REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON GIDEON FRIEDER
APRIL 25, 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. Gideon Frieder, 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.

Gideon 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 Gideon 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 the hashtag #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. Tomorrow's program will also be livestreamed. Please visit the First Person website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

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

We begin with this childhood photograph of Gideon Frieder, who was born September 30, 1937.

Gideon was born in Zvolen, Slovakia. On this map of Europe the arrow points to Slovakia.

Here we see Gideon's father, Abraham Frieder. Gideon's father, a rabbi, was part of the underground "Working Group" of the Slovak Jewry
and was responsible for communications with the Slovak authorities.

The photo on the left is of Gideon and his sister Gita. The photo on the right is of Gideon's parents, Ruzena and Abraham before the war.

In 1944, during the Slovak uprising against the Nazis, Gideon, his mother and his sister fled from Nove Mesto, where they had been living since the beginning of the war. In October they made their way northeast to Banska Bystrica, which served as the center of the uprising. Because of his connection to the working group, Gideon's father fled separately. On this map of Slovakia, the arrow points to the location of Banska Bystrica.

As the Nazis were nearing Banska Bystrica, the family fled to the mountains where they were caught in a massacre at Stare Hory. Gideon's mother and sister were killed and Gideon was wounded. Gideon was taken from the massacre site by Henry Herzog who eventually took him to the village of Bully where he was placed in the home of Paulina and Jozef Strycharszyk. This is a contemporary photograph of the home where Gideon was hidden until 1945. He was later found by his father who survived the war.

Gideon lives in the Washington, D.C. area with his wife Dalia, having emigrated from Israel to Buffalo, New York, in 1975 and then moving here in the Washington, D.C. area in 1992. They have three children, a son Ophir, and two daughters, Tally and Gony, and four grandchildren, including twins who are 9 years old. Their granddaughter, Gita, is named for Gideon's sister, whom we shall hear about in a short while.

Gideon is a physicist and computer scientist. He earned his Doctorate in quantum physics in Israel. Upon his retirement in 2010 as the A. James Clark Professor at the School of Engineering and Applied Science at George Washington University, he was named the A. James Clark Professor Emeritus of Engineering and Applied Science, the first time in the history of the George Washington University that the Board of Trustees kept an endowed chair title for an Emeritus Professor. He also previously served as the school's dean.

Gideon has also taught and held dean and chairman positions at Syracuse University, the University of Michigan, and the State University of New York at Buffalo. He served in the Israeli Ministry of Defense in Research and Development and also served in the Israeli Air Force. In addition to teaching, he has been a consultant with government agencies

and private companies, served as an expert witness in patent and copyright litigation and he holds several patents.

Gideon's son Ophir holds the title of Inaugural Robert L. McDewitt and Catherine H. McDewitt Professorship, which is the highest endowed chair position in Georgetown University. Ophir formerly served as the Chair of the Computer Sciences Department at Georgetown University. He is also a professor in the School of Medicine at Georgetown.

Gideon and his son, who also volunteers his time and expertise to this museum, are collaborating on several computer projects concerning degraded images. One of these projects is a computer-based initiative to aid in the recognition of faded documents that was started eight years ago in cooperation with a German team from the University of Bremen. Their recent work in the German laboratory had led to a breakthrough in the processing of faded documents which is now the subject of four U.S. patents and one international patent. They hope to use this technology to improve the usability of faded documents in the museum.

With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Gideon Frieder.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, thank you so much for joining us today and being willing to be our First Person. I know that we have just a short time and you have so much to share with us. So we'll go ahead and get started, if you don't mind, right away.

Gideon, although Germany overran Poland in September 1939 and soon dominated Europe, your home country of Slovakia was allied with the Germans and therefore not occupied by the Nazis until much later. Before we talk about the start of the war and eventually leading up to and following the German occupation, let's start first with you telling us what you can about your family and community life before war was underway in Europe.

>> Gideon Frieder: Well, I was a child so everything I will tell you is from a child's perspective. I didn't know about the war. I knew about hatred because there were certain streets I couldn't go through in the city I lived because the children were throwing stones at me. The anti-Semitism was in the air even for a child.

My family was more or less protected because my father was very well-known in the community. He created relationship with the government. I'll give you one example that was very well-known. One of the ministers in the fascist government considered himself a scholar and was really unhappy that he didn't have a doctoral degree. So my father wrote him a doctoral degree. He got a doctoral degree which created a good relationship between him and my father.

>> Bill Benson: And that became important later on.

>> Gideon Frieder: It became very important.

>> Bill Benson: Your father, Gideon, he was a highly educated man. Was that unusual for the time and place?

>> Gideon Frieder: It was very unusual in the following sense. He was a rabbi.

A second degree, German philosophy, gaining a doctorate. It was very unusual for a rabbi to be involved in the everyday life of [Inaudible: low mic volume]. Particularly [Inaudible] it was very unusual for the rabbi at this time. Rabbis are rabbis and people are people. [Inaudible]

He used his ties to the government to save Jews. Because although the Nazis did not invade Slovakia until 1944, the persecution of Jews started very early. In 1942 there was a census of the Jews. Every Jew was written down. And the Slovaks, they paid the Germans for every Jew the Germans would take away to resettle, they called it. The resettlement was

taking them from Slovakia and putting them in Auschwitz. Most of them were killed.
>> Bill Benson: If I remember, you shared with me that not only did the Slovaks pay the Nazis to take Jews from Slovakia, the money they used to pay the Nazis they had taken from Jews.
>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. After the Census of the Jews in 1942, they knew about every Jew. They used it to confiscate Jewish property. And by confiscating the property, they created the funds necessary to pay the Germans and kill the Jews. So the Jews paid for their own extermination. It is a unique case in the history of the Holocaust. Not something the Slovaks should be proud of. But just to show you [Inaudible] they had very many cooperators and collaborators. The Slovaks weren't the only ones.
>> Bill Benson: Before we continue about the Holocaust, a little bit more about your early life. I believe that you told me that much of what your father was doing during that time was trying to build a Zionist community in Slovakia that was agricultural related. Can you say a little bit about that?
>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. Again, they were not very good friends in the beginning of the previous century. My father was distinguished as well. He was a Zionist. [Inaudible] as I said, because he is a rabbi. He was an extraordinary man. I could never fill his shoes.
>> Bill Benson: If he saw all that you had accomplished, I think he would be saying some remarkable things about today.
>> Gideon Frieder: I did the best I can.
>> Bill Benson: [Inaudible]
>> Gideon Frieder: I don't know. My mother, she was a mother, she had two little children in a time where food was difficult to get by. She had to keep the family, support her duties as the wife of a rabbi. She was extraordinary. But everybody says that about their own mother, right? So that's nothing new to you. She was trying to keep a sense of normalcy, the child to have a regular life. I played. It was a regular life.
>> Bill Benson: Just talk a little bit about that. You were not yet 7 when the German Army occupied Slovakia in August of 1944. So tell us what your life was like for you and your family in those war years from 1939 but before the full force hit Slovakia in 1944, almost a five-year period. What was that like?
>> Gideon Frieder: A child playing, going to preschool and then to school. As you had seen from the picture, my father had the flowing long beard. So one of the days in 1944, a clean-shaven man comes to my house and starts to hug and kiss my mother, which was a very unusual thing for a wife of the rabbi to do with somebody else. Right? [Laughter] And not until he opened his mouth I realized it was my father. What he did, he shaved his beard so he would not be recognized. It took me, my sister, my mother, put in an ambulance and sent us toward the German lines.
>> Bill Benson: Before we come to that, can I ask you a few more questions before you tell us about that?

I want to ask you -- your father, because he was so well respected and educated and valued in the community, he was involved in something I think called the Working Group.
>> Gideon Frieder: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about what his work was.
>> Gideon Frieder: The Working Group was an unusual phenomenon in the Jewish life in Europe. It consisted of representatives from all Jewish life, Orthodox, Zionists, Leftists and it was headed by a woman which is, again, unusual. Having two rabbis in the group, the group still headed by a woman. Gizi Fleischmann, may she rest in peace. She was killed by the

Germans in Auschwitz.

So that group took upon itself to negotiate with the Slovak government to try to slow down and for a while even stop the deportations to Auschwitz. They also created homes for the elderly. My father also did mass weddings because young men -- unwed men and women were first ones to be deported. So there was a lot of activity that this working group did which is known more in history by German name [speaking German] which translates to working group. So they were representative and then negotiated with Germans, Eichmann included, and the Slovaks and did bribery and other good things that do to save lives.

>> Bill Benson: One of the points you made already, and I think bears repeating, is that because Slovakia was an ally of the Germans the Germans weren't there and yet there was such a willing -- they were such a willing accomplice of the Germans that before deportations were beginning elsewhere, the Slovaks --

>> Gideon Frieder: The Slovaks supported the deportation. The Slovaks supported something they called Aryanization, the process of transferring valuables, real estate, businesses from Jews to Aryans, to Christians.

Volunteering in the museum, I had an opportunity to read some letters that were written to the president of the country who was a Catholic priest, by the way. And one of the letters in handwriting, wonderful Slovak, written by a woman to the president saying, "I am a God-fearing Christian and my neighbor, the Jew, has a business. Why should he keep the business and why shouldn't it be giving to me as a God-fearing Christian?"

So you discover things like that when you're going through the archives. And you see there were many people who were considering themselves good people who were part of the hatred.

So although the Germans were not there, they were there because the fascists, the Slovak fascists, did a very, very good job in persecuting their own.

>> Bill Benson: During that time, Gideon, were any members of your extended family deported?

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. My grandfather on my father's side and my grandmother from my father's side were deported to Auschwitz where they perished.

>> Bill Benson: So you live under the war era with the Slovak government essentially doing the work that the Nazis were doing elsewhere but that changed in 1944. In August 1944, the Slovak national uprising -- and it had an immediate effect on you and your family. Tell us about the uprising and then what that led to for you.

>> Gideon Frieder: Let me start with a caveat. I am not a historian. I am not an expert in this area. I just tell you what I know. So check everything I say. Because my memory may be faulty. But in 1944, many Slovaks decided that the war is really over and Germany is going to lose and so was Slovakia. It's always better to be on the side of the victors than the side of the losers. So in an unusual alliance between western leading partisans and Communist leading partisans, got together and created an uprising. Today it's called the Slovak National Uprising.

There's a beautiful museum in Banska Bystrica, by the way, among other documents that he wrote, my father in that museum.

So there was an uprising against the Germans. So everybody who looks at the map of Europe would understand that the Germans could not have fought a non-German allied Slovakia because it's rich in the mid -- middle of Europe. And if the Germans don't control it, incapable to move armies from the north to the South and from the South to the north. So they had to crush it. They invaded. The invasion was led by a brigade of the Waffen SS, which was

the military party of the Nazi SS.

And by the way, a large number of these soldiers were not Germans. A large contingent of the Waffen SS which invaded Slovakia was Ukrainian. So they also participated. They had no choice but to crush the uprising as they were moving from the south to the north and we had to flee.

>> Bill Benson: Is that when your father came home?

>> Gideon Frieder: That is when my father came home and put us in an ambulance and sent us toward the German lines because nobody would suspect anybody going toward the German lines. The minute we left town the ambulance stopped going in the direction and went to the mountain. My mother, my sister and I started to walk through the mountains.

>> Bill Benson: I think the ambulance broke down on you if I remember right. The ambulance broke down?

>> Gideon Frieder: The ambulance broke down.

>> Bill Benson: I think you tried to pull it or something?

>> Gideon Frieder: Tried to pull it with a horse. Eventually we unbundled the horse and the ambulance. For me as a child, it was an exciting time, going through the mountains, eating blueberries and raspberries.

>> Bill Benson: Riding in an ambulance. So from a kid's perspective --

>> Gideon Frieder: It was a great thing in an ambulance. I was recently in an ambulance because I had a stroke. It was not as exciting as then. But somehow I survived. I am proof that I survived.

>> Bill Benson: Yes, you do.

So you made your way to the city of --

>> Gideon Frieder: We started to walk through the mountains. We were given milk and cheese by the shepherds it was very exciting. We came to Banska Bystrica.

>> Bill Benson: And why Banska Bystrica?

>> Gideon Frieder: Banska Bystrica was the center of the uprising. It was under total control of the partisans. So we came there and the community knew about my father. So they embraced us and gave us a place to live. Eventually the Germans started to move towards Banska Bystrica.

While we were in Banska Bystrica, my mother met this Jewish partisan by the name of Henry Herzog. And when the Germans came close, she implored him to take us with the partisan group out of the city. He was a bit reluctant to do it, to take two little children, one 7-year-old, one 4-year-old, but eventually he did.

>> Bill Benson: And before you tell us about that, just another question about the partisans. You said the center of the uprising. They're held up in Banska Bystrica. The Germans are going to attack. Did the partisans think that they could hold out?

>> Gideon Frieder: No. They didn't have any heavy armor or any armor at all. And the Germans were armored, Waffen SS supported by the Ukrainians there was no way the partisans, with their rifles, could stop the German onslaught. So they knew they had to leave.

>> Bill Benson: So then as you were telling us, your mother convinces Mr. Henry Herzog to take him -- and he was a partisan.

>> Gideon Frieder: He was a Jewish partisan from Poland. He fled Poland and joined the partisan groups in the mountain, in Banska Bystrica. He finally agreed to take us. So we started to walk through mountain passages to the north because the Germans, being a motorized unit, couldn't go through the mountains really. The tanks are very good on the plain

but not very good in mountains. So this was the way the partisans would hold territory in the mountains.

So eventually we went to this mountain passage and we were attacked. There was a big massacre. Luckily Henry was not hit. He found me standing next to my mother and my sister. I couldn't understand why my mother was not getting up. So he took me away from there.

My recollection is, always was, he took me away from there and brought me to this village. Many, many years later we were reunited and I found he had written a memoir. And in the memoir I read that he took me to the mountains and I was seven days with the partisans. Finally the partisans decided they cannot keep a wounded little child and they brought me to the village. Those seven days are not in my memory. I never knew about them until I read the book. They just disappeared.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, before you turn to telling us about ending up where the Strycharszyk family, when you were attacked by the Germans, they attacked from the air. These were stuka dive bombers that came in. And as you told us, your mother was killed, your sister was killed. Something as traumatic as that, it seems to me, is either going to be seared forever in your memory --

>> Gideon Frieder: It is.

>> Bill Benson: And it is in yours?

>> Gideon Frieder: It is. I don't remember whom I met yesterday and what I had for breakfast two days ago but I remember every little item to the point that many, many, many, many years later I went back to Slovakia. I couldn't go back to Slovakia before because Slovakia was Communist and I was part of the Israeli Ministry of Defense and the Communists were supporting the Arabs against the Israelis I couldn't commute with anybody in a Communist country. When Communism failed, I decided to go back. And essentially I found exactly the place of the attack. It's a long story, so we don't have the time.

>> Bill Benson: If we end up with time we might return to it.

But you were also shot, hit. Tell us about that.

>> Gideon Frieder: So in Europe, at the time, boys, wore shorts. Long pants were a sign of maturity. So I had short pants on. But it was very cold. And boys and girls, doesn't matter, always had very thick woolen stockings. And what happened when I was shot, I was lucky. It's interesting to say you're lucky when your mother and sister are killed but I was lucky. No major nerve was severed, no major artery was severed and no bone was shattered. It was a flesh wound of two bullets typical of machine-gun fire. But what happened is the blood gushed and saturated the wool stocking. It was very cold outside, so the blood immediately coagulated and created the pressure bandage in the stocking and this is how I survived. Otherwise I would bleed to death.

A friend of mine who is very religious, when I told this story in a setting, he said, "Luck has nothing to do with it." He's very religious. He said it was preordained. I have asked why was it preordained. And he said, "Because in the future, 10 years later, you awoke, the minister of defense, a very important project." More than 10 years. "And God saved you so that you could work on this project to preserve the people of Israel." He believes. Good for him. We all believe in something. But I survived.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn on -- just to move on, your sister Gita was just 3 years old.

>> Gideon Frieder: She was 3 years old when she was killed.

>> Bill Benson: So Henry rescues you. You're wounded. He takes you up, and as you said

there was a seven-day period --
>> Gideon Frieder: That I don't remember.
>> Bill Benson: But eventually they find a place for you. Tell us what you know about getting you to this village.
>> Gideon Frieder: They went to the village and took -- it was a hamlet a small set of houses.
>> Bill Benson: High in the mountains. Right?
>> Gideon Frieder: High in the mountains. They came to the first house and knocked on the door. Somebody opened. They say, "Take this child. He's wounded. He's a very important child. Keep him until the end of the war."

Now here the story differs. I remember because I was immediately embraced by care and love. They fed me. They took care of my wounds. They gave me a new name and new identity. I just remember that they loved me. When I read the memoirs of Henry, which I was instrumental in publishing -- that's another story. It was published. When I read the memoirs, he wrote that he and two of his friends, quite fiercely looking, machine guns and grenades, not shaven, obviously, knocked on the door and said "You either take this child or we kill you". Given the alternative, they took me. But that's history. I never felt anything but willingness, love, and support from this family.

There are proofs that I have to show that it was really genuine, actual proof. I'm a scientist. I don't believe in anything but honest proven. And it's proven. I doubt the proof until I understand it but that's another story. But there is a proof that they really cared for me.
So it doesn't matter. They kept me. They took care of me. They saved my life. They taught me things which helped to save my life.
>> Bill Benson: And you were with them for -- until April 1945. So you were with them for how long?
>> Gideon Frieder: About half a year.
>> Bill Benson: And in this little, as you said, hamlet in the mountains.
>> Gideon Frieder: Hamlet in the middle of nowhere. In this little hut, only two rooms. One room in which I stayed with the brother of the woman and the other room I never entered, which was their bedroom. So this was all they had. And the hut was built around a big stove which was intrusion in every place so it kept both rooms warm in which the place in which they cooked.
>> Bill Benson: Very, very simple.
>> Gideon Frieder: Very simple life. He was a cobbler. I remember helping him creating to sew the shoes that he did. I have in my house a couple of things I took from the village in the 1990s when I visited the family. They gave me two artifacts which I still have in the house. I should have brought them but I didn't. One is a mold for a shoe and one is the tool to take out old yarns out of the shoes. They were extraordinary people.
>> Bill Benson: A religious family. Right?
>> Gideon Frieder: They were very religious. On every wall in the hut there was a picture of Jesus. And every evening they would play before the picture. It was very typical to all the people in the village. They were very, very religious. And they lived their religion. As opposed to the president of the country who was a priest and who killed his own citizens and paid to kill his own citizens. So here you have what faith is, true faith.
>> Bill Benson: And I believe you told me that the priest who ran the country was actually executed.
>> Gideon Frieder: The priest who ran the count country was executed as a war criminal, one

of the few priests extinguished.
>> Bill Benson: So here you are, this Jewish boy, son of a renowned rabbi and leader, in this little village but you weren't secure and safe there. What was going on? There's still war fighting.
>> Gideon Frieder: There was still war fighting. Not for me but the children knew about the dangers. There was a hierarchy of fear.
>> Bill Benson: A hierarchy of fear.
>> Gideon Frieder: Hierarchy of fear. You see, this is 1944. The regular Army was more or less old people. The young people were either at the front or killed. So when they came to the village to patrol, these older men were very kind to the children. So I didn't have any fear of the German Army.

The second hierarchy was the Slovak fascists who were very dangerous. The third level was the SS. Those were feared. But the most feared by the children were the Ukrainians. These were murderers. And when the children would see the Ukrainians coming, distinguished by the uniforms, we fled into the house and closed the window. Didn't even look through the window. So we were very much aware of the danger.

There's a story how I was saved by them. Do we have time?
>> Bill Benson: We do. We do. Please.
>> Gideon Frieder: I came to the hut. And Paulina and Jozef told me, we will teach you something. When somebody tells you to say this, you say that. And taught me a slur of words I didn't understand a single word. But I memorized it. And if Slovak fascist or Ukrainian tap me on the shoulder and say, boy, say this. And I recited it. They would test me again. Say very nice, boy.

And for years, many, many years, I didn't know what it was that they taught me. It was so important to keeping me alive. Many, many years later, now we are talking about the mid-90s of the previous century. Slovakia became independent. They opened the embassy in Washington. And the Slovak Ambassador, a very well-known scientist, a doctor, tried to create a community of Slovaks around him. So he went to the Department of State and got a list of, quote, prominent Slovaks living in the DC area so he could invite them. And the most amazing metamorphose happened. The little dirty Jew, who should be shunned, stinking Jew, suddenly was not Gideon anymore but was Professor, doctor, dean, a respectable Slovak. Amazing.

Eventually the Slovaks opened an embassy and they invited me to the opening. Now, I was very reluctant to go because the flag of the Slovakia is almost identical to the flag of the fascist Slovakia. The only difference is they moved the emblem from the middle of the flag to the left. So I was hesitant to go but I was a dean and one of the duties of the dean is to keep community relationship with anybody who can sent a student. My university was a private university. We needed students to pay my salary. So I went.

Now, Slovakia is a Catholic country, even today. 85% Catholic, 15% protestant, and 0% everything else. So it was not surprising that the person who was invited to the opening was a Catholic priest from Slovakia. So he started the opening by benediction and he said in English that he's happy to be here and so on. But the benediction will be in Slovak. When he opened his mouth and started to speak Slovak, I felt like I was hit by lightning. Because what he said were exactly the words I remembered but this time he said it in perfect diction, every word separate and I understood what it means.

So I went to him afterwards and asked him what did you say. And he said, I said [Speaking Non-English Language]. I said, oh, I remember but I remember differently. I told

him, no, no, no. This is the way it's pronounced. It was The Lord's Prayer.

And those people, superbly intelligent, totally uneducated people -- I hope you know the difference between education and intelligence. Education is a privilege. Intelligence is a gift. And they were gifted. They understood what is necessary to be able to do in those times. They understood that every little boy will know The Lord's Prayer by heart in Slovak. So they taught me The Lord's Prayer and in that way they saved my life. They cared for me.

I think the beautiful story of faith and understanding, especially in today's troubled world, religion is misunderstood and misused. It's a heartwarming story.

>> Bill Benson: I'm glad you told that.

>> Gideon Frieder: By the way, I have it on good authority that Jesus, when he taught The Lord's Prayer, didn't speak English.

>> [Laughter]

>> Gideon Frieder: He possibly spoke Galilean, the language of the people. So to look up The Lord's Prayer in Aramaic. And in my mind, it's most Jewish prayer in the Christian liturgy. The first words in Aramaic are [Speaking Non-English Language], the first four words of the Lord's Prayer translates to English, "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." But in the -- the language is far more concentrated. The structure of the language is different.

I say it because the most recited prayer in Judaism is called the Kadesh, starts with words [Speaking Non-English Language] exactly what The Lord's Prayer, in the beginning. So it resonates with me always. And I had the unusual honor two, three years ago to be able to recite it in the Senate of the United States. And I mentioned the parallel between that and The Lord's Prayer. And I still cherish it today.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Gideon. I'm so glad you did.

In the time we have left, when the war ended for you in April 1945, you were able to reunite with your father. Tell us what happened.

>> Gideon Frieder: The partisan, the Jewish partisan who saved me, who brought me to the village, each time he met other Jews told them let it be known what happened to the Frieder family and that the boy survived and is in this place in this village. And my father heard about the death of his wife and his daughter and my saving even before the end of the war. My father was hidden by Franciscan monks because he was very well-known in the Christian hierarchy. So he knew about it and he came and picked me up.

And I have to tell you a story but it takes time. He picked me up in April 1945. At the end of 1945 on a piece of paper thrown out of a pen, I wrote a message to the family in Slovak. And sent it to them thanking them for saving me.

In 1990-something I went to Slovakia. I found that these people are dead. I found the daughter. She had this piece of paper. They kept it. And she said: My parents told me they want to keep you and we would be siblings. It is their most cherished possession to give to their daughter before they died. So this for me is the proof of their genuine love. Nobody would keep a scrap of paper. And the daughter wanted to give to me and I said no. This is a sacred object. You should keep it. I did take a picture of it, I have a copy of it.

So at the end of the story, my father picked me up. One year avenue picked me up, he died.

>> Bill Benson: He was just 36 years of age. Right?

>> Gideon Frieder: He was 36 years old. He left a diary which today is in the museum in Israel, considered one of the most important documents of the Holocaust.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about those diaries. That's remarkable. If I remember right, he wrote in

different languages.
>> Gideon Frieder: Written in five different languages. I know maybe six. He was a master of all of those languages. And it was used in the Eichmann trials, used today by researchers of history. I have copies, scanned copies of them. They were written originally in German. They were written in German because he was educated in the Hungarian empire. In a German high school. He eventually went to university. So written in German, Slovak, Hungarian, Hebrew and Yiddish. N and some parts in Latin, small parts.
>> Bill Benson: He carried them with him, hidden.
>> Gideon Frieder: They were hidden partially by the monks and partially, again, and resurrected, dictated after the war.
>> Bill Benson: After your father, who died a year after the war ended, you were just 9, that had to be just a crushing loss for you at that time.
>> Gideon Frieder: It was difficult. He taught me the Kaddish, this prayer that people say every day for a year after their father or somebody dies in the family. So I said it for a whole year for my mother and sister. And then he died. I said it for another year for him. It was very difficult. Before he died, he married almost immediately. There was an epidemic of marriages in Europe. Everybody wanted to resurrect regular life. He was stuck with a little child who was very active. Jewish community, Slovakia, did fundraising and things like that. He needed somebody to take care of me. He married a woman who was also a local survivor and lost her husband in the Holocaust.

And before he died, on his dying bed, he told her, "Take my child away from this bloody continent." And because of his ties to the Zionist movement and to the underground in then Palestine, pre-Israel, the Haganah, the underground in Israel, arranged for us to come in what people call it in Israel the second immigration. And what people call for what is unknown to me illegal immigration. There's nothing illegal in coming home. There is no illegal immigration when you go home.

So I was brought to Israel in 1947, just before -- coming from one war just before the independence war. Quite traumatic. Not knowing the language, being looked down by the kids who were healthy and strong. I was undernourished and traumatized. It was difficult but I survived.
>> Bill Benson: Gideon, by that time, 1947, was Slovakia completely under Communist rule at that time?
>> Gideon Frieder: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: So getting out of there was probably not an easy matter.
>> Gideon Frieder: No. What happened was not Slovakia, it was Czechoslovakia at that point. And what happened was there was a Czechoslovakian brigade fighting as part of the British Army. And the British wanted to honor the soldiers and gave them visas to the holy land. And the Jewish underground bought all the visas and created families around it. Kind of ridiculous because on the visa that my stepmother had, she had a husband who was 17 years old.
>> Bill Benson: With this 9-year-old son.
>> Gideon Frieder: They wanted to bring as many young people to Israel.
>> Bill Benson: But it worked. [Laughter]
>> Gideon Frieder: It worked. There's proof that it worked. I'm sitting here.
>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind --
>> Gideon Frieder: Again --
>> Bill Benson: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

>> Gideon Frieder: Some people like my friend says it's not a miracle. It was all pre-ordained.
>> Bill Benson: Obvious obviously there's so much more you could tell us both about the events you weren't able to share with us but also what happened once you went to Israel and beyond. But I think we have a few minutes to turn to the audience for questions. Is that ok if we do that?
>> Gideon Frieder: Yes, please.
>> Bill Benson: We have two mics. Go ahead.
>> Gideon Frieder: I have a commitment tomorrow evening. Till then I'm ready to answer questions.
>> [Laughter]
>> Bill Benson: So you're with us for the rest of the day. We have two mics. If you wouldn't mind going to the mic, that way we can all hear it. If you make your question brief, I'll repeat it so that we make sure we all hear it before Gideon responds.
>> Gideon Frieder: Two strong lights shining in my face and I don't see anything.
>> Bill Benson: Yeah. It's hard to see. If you don't mind going to the mic that would be great. And if somebody does need the mic brought to them, we will do that as well.
>> Did the people in Slovakia know what was going on in Auschwitz? Had anybody brought any news back that said about the extermination camp?
>> Bill Benson: Did you know or your parents or the adults did they know what was going on at Auschwitz?
>> Gideon Frieder: Yes, as a matter of fact, in the diaries of my father there are documents. People escaped Auschwitz, two people escaped Auschwitz, talked to my father. And he documented what was happening there. So the myth that people didn't know is a myth. As a matter of fact, there was a Polish noble man by the name of Jon Suche, part of the Polish underground, visited the extermination camps in Poland. He met with Roosevelt and briefed him. So people knew what was happening. In Slovakia and in other places.
>> Bill Benson: We have a brand new exhibit in the museum that opened -- Monday. I believe there's a little segment on Jan in that exhibit.
>> Gideon Frieder: I had the privilege of hosting him in my house. He has now passed away. By the way, he was a professor -- after the war he was a professor in Georgetown University. The only non-priest accepted in the university in Georgetown. He was a very distinguished man. I had the privilege of hosting him.
>> Bill Benson: Anybody else, a brave soul who has a question?
Yes, sir? Thank you.
>> You've explained the role of Slovakia in the Holocaust. What were the Ukraines doing?
>> Bill Benson: You explained the role of Slovakia during the war. Why were the Ukrainians there? What was their role?
>> Gideon Frieder: The Ukrainians were part of the brigade. There were divisions of Ukrainians fighting on the side of the Germans, especially as part of the Waffen SS which was an elite fighting group. So they came as part of the German Army. When the Germans invaded. But they were known for the cruelty. All the kids were scared to death of them. I was part of the kids.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you. It gets to your point you made earlier that, you know, Nazi Germany had other allies in Europe who provided not only troops but also did their dirty work for them in many cases as you described.
Any other questions? One more? Yes, sir. Then we'll begin to close our program.

>> We are contemporaries and I don't have a story to tell like you do. But I'm impressed. I wonder if you can tell us about feelings in terms of what you felt at the time when you were a child in that village and you realized you were in danger and then you met your father and so on. To reach a point now, I figure -- what changes there being on you in terms of accepting, understanding, and being able to sit here in front of us and tell us of painful memories so calmly as you have?
>> Bill Benson: Thank you very much. Let me see if I can paraphrase that.
In light of all that you shared, all the trauma you went through, what is it that enables you today to be able to talk about it and to do so in the way that you do? How have you got to this place?
>> Gideon Frieder: When I worked in the Israeli minister of defense, we were given certain tasks and being a head of a project, of many projects, people who I assembled to do the task, there was always some newcomer and he or she would ask, "Who is the idiot who told you to do this project?" I told them always, "General No Choice." We have to talk about the Holocaust. Because my generation is dying. And if I will not talk, who will? Because it's always important to remember -- I don't like to quote myself because who am I but I like to stand on the shoulders of Giants. President Kennedy was, in my mind, one of our most beloved Kennedy, was quoted to say: "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those which in time of need kept neutrality and didn't speak up." I don't want to reserve the hottest place in hell for myself. Neither should you.
>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Gideon in just a moment to close out our program. But I think you were starting to do that. But before I do, I want to thank all of you for being with us. I remind you that we will have programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. We hope that you can come back.

When Gideon is finished in a moment, he's going to remain on the stage up here and we invite you come up here if you want. Ask him another question. Shake his hand. Get a picture taken with him. Please, absolutely feel free to do that.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person get the last word. So with that, I'm going to turn back to Gideon to close today's program.
>> Gideon Frieder: There is no better last word I think than what President Kennedy said. In my office, both in my home and in the university, I have the saying about the reverend: In the beginning the Nazis came after the trade unionists. It is displayed. The end of the saying is "When they came for me there was nobody to talk." So if you will not talk, who will? If you will not act, who will? Evil can be present only when the good people are silent.

I am fond of saying the silent majority is not the majority because it's silent. So when you see injustice, when you see hatred, do something. Say something.
Thank you.
>> [Applause]