we lost electricity. I would need a flashlight. Anything that a 10-year-old child can think about that might happen, something like this was occurring.

>> Bill Benson: And as it turned out, of course, as you said, you were able to get out. You were able to go to Chile. And as you said to me, it was nothing less than miraculous that you were able to get out. Tell us about leaving Germany, how you were able to do that.

>> Fred Flatow: Again, I think I mentioned this before, this employee of my parents tried to frame them, tried to frame my father, he had embezzled money and what not, hoping that he would be sent to a concentration camp and he, himself had stolen a lot of money from the factory. Because my parents had been philanthropists in the Jewish community for a long time and my father was jailed on Kristallnacht, November, 1938, when he came out of jail the Jewish community -- remember, this was long before the Holocaust. People couldn't imagine the Holocaust. Yes, people wanted to get out of Germany but it wasn't like we knew we would be murdered as it was a few years later. The Jewish community agreed to help us to get visas to most countries that were closed was impossible. How the Jewish community got these visas for my family to go to Chile I shall never know. But it was a Jewish community that was able to get these visas and how we got to Chile.

>> Bill Benson: There's so much you could tell us about the details of that. You left about six weeks after the war began. You were able to get out. One of the things you shared with me is that the Nazis allowed you to take only a little bit of money but your father got around that somehow. Share that with us.

>> Fred Flatow: We were allowed, I believe, something like 10 marks, 10 marks a person. 10 marks at the time was like \$2.50.

>> Bill Benson: Per person.

>> Fred Flatow: Per person. So the four of us were allowed to take out 10 marks. But my father had some cash at home, a fair amount of money. Now, you couldn't cross the border

with a fair amount of money. Would have been caught and jailed. When we got on the train -- oh, the ship that we were going to take to South America left from Genoa, Italy. When we got on the train to go to Genoa, my father went to one of the bathrooms and hid the money, whatever money he had, in the bathroom. So when we crossed the border, when the train crossed the border, he went back into the bathroom, retrieved his money so that we weren't wealthy but we had at least a little more than \$2.50 a person.

>> Bill Benson: And he did that at great risk.

>> Fred Flatow: At great risk. And also, the fact that we had a little money -- I don't know -- that money was mostly spent -- we were on the ship for six weeks. Remember, at that time people didn't travel by airplanes. They traveled by ship. So we took a ship in Italy and it took us to Chile. And whatever little money my parents had now because of the strategy of my father was mostly spent during those six weeks as we entered ports and went off the ship, maybe bought some food, whatever. By the time we came to Chile, there was very little, if any, of that money left.

Now, what happens now? The community in Konigsberg must have notified the Jewish community in Santiago, in Chile, that we were coming. Just not us but other people, too. When we came by ship, to Valparaiso, there was a woman waiting for us. She took us by train to Santiago, about a four-hour train ride or something like that. And then we got to Santiago. She took us to a place where you live, where you have a room but where you also get your meals. Again, arranged by the Jewish community. So she took us there and left us. So at least we had a place to stay at night. And we were safe. We got the food. The Jewish community must have paid for this.

Let me tell you a little bit what happened next. How were my parents going to make a living? In Germany they had a rainwear factory. So they had some understanding of things to wear, clothing and so on. My father decided that the best thing to make a living in Chile was to open a factory, if you will, and make women's wear. How do you open a factory? Well, the Jewish community there gave my parents two sewing machines. And that one room where my brother, myself, my parents lived, there was a big table to cut clothes and two sewing machines. And the room where we lived so-called, became a factory. I was sick and my brother was sick at one time. The seamstresses came and went and came back with clothing that they had sewn in their own homes overnight, came back, picked up more material and so on. This was what -- the Jewish community arranged that for us. And we were lucky. We were really, really lucky.

Now imagine -- I mean, we were children. We accepted it. I was 10 years old. My brother three years older.

One more thing. My brother started working at age 14, the day we came to Santiago. He never had any formal education after that. I was more lucky. I was able to be in school for another three years. I started working at age 16. So at least I had a little time. I was 11 when I started working I was 15 or something like that. So I had at least a little time to get to know the country and learn the language and so on.

>> Bill Benson: We're getting close to the end and I want to leave a little time, if we can, for the audience to ask questions. But I want to ask you a couple more.

When you left Germany six weeks after the war began, you were close to the last of any Jews that were able to leave, weren't you?

>> Fred Flatow: Yes. In the city where I lived, Konigsberg, whatever was left of the Jewish community, some of these people still were able to escape but the great majority of them were

caught up in the Holocaust, deported to somewhere east of Germany and murdered. Amongst were many of my friends, many of the friends of my parents.

Now, it's fortunate my immediate family survived. But I think of myself as a child, I lost friends but my parents lost relatives and really close friends. These people not being able to leave Konigsberg and being deported and murdered in the German camps. If I think back today how the Germans could have done that, established these camps exclusively, the exclusive purpose of these camps was to murder people -- of course as you all know now they were successful of five or six million people. Even today at my age, I can't understand. I can't understand how a country like Germany, one of the most, quote, cultured countries in Europe, came to do that and came to be successful in murdering so many people.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, if you don't mind, let's turn to our audience and see if they have some questions for you.

>> Fred Flatow: Absolutely.

>> Bill Benson: I'll ask if you can, stay with us for the few minutes of questions because Fred will close our program out in a few minutes.

So we invite you ask a question. We have microphones in the two aisles. If you have a question, try to make it as brief as you can. I'll repeat it just to make sure everybody hears it. Then Fred will respond to it.

We have a brave soul already.

>> Thanks so much for being here and for sharing your story. Really appreciate it. It was very emotional and moving. I just wonder, How do you reflect, based on your history and wisdom, on current situations with other religions, other cultures, and the hatred culture that is currently going?

>> Bill Benson: I think --

>> Fred Flatow: That is a very difficult question because I know of no country at this point that was so violently intent on murdering people like Jews as Germany was at that time. I can't answer that question because I see no real identity between what happened then and what happens now. I really can't answer that properly for you.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to also mention that when Fred finishes, he will stay up here on the stage and we invite anybody who wants to, to come up on stage and meet Fred, ask him another question, get a picture taken with him, whatever you want to do. So please do that.

Do we have any other questions? Anybody want to ask a question? If you don't mind coming to the mic, we'd appreciate it. I know that's a little scary. [Laughter]

Go ahead. You just ask the question and we'll try to hear it.

>> [Question Inaudible]

>> Bill Benson: That's a great question. The question is, What do you think causes that kind of hate?

>> Fred Flatow: I don't know. There was always, always, a certain amount of anti-Semitism in Germany. How it came to escalate, how the Germans came to establish these camps, multi-murderous camps, I don't know. I really don't have an answer. Because today after all these decades of years I ask myself the same question that you ask. It is an extremely important question but I have not found an answer to that.

Maybe if you ask a real psychologist. You know, people have analyzed that. You can read books and they say, you know, for this reason. Nothing has convinced me to understand how this could have happened. I can't understand it.

>> Bill Benson: I believe it was [Indiscernible] who said about this museum, this is not an

answer; it's a question. Which is a very profound statement.

Again, if you have a question, please come up on the stage afterwards and feel free to ask Fred that.

Thank you all for being with us. We'll have a *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So we hope you can come back. We have two more programs in April that will be livestreamed.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person gets the last word. So with that, I'd like to turn to Fred to close our program.

>> Fred Flatow: It's very difficult to finish a program this way. The question I ask myself, why me? Why was I saved? Why was I able to survive and so many of my friends -- so many other people who don't know but also so many of my friends, my family's friends, weren't able to survive. I think it was simply a matter of luck. It was luck to be in the right place at the right time to get the right resources and what not. I'm grateful, really grateful, to I don't know to whom that I was able to survive that way. That's an important question.

The other questions, of course, that was asked a moment ago, why, how did all of this happen. How did all of this happen in a country like Germany, mind you, again, one of the most cultured, if that's a proper word, countries in Europe, maybe in the whole world? I don't have an answer.

You know, I wrote a book about my experiences and so on. At one point I wrote a chapter about Germany and then how we emigrated to Chile, how eventually I met my wife in Chile and we came to America. I asked myself in that book how could this have happened in Germany. And I asked it in the book. I ask it today. I ask it every day. I don't know. I don't know. That's about the only answer I have. I'm not a psychological professional. I can only reflect on my life and on the luck that I had that I was able to survive, come first to Chile where I met my wife and then to America where we established a family, children and had had a wonderful life.

My expectations as a child in 1938, 1939, in Germany, were zero. What in fact we had, my life since has been expected. It was fantastic. In this Chile life was very, very difficult for my parents to make a living, to start making a living in this country without language, without anything, was very difficult. For us children, you know, we went to school. Eventually we got jobs.

And our lives -- I met my wife and we had a wonderful time together. Again we came to America more out of a sense of adventure than anything else. We were going to go to Israel -- I think it was Israel already, not Palestine. We -- all our friends had emigrated to Palestine, Israel, whichever. My wife and I decided, well, we want to live an adventure. And we will come -- well, the excuse for us was we will learn something in America that we can use in Israel to earn our living.

I think thinking back it was simply a sense of adventure. We came to America maybe to stay six weeks, six months. This is now 60, 70 years and we are still here. We really, really love it here. It was a country like no other we had ever been.

Let me tell you one experience.

>> Bill Benson: Go ahead.

>> Fred Flatow: One quick experience. We had been in America, I don't know, a few months or something like that. I was walking on Broadway, no New York, and there were two people who were accused to be spies at the time. I forget their names. And they had set up a table of supporters. Here I was, not a citizen, I had recently come to this country, and they had a big

piece of paper for people to sign a petition to let these people go. I forget their names. And here I was, maybe six months in the country, and I signed that paper.

How could I have ever thought in Germany, certainly not. And Chile was semi-democratic. I would never have signed anything like it. I felt free to sign that here. It was an experience I had never, never, ever had before that I could do something like that and not be punished, not have police after me and jail me because I signed a piece of paper. It was, to me, today, memory, a tremendous, tremendous experience of what this country was like. And here we are.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you. That's a great story.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: If anybody wants to come up, absolutely feel free to do that. Come right up on the stage.