REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON ARYE EPHRATH
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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. Arye Ephrath, 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.

Arye 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 Arye a few questions. If we do not get to your question today, please join us in our on-line 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.

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 Arye is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

Arye Ephrath was born into a Jewish family on April 7, 1942, in Bardejov, Czechoslovakia, which is present day Slovakia. Here we see Arye and his parents, Miriam and Samuel Friedman, taken after World War II, probably 1946.

Arye was born the same day as the first deportation of Jews from his hometown. Nazi authorities had ordered Jews to report to the town square, but Arye's mother ignored the order. She gave birth in the basement of their home with assistance from her maid. Arye's father was absent during the birth as he had escaped to evade the Nazis. The red arrow on this map of Czechoslovakia points to Bardejov where Arye was born.

Arye's father decided to remain in Czechoslovakia but Arye's parents decided it would be safer for Arye and his mother, Miriam, to move to her hometown of Beregszasz, Hungary, which is now part of the Ukraine. The yellow arrow shows the location of Beregszasz.

Miriam was able to get to Hungary with Arye. Miriam and Arye moved from inn to inn to avoid detection, splitting time between Budapest and Beregszasz. Hungary enacted their own anti-semitic policies and was an ally of Nazi Germany. Meanwhile, Arye's father continued to operate the family-owned general store in Czechoslovakia. The store provided goods that the Nazis considered essential, so it afforded him some protection.

In 1944, the Nazis revoked Arye's father's work permit. He escaped to Sisov, a village in western Czechoslovakia, with his wife and Arye. The arrow points to the location of Sisov.

A local priest agreed to hide Arye's parents, but not Arye as he posed too much of a risk as a young child. This photograph is of the church where Arye's parents hid.

Jan and Irena Mierni, a local shepherd and his wife, agreed to take Arye if he would dress like a girl in order to avoid suspicion from the townspeople, because the couple only had daughters. The Miernis changed Arye's name to Annicka for the duration of his time in hiding. Here we see Arye disguised as a girl.

And here we see Arye with Jan and Irena Mierni. The boy on the left is another Jewish child who was also hidden with him. Later, Arye's parents, fearing a Nazi raid of the church, found another place to hide. They hid for eight months in a hole dug in the ground covered by hay. Finally, on Arye's 3rd birthday, the Soviet Army liberated Czechoslovakia and Arye was reunited with his parents.

After serving as a tank officer in the Israeli Army, Arye decided to combine travel with education so he came to the U.S. in 1967. He attended junior college in Florida; then went to the University of Florida. Knowing his savings from the army wouldn't last long he took a double-load of classes and graduated early, finishing in 1969 with a degree in aerospace engineering. Arye attended MIT, earning his Master's and became a research assistant. That led to earning his Ph.D at MIT in 1975. Arye went to work for NASA for a short period in California and Houston before teaching electrical engineering, biomedical engineering and

other topics for several years at the University of Connecticut and Tufts University, as well as conducting research at MIT.

In 1980, Arye went to work for Bell Labs staying there until 1997. He was then recruited by a colleague to work at a private consulting firm in Virginia that specializes in computer technology and communications. At present, Arye serves as a technical consultant to the U.S. government.

Arye married his wife Peggy, who was also with the Bell System, in 1990. Peggy has been very involved in Jewish education. Arye and Peggy's son Mickey, named for Arye's uncle who perished in the Holocaust, passed away in 2013 at age 21. They have a daughter and three grandchildren, all of whom live in Alabama. Arye and Peggy are in the process of moving from Fairfax, Virginia, to Smith Mountain Lake near Roanoke, Virginia, which will put them closer to their grandchildren. I'm pleased to say that Peggy is here today with Arye.

Arye's volunteer work at the museum has involved staffing the Information Desk and providing information to visitors about his experiences as a Holocaust survivor.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. Arye Ephrath.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Arye, thank you so much for joining us today and being willing to be our First Person. We are glad to have you here. You have so much to tell us. We have a short period so we will jump right in if you don't mind.

World War II began with Germany's invasion of Poland September 1, 1939. Your parents were married in 1941. And you were born April 7, 1942, which was more than two and a half years after the war began.

Before we turn to what happened you and your family after your birth, let's start first with you telling us what you can about your family and what you know of their lives before you were born.

>> Arye Ephrath: Thank you, Bill. And thank you, everybody, for coming here today.

My father was one of eight children, six boys and two girls. Born to a very religious Jewish family in Bardejov, Czechoslovakia. And his father ran a general store in that little town. With the boys of the family working with him in the store.

My father, by the time the war started, was already in his early 30s and caused worry for his parents because he wasn't married yet. He was very choosy in who he chose to associate with. He was by that time pretty well to do economically from his work in the store. But as I said -- my mother was born in Hungary. Her father was a lumber merchant. She was born in a very small town. Her family was much more modern in the sense they were not Orthodox religious Jews as my father's family was. She could very easily have passed for a non-Jewish person by her appearance.

When the Nazis invaded Hungary, they deported many Jews before they started taking them to the concentration camps they deported many Jews, including my mother's family who had to leave everything behind and move. They found refuge in a Czechoslovakian city, large city, Brno. They showed up there with no possessions and my father-in-law and her father was trying to find a way to sustain his family. Not long after that, they were deported from there as well and they found refuge in a small village near Bardejov, which was my father's village.

As they arrived there, the local Jewish community met them and accepted them. My grandmother, my mother's mother, was bemoaning the fact that here they are, the opposition,

they had to leave everything behind other than the shirts on their backs she has two daughters, my mother and younger sister, and how was she going to get those daughters married without a dowry, which was the custom in Europe at the time, provide a dowry to her wedding.

One of the local people said, a-ha, I happen to know of this family in nearby Bardejov and they are besides themselves because they say they happen to have a son who is in his 30s, well to do, but very choosy for girlfriends; maybe he wouldn't care about dowry; maybe we can get the two together, which they did and the rest is history.

>> Bill Benson: As we said in the introduction, your father was able to keep his store for a long time because it was considered essential. Why did the Nazis consider it essential? What was it that he was selling that was important?

>> Arye Ephrath: The general store, it was the one general store in town. And it sold basically -- it was the mini Wal-Mart of Czechoslovakia. It had everything from feed to bolts to groceries. So they sold basically a little bit of everything. It wasn't a very large store but they sold everything that anybody needed. That's where they went. And some of it was perishable, the food items and so on. And some of the hardware became useful to everybody including the German occupiers.

By the way, as long as we are talking about the chance meeting of my father and my mother, I know that arranged marriages or marriages by blind dates may sound quaint nowadays but I must tell you that they were married all of their lives, close to 60 years. And they went through some very hard times, through the war and then later after the war as well. And not once have I heard them, a cross word going between them or any other attitude other than just respect and love. I think there is a lot to be said for that.

>> Bill Benson: Thanks for sharing that.

Sadly, the day that you were born, April 7, 1942, as we mentioned, was also the day of the first transports taking Jews to Auschwitz. Tell us the circumstances of your birth and then how your parents were able to then avoid deportation.

>> Arye Ephrath: The war transport in the context of the Holocaust, as many of you know, was enough that cause shivering in everybody's spine in Europe at the time. A transport did not mean what it means today a transport. A transport meant that the local German authorities published a list of names of local residents who were required to report to the local train station with one suitcase. There were 100 to 120 people to a car and taken to what was billed as a labor camp.

The transport, the day I was born, the first transport out of Bardejov, was going to a newly opened concentration camp in Poland named Auschwitz. Even though Auschwitz was only a few months old at the time it already had a very bad reputation of people who went there were never to be heard from again.

So when the order for people to show up to the train station went out, many people, of course, complied as they had everywhere because the penalty for non-compliance was to be shot. Many people complied but some people preferred to take the chances. Bardejov was surrounded by forest. And some people escaped into the forest to avoid going on that transport. Among them was my father. My mother was in labor in that day and she could not leave the house and she stayed home with her housekeeper who later helped her deliver her son.

Also, it's an interesting point that my mother's obstetrician, Dr. Rudolph Radich, a Czechoslovakian, non-Jewish, and he had no reason to fear for his life in that point but it turns

out that Dr. Radich's mother -- when he was a young boy, his mother worked as a housekeeper in the household of the Jewish doctor in town, in Bardejov. And the Jewish doctor took a liking to the young Rudolph who was turned out to be a very bright boy and saw to it that he got a good education, which normally he wouldn't have gotten being the son of a housekeeper. And when he graduated from high school, the Jewish doctor supported him through medical school until Rudolph Radich became Dr. Radich.

He did it out of the goodness of his heart. But there was a thought in town that perhaps he did it because Rudolph may have been his legitimate son. That was enough for the Germans to suspect Dr. Radich of having some Jewish blood in him and therefore when the transport order came out, even though he was a good Catholic who went to church every Sunday, he was on the list of Jews to be transported. And he went to the forest as everybody -- as many other people did. He came back after dark into my mother's home to tend to her after I was born.

>> Bill Benson: You said to me that at that time the Germans were very methodical as they took their lists with names on them. Tell us what happened when they came for your mother's sister.

>> Arye Ephrath: In the beginning, as you said, Bill, the Germans were working according to the German order of things. They took people on the list. They had their methodology -- it blows my mind to think of the industrialized murder -- industrial scale of the murder of people, of thousands of people, worked in a bureaucratic, orderly, official, process-oriented way. They had lists of names. They were looking for people. Toward the end of the war they were a little less orderly and less panicked and they took anybody who they could. But at that point they hadn't.

They showed up at my mother's home, my grandmother's home, looking for my mother's younger sister. And I have no idea what caused them to decide that out of all the Jews in Europe they needed my aunt, my mother's sister, to take the that day. But they showed up to take my mother's younger sister who was not home at the time. So they told my grandmother they are going to be back in the evening and she better be here. And my grandmother told them, you know what, my daughter is a young girl. She was in her maybe 20s at the time. My daughter is a young girl and her life -- her whole life is ahead of her. I am an old woman and I have lived my life. Why don't you take me instead and fulfill your quota? Being German they said, no, we need to take her.

I'm thinking back on that. My grandmother, the old lady who had already lived her life, she was 48 years old at the time. She was taken shortly thereafter, after the Germans gave up on going by lists. The wife of the keeper of the local synagogue got sick. And so my grandmother went over to their house to bring them some hot soup because the woman of the house was sick and couldn't cook. So she went over with hot soup for the family. And it so happened that she showed up just as the Germans were there taking the family away. And as soon as they showed up, they took her as well. And that's the last that anybody had seen of her. My grandfather was at work at the time. And he heard what happened and not wanting to part with his wife, he ran to the train station and managed to get on the same train and both of them were taken and that was that.

>> Bill Benson: And you had shared with me, Arye, that your grandfather, when he did that, there was no question what he knew --

>> Arye Ephrath: By that time there was no question if you got on the train, you were going to your death. Yes, of course.

>> Bill Benson: Arye, about a year after your birth your parents concluded they couldn't keep you safe in Bardejov and made the decision to have your mother take you to Hungary with her while your father remained behind in Bardejov. How did they arrange for you and your mother to go to Hungary? Tell us about the efforts they went through to get you there and then tell us what your mother did once back in Hungary.
>> Arye Ephrath: My father didn't have much of an education growing up in a small town, small village in eastern Slovakia. I think basically he finished maybe the equivalent of elementary school and then went to work at his father's general store. Nevertheless, he was the sharpest, smartest person with the best common sense I've ever known in my life. Between his brains and his unbounded optimism, I used to think of him as being sort of a cat. No matter how you drop and him and where you drop him, he always managed to land on his feet.

So he managed to get [Speaking Non-English Language]. I think it translates literally to an important Jew. But of course they didn't mean important. It means an essential Jew. A useful Jew. Somebody that they could use. So he had this certificate that named him [Speaking Non-English Language] which basically guaranteed him safety as long as the certificate was in power. It didn't cover his family. His wife or his child.

The first here of -- the first year of my life my parents tried to raise me under the protection of this certificate. And then they realized that this is not going to work well. So they decided to take advantage of the fact that my mother was from Hungary, a native Hungarian and that she could pass for a non-Jew by her appearance. And they had false papers forged in her name. She presented herself as a single lady, non-Jewish.

And the idea was that she would move to Hungary and live there as a non-Jewish lady. The problem was how to get her in with me to Hungary. My parents hired a woman to try to smuggle me across the border between Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the dark of night. And she tried. And she was stopped by the Czech border guards, fined and turned around. So they tried again a few nights later. The same thing again happened. She was caught again. So on the third time my mother decided to take things into her own hands. She gave me a sleeping pill, put me in a sack, put the sack on her back, and she managed to cross the border into Hungary.

In Hungary, as Bill said, we went to her hometown, Beregszasz. And then we went to the capital, Budapest. In Budapest she found a pediatrician, a lady pediatrician, named Dr. Agnus Partzer, an older lady, a spinster, never married. She was a pediatrician. And she ran an orphanage out of her own home, out of her apartment. So my mother found her and deposited me with her to stay in the orphanage with the other kids, of course, never admitting that I was a Jewish boy.

Dr. Partzer was a little bit of a disciplinarian -- not a little bit, quite a bit of a disciplinarian. She thought the best food for kids was spinach. And if you didn't have your spinach for breakfast, if you didn't finish it, you would get it back for lunch. If you didn't finish it for lunch, you would have it again for supper until you finished. it. She also forbade my mother from coming and visiting me because she said that young kids cannot go through the emotional up and downs, being happy when my mother comes, and then crying and being sad when she leaves. So my mother couldn't come and visit me.

Fortunately there was a small park near the apartment building where there was the orphanages. And the park had a little bench. My mother would come and sit on the bench and hope to catch a glimpse of me, maybe on the terrace or through the window as I was playing with the other kids. And many, many, many years later, when I was already an adult, I went to

Budapest for business and took my mother with me. We had a very good time sitting on the same bench, looking through the same window and the same park.

My mother rented a room in a boardinghouse with her false papers. The law was, in all of Europe at the time, that the landlord who rents rooms needs to notify the local police of every new tenant. My mother knew that it would probably take the local police somewhere between three and four weeks to find out the papers -- that the identity was forged. So she would rent a room. She would pay in advance for the first month. And then two weeks into the month she would skip the place and go and find another place and do the whole thing all over again. So she kept moving from place to place, being one step ahead of the law for about a year in Hungary.

>> Bill Benson: That must have been quite costly for her to do that. How was she able to manage that?

>> Arye Ephrath: As I said, my father, before he married, being a single man with not too many expenses, living in his parents' home, working in his parents' store got reasonably well off. So fortunately they had the means to buy forged papers, to pay rent in boardinghouses and so on.

>> Bill Benson: One more question before we move on. Were your parents able to be in touch during that time, to your knowledge?

>> Arye Ephrath: To my knowledge they were not able to be in touch during this time except whenever -- my mother was not the only one who crossed the border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. At the time the Jews were being hunted down by the Germans in both countries. And there was a constant people trying to cross the border illegally. And whenever either one of them knew of a Jew trying to cross the border, they would get in touch and try to send messages to each other.

>> Bill Benson: In fact, your father eventually did send a message to your mom to come back because he had decided it was time to go find another place to live to get out of Bardejov. So he found a place in a very rural part of Slovakia. Tell us about that, how he found that place, and then how they got there and what happened once they got there.

>> Arye Ephrath: His essential Jew certificate was expiring and didn't think it was going to be renewed. The Germans were getting a little bit more desperate. There was basically a picking up of people off the streets to send to the death camps. And my father decided it's time to go into hiding. And he decided that the best place for Jews to hide would be to find a place, a village of a town that never had any Jewish population in it, reasoning that the Nazis would not go look for Jews in a place that was known not to ever have Jews in it. I don't know how he managed to do the research. This was the days before the internet and before Google. As I said, he was a very resourceful person.

It was not easy because the Jews had been living in Europe by that time for well over 1,000 years. And there was a Jewish population, even small Jewish population in some places but Jewish population almost anywhere in Europe. He found a small village in, as you said, in Slovakia named Sisov that somehow managed never to have had any Jews living in it. So he sent for my mother and for me. I do not know how we managed to get back. The three of them went to Sisov along with my father's best childhood friend and his wife and his son, older than me. They tagged along.

So the two couples --

>> Bill Benson: Can I interrupt for a second? You told me why the friend tagged along. What did he say about your dad?

>> Arye Ephrath: He said my father was born lucky and that my father -- if anybody would

survive this Holocaust, this catastrophe, then my father would be the person and he wanted to be nearby. So he did -- wherever my father goes, he would go.

So they came, six of them moved to Sisov. In Sisov they headed directly to the local church, identified themselves to the priest as Jews looking for a hiding place and asked for shelter. Of course they were taking an enormous risk. The law was that anybody harboring Jews was shot on the spot. Anybody knowing of hiding Jews and not reporting it was shot on the spot and not only they but the family and the neighbors under the assumption that the neighbors probably knew as well.

So the priest was taking an enormous risk hearing these people telling him we are Jewish and we are trying to hide, please take care of us. And he agreed. And he agreed to shelter them in the church. But he said: I can take care of the adults; I cannot possibly take the risk of having two little children. I was 2 years old and the other boy, Victor but went by Vici, was 3. I cannot take the risk of having little children here so you will have to find another solution for the children.

They were really quite in a quandary about what to do about the children. My father noticed the village, like many other villages in Europe, was also surrounded by a very thick forest, forest and hills. And he noticed on a hill right outside the village, on the top of the hill, there was a single building, single house. He asked the priest what is that. The priest told him the people of this village of Sisov, they make their living by raising sheep and goats mostly. And instead of each family taking care of their own sheep and goats, they designated one person to be the village shepherd and he would take care -- take the sheep out to graze and so on. He would take care of everybody's sheep and goats and in return the village provided him with a place to live.

Sheep and goats, I don't know what you know about them but one of the things about them is they don't smell the best. So the house that they gave him was the house furthest out from the village on top of that hill. And my father decided that that was the ideal place for Vici and for me. They went up the hill. They met the shepherd. His name was Jan. Jan is the Slovak version of John. Jan Mierni. His wife was Irina. So he talked to them. And they asked if they would be willing to take care of the two children.

At that time -- this was 1944. It was beginning to be clear that the Germans were going to lose the war. The BBC, the British Broadcasting, kept broadcasting to the population of Europe: Hold fast, we are coming, the war is not going to last very much longer. So they considered that this is going to be a matter of maybe weeks at most, maybe a month, two months. So they wanted Jan and Irina to take care of us for the duration. And they agreed.

They agreed to take us in. And they had two conditions that they wanted to -- one condition was they only had daughters and they said it would look suspicious if people saw boys running around in the front yard. So we needed -- they said we need them to become girls, to be dressed as girls, to grow our hair to behave like girls and to be girls to which the parents, my parents and Vici's parents, agreed. The second condition was this is -- they only had daughters and they did not have a son. They wanted my parents to sign a paper saying that should my parents not survive the war, that Jan and Irina had the right to adopt me as their own son. And my parents had not much of a choice and agreed and signed.

To this very day when things, in my life, when things are rough, I'm known to say, Darn it, you know, today I could have been a very successful shepherd in Slovakia.

>> [Laughter]

>> Arye Ephrath: So after -- an interesting point here. After my parents left Vici and me with

the Miernis and they went to the church to hide in the church, it occurred to them that they had given the Miernis the perfect motivation to turn them in. The Miernis were desperate to have a boy. They were going to get me as their son if my parents didn't survive. What's to stop them from turning my parents in? And so they decided not to tell the Miernis where they were hiding.

At the end of the whole episode, after the war was over and we were all reunited, they very strongly apologized to the Miernis that we didn't trust you and we didn't tell you where we were hiding but you know we couldn't because we didn't want to put you in the position to where you could turn us in you didn't know where we were, you couldn't turn us in.

And Jan -- Jan was a very special character. He was what I think we would call here a maverick. He was a chance taker. He was a gambler. He was a happy-go-lucky type of person. I think one of the reasons that he agreed to take the risk and take us in is because he wanted to stick it to the Nazis. He was a very special character. And he said, "Oh, I knew all along where you were hiding." And they said, "How did you know?" And he said -- well, my mother, against the advice of everybody, once a week or so at night came -- got out of hiding, jumping ahead, but got out of hiding and made her way to the Miernis' house to visit her little boy. And he said -- including during the winter. And he said one of the times when she came to visit after she left, "I just followed her footsteps in the snow. And I knew exactly where you were hiding."

>> Bill Benson: Arye, I'm mindful of our time. I'm going to ask you now to turn to what the adults did when they left you at the Miernis. But before we finish, I want you to come back to the Miernis, but tell us, so your parents leave you with the shepherd and his family. So they go back down to the church.

>> Arye Ephrath: They go back down to the church. They were hiding -- the priest put them in the bell tower of the church because nobody ever goes up there. And the four adults were up in the bell tower under strict orders to be very quiet during the day. At night the priest would come up on the ladder, bring people some food and water. They had a bucket up there to use the bathroom. So the priest would take the bucket away to empty it. And they were there for something like two or three weeks maybe.

This was already the fall of 1944. And they were beginning to be worried. The winters in Europe are very harsh. And they were beginning -- of course, the bell tower is open to the elements. They were beginning to get worried about the winter. But they were happy to have a place to hide which seemed like a safe place.

After about two or three weeks of being there, one night after the priest had left from his daily visit, they were asleep when they heard footsteps coming up the ladder. Of course, scared the daylights out of them. A man they did not know, a strange man, showed up, coming up the ladder. And he said, "A-ha, just like I thought. There are Jews hiding here". I think it's a miracle that nobody had a heart attack.

But it turns out that man, his name also was Jan, Jan Galko. The priest was the most respected man in every village in Czechoslovakia. And the village folk provided him with transportation. What is the transportation? The transportation was a horse and carriage. It's not really much of a carriage. It's a horse and a cart. And a person to drive the cart to take care of the horse. Jan Galko was this person. He was the priest's coachman.

So he came up and he said there is a rumor in the village that there are Jews hiding in the church. And there's rumors in the village that tomorrow a Nazi patrol is supposed to come and check this church out. And so if I were you, I would not stay here.

Of course, they don't know who he is. They don't know if he's telling the truth. They

don't know if this is maybe a trap. And even if all of this is true, what else can they do? And they say to him, "What is it that we can do?" And he says, "You come with me to my home." Not having any other alternative at the time, middle of the night, he takes them to his home.

It turns out that he and his four sons and his wife live in a hut maybe the size of half of this stage, the whole hut, one room. There is a coal stove in the corner to keep the place warm and to cook on, the kitchen. There are a couple of beds in the other corner, that's the bedroom.

It's a very small place. And it's clearly -- they have a hard time making ends meet and feeding themselves never mind bringing in four more people. So my parents and the other couple, they look around and they say, you know, we really appreciate the offer, we really appreciate your generosity and what you're offering us but we just don't see how this can work. We'll manage somehow. We've managed to this day. We shall continue to manage. Thank you very much. And they turn to leave.

And his wife, Jan Galko's wife who was standing there quietly the whole time, she starts to cry. My father thinks that maybe he had offended her in some way. He says, "I'm sorry, what is it I said? What caused you to cry?" And she says, "All my life I have been a good Catholic. I have gone to church every Sunday. I have done what Jesus would want me to do. And Jesus sends me four people. I can save four lives. And you want to leave." Not much they can do. They stayed.

The next day, Jan and his four sons, he had a big pile of hay in his backyard for the horse. They went and they dug a hole in the ground under the hay and covered it with a couple of pieces of lumber. And my parents and the other couple went into the hole. The procedure was that during the day, all four of them lie under the hay in that hole. They called it their bunker. They lay in the bunker. There was not enough room for a person to move. If one person wanted to turn, everybody had to turn. And that's where they stayed during the day. After that they could come out to take a breather to go to the bathroom, to stretch. Once a week or so one of the sons would go into the forest and shoot a squirrel or rabbit and bring it home and that would be the meat for the week. They stayed in that bunker for eight months, until April 1945.

As I said before, once a week or once every other week, my mother would crawl out of the bunker at night, against the advice of everybody else, to go -- there were three things my mother was afraid of. It was the darkness, the woods, and dogs. And nevertheless, she would get out in the darkness and go into the woods with all the dogs of the village barking to go and visit her son and then come back.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind, tell us what you can, a little bit about your life with Vici now living with the shepherd and his family while your parents spent eight months in their hole in the ground.

>> Arye Ephrath: Well, relatively speaking I had a good life. The Miernis embraced Vici and me as part of the family. We had our chores with the sheep and the goats and the household. The one thing that was difficult for me. My mother tongue was Hungarian because my mother was Hungarian. I also spoke German because the common language between my father who was Czechoslovakian and mother who was Hungarian, the common language was German. And, of course, I spoke Slovakian. I had to speak only Slovakian, never utter a word in any other language. I had to call Jan papa and Irina mama in Slovakian instead of what I was used to calling my mother, in the Hungarian word for mother.

And Jan also instituted an exercise just in case somebody shows up unexpectedly.

Whenever he made a sound and said [Speaking Non-English Language], which means now, Vici and I were supposed to jump into the coal bin, right next to the coal stove in the corner of the room. There was a big bin full of coal. We were supposed to jump into the coal bin, close the cover over us, and stay there until he told us come out. Of course he did the right thing to prepare for the case of anybody showing up. I don't know if anybody ever did show up. But we had those exercises very often.

And being 2 years old at the time, my memories of the period are not very solid but I do remember very, very vividly how I hated -- how afraid I was of the dark. In the coal bin with the cover closed. The other thing I remember very vividly from this time, Jan was a very simple person. He was a sheep shepherd. He was a hard worker. Every night after work he would go down to the village, to the pub with a friend and he would come home having a couple of beers maybe too many and take us all out of bed, his daughters, Vici and me and his wife, line us up, take off his belt, and give us a taste of his belt, beat us up, just in case we had done something wrong. So my two vivid memories of that period.

>> Bill Benson: You said when he hadn't had too much to drink he was a really pleasant guy.

>> Arye Ephrath: He was a very pleasant guy and he was a fun guy because he had this impish character about him.

>> Bill Benson: And you were with him for more than eight months as well.

>> Arye Ephrath: By the time I finished being there, I had grown to regard Irene and Jan as my parents, actually. I knew my mother because she came to visit frequently but I regarded Jan and Irina as basically my parents.

>> Bill Benson: Two other things as we start to close out I'd like you share with us. One, of course, was liberation day and reuniting with your parents.

>> Arye Ephrath: Just like the day I was born was a very sad day, first transport out of Bardejov, my 3rd birthday, April 1945, was the day the Red Army liberated Czechoslovakia. And shortly thereafter Vici and I were reunited with our parents. By that time -- I don't know about Vici. I did not recognize my father at the time. It took a while. It took a while for us to become a family again.

We went back to Bardejov to find out -- everyone who stayed in Bardejov -- three of my father's brothers had left Bardejov beginning of the war. One went to New York to find his fortune in America. And two of them went to what was then Palestine to start building the country there. Other than those, everybody who was left in Bardejov and their families were gone.

Bardejov had a very thriving Jewish community and it was all gone. They did not -- my parents did not want to stay there. They moved to a nearby city named Kosice, which is a big city, relatively speaking, in Czechoslovakia. My younger brother was born there after the war. And then a couple of years later we all emigrated to the state of Israel.

>> Bill Benson: There's -- it's obvious to everybody here that you were only able to just touch the surface of what you could have shared with us. I wish we had all afternoon. And, of course, getting to Israel, starting a new life in Israel, you ended up joining the Israeli Army, became the tank commander, seven years in the Army, fought in the Six-Day War.

So much more you could share with us. But the one last question I have for you -- and when Arye's finished this question, please stay with us because he will conclude our program in a moment.

You said to me when I first met you, "I have always been floored by the Slovakian families who saved us." And you were able to have the Miernis and the Galko families formally

recognized by the state of Israel. Tell us about that really significant event in your life.
>> Arye Ephrath: I want everybody to understand, and of course you do understand, it's not just the matter of the inconvenience of having extra people living with you for a long time when you can hardly afford to put food on the table for your own family. It's not just that. It's the fact that they took unbelievable, incredible amount of courage for people in those days to harbor Jews. They were putting their lives, their family's lives, their neighbors' lives in huge jeopardy. Those are not overly educated, sophisticated people. They were people who knew right from wrong, who knew good from evil, who did the right thing at the right time. I'm in awe of both of those families and of the priest in the church who did all of that basically just because their conscience told them to do that.

Years later, an international organization that exists to commemorate the Holocaust, they declared selected people who had shown outstanding humanity during the Holocaust as righteous among the nation. By the time that I was a young adult and my younger brother was a young adult, we had nominated -- I say we but it was really -- I have to give the credit to my younger brother who did most of the legwork of collecting the documentation and notarized testimonies and photographs and all of this kind of stuff, to nominate both of those families as the righteous among the nation.

They were, indeed, designated as such. And when that happened, my family, my brother's family, some of our cousins and so on, we all made a pilgrimage to Czechoslovakia to be present at the ceremony where the Israeli ambassador presented them with the certificate and medals, my mother, who was an older lady by then, made a speech, cried. It was a very, very touching ceremony and very touching -- they deserve every bit of it.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Arye.

One other comment. Probably it's on the minds of everybody. Your parents and their friends that were in that hole together, you shared with me that after that experience they remained friends for the rest of their lives after that.
>> Arye Ephrath: They did.
>> Bill Benson: We didn't have a chance for you to ask Arye some questions. We could have used another few hours. But I would like to let you know that when we finish, when Arye closes our program, he will remain on the stage and we invite you to come up here afterwards and meet Arye, get your picture taken with him if you want, ask him a question. So we'll have that opportunity afterwards. Please take advantage of that.

I want to thank all of you for being with us. We'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. When Arye finishes in just a moment, I'm going to ask you to stay for that, our photographer, Joel, here, one of the three we have today, is going to come up on stage and he's going to take a picture of Arye with you as the backdrop. That's a really wonderful memento of today's program.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. So with that, I'm going to turn back to Arye to close today's program.
>> Arye Ephrath: Thank you, Bill.

Even though my story is told against the dark and tragic background of the Holocaust, I consider my story to be one of inspiration. My parents, when they came to Sisov and put their faith in the hands of the priest whom they did not know and then the Miernis and the Galkos, it is possible that they happened to meet the three only righteous people in Sisov and it was just their luck that they had met those three righteous people.

I think it's much more likely that there were many other people in Sisov who, when

the chips were down, when they were faced, if they would have been faced with the same kind of hard decision with that kind of life and death type of situation, I like to believe that there are many other people in Sisov who would have done the right thing just like those people did.
If that is true, then it only follows that many of us today whether we believe it or not, if we are faced with a moral dilemma of this magnitude, of this kind of situation, that many of us would find it within themselves to come up with the courage and the generosity and the decency to do what is right at the time. And that is my hope.

Thank you very much.

>> [Applause]