

REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON ALBERT GARIH
MAY 10, 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. Albert Garih, 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.

Albert 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 Albert 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. Please visit the *First Person* website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

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

We begin with this school portrait of Albert Garih, taken in 1945.

Albert's parents, Benjamin and Claire Garih, were born in Constantinople, Turkey, but moved to Paris in the 1920s. Albert and his twin brother, who died in infancy, were born June 24, 1938, in Paris, joining older siblings Jacqueline and Gilberte. We see all three siblings-- including Albert with long hair--in this 1941 photograph. Albert's father worked in a garment factory, and the family lived in the janitor's apartment there.

In May 1940, Germany invaded France and occupied Paris. The arrow on this map of France points to Paris. The Garih family fled south, but they soon returned to Paris, where they were subjected to France's new anti-Jewish legislation. In 1943, Albert's father was deported to a forced labor camp, and Albert's mother and the children went into hiding with Madame Galop and her husband for the next six months. When they returned home in 1944, police were sent to arrest the Garihs, but agreed to say instead that the family was not home if the family would leave immediately.

Albert was placed in a Catholic boarding school for boys, and his sisters in one for girls, in a northeastern suburb of Paris. When Paris was liberated in August 1944, Albert's mother was able to bring her children back to the city. Claire and her children are shown together in this photograph. Albert's father, released from the labor camp, walked from Belgium to Paris, returning to his family in September 1944, on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

The Garih family remained in France after the war. Albert received his Baccalaureate degree in 1957, then earned a degree in English and Spanish to French translation from the School of Advanced Translation and Interpretation studies at the Sorbonne in 1962 and immediately began his career in translation, which he continues to this day, 56 years later. His early work was translation of scientific and technical documents and publications and later translation of political and economic documents.

Albert's work took him from France to Cameroon in Africa, to Montreal and then eventually to the United States. The organizations for which he worked included, among others, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and the United Nations. His work with the World Bank brought him to Washington, D.C. in 1976. His current consulting work is for the United Nations.

In 1967, Albert married Marcelle Ohayon who had moved to France from Morocco in 1960. Albert and Marcelle have three daughters, Judith, Dalia and Noémi, who have given them eleven grandchildren, ages 23 years to 3 years.

Albert describes himself as a real movie buff, enjoys photography and loves to read, and he loves to travel. Albert and Marcelle have been to China and South Africa. In 2015,

Albert traveled to France, a very significant trip for him that we will likely hear more about today. In 2016, he traveled to India where he spent almost three weeks touring the country, and earlier this year Albert and Marcelle went to Australia and New Zealand. Albert speaks French, English, Spanish and Judeo-Spanish. Albert volunteers here at the museum, speaking very often to classes of students from all over the country, sometimes by teleconference, in which he tells his story. And he sits at the Donors Desk where visitors can talk to him.

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

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Albert, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our First Person today. I know you have so much to share with us so we'll just jump in and start right away if you don't mind.

World War II, of course, began September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. The following May, 1940, Germany attacked France. You were nearly 2 years old at that time. But before we turn to the war years and what it meant to your family and you, let's start first with you telling us a little bit about your family and their life in the years before Germany invaded France.

>> Albert Garih: Well, my parents, as you mentioned, were born in Istanbul, Constantinople in those days in Turkey. Turkey was part of the Ottoman Empire. They had the idea to side with Germany. And when Germany was defeated in the First World War, the empire was dismantled. It was already falling apart anyway. So at that point came a strong man called Mustafa Kemal, also known as Ataturk, which means the father of modern Turkey. He tried to salvage whatever could be salvaged from the Ottoman Empire which was Turkey itself. And at that point the Jews in Turkey started to be a bit concerned because they had witnessed the genocide of the Armenians in the beginning of the century. And then when Ataturk came to power, there was a very strong Greek community living on the Adriatic sea. They were pushed out, encouraged to leave, and go back to Greece.

So the Jews thought maybe they were next. So that's when my parents decided to emigrate to -- you know, when they were in Turkey, they were educated in the School of International Association called [Speaking Non-English Language] where education was given in French. So they were perfectly fluent in French. So when they decided to move, it was a natural destination to them to go to France.

>> Bill Benson: I'll interrupt for a second. When they moved to France, they didn't move together, though, right?

>> Albert Garih: No, no, no. They met in Paris. I guess in those days it must have been an arranged marriage. I don't know the details. I was not there. But, yes, they met in 1927 and married in 1928. And from that marriage they had four children. You saw the pictures. One of them my twin brother died at the age of 6 months. Then we were three children.

>> Bill Benson: You described your father as a very smart but self-educated man. Tell us a little bit about him.

>> Albert Garih: Yeah, my father at a very young age had to quit school and start working to help his parents. So, yeah. He was self-educated actually. But he spoke French, perfectly fluent in French. I think he went to school until the age of 10 or 11 and that's it.

>> Bill Benson: And your mother, on the other hand, was very well he's indicated.

>> Albert Garih: My mother went to what they called the boarding superior, which is more equivalent of today's Baccalaureate. She was very good at French and spelling and everything. When she came to France, she worked in a company -- she was the secretary to

the boss. And one day she had to write a letter and the address was a baron who lived in Paris, but my mother, all she had heard of Osman was of a server -- former servant o-s-m-a-n. So she wrote that. So her friends, co-workers started to make fun of her and she was defended by her boss who said when you speak a lot of languages the way she can speak French, you can make fun of her.

>> Bill Benson: When your parents got married in Paris, how would you describe their economic circumstances?

>> Albert Garih: It was not -- my father had to struggle had to work two jobs at the same time because my mother had to take care of the children. You know, three young children. I was the youngest. My sisters were not much older at that time. So she stayed home. And my father had to struggle with two jobs. He was working in the garment factory as the accountant. He was doing the payroll of all the employees. And at night he would go to a movie theater in Paris and tear off the tickets, like they have today in the movie theaters. So he was juggling with two jobs. His boss was Jewish also in this garment factory. He allowed us to live in the janitor's apartment of the factory so that, I guess, he could save a little on the rent. So the economic situation was not brilliant.

>> Bill Benson: Your parents, of course, born in Turkey. What was their citizenship status in France?

>> Albert Garih: As soon as they moved to France, they lost their Turkish citizenship and they were stateless. They didn't get the French citizenship until much later. My father had applied for naturalization in the '30s but at one point for whatever reason all the applications were frozen. So they didn't get their French citizenship until after the war. And my father got his first French passport in 1948, 25 years after emigrating to France.

>> Bill Benson: So for that entire time he had no citizenship, he was stateless.

>> Albert Garih: Exactly. And that was very bad because when France was invaded and the statute of the Jews, the Nuremberg Laws, depriving the Jews in Germany from most of their basic rights, the same rules applied to the French Jews. And when they started deporting the Jews, they started with the stateless. So the people who had French citizenship were spared at least for a while. But the stateless were the first to be targeted.

>> Bill Benson: So they were very vulnerable from the very beginning.

>> Albert Garih: Absolutely.

>> Bill Benson: So you were born in June 1938. In fact, you have a pretty big birthday coming up very shortly.

>> Albert Garih: [Inaudible]

>> Bill Benson: Ok. Enough said.

In your very early years, war began in Europe and September 1939. But in May 1940, Germany attacks France. And as they advanced on Paris, there was a mass exodus of people leaving Paris. I think estimates as much as 80% of the population potentially.

>> Albert Garih: I don't know what the proportion was but, yeah. It was beautifully described in some books, actually. So, yes. The population of Paris fled and not only from Paris but from northern France, actually. When France was invaded, it was invaded through Belgium. So as soon as they entered into France, the people of France fled south. So that's how we ended up.

My mother, my sisters and I -- my father stayed behind. He wanted to keep on working, to keep on making a living. But my mother and my sisters and I, we fled south. And the rest of the family also. My grandmother, an uncle and an aunt, and two cousins. My grandmother was killed during that exodus by strafing. When we were fleeing, we were under

the fire of the German Air Force and the Italian Air Force also. It was called a stab in the back, actually. And my grandmother was killed by strafing. She was doing some errands, trying to get some food, I guess. She was killed. And my uncle, aunt, and cousins were killed when a bomb fell on their car on a bridge, which was about 70 miles south of Paris. That's where they were killed.

>> Bill Benson: So now it's pretty much you, your sisters and your mother. Where did you go from there?

>> Albert Garih: Well, first of all, we tried to stay there for a while. My mother told me all I'm telling you now about this exodus. It's what I got from my mother. I was 2 years old. So there's no way I can remember that.

But apparently, according to my mother, we even slept in one of the -- you know, famous for their beautiful chateaus all along. Magnificent, really. So we stayed in one of the chateaus. Of course we were sleeping on the floor. And my mother didn't have anything to feed me. I was 2 years old, so I was crying. And still, according to my mother, she fed us -- said at one point I was disturbing everybody. Everybody was trying to sleep in that chateau and I was disturbing the peace there. So a soldier, one of the soldiers who had managed to escape -- because most of the French soldiers had been taken prisoner. This one had managed to escape. Had a small flask of Schnapps. He gave my mother and said give him that, that will calm him down. Apparently it worked.

>> [Laughter]

>> Albert Garih: So I had my first experience with Schnapps at the age of 2.

>> Bill Benson: And after calming down from there, your family would return to Paris. So you went back to Paris and you remained in your own apartment in Paris until, I think, June of 1942. What do you know about those two years after you went back, under the Nazi occupation, and then the events that did lead to force you to leave your apartment in 1942?

>> Albert Garih: Yeah, my family, after a few weeks -- I couldn't say whether it was a few weeks, a few days. I don't think it was more than a month, anyway. We went back home. We had no money. And we had nowhere else to go. We had nobody to sponsor us to invite us to go to join them overseas. So we had to go home. And that's what we did.

At that point, you know -- France was invaded, to give you some historical background, the French Army was defeated. There was the Battle of France. The French Army was defeated. The government capitulated, France capitulated, the government resigned, and a new government was formed under a hero of the First World War. He was a hero of a big battle in the First World War. But 20 years later, 20 years older, of course. He belonged to the old -- a stiff neck, anti-Semitic. So he formed a government. He appointed a prime minister, he was a notorious anti-Semite. They started to -- the statute of the Jews that was modeled after the Nuremberg Laws, that I mentioned before, that deprived the Jews from Germany of all their basic rights. Lawyers were debarred. Doctors were not allowed to practice medicine. Teachers were kicked out of public schools. And all sorts of things like that. Some very basic rights. So the same rules applied to the French Jews in France, by the French government, the collaborationist government.

>> Bill Benson: During that time, was your father able to manage to continue working during that time?

>> Albert Garih: Yeah. He worked. Yeah. He kept on working. Because as I said, the owner of the factory was a Jew. So until 1942, there was no -- he kept on working. Of course they had to register as Jews. So they had to go to the authorities. And my father was eager to abide by

the laws because he didn't want to have any trouble. He knew he was already in a very precarious situation. So he had registered to the French authorities.

And when you registered, they would put a stamp on your identity card "Jew". It was a red stamp. That meant that if you were arrested in the street and people ask you to show your papers, you had to show that. When they saw "Jew" like that, they would put you aside and send you to a transit camp north of Paris. And from there that was the chamber to Auschwitz. So it was very dangerous. And my parents were very concerned about that.

>> Bill Benson: The way you put it to me, you said, quote, the Nazis really turned the skies in June 1942. That's when things got even more dangerous in a dramatic way. Tell us about that.

>> Albert Garih: Actually, they started rounding up people in 1941. The first roundups started in 1941. But June 16 and 17 was the biggest roundup of all. The Germans asked for 20,000 men to go to war to Germany as slave labor. The French government obliged but instead sent 13,000 of men, women, children, elderly people, sick people. Everybody was sent.

They were parked in a big stadium, a bicycle stadium. There was a track where there were races. There was a race for six days, for six days around the track. They were parked, about 13,000 people in that stadium. Of course no water. You have to realize it was in July. It was very hot. And the people were sweating. They were thirsty. They didn't have access to water. The toilets were out of service very quickly.

And they stayed there for about a week until eventually they were sent to transit camps south of Paris, two transit camps south of Paris. The mothers and the children were sent to these camps. And eventually the mothers were sent to Auschwitz and the children followed a few days later. They had been separated from their parents already. They were sent and there were 4,000 children among the 13,000 people who were rounded up at that time. And from the 4,000 children who were sent to Auschwitz, none of them came back.

>> Bill Benson: And of course, as you said, that was the most infamous, largest roundup but there were many, many others.

>> Albert Garih: There were constant roundups like that. And that's why my parents were very concerned. They wanted to -- they tried to isolate us by sending us away. And they sent us to a farm outside of Paris in a place which is famous today because it was a famous park. In those days it was just farmland. We were on a farm run by two ladies. I guess the men must have been taken prisoner with the French Army. They said to the ladies -- they didn't say that we were Jewish. They said they had nothing to feed us and we would be better fed on a farm than in Paris. So they sent us that farm.

That was the winter of '42-43. I remember that winter like it was yesterday. There was a lot of snow. It was beautiful, beautiful. My sisters would go to school. At that time they were 9 and 12. So they would go to school and I would stay with the ladies. They were raising pigs. And rabbits. And I remember I would spend hours watching the rabbits. That's all I was doing. Basically I was happy there. I was very social, so I was talking to the ladies. But my parents had not said that we were Jewish but I told them. 4 years old. 4 1/2. So the ladies panicked and sent us right back to our parents.

At that point my father took me aside and said don't ever, ever say that you are Jewish. It was like a stigma, you know, to be Jewish. We were afraid. We were ashamed. We were different from the others. You know, a kid 4, 5 years old, all they want, they want to blend with the rest of the kids. But I felt that I was different. I was frustrated about that. But I had to learn my lesson after having spoken the way did I to these two ladies.

So we went back to our apartment. I will tell you also --

>> Bill Benson: Where you moved to.

>> Albert Garih: Yes. In July 1942, with the new laws by the new government, we had been expelled from our apartment. The owner of the garment factory was a Jew so the factory was confiscated, given to a non-Jewish manager. And the owner had to flee. He went away. He came back actually after the war.

So at that point with a new manager and a new collaborationist authority in France, we were expelled from that apartment and we had to find an apartment in no time. We found an apartment in a big complex, apartment complex, a two-room apartment. Not a two bedroom, two rooms, a tiny kitchen, toilette and that's it. No bathroom, nothing. The only comfort we had was electricity and cold water. That was it. So we moved into that apartment. That was July 1942. Before we went to the farm, actually.

So we went back to that apartment when we came back from the farm. And in September 1943, my father was summoned to go to mandatory Labor Service in a slave labor camp of the Channel Islands. The Channel Islands, three small islands off the coast of Brittany, between France and Great Britain. That was the only British territory under Nazi occupation. And their job was to build fortifications, to stop an invasion from the allies.

>> Bill Benson: So your father's taken away and now it's your mother and you and your two sisters.

>> Albert Garih: Yes. And my mother was terrified because they were rounding up people every day. She was concerned that at one point they could come for us.

>> Bill Benson: So she needed to find a place.

>> Albert Garih: She had to find a place. She had nobody to turn to. And eventually she met this lady at a street market. She didn't even know her but somehow she felt she could open up to her. And she told her that she was terrified that at any moment they could come and take us away.

This lady, Madame Galop, went back home to her husband. She told the story to her husband. And the next day her husband came with a cart and we took whatever we could take with us to go and live with the Galop family. They were a protestant family. They had a very dark history of being persecuted themselves in the religious wars in France in the 17th Century and they were very sympathetic to the fate of the Jews at that time.

For those of you who haven't visited the museum yet, on the second floor, about the rescuers, you have the story of a small village where a protestant pastor managed to save like 5,000 people, mostly Jews but also resistance, in the surrounding villages.

So the Galop family took us with them. It was very dangerous for them. I was 5 years old at that time. And they had two daughters who were 4 and 3. So that meant that they could have been denounced by one of the neighbors, which could have very well happened, actually. Not only would we be taken away and sent to Auschwitz and I wouldn't be here today but also the Galop family, with their daughters, were facing the same fate, actually. Because it was strictly forbidden to hide Jews. And people who were caught hiding Jews were promised the same fate as the Jews themselves.

>> Bill Benson: You had shared with me that when you were at the home of the Galops and Mr. Galop was a sculpture -- sculptor, and what -- tell us what he did.

>> Albert Garih: He was an absolutely charming man. A big heart. Simple people. He was a sculptor. He was making movie sets for the movie studios. And they had a big warehouse behind the house. They were storing all of the sets. With the two daughters, we had great hide and seek games in this warehouse.

>> Bill Benson: And what I was struck by when you told me that because for you as a little boy, that was fun but you said that for your mother and your sisters who were older, they were constantly terrified.

>> Albert Garih: Yes. I was blessed to be that young because I didn't realize the danger. I was never traumatized by the danger or by the fear or anything like that. I suffered mostly from the food, the lack of food and poor quality of food but that was everybody's fate, actually. But I was never terrified about what could happen.

And I remember one night we were with the Galop family and there was an alert and we had to go to the shelters. Mr. Galop had built a small shelter in the yard of his house and we went down in the shelter. And the youngest daughter, 3 years old at that time, said "Tomorrow if I find a bomb in the yard, I'm going to pick it up." That was the kind of statements of a 3-year-old. We had no idea. We didn't know what a bomb meant. We didn't know that it could destroy us. Anything like that. We didn't realize. My sisters, and my mother and the Galop, the parents, the family, they were aware that if a bomb fell on our shelter, that would be the end of us. But to us -- I was never traumatized by that.

>> Bill Benson: And between September -- the fall of 1943, you stayed with the Galops until the spring of 1944 but you had to leave there as well. Tell us why and what happened next.

>> Albert Garih: Well, actually, the Galop family was living in a small street. There were about 10 houses. It was mostly artists, painters, sculptors. And one painter, his wife was pro-Nazi. She was a sympathizer, an anti-Semite. One day she said, "Mr. Galop when are you going to get rid of that scum?" So there was a real danger that she might report us to the police or to the Gestapo, whatever. That would be the end of us and the end of the Galop family. So at that point Madame Galop and my mother decided it may be safer for us to go back home, which we did. But I still have a wonderful memory. What they did was really heroic.

>> Bill Benson: Maybe we'll have time to tell how you honored them later.

So you're back at your apartment but even there you're not safe and it didn't last long.

>> Albert Garih: No. We went back to our apartment. And sure enough a few weeks later -- it must have been more around D-Day. I'm not exactly sure about the date. We didn't have radio. I couldn't read the newspapers. I was not aware of the landing of the allies on Normandy beaches. I was not aware of that. But apparently it must have been around that day. That was June 6, 1944.

One morning two police inspectors came to our house, knocked on the door. "Madame Garih?" "Yes." "We came to take you away." That's what my mother had been dreading all along. She started shaking. They said, "Calm down. We are going to report we didn't find you but you must not sleep in your beds tonight. You have to find another place to hide."

So easier said than done, actually. So it was 8:00 in the morning, I don't know. I was still in bed. My mother woke me up. Actually, I was awakened by the commotion. But she took me out of bed and she dressed me and we went away. We went to see a social worker that she had been referred to. She explained the situation. And the social worker said, look, you have to give me a few days. I cannot find a place like that overnight for you and your family. So in the meantime, try to see if you cannot sleep at your neighbors, not in your apartment. That's what we did.

And I must say we had wonderful neighbors. Our neighbors opened their doors to us. My mother and I slept at the next door neighbors. They were a Communist family. A couple

with a daughter who was about my age, a few months younger than me. And my sisters slept with the lodge keeper downstairs. The lodge keeper was -- I never saw her husband. Probably had been taken prisoner with the French Army. She was raising her children by herself. She had two boys, 13 and 14. And a little girl, 5. And my sisters slept at the lodge keeper's apartment until the social worker came back to my mother and said I found a place for each one of you.

So my mother was placed as a governess with a family of about eight or 10 children, near the Eiffel Tower. And we were placed in Catholic boarding schools outside of Paris in a suburb northeast of Paris. The suburb was famous, for those of you who have read "Les Misérables," it's the place where Jean Valjean met Cosette when she was going to get some water.

So we were there. I was in the Catholic boarding school for boys and my sisters in one for girls and I was completely isolated. The only person who was showing me some affection at that time was the head mistress. I must have been a prodigy. She was always making sure that I was around. She was wonderful with me. But the food was terrible. It was just that there was nothing to eat so we were fed rotten beans. I remember the rotten beans. Because they made me sick. And I lost a lot of weight there.

One day I had a feast. The priest was suffering from some sort of cancer or whatever. They found some potatoes and a small piece of butter and made some mashed potatoes. And even that the poor priest could not swallow them. And guess who was fed the leftovers from the priest? Yours truly.

>> Bill Benson: And you remember that?

>> Albert Garih: I remember that!

>> Bill Benson: That was a feast.

>> Albert Garih: That was the only time I had decent food. And to this day I love mashed potatoes. [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: So after being both in the Catholic boarding school, your sisters were in another place, you had spent some time with another family, Paris is liberated in August 1944. The war, of course, would continue until April 1945 but Paris was liberated. You were 6 years old. What do you recall of liberation? What do you recall of that?

>> Albert Garih: Everything. Everything. Actually, I was still in the Catholic boarding school. As I said, I was completely isolated from my family. Of course my mother could not write to us, could not come to visit us. It was too dangerous.

>> Bill Benson: Because she's in hiding.

>> Albert Garih: She's in hiding. We were in hiding. So she never came to visit us. So I was completely -- I was 6 years old, completely cut out of my family. The only contact I had with my family was with my sisters, would meet every Sunday in church. We would go to mass every Sunday and that's when I would see my sisters. And even then I didn't have much contact with them because they were with the girls and I was with the boys and they forbid you to mix up.

>> Bill Benson: But at least you saw each other.

>> Albert Garih: Maybe had a few words with them but it was not very much.

And one day when we were in that school -- it was the summer. So it was vacation, actually. We didn't have class. We had class occasionally. And I remember when we had class, I was the youngest. I was 6 years old. The others were from 7 to 14. Being the youngest, I already could read and write at that point because my mother, when we were at the Galop family, since we had nothing to do, she would teach me how to write and read. So I

was the baby in that school. They put me in with the babies and I was making strokes like this. And when I could have written letters, at least, not words but letters.

So one day -- also, when we were in that school, sometimes we had raids and we had to go to the shelters. And one of the hobbies that we had -- I was not the only one. Actually all the kids there did that. As soon as the raid was over and the sirens blasting the end of the air raid, we would go back to the playground and our hobby was to pick up pieces of shrapnel.

>> Bill Benson: Pieces of metal from the bombs.

>> Albert Garih: Exactly. And I had ones like that. I had a whole collection of them, which my mother quickly threw away when we got home. But anyway. That's what we were doing.

One day, one of the kids ran away from the school. In France, at that time -- I don't know how it is now. But at that time you have two types of boarding schools. You have boarding schools for people from the upper class, where they were groomed and all of that. They were very expensive and fancy and everything. And you had boarding schools for kids who were kicked out of public schools because they were not manageable. And that was the kind of public school I was in.

>> Bill Benson: So this kid runs away.

>> Albert Garih: He runs away. And he came back the next morning saying the allies are coming. So we all went on the main street. We saw the tanks, the jeeps, the trucks. We saw soldiers with a different kind of helmet, different kind of faces, smiling faces, you know, friendly faces and the first time I heard about Americans. I had never heard about Americans before. I had heard about Italians, Germans, Russians. Who are these people the Americans? Where did they come from? I had no idea. So that was my first contact with Americans. Needless to say I was seduced immediately.

>> Bill Benson: And what happened immediately?

>> Albert Garih: Well, I can almost tell you the date. Paris was liberated August 25, 1944. We were liberated August 27, two days later because we were east. The allies were pushing the Germans eastwards back to Germany. So we were liberated on the 27th. I guess maybe a couple of days later they restored the train service. And as soon as the train service -- Paris was liberated, so my mother could come out of her hiding place. As soon as the train service was restored, she was on the first train and she came to see us.

One morning I see my two sisters coming to my school. I was in the playground. They said, "Guess who is here?" And you know what? At the age of 6, how easy -- how fast it is to forget about your loved ones. I had no idea who could be there. So I pushed my sister around. I was curious. When I saw my mother, of course I jumped into her arms. And when she saw me, she was so appalled how I looked. I was so skinny and sick. So I remember, you know -- everything was rationed. So she had the ration tickets to buy a loaf of bread. She bought a loaf of bread. We swallowed the loaf of bread in no time. That's how hungry we were. We were starved, literally.

She took me home right away, the same day. And for whatever reason, she went back the next day to pick up my sisters. Maybe it was too much to do in one day. So she had to go back. She brought back my sisters the next day.

In the meantime, when I was alone at home, I was in bed, I was sick, and I was hungry. And there was nothing to eat in the house except for a green apple. And that was the worst possible thing I should have eaten because I was 6 years old, I was hungry. I saw that apple. I grabbed it and I ate it in no time. And I was under the custody of the next door

neighbor. As soon as I finished the apple, I heard the key in the lock. She was coming to check up on me. And she said, What did you eat? I said nothing. But -- she discovered. But anyway, my mother came back in the evening with my sisters. So we were reunited. Our tiny apartment but apartment. Freedom.

It was the end of August, or maybe the very few first days of September. September 21, 22, 23, I'm not sure, exactly, was Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. My mother was dressing me. I forgot to mention. In the meantime, my father was in the Channel Islands. One month before D-Day they were moved to the straits, the shortest distance between France and Britain, and they were repairing the fortifications because the allies were doing whatever they could to make the Germans believe that if there was an invasion, it would take place there which would have made sense because it was the shortest distance between France and Britain. So they were bombarding them all the time.

So 900 detainees who were with my father in this island were transferred to the Straits of Dover. And one day my father told me that at one point, you know, when there were raids there, they had no shelters or anything so they were laying flat on the ground. And my father was laying flat next to a German soldier. And when the raid was over, my father stood up and the German soldier stayed on the ground. He had been killed. So it was close calls, I assure you.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us how your father -- how he was able to get away from that slave labor camp on that island and make it back to you.

>> Albert Garih: Well, they were transferred to the Straits of Dover, probably in September. The Germans put them on a train bound for Germany, probably to send them to a death camp or to a slave labor, factory, whatever. And the train from the north of France to Germany had to go across Belgium, northern Belgium actually. And at one point the train was stopped by a Belgian Resistance who had blown up the railroad, or bridge, or whatever it was. The train was stopped. And in the confusion, the Germans released the 900 inmates. And my father, after spending a few days there to try to regain some strength, started walking back home. He walked all the way from northern Belgium to Paris which was about a 200-mile walk. And he arrived in the morning of Rosh Hashanah.

So at that point we were liberated in Paris. And my mother was dressing us to go to synagogue for the first time since after the liberation. And there was a knock on the door. My mother went to open it. It took her a few seconds to realize it was her husband because he was like a ghost, so gaunt.

>> Bill Benson: Had she known that he was even alive?

>> Albert Garih: Yes. She knew that he was on his way because he was there with a first cousin of his who came back a few days earlier and said he's on his way, he's coming.

>> Bill Benson: And do you remember when he came home?

>> Albert Garih: Oh, yeah. I remember when he came home and mother went to open the door. He was in terrible shape. That's all I remember. I don't remember all the details about that. All I know is our nuclear family was safe. We all survived. My father, my mother, my sisters and me. We all survived.

But we lost -- my mother lost her mother. My grandmother was killed during the exodus. Brother and a sister and nephews plus some of her cousins who were deported and never came back. And my father also had some cousins which I never met because I was a baby at that time, so I never met them. But I know that he lost some cousins who were deported. Actually, these cousins lived in the district of Paris where there were a lot of Jews.

And the building where they were living, there were a lot of Jewish families there so they were easy targets for the roundups that's how they ended up.

And today in that building, on that building, they have a plaque saying whatever date it was, '42, 43, they rounded up X number of Jews and they were sent to Auschwitz and they never came back.

So after that, that was in September of 1944. October 1, 1944 was back-to-school day. It was my first day at school and I was so excited about that. That was a very happy moment.

>> Bill Benson: Albert, there's so much more you could share with us. For example, you would continue to live in Paris, you know, to -- for the next six, seven, eight months while the war continued until it was over in April 1945. Your parents trying to regain a sense of normalcy, go back to work. So much more you could tell about your life after the war. But I think we have a few minutes, if you don't mind, we can turn to our audience to see if they have a couple of questions.

>> Albert Garih: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: We have two microphones, one in each aisle. We ask that you use a microphone. Try to make your question as brief as you can. I'll repeat it just to be sure that we all hear it before Albert responds to it. I'm hoping you'll stay through the brief question period because we're going to turn back to Albert in a moment to close our program. So if you have any -- anybody brave enough to step up and go to the mic, we'd appreciate it.

Well, let me tell you this. When Albert is finished, he will remain on the stage and you are most welcome to come up on the stage afterwards and ask him a question that you may be thinking about or, just, you know, shake his hand, get your photo taken with him. We encourage you to do that after the program.

I want to remind you that we have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. So we hope you can come back. All of our programs will be available through the museum's YouTube page. So you can see Albert's program again or any of other -- of our other programs this year. So please take advantage of that if you can.

When Albert finishes, our photographer, Joel, is going to come up on the stage and take a photo of Albert with you as the backdrop. So that makes for a very nice picture, portrait, for Albert for after this program.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person gets the last word. So on that note, I'd like to turn back to Albert to close today's program.

>> Albert Garih: I'm not going to talk about my own story. I told you enough about that. But I read somewhere that kids who were in the camps, while they were in the camps, they never saw a bird, never saw a flower, never saw a butterfly. That's things you take for granted, that are part of an environment. And can you imagine a kid -- a lot of kids were in the camps they were subjected to experiments actually. And they could never see one of these beauties of nature. All they saw was death, stench, and that's it. So I think it's very important to realize what we have when we have our freedom. That's my message.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Albert. Thank you very much.

>> [Applause]