

REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS  
FIRST PERSON DAVID BAYER  
MAY 16, 2018

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

This 2018 season of *First Person* is made possible through 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 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 serve as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org), provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

David will share with us his First Person account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have time at the end of our program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask David a few questions. If for some reason 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 the 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 today, as well.

With that being said, we have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

We begin with this 1945 portrait of David Bayer taken in his home town after liberation.

On this map of Europe the arrow points to Poland where David was born September 27, 1922. He will be 94 in September.

The arrow points to the approximate location of Kozenice, David's hometown. This is a contemporary photograph of David's home in Kozenice, In front of David's house.

David's brother, Joshua, is in this 1938 photo of a Zionist youth group. He is in the third row, third from the left.

In 1939, German troops invaded Poland starting the Second World War. The next year the Bayers were forced to move into the Kozenice ghetto. Here we see a view of the Kozenice ghetto through the barbed wire fence that enclosed it.

In September 1942, the ghetto was liquidated and its inhabitants including members of David's family were deported to the Treblinka killing center. The arrow points to Treblinka. David was taken to Pionki, an industrial complex that produced munitions. In 1943, he was deported to Auschwitz. The second arrow points to Auschwitz.

Our next photo shows a fence around the barracks in the main camp - Auschwitz I.

As the Soviet army neared, David and the other prisoners were sent on a death march. However, David managed to escape into the forest and was found by the Soviets. He spent two years in the Fohrenwald displaced persons camp in Germany.

Here we have a map of the major camps for Jewish DPs with the arrow pointing to the Fohrenwald. David is here, first row, third from the left, posing with friends at an airport near the DP camp in 1946.

Here we see David with a friend at the Fohrenwald DP camp in 1947.

Later that year, David moved to Panama. We close with two photos from Panama. First, here is David in front of a gate to a synagogue in Panama City and next we see David standing by his employer's horse in Panama City.

And now, I'd like to have you join me in welcoming David up onto the stage.

>> [Applause]

>> Suzy Snyder: Thank you, David, very much for coming to *First Person* today and joining me on stage. I greatly appreciate it. I know your story pretty well and I think it's fascinating.

You were born in 1922 in Kozenice. Can you describe what your childhood was like, what your parents did?

>> David Bayer: Well, I was born in a town called Kozenice, in Polish. In English it means nothing happened to the goat. [Laughter] It's a funny name. And my father had a shoe factory and we sold shoes all over Poland, even some to Germany, wholesale. We had about 25 to 30 people working in our factory steady, all the time. I have two sisters and a brother. One sister, about 19, and one about 8, and my brother was 12 years old.

>> Suzy Snyder: At the time of the German invasion.

>> David Bayer: Yes, 1939. I was 16 years old then.

The Germans came into my hometown September 9, 1939. The German crossed

the border to Poland September 1, 1939. And nine days they were in our town. They came into our house and they were robbing everything. They took my mother's dishes. They took our linens. They took the table cloths. They took everything they saw, shoes, all for nothing, just came in and took it. And we had to be quiet and say nothing.

>> Suzy Snyder: Can I back you up a little bit? You had a factory -- your father had a factory in Kozenice. You had employees in the factory in Kozenice. Correct? In the shoe factory?

>> David Bayer: Yeah.

>> Suzy Snyder: Who were the employees that worked for your father?

>> David Bayer: Polish people, Jewish people, all from the same town.

>> Suzy Snyder: And you were friends with everyone.

>> David Bayer: I helped. My sister helped. My brother helped. We had a very good business. My father was a rich man.

>> Suzy Snyder: And you were well liked in the town.

>> David Bayer: We were very religious people. I went to school. I was supposed to go to high school and the war broke out and I didn't go nowhere. I would probably be working in the factory and taking over my father's business. But every Jew in my town had to go to work for the Germans.

My father had three brothers, younger than he was. My father was in his 40s. And one brother was caught by the Nazis and they made -- a Nazi officer, made him a house boy, cleaning his house, shining his shoes. So my uncle, my father's brother, asked the Nazi if I could go work for the same Nazi because my uncle had a young wife at home and he wanted to stay with his wife. The Nazi agreed and I went to work instead of my uncle.

And I went to work for that Nazi. And he was very nice to me. He gave me food to take home. He gave me bread. He gave me Salami. It was very good. But I also did other jobs for him. I was translating from Polish to German. He had a prisoner in a dungeon in that building where he lived and accused a Polish boy for having a gun. They find the gun when the Polish boy was sleeping in a barn. And the Polish boy kept saying this is not my gun and I didn't have no gun, I was just happy to sleep there. Every day he was crying, begging, this is not my gun. The German was very nasty to him. One day the same interrogation and the Polish boy was crying. The German took a pistol and shot him, right in the dungeon, in the basement.

What I'm trying to bring out, he was so nice to me and here without hesitation he pulled a gun and shot him. And then he asked me to take him out and bury him in a potato field.

>> Suzy Snyder: So at this point, your family is living in the ghetto in Kozenice.

>> David Bayer: My parents were not in the ghetto yet. They lived in a big house across from a church, in a nice neighborhood. Then we had to move out, move out from our house, don't take nothing. We only took what we could carry. We got one room in somebody else's house in a Jewish neighborhood, one room. And there was a kitchen, that's all. I couldn't even sleep there because some friends of ours asked me to come stay with them and I slept on the floor. So my mother, my father, my two sisters, and my brother went to one room and they all slept on the floor, father, and mother.

>> Suzy Snyder: And what happened to the factory?

>> David Bayer: It was dismantled. No machine, no shoes left, no nothing, no leather, supply, we didn't have nothing. They even took my mother's jewelry. They took everything. The Germans took everything they could. Not politely, not nice, just came in and took.

>> Suzy Snyder: And what was life like in the ghetto for your parents?

>> David Bayer: The ghetto, barbed wire, we couldn't go out. You go out, they find you, they shoot you and kill you. There was no food. The farmers didn't come to town no more. Whatever we had -- one thing, the German who I worked for, moved away to another town. He asked me to go with him and I didn't go. So I had to go work on an irrigation canal. There was a river and every year it overflows the Polish government was irrigating the area before the war. And when the Germans came in, the Germans continued doing the same work. So all the Jewish, young men like me, had to go to work in the canal.

So I worked in the canal until September 27, 1942, on my birthday. September 27. I was born 27th. They took all the people from my hometown, put them on trains, and shipped them to Treblinka, a killing center in Germany. In Poland, actually. Called Treblinka.

>> Suzy Snyder: Your parents were taken, your siblings?

>> David Bayer: They took hundreds of wagons of freight cars. Took them all away and killed them in one day. How do I know it's one day? There was one young man which I knew. He was also on the transport. When they came to Treblinka, the Germans picked him out and made him go to work. All the possessions the Jewish people had, he had to put back on the train and shipped to Germany. So he was working. He was hiding in the train, under the bundles, under the suitcases, and he jumped trains in Poland. He came back to Kozienice.

I wasn't there no more. The people weren't there no more. They took us from the canal to Pionki, a munition factory about 25 kilometers from my hometown. And I worked there as an expert at making powder for bullets. The Germans taught me how to do it. I had been working there two and a half years, making powder for bullets.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you worked in Pionki. Were you with anyone you knew? People, friends? Any kind of relatives? Were you alone in Pionki?

>> David Bayer: I have a problem. My hearing aid is not worth nothing. So I don't hear so good.

>> Suzy Snyder: When you were in Pionki, were you with anyone that you knew from Kozienice?

>> David Bayer: All the people who survived on the canal went to Pionki. And I knew them, all of them. They were all my friends, same page.

>> Suzy Snyder: And what was it like in Pionki?

>> David Bayer: Pionki, they have to give us food because we worked hard. A lot of people worked in places where they made powder for bullets. It was very dangerous. A lot of explosions and also a lot of machinery breaks down and the Germans blamed us. They say that we did sabotage. We didn't know about sabotage but the Germans actually told us that we did sabotage. We didn't do nothing like this. They taught us how to sabotage, actually. So we did. A lot of times we broke the machinery. We put in a rock. Because powder for bullets is made out of cotton. We mix it with chemicals. It goes from machine. The machine breaks down.

So one day there was a young man who was a smoker. He smoked cigarettes. He give away everything for cigarettes. He was very nervous. He was the one who was putting the cotton in a hamper and pushing it over to me so I could mix it with the chemicals. He fell asleep or something, the cigarette falls in on the conveyor. The conveyor ignited. And the Germans came and were going to hang us, three guys. Prepared everything, morning, soccer field, they were going to hang us on the gate. Two old Germans who were in charge of our department came and begged the Gestapo not to kill us because we need the production.

>> Suzy Snyder: Keep the workforce.

>> David Bayer: Keep on working. And they had nobody else because we had to teach other people how to do it. So they let us go. They didn't hang us.

>> Suzy Snyder: And it was strictly a business decision.

>> David Bayer: Well, the two old Germans, one from Poland who speaks Polish and German, and the other one, they begged the Gestapo, told us we're not going to do it because we needed production and we're going to let you live.

They were hanging people. They hanged people before that for little things, for not coming to work, for hiding in the buildings. Because a lot of times the Germans, we'd finish our work, they took us again to work for eight more hours. I once worked 24 hours without sleeping.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you are working and you are told that you're going to die the next day.

>> David Bayer: I thought I was going to die. Because everybody thought they were going to die. They didn't treat us right. A lot of people starved from hunger. People went years no food, and the gases from the chemical were killing us. The Germans finally brought us heavy-duty pants and jackets because one drop on it made a hole.

>> Suzy Snyder: So let me ask you a question. Because you sort of glossed over this. What was that like, that 12 hours or 24 hours, where you thought you were going to die? Were you thought you were going to be hanged?

>> David Bayer: We had no other choice. A lot of them escaped. I escaped a few times. One time I escaped from the factory. I was working with a young man, I have to mention his name, Mosze Matis. He was a big guy. His job was to take out the chemicals from the tankers to the building and hoses. He was a very dangerous job. He said to me, you want to go -- let's get out of here. I have a hole under the barbed wire and we can get out, join the Polish underground Army in the forest. So I said I'm ready. So we went out, easy to get out. We went to the woods, in a village. And then we saw big posters in German and in Polish. 10 liters of vodka to bring in a Jew. 10 liters of vodka.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you said it was actually better to be in Pionki than it was to be in the in the forest.

>> David Bayer: So we went back. We went back to the factory.

>> Suzy Snyder: You felt you had a better chance.

>> David Bayer: They didn't kill us. We work. As long as we work, we're all right. We ate only the bread they gave us in the morning. And it was supposed to be coffee. But the Germans never had coffee so it was dirty, black drink, maybe corn or something. We got it in the morning. And then they gave us soup. The soup was terrible soup. We call it mamaliga, a Romanian word for terrible soup. There was all kinds of garbage in there. We ate it. We had no other choice.

>> Suzy Snyder: From Pionki, though, you were deported again.

>> David Bayer: Well, the Germans had big eyes. They wanted to take all over Europe. They went to Russia. Russia was not so easy to conquer. They went to Russia and they were losing a lot of German soldiers in the Cold War -- the cold weather, they couldn't progress. They were losing the war. And the Russian people were fighting them very bad. The Russian population were burning their own houses so the Germans would freeze to death. The Russians were winning and the Germans defeating.

Afterwards, they took us out from Pionki. And everybody had to evacuate and keep on going towards Germany. And they call it the Death March. We have to march from Poland

to Germany and keep on going and going and going. And pounds of people die on the way. How did they die? When they couldn't walk no more, couldn't eat, the cold weather was very bad, snow high. It fall down and couldn't get up, they shoot you. They shot thousands of people on the way, and pushed them into the ravines. I was with one guy from my hometown and he fell down. And he was crying. And I picked him up. We hold him up. He didn't want to get up. The German came over and shot him.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me back you up a bit. I wanted to talk about when you went from Pionki to Auschwitz. You were sent from Pionki to Auschwitz. Can you talk a little bit about your experiences in Auschwitz?

>> David Bayer: Auschwitz? No. Pionki was evacuated. They took us to Auschwitz.

>> Suzy Snyder: And this was September -- or fall of --

>> David Bayer: Auschwitz-Birkenau. There were two camps one to another. Auschwitz was a military camp, Polish Army. And then the Germans built towns, barracks for like the horses and that's where we stayed. But I came to Auschwitz and the prisoners who were there already helped us out from the train. One guy came over to me and asked me what happened to you because I was burned, from an explosion on my job, where I was working. I had a cross on my face and hands. So I told him that I was in the factory, ammunition factory and I got burned. So he said when the Germans come over to you and they ask you what happened to you, tell them that you are a chemist, making explosives, and they will put you outside. And that's exactly what happened. They put me outside with other people, professionals a lot of them who didn't know what to say, they took them to a different area and gassed them, killed them.

>> Suzy Snyder: In other words, you had to have some kind of a trade or occupation. You had to make yourself useful.

>> David Bayer: They put me in a camp where all the gypsies lived. There were a lot of gypsies, women, children, men, old people. And I was in a barrack with them.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me just stop for a second and just explain that during the wartime, the Nazis persecuted a very large number of the people --

>> David Bayer: Gypsies in Europe were picked up and did the same thing to them like they did to us. But the gypsies, they kept the women, children and their accordions, pots and pans together. They didn't take nothing from them. They let them live like they lived.

>> Suzy Snyder: They lived in their own camp.

>> David Bayer: Yeah. So they were nice to us. And they had more food than we did and they helped us. The gypsies were very good people. Food was the most important thing. We were always hungry. You work hard, you have to have food.

>> Suzy Snyder: What did you do in Auschwitz?

>> David Bayer: And a lot of people stealing. If you're hungry, you don't care if you steal from your father, your brother, your neighbor. I have to have my bread under my shirt. At night, people are sleeping, they steal it.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me reattach so people can hear you.

>> David Bayer: I forgot about that.

>> Suzy Snyder: Ok. Say hello.

>> David Bayer: Hello. I'm all right.

>> [Laughter]

>> David Bayer: You all right? I'm all right.

>> [Applause]

>> David Bayer: Now I can laugh. I never laughed. I always was hungry. I'm still hungry but

pretend to smile.

>> Suzy Snyder: What was your life like in Auschwitz? What did you do?

>> David Bayer: In Auschwitz I do nothing. Once in a while they took me to work daily. One day, talking about going daily -- ok, one day some Germans came in with the guns. They needed 10 people. They didn't -- we didn't know what. Worked out, you, you, ok, go. We went to work.

The Commandants of the camp, his wife, the house, the children. She could see from her house, from the window, from their veranda, the porch, she could see the whole camp and all the people, slaves in the camps. The reason I mention that is because after the war the German population, the German people, women, children, old men, said we didn't know about it, didn't hear about it, didn't see about it. They were lying. They saw us working in the garden. The woman all the way from the house, she was planting flowers and vegetables and things and we have to dig the ground.

>> Suzy Snyder: And you're wearing, mind you, striped uniforms.

>> David Bayer: Yes, uniforms. We thought maybe to get some food. She didn't give us nothing. She saw us. She didn't say nothing. The German soldiers told us to dig. That's it. And then we went back to camp.

What I'm trying to bring out, after the war, the Germans population in the area and in Germany all but said we didn't know there were concentration camps, we didn't know that they were killing the Jews, we didn't know nothing. They were silent. They were lying like hell.

>> Suzy Snyder: So in Auschwitz, you were working.

>> David Bayer: In Auschwitz, I went to another camp, Jaworzno. They didn't take me to work in the munition factory. They picked me up to work in the coal mine, with Polish coal miners who were working. The Germans paid them. Us they didn't pay nothing. We had to produce 18 wagons ever coal. Every prisoner had to put in a wagon and to push it out to the main road to lift up to the elevator, 18 wagons a day in a shift.

>> Suzy Snyder: You were below ground all day long.

>> David Bayer: Whoever made 18 was a strong guy. I couldn't do it. So what do I do? You steal. The steal the wagons from other people and put our tags on it and that's it. So the Germans got the same every day from somebody else.

>> Suzy Snyder: Basically it's just -- you took it to make it through the day.

>> David Bayer: If I didn't make my quota, I had to stay other shifts.

>> Suzy Snyder: Until you did.

>> David Bayer: How can you do it? I couldn't even walk. The shovel was 10 kilos. I couldn't lift the shovel. I couldn't lift it.

>> Suzy Snyder: And during this time when you're in Jaworzno, you were hospitalized. You were in the hospital.

>> David Bayer: Yeah, but what happened is this. I had my glands swell up from malnutrition, from the gases, from the cold, from the hunger and my glands swell up here. And every morning before we went to work the Nazis check you out, like a roll call. He saw me covering up with my jacket. So he took me out, put me in a clinic, and they operated on me.

>> Suzy Snyder: Before you explain that, let's back up a little. Every morning the Nazis checked you all.

>> David Bayer: Roll call, call a number. I had no name. My number was tattooed on my hand. B74 is here. If someone was missing, they made an alarm. They figured maybe escaped or something.

>> Suzy Snyder: What if somebody was there but didn't --  
>> David Bayer: They look for them and that's it. If they find them, they kill them. They didn't need them. They always get new people in.  
>> Suzy Snyder: But were they only looking for people who were missing?  
>> David Bayer: If they were missing, we didn't go to work, an hour, then we had to go to work. The Germans work eight, 10 hours, doesn't matter. They didn't have a schedule. If we didn't finish, we had to stay longer.  
>> Suzy Snyder: So you were taken to the infirmary, the hospital.  
>> David Bayer: And when the Germans were losing the war with Russia, they had to run away. So they took us and everybody else. They took all the machinery. Everything they could transfer to Germany they took. Humans and everything else.

And then we came to camp where we lived, where we stayed, to get extra help to dismantle the machinery. Pionki was as big as Washington, D.C. It was factories and factories, all kinds of different factories. So the Germans wanted to take everything. It didn't belong to them.

>> Suzy Snyder: At this point you mean Jaworzno?  
>> David Bayer: Everything was taken out from Jaworzno from Auschwitz, from Birkenau, all the towns around there.

What happened -- where was I?

>> Suzy Snyder: You were -- I asked you about being in the hospital at Jaworzno.  
>> David Bayer: I had an engineer, a German engineer, who used to come and work -- he was a very polite guy, nice guy. He would say good morning. He was an engineer. Something broke down, he would fix it. Very nice. This guy came in our camp to get volunteers also for the machinery. Guess what. Everybody wanted to go with him.  
>> Suzy Snyder: Because he was nice.  
>> David Bayer: Because he was a nice guy. We knew the others come in, we were hiding. I was hiding under the bed, in the forest. I didn't want to go. But when he came in, everyone wanted to go with him, keep their heads up. Guess what he did. He pulled a pistol and shot in the crowd. The same good guy.

What I'm trying to bring out, the whole world should know, that they were not so good. They listened to one guy named Hitler. They raised their hand to Hitler all the time. He was their God. This is a power this man had that the whole nation listened to him. And that's what happened. That's why they killed so many people in this world.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let me ask you.  
>> David Bayer: And a lot of people don't want me to talk about Germans. I talk about. Nice people now. Tomorrow they not going to be nice.  
>> Suzy Snyder: Let's just back up a little. I explained that you were in the hospital. People were chosen often because they were not healthy and they were usually killed but you were not killed.  
>> David Bayer: No. I was not killed because I was looking a healthy guy. Didn't flinch, didn't complain about nothing.  
>> Suzy Snyder: You had surgery.  
>> David Bayer: I had surgery. They sewed me up. They put me in a room, clean, everything was nice. And then a guy, who was a nurse, he was a Polish guy from my hometown. He used to live not far, maybe a block and a half away from my house. Once he was a coach, coaching us in the public school, soccer coach. His mother was a nice lady. My mother and her knew

each other. He saw me. So he said, I will help you. He did help me. He fixed me up. He made a paper that I could go to work. So I went out and the guard looked at the paper and said go. So I went back to my barrack and that's it. And I went back to the coal mine.

>> Suzy Snyder: So let's go back to the Death March. You had talked about it briefly but you were walking. Auschwitz was liquidated.

>> David Bayer: People from all over Europe. Everywhere you looked you saw transport, walkers, people were lying down on the ground, marching toward Germany. And the Germans were shooting people like crazy.

There was a town in Bavaria, they killed maybe 30, 40 people. So after the war -- and I knew it. So after the war I went not far from there to a displaced persons camp. I went to the mayor of the city. I wanted to know what happened to the dead bodies the German killed. And he took me to the cemetery and he said we picked up all the bodies and put them in one grave, in a cemetery.

>> Suzy Snyder: Why did you ask?

>> David Bayer: Because all my friends were dead, killed there. The guy, I took his jacket because he didn't need a jacket no more. He was dead. It was cold. His jacket was full of blood. I washed it off with snow.

>> Suzy Snyder: And when you're marching --

>> David Bayer: And I stood before his body a few minutes and I said a prayer. I said Kaddish.

>> Suzy Snyder: Which is a Jewish mourner's prayer.

>> David Bayer: A prayer for the dead. We cried. That's it. I thought I would be next anyway. And I came to a camp called Blechhammer. The camp was on the border of Poland and Germany. Also a concentration camp but there was already British prisoners are, Russian prisoners. There were a lot of prisoners there. And I met two Russian prisoners who were very nice to me and I was very nice to them. I spoke to them in Russian. They said you want to escape -- if I want to go with them?

ut I didn't tell about Ruben yet.

>> Suzy Snyder: Ok. Would you like to -- what happened after you were asked if you wanted to escape from the Death March? From Blechhammer? You did escape. Right?

>> David Bayer: I didn't talk about Ruben in the coal mine. Should I go back?

>> Suzy Snyder: Finish your story and then we'll go back to Ruben.

>> David Bayer: I jump a lot.

>> Suzy Snyder: I will bring you back.

>> David Bayer: It would take me 10 days to finish.

>> Suzy Snyder: You've got a few minutes. Don't worry.

>> David Bayer: Where was I?

>> Suzy Snyder: Why don't you explain, you escaped from the Death March or from Blechhammer.

>> David Bayer: Well, we come to Blechhammer, and Blechhammer I escaped with two Russian prisoners. We went to the forest. There were big signs, the vodka signs.

>> Suzy Snyder: But at this point it's like towards the end of the war. Well, it's at least in the cold winter of 1945.

>> David Bayer: The thing is the Russians came in after that. We had to wait a little bit longer, then we wouldn't make it. I would freeze to death, starved to death or something.

>> Suzy Snyder: How long were you in the forest?

>> David Bayer: Maybe six days.

>> Suzy Snyder: And then you were liberated essentially by the Russians.

>> David Bayer: I didn't talk much about the Russian liberators because they did bad things to other people, too. But I didn't say nothing about the Russians the Russians were good to me. That's all I know.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let's back up. We'll talk about what happened after liberation but you wanted to talk about Ruben and your encounter with Ruben.

>> David Bayer: I don't know if I told --

>> Suzy Snyder: You haven't.

>> David Bayer: Ok. In the coal mine there was a Gestapo man. He was working for the coal mining people but a Nazi with the arm band, swastika, and he used to come in every day with a walking stick and a copper handle, like a coal mine handle. He would check the walls and the ceiling, where we would have to dig and blow. He was a bad guy. He hit people over the head for not bowing to him or not saying anything. He was a very, very bad -- he killed people.

So before that, before he was coming into the mine -- there was a Polish miner who worked with us. He was the one who was drilling. And he was the one who put the dynamite in. He told us to be careful when the German came in, to move away, not to stay near him. So that's what we did. But he put dynamite and he blow up the walls and the ceiling and the Germans got killed. That's it. So the German got killed. The alarm, screaming, yelling. The Germans came in, investigation, had to find out. We claimed it was an accident.

So what happened, Ruben came over to me and whispered in my ear. He said, "Am I crazy? I'm not crazy anymore, am I?" Why? Because Ruben used to pray, constantly walk around and pray. We told him that he's crazy. A religious young man. He was praying all the time. He was reciting the psalm. All the time, every time you looked at him, you heard him mumbling. So everybody called told him he's crazy. But he believed in God. He was very religious. So we gave him credit. Said God helped because of Ruben. Ok? I find Ruben after the war. I tell you in a minute.

We escaped, me and two Russians. Ruben wanted to go. I said go. He complained about the leg. He couldn't walk. Shrapnel or bullet or something but bleeding so he couldn't walk. We went out under the barbed wire. The we had to leave him. Put him in an empty house. Nobody there. There was a barn and everything else but we put him in there, stay here. We left through the forest.

And that's it. I forgot about Ruben. I survived the war. I came home. I went to Poland. Didn't like to stay there. I went back to Germany. I went to the DP camp. From the DP camp, to South America. I couldn't come to the United States. I couldn't go anywhere else. So I went -- I had a chance to go to Panama. I went to Panama. I stayed in Panama until 1948. In 1948, I met a Jewish guy in our area called David, the capital of Cherokee, in an Indian area, where all the Indians lived. I was living there and making leather for the Indians. I was a happy guy. I washed in the river. I lived in a shack. I was happy.

So what happened this guy, this Jewish guy, German Jew and, David, tell me what are you doing here? Are you crazy? Guy from Poland, Jewish guy, live with the Indians, Jewish Indians? Why don't you go to Israel? Israel becoming independent. It was 1948. Said, how can I go? I have no money, nothing. He said, I'll arrange for you. He told me to join a ship in Panama City. He said the ship will be there whatever date. I don't remember exactly. And he said you will know.

The ship was called [Speaking Non-English Language], never forget the name, a Greek ship with supply from the United States going to Israel. You could join that ship.

So I did. I went to Israel. And guess who I find. Ruben. I came to Haifa. I got off the ship. And I was sent to an observation center. I come there and I go look and I see a guy sitting there in a tent. A lot of tents. And there's Ruben, a little beard. He recognized me. I didn't recognize him. He went to Israel, too. He lived in Jerusalem, became a teacher, got married. Probably still alive.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you just did three years in like five minutes. So I'm just going to back up a little because I wanted you to talk about when you were liberated, you went back to Kozienice. How did you get back to Kozienice?

>> David Bayer: I just went by train. Trains worked.

>> Suzy Snyder: Train, walked. Where did you stay at night?

>> David Bayer: Every time I got the train in Europe, I put out my hand. I'm going home, I said. So we have to get free train. Everywhere I went. I went even to Moscow with a Russian woman -- a Russian soldier.

>> Suzy Snyder: Were you afraid that there was still anti-Semitism?

>> David Bayer: I wasn't afraid. I knew. I could smell it. I wouldn't live in Poland and in Germany or any other Europe place if they gave me \$1 million every month.

>> Suzy Snyder: But you did go back to look for family.

>> David Bayer: I wanted to see my friends I went to school with. I wanted to see the guy who saw my mother on the train going to Treblinka. She waved to him and said don't forget to talk to Daven. And my friend. He was on the train station, so all -- saw all the Jewish people pushed into the train.

When I came back to Kozienice, my hometown, I went to the station and met him. And he told me the whole story. He saw everybody who he know getting on the train. Saw your mother. She waved to me, she told me to talk to you if I survived.

>> Suzy Snyder: And what about your older sister?

>> David Bayer: Nobody survived. I even had a cousins, I had places, all the small towns in Poland I had family. I went all over to look for somebody made it.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you went back to your house.

>> David Bayer: I went to Kozienice. A few other people came back, survivors. And we all went back to Czechoslovakia. But the Germans -- we went to a DP camp, displaced persons camp, run by American military, American government. And the Americans gave us milk and honey. Everything. We came there and we got everything.

>> Suzy Snyder: But you were not happy staying.

>> David Bayer: I was not happy to be in Europe. I didn't like it. I didn't like the Germans. I didn't like Europe. I did not want to be living from that graveyard. So I went to Panama. Panama was the best I ever met.

>> Suzy Snyder: And you speak Spanish fluently, don't you?

>> David Bayer: Spanish, German, Polish, Russian, Hebrew.

>> Suzy Snyder: Why Panama?

>> David Bayer: Because in Panama there was a family who left Poland before the war, from Kozienice, and they saw my name on the list. The son, a friend of mine, said let's bring him in here.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you had a place.

>> David Bayer: And they sent to the American Embassy in Munich my name in case I'm alive. So I said, ok, I go. I have nowhere else to go. And then they had a daughter which they wanted me to marry. I didn't want to get married. So I left. Went to live with the Indians. That's why I

left.

>> [Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: And you came to Palestine.

>> David Bayer: And from there I went back to Panama and worked for a man, in a house, making some money. And then I met a girl from the American Embassy who arranged for me to go to the United States.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you went to Israel and then back to Panama?

>> David Bayer: Well, I went to Israel and came back to Panama because Panama was my base. I could have stayed in Israel but there were thousands and thousands of people coming from all over. There was nowhere to sleep, nowhere to eat, no jobs. And here I got a job. Went back to Panama. So why should I wait? I go. I had nobody else. I had one little luggage. So I went back to Panama, worked. I was doing all right. And I met the girl. She was from New Jersey. Her name Rose Epstein. She arranged for me to come to the United States. So in 1955 I took whatever I had, \$7.75 in my pocket. I took it to Miami.

>> Suzy Snyder: To Miami, not New Jersey?

>> David Bayer: Miami. I got off the plane, the bus stop, and I said I want to go to Washington, D.C. because I had friends in Washington. That's it. I came to Washington. I had nothing. I went to work here.

Then I met a guy, my accountant. He arranged for me to go in business with a man who had a liquor store who didn't want to work anymore. So I said I have no money. Said he would take you in, partner, will take you in. So I went to a liquor store in DC. For 30 years. I bought the partner out, bought the building and everything else. I got married. I have children. I have grandchildren. And then I give up and came to work to Israel.

>> Suzy Snyder: Is your wife American? Was she born in the United States?

>> David Bayer: My wife American? Sure. From New York. She's American. She speaks Yiddish, English. I have a daughter who lives in Annapolis, a son who lives in Florida.

>> Suzy Snyder: You have grandchildren, great grandchildren.

>> David Bayer: Two grandchildren, one great grandchild, 4 years old, talks so much every day. Called me up.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let's stop here for a moment to take some questions from the audience. Is that ok?

>> David Bayer: Yes, questions, millions of questions. If I have to answer all the questions, we have to be here a long time.

>> Suzy Snyder: Don't worry. I'll cut it off when it gets to be too much.

>> David Bayer: How did I feel? How this? How that? Do you believe in God? Do I still believe in God? I don't know.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let's let them ask the questions.

Does anyone have a question for David? Anyone? Yes.

>> David Bayer: You have to repeat it to me.

>> Suzy Snyder: I will.

>> David Bayer: I have to go to see a hearing aid doctor.

>> Suzy Snyder: Can you actually stand up and come to the mic? To ask the question. So that everyone can hear you. Thank you. And even though you're using a mic, speak a little louder.

>> I've heard other speakers before who have survived the Holocaust and they've always been men. Were there any women that have survived or written any books? I've never heard a woman speaker before.

>> Suzy Snyder: Oh, yes, yes. That's a question for me. I'm sorry. Yes. We have actually lots of -- there are lots of women who survived. And it's interesting because I always say that in many cases women, especially women who were German and Austrian refugees, they basically often would tell their husbands we got to go, we can't stay here. And their husbands -- my occurrence is that their husbands were often like, I have a business, I have a life here but those women packed those husbands and got them out of Europe. And I always think they're a little bit -- they're strong. They're very strong. And we have many who volunteer here.

Another question?

>> What happened to your family's house and factory once things settled down?

>> Suzy Snyder: What happened to your family's house and factory? After the Germans entered Kozenice.

>> David Bayer: The Germans forced us to get out of our house and we had to move into a ghetto. Barbed wire encampment. All the Jewish people from the town had to move in there. And I lived in one room.

>> Suzy Snyder: But you lost your house and factory. The Germans took it.

>> David Bayer: They took it.

>> Suzy Snyder: After the war did you get reparations?

>> David Bayer: I didn't get nothing. I didn't want to be back in Poland. The Polish government -- when I came back, one time, first time, to Kozenice, I wanted to find out what happened. Somebody was living in our house. A lot of people. So they said we pay the rent to the government.

>> Suzy Snyder: So one of the things you didn't talk about was when you came back to Kozenice, you went back to your house.

>> David Bayer: Yeah, and there was people living there.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did you expect them to leave or --

>> David Bayer: No.

>> Suzy Snyder: You expected nothing.

>> David Bayer: I didn't want to live there. I didn't care to move in. There was nothing mine anymore in that house. All our furniture, everything was gone. Everything was taken.

>> Suzy Snyder: What did they expect that you wanted?

>> David Bayer: I didn't say nothing. I didn't want it. If they give it to me, what was I going to do with it? Ok, one thing happened. I went to a supervisor who used to work for my father in the factory. A Polish man whom my father bought him his house, actually, paid and he paid back. His name was Leon. I went to see him. And there was a big table, we had a moving out table, a big one.

>> Suzy Snyder: Your furniture?

>> David Bayer: In his house. So he asked me if I wanted it. So I said I don't want it. He said somebody wants to buy it, he says. Sell it and give me the money. So he did. He give me some money. I didn't have no money.

>> Suzy Snyder: Does anyone have any questions?

>> David Bayer: And how do I make some money? I didn't tell this story. After Kozenice I went back to Germany. From Germany to the DP camp. Still didn't have no money. I needed money. So what happened? I went to the black market. Black market means cigarettes, items, coffee, things like this the Germans don't have. I was buying and selling and made some money. And I went to Paris, lived in Paris for three months. Spent everything.

>> [Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: Yes?

>> How did you escape from the Death March? That just seemed like such a critical and terrifying moment. What was your movement or what did it look like?

>> Suzy Snyder: How did you escape from the Death March? It seemed like a terrifying moment.

>> David Bayer: You see, when everybody was walking and walking, cold, everybody had their own problems. The Germans had the same problems we had. We were cold. They were cold. It was not like an organized soldier march. But everyone was walking fast, slow, falling down, getting up.

>> Suzy Snyder: It was chaotic.

>> David Bayer: So a lot of times we checked the Germans didn't see us. And we -- in Blechhammer, we were all barbed wired. The Germans didn't go checking every hole in the ground, every barbed wire broken. So the two Russian soldiers saw the barbed wire moved and then the ground was soft, but snow, maybe animals, dogs or something came in. So we moved in. I was skinny like a spindle. So we all went out through that hole and nobody saw us. A lot of people couldn't even do that.

>> Suzy Snyder: They didn't even have the strength?

>> David Bayer: No strength, nothing. Everybody was lying on the floor.

>> Suzy Snyder: I also want to point out it's the winter of 1945.

>> David Bayer: We walked hundreds of miles.

>> Suzy Snyder: Right. And I mean, the Germans are getting tired. The Nazis are getting tired.

>> David Bayer: No food, no nothing.

>> Suzy Snyder: So I think it was really a point of chaos although people were shot when they walked away from the Death March. That was very common. Some people took a chance because they thought this is our chance; we have no other chance.

Any other questions? Yes?

>> You mentioned that you have always believed in God and you still do but tell me how God met you in the midst of all of that evil.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you understand the question?

>> David Bayer: I didn't hear you.

>> Suzy Snyder: How did God meet you in the midst of all of this evil? Like in other words, how did God come to you?

>> David Bayer: God? God come to me with Ruben. I believe that he believed God and maybe he helped. Why should I deny it? I don't know if it's true or not. Might as well believe. Doesn't cost me nothing.

>> [Laughter]

>> David Bayer: So I believe.

>> Suzy Snyder: So we have a tradition at *First Person* to let the speaker have a last word.

>> David Bayer: My mother used to say to promise to love doesn't cost nothing.

>> Suzy Snyder: Do you have a last word?

>> David Bayer: A last word? I never have last words.

>> [Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: Is there anything you would say?

>> David Bayer: I'm going to talk till I die. And I'm 95 years old. Everybody asked me how? Live to 120. The Jewish people every time they wish somebody something, you should live to

120.

>> [Laughter]

>> Suzy Snyder: Is there anything else you want to say? Are you good? Do you want to say anything else?

>> David Bayer: What else? I have to -- I don't remember everything.

>> Suzy Snyder: You did a pretty good job. Ok.

Thank you very much for joining us. Thank you, David.

>> [Applause]