REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON MANNY MANDEL
MAY 31, 2018

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>> Edna Friedberg: Good morning. Ok. That was the lamest good morning I have ever heard. Please. Good morning.
>> Good morning!
>> Edna Friedberg: Thank you. I don't like to feel that I'm alone here.

Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Edna Friedberg 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. Manny Mandel, whom we shall meet shortly.

How many you have this is your first time in the building? Wow. Really almost everybody. That is really terrific. Welcome. We hope it's not your last time here and that you will encourage your friends to come back when they are in town.

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. This program allows you to hear directly from someone for whom this history is not history but his life, his personal experience.

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their Experiences and this is our 18th season of the

program. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here At this museum. This program will continue every Wednesday and Thursday until mid-August. So please encourage people to come and hear from our other guests. Our website, www.ushmm.org, also includes information about upcoming guests, podcasts, and video recordings of prior interviews as well. So if you are finding yourselves intrigued by what you hear today, please check it out.

Manny will share with us his *First Person* account of his experience during the Holocaust as a survivor of the Holocaust for about 45 minutes. I've already warned him that I will interrupt him. If he doesn't go on too long, we will hopefully have a chance for questions from you but we have a lot to cram into today's program.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Manny is just one individual's experience. We have prepared a brief slide introduction to help orient you and make sure that we all have the same frame of reference when we're talking about this history.

So this very cute baby that we see here is little Emanuel Mandel. Manny was born to a religious Jewish family May 8, 1936, in Riga, Latvia. His parents were not Latvian Jews. They moved there because of a job his father took and he will tell us more about his dad's career trajectory soon.

Manny was just 3 years old when World War II started. And although he was born in Latvia, his parents were, as I said, not from there. His mother, here on the left, is Ella Mandel and his father was named Yehuda.

Shortly after Manny's birth his father accepted a post as a cantor in the Hungarian capital city of Budapest. The family returned to Hungary where they had lived before the war.

We will go to the next slide. It shows Hungary on a map of Europe and then Budapest, the city, is highlighted here in the map.

Another photo of Manny as a little boy with his father. He was based at the renowned -- whoops. A little delay here. Magic, Tom, in the booth, can you help me out here? I'm not getting a display of what I see.

Well, I will go on and talk while we are hearing about it. We will see in a minute, a picture of Manny and his father on the street in Budapest.

Just to orient you, the Hungarian government began to pass anti-Jewish laws beginning in 1938. And in 1940, Hungary joined the Axis Alliance so they were allied with Nazi Germany. In 1941 troops participated in the invasion of the Soviet Union. And both the circumstances of the war and increasing restrictions on Jewish participation and public life in Hungary made life increasingly difficult, stressful, precarious for Jews living in Budapest at the time.

Manny did, though, attend school in Budapest. Let's see. Should I keep clicking along? Should we -- is that a thumbs down?

All right. I'm just going to keep talking then. We will in a minute, I hope, show you more pictures of Manny's family. But maybe in the meantime I'm going to go ahead and introduce Manny and ask him to join us on stage if we can show some of your little kid pictures later, that will be a bonus.

Thank you. Please join me in welcoming our *First Person* guest Manny Mandel.

>> [Applause]

>> Edna Friedberg: I also want to acknowledge that in the audience we have Manny's wife of 59 years -- am I right?

>> Manny Mandel: 60 this year.

>> Edna Friedberg: Congratulations. Adrienne is here.

[Applause]

Also, his son, David, his daughter, Lisa, are here today. And I wanted to let you know that after the war Manny worked for many years as a psychotherapist. So we are very happy that now that he has retired he spends a lot of time with us here at the museum.

Manny, let's begin at the beginning. You were born in Riga, Latvia, 1936, but your family's stay there was a short one. Can you tell us about your parents, where they were from, what brought them there and how they met?

>> Manny Mandel: My father was born in what was this Austro-Hungary. It was part of Hungary but it was also Transylvania. You might know it a lot better because there was a very famous count that came from that part of the world? You remember him? My father claimed not to have met him. But that's where he's from. My mother is also from Hungary but from southern Hungary which after the First World War became part of Yugoslavia. So ethnically Hungarian.

Because of certain situations of my father having served in the Czech Army, he could not get work papers which is what he wanted to do to work as a cantor. He found a rather prestigious job in Riga, where we had no family, connections, but they were there for about three and a half years. And during that time I was created. And at the time that I was just about to be born, they were waiting for me to be born so my father could go back to Hungary because he did get working papers.

So as Edna said, 1936, I was born in May. I think in July, August, I don't remember obviously, we moved to Hungary and lived there until the war came. He had a job in Hungary, in Budapest, which was a prestigious job as a cantor, one of the four chief cantors in the city of Budapest which at the time had 200,000 Jews. It was a very large Jewish community.

>> Edna Friedberg: And for those not familiar with Jewish religious practice, a cantor is a member of the clergy who specializes in both ritual but also music. Your father was a performer as well as a religious leader.

>> Manny Mandel: The most famous cantor in history is one Johann Sebastian Bach. That was his title, believe it or not, a cantor.

>> Edna Friedberg: You told a story of someone saying you spoke Yugoslavian. Can you explain what that means and what borders were shifting all the time?

>> Manny Mandel: Borders were shifting. My father from Hungary, served in the Czech Army. Today that village is in the Ukraine. The Village did not move. The government did. My mother is from Hungary which in 1919 or 1918, just after the First World War, becomes part of the new country of sorts of Yugoslavia; not the kingdom of Serbia but Yugoslavia. Today it's Serbia again.

My mother tells a story that one day, age of 10, a teacher comes to the class or the principal comes in and says: Boys and girls, tomorrow, after the weekend, we're going to change language from Hungarian to Serbo-Croatian. If any of you know anything about Hungary and Serbo-Croatian, you would know there's not a syllable that's the same, not even the alphabet. Hungarian was written with the characters we use in English and Serbo-Croatian in their alphabet. They had no issue. They were bilingual. But this was the kind of change that came about as the countries changed borders and changed governments.

>> Edna Friedberg: And your grandfather was a rabbi; was he?

>> Manny Mandel: Yes.

>> Edna Friedberg: Where did he live?

>> Manny Mandel: My grandfather and grandmother, my mother's parents, lived in the city of Novi Sad, again, a Serbo-Croatian name. It's in southern Hungary, northern Yugoslavia. He was a rabbi of the community. My father and my mother met there. And they married there.
>> Edna Friedberg: So I would say for anyone who might be having a little confusion or difficulty following all of these languages, they've actually gotten the idea. The idea is this is a very cosmopolitan, multi-highly cultural, shifting environment.
>> Manny Mandel: Mixed up.
>> Edna Friedberg: Technical term, absolutely.

So your father got the job he wanted in Budapest. This was really a plum position; was it not?
>> Manny Mandel: Very much so.
>> Edna Friedberg: And you moved to Budapest. How did he come to get that job? What did that mean for your life? Did a lot of people know who you were, the cantor's kid?
>> Manny Mandel: I can't give you chapter and verse about the very early years because as I said I was a few months old. My recollection is much clearer from the time I was about 4 or 5.

Life was very nice. My father's income and position was of some significance so we had a very lovely life, as I remember.
>> Edna Friedberg: Well, you were a child. Children I think even in stressful situations don't know any different.
>> Manny Mandel: But as you said before, the Hungarian and the -- anti-Jewish laws though promulgated in the `20s did not enforce until `38. So the beginning -- there was really no impact of any of those laws until late `30s. As a consequence, life was very good and very comfortable for all of us until it began, they began to squeeze the envelope.
>> Edna Friedberg: Could you tell us a little bit more about that squeezing, what kinds of restrictions, when did that start? And this is under Hungarian rule not German.
>> Manny Mandel: As it was mentioned in the introduction, Hungary became a country that was connected to the Nazis as Italy was; namely, they were allies. As a consequence, Hungary both had the problem of having a Nazi-connected population, called the Arrow Cross, which were the Nazi Party of Hungary but in addition to that they also had the privilege of not being invaded.

If you know your history to some degree you know many countries were invaded from 1937, `38, `39, Poland and so forth. Hungary doesn't have any German troops until 1944. So our life was in some ways easier, began to be more difficult as certain restrictions came in.

Example, everybody was required to wear a yellow star. Which I as a first grade kid thought was a mark of distinction. Terrific, you know? Here I am a little boy and I have a yellow star like the adults do. Until a little bit later when I discovered this is not a mark of distinction but a target.

Let me explain. We lived on the fifth floor of our apartment building, the top floor. From the corner of the building where my parents' bedroom was you could see down the street and see my school. We lived at No. 13, the school was 44. Two blocks away. Yet, I'm told, and I didn't know this at the time, most every day, perhaps every day, my father or somebody would follow me to school. Why? Because what was beginning to happen is that this was a target not a mark of distinction. Somebody would come by and whack you on the head. They don't want your shoes, books, jacket, anything. Just wanted to whack you on the head. Jewish kid, whack, nobody would say boo. I didn't notice until a little later I discovered maybe a mark of distinction a misnomer.

In 1942, my father began to leave the house because he was called by phone or by letter or somebody came to the door for what were called the labor battalions. Let me digress a little bit. Hungarian men were conscripted into the Army. As I said, 1941, fighting on the Russian front to do the work that the men could not do back in Hungary. The labor forces recruited Jews who were not drafted into the Army. So they were called out for one day for a week, for a month, or undetermined period to repair roads, to repair railroads, to do some mining, other kind of work. You weren't familiar with it but you learned quickly.

My father would be gone from `42 until `44 when we were deported. I saw less of my father than I saw him. His being gone was perfectly normal in my life. As a consequence, my father was not in my life for two years. He was home sometimes. One of the times he was home I said to him, I wondered if you could would consider doing something for me. He said, What would you like me to do? I said, Well, I've got this overgrown tricycle, I'm 7 1/2, I could ride an 18-inch bike. Would you get me one? He said getting you the bike is not the problem. There are two problems with the bike. One I can resolve, the other I will not.

What's the problem? Fifth floor of the apartment building, the apartment building had an elevator which was as olds the building 50 years old, had brakes and mechanical problems. And the equipment that had to be repaired was repaired in those kinds of workshop and factories that now were repairing tanks and guns and stuff. And the elevator parts for my building were kind of low on the priority list.

So my father said, I have to truck the bicycle down, go to the park, ride the bike, I'd come back and trike the bicycle up. I could not truck an 18-inch bicycle up and down the stairs. I wasn't big enough or strong enough at the time. My father was. He says, As much as I would like not to do it, I will do it. Second reason is more important. When you're in the park -- which was near the house, and had the picture come up, you would have seen the park, But the point is, if we go to the park and you ride the bike and you're out of my sight for 12 seconds, somebody might decide you and your yellow star which had to be worn are a target and they can whack you on the head. They don't want your bike. They don't want your shoes or your coat. They just want to whack you on the head because this is something that says permission is granted. I began to understand at the age of 7 this was not a mark of distinction but a target.

A couple of other things rather quickly. Man comes through the door and says the telephone has to go. My father said, I need the phone for work. Too bad. Law was passed no telephones in Jewish homes. If anybody gets the logic of that, I'd like to know what it was but that's what it was.

Most homes, most middle class families, and we were middle class, had some kind of household help. There was a young woman from one of the local farms who lived with us. She was 17. She had her own quarters in our apartment. She was my mother's helper. But you want to remember this is 1939, 1940, 1941, there weren't too many here but certainly there were no washing machines, dryers, fridge raters, freezers, microwaves and toasters. So all of this work was done by hand. She was told she had to leave the house because Jews could no longer employ domestic help. She was my buddy because she was the closest in age to me. She was 17. I was about 8. She had to go.

These were the beginning of restriction that came and kind of pulled the straps from the duffle belt bag and tightened the noose around the Jewish community.

>> Edna Friedberg: I have to grab my time piece. Did your family have any difficulty in obtaining food during these early years of the war? Were there other material depravations?

>> Manny Mandel: My recollection is twofold. One, no, we had all the food we wanted.

However, my grandparents, who lived in a community of maybe -- where my mother was raised, lived in the courtyard of the synagogue. My grandpa had been rabbi. They had apartments on the edge of the courtyard. There was some land. As the war came, they began to grow turkeys and geese and would send one up through a messenger periodically. I don't seem to recall we needed it but it was a nice supplement. The food was ok.
>> Edna Friedberg: I think the context of Hungary teaches something very interesting to us; that, in fact, one of the ironies is since Hungary was allied with Germany, Hungarian Jews in many ways were sort of sheltered from the most chaotic violence of the war until later.
>> Manny Mandel: It was delayed.
>> Edna Friedberg: Let's talk about the first time that you really did encounter violence. December 1941 your family took a trip. Would you tell us about that.
>> Manny Mandel: This is winter 1941. I was not yet in school. My father had some time. So they decided to go south by train from Budapest to Novi Sad. My mother's town to visit with my grandparents, my mother's two sisters and one of my cousins. There was nothing particular about that, about a three, three and a half-hour ride by train. We stayed in my aunt's apartment. My mother was the oldest of the three. This was the youngest aunt who became my favorite aunt. It's her birthday today or tomorrow. She's long gone but we recognize her birthday.

As an anecdote, I have one cousin left who lives in Belgrade, Yugoslavian. She's the daughter of my mother's brother, my first cousin. I talked to her this morning. We recognized our aunts that way.

We go to Novi Sad, and stay in my aunt's house. I don't recall anything the first day or two. Though I do remember her husband took me to his factory. He manufactured cork products. About the third day, in the morning somebody comes up the elevator or the stairs and says there's something funky going on in the street. We're going -- within a few minutes, knock, knock on the door and two policemen, I thought rather curtiously, say, gentlemen -- this is winter. Not blizzard but snow on the ground and it's winter -- please dress warmly; you need to come out; we have to run a census.

Now, we all know we do census in this country every 10 years. The Nazis felt if they do a census every 20 minutes -- I exaggerate -- that would be helpful to them in keeping track of where everybody is all the time. It, in fact, worked. We get dressed, come out on the sidewalk. They said, please line up on the sidewalk and turn left and walk in that direction. Which we did. I remember clearly we walked for some time, a couple, three hours perhaps. I walked. My mother carried me. My father carried me. I'm 5 1/2, a little guy. We arrived in a place that I recognized, believe it or not. It was an eight-foot house, sidewalk, and the main road.

In European cities, perhaps some of you know this, that have no oceans or seas or lakes, people will make beaches out of rivers. The Danube River, major river, runs through the city. On the left side of the stockade fence between the fence and the river, which was frozen solid of about three feet of ice, maybe 200, 300 yards, were beaches in the summer time, hot pools, cold pools, thermal pools, amusement park, restaurants. It was a lovely place. I had been there the previous August. This is only three, four months later. I remembered being there. Why we were there I didn't know, of course. But neither did the adults.

We were lined up along this stockade fence. Eventually my grandparents came, my aunts came, others. We kind of huddled together, walking in that direction. And we see that the gate to the beach is open. People go to the gate and turn left. That's all we know.

As we're doing this, there's a police officer standing on the right. He says to my father, Mister, what are you doing here? My father said visiting my family. He said, That's your business but you're not from here. If we count you in the census, you and the people around you, it will mess up the numbers. We can't do that. My father said to him, How do you know me? He says, Well, you don't recognize me but I recognize you. I'm a foot patrolman, police officer, street police, a block from your house in Budapest. I was brought in to assist in this particular project that we're conducting. And I know you're not from here. My father says, Very nice of you to recognize me. I did not recognize you. He says, Please stand aside. Which we did.

Within minutes of the standing aside, a staff guard comes down the main road, uniform guy gets out, has power over the rest of the officers, and makes an announcement in the bull pen that says: Ladies and gentlemen, the requirements of the census have been met. Please go home. If you want to stop at the school, get some hot chocolate and coffee, you're welcome to do so. That was not of our interest:

But folks, understand, as you may be bewildered, so were we. What happened? My father grabs the first taxi to back to the apartment. First call comes in from my other aunt who says, well, 7:30 in the morning two policemen came to her house, asked three questions, and said thank you very much, goodbye. As the phone calls begin to come in and we understand what happened.

Some of you may be familiar with the fact that by this time, this is 1941, late `41, there were certain partisan activities, guerrilla activities in the forest. Something else made about it. And something happened in the general area of the city. In retribution for this particular activity, the local gendarmes, whatever you want to call them, created a Pogrom. It's a senseless, purposeless, useless, and valueless activity which says I can do this to you and there's nothing you can do about it.

Everybody made the left turn towards the river and marched 200, 300, 400 feet towards the river. The river had been opened up by cannon fire that morning. They were shot into the river. Several thousand people, Jews and non-Jews, were marched into that river, were never found -- were found down river where the ice may have been thinner or were found as bodies in March when the river thawed out. That was my first experience at any kind of Nazi-related Holocaust experience. Nothing to be personal because obviously I wasn't shot but that was my first experience in a visual way of what happened.

>> Edna Friedberg: And these shootings were conducted by policemen, officers --

>> Manny Mandel: Officers, military, and the Hungarian gendarme and so forth.

>> Edna Friedberg: But by officials.

>> Manny Mandel: Absolutely.

>> Edna Friedberg: These Hungarian measures, and in the early years of Nazi Germany, these were not crimes. These were things done within a legal framework, just discriminatory framework.

>> Manny Mandel: To the surprise of everybody when I do tours here, and I do, I tell people that there was nothing the Nazis ever did that was illegal. Get a load of that. Nothing illegal. Because what they did is they passed the law which made anything legal. If they wanted to make murder legal, they made murder legal. So murder was no longer an arrestable offense. Because they first passed the law and then everything was legal. This is one of those experiences.

>> Edna Friedberg: In this mass murder, this massacre that happened, approximately how

many people were shot?
>> Manny Mandel: The estimates go to about 3,500. Maybe not at that spot but over this particular several day Pogrom that took place.

For those of you who have been through or will go through the museum, you'll see a very famous Pogrom of course called Kristallnacht, Night of Broken Glass, which is also a reaction in Germany that happened before this one I've described to you.
>> Edna Friedberg: So your family returns to Budapest. I'm sure quite shaken from this near miss of violence. By March 1944, tensions, and I'm simplifying complex history, are increasing, disagreements are increasing between the Hungarian government and their allies in Nazi Germany and in March 1944, the Germans invade. They invade Budapest. Could you give us a little of that background? Why didn't the Nazis invade Hungary sooner and what did this actual direct occupation mean for your family and other Jews in Budapest?
>> Manny Mandel: Well, as allies, they were separate and unequal but they were separate. In 1942 -- `41, actually, the number two man in the Nazi government whom you may recall his name, Herman Goring, writes a letter on behalf of Hitler who talks about the "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem. That is not put into actual operation until 1942. There's a conference in Berlin called the Wannsee Conference. It was a building, it is still there and of no significance, where the head of Nazi government in eastern Germany, a general later assassinated in Prague, calls the conference.

And the point is the man who is going to be -- appoints the man who is going to be in charge of managing the transportation of Jews into the various camps the man's name is Adolf Eichmann, if you know the name. Eichmann does a credible job in what he's able to do in all of the countries throughout Europe. And the last country he comes to because of the allied connection is Hungary. So the Nazi government does not arrive into Hungary until March 19, 1941, which is very late in the war --
>> Edna Friedberg: `44.
>> Manny Mandel: I'm sorry. `44. Of course. As you recall, D-Day is June `44, the war ends May of `45. This is very late. And most everybody in the Nazi government understands their future except for one person who never accepted his future named Hitler who thought he would win the war the day before he killed himself. But everybody else kind of knew and they were taking certain steps to deal with what might happen after the war.
>> Edna Friedberg: Wasn't Budapest bombed by the Soviets? What was that like, do you remember?
>> Manny Mandel: The allies. The early years of the war, not the Holocaust, are very clear in my mind. We lived on the fifth floor of the apartment building, as I told you, and would march down to the shelters, the basement, twice, sometimes three times a night. The frightening part of that was the bombing. When you came up from the shelter at night, you didn't know that when you went to school the next day, the building next door to me would be bombed out and three of your friends with whom you went to school were dead. So the war was much more of an issue, an impact. And the bombings was much more frightening than Holocaust which doesn't come until very much towards the end.
>> Edna Friedberg: So once the Germans were there, what happened to your grandparents?
>> Manny Mandel: I had three grandparents that I knew. My father's mother, who lived in the village -- actually she lived with us in Budapest. But my father -- his younger brother who also lived with us, decided after having seven children who lived, she had some feet problems and diabetic problems and she should go back to the village where she had lived, where she raised

her family. Although it was a much more primitive life, there were no bombings and no war. Except what was there was the deportations and she was taken to Auschwitz. My other two grandparents from my mother's hometown were also taken to Auschwitz in a transport with my two aunts and my cousin.

In Auschwitz, and some other camps which were death camps, the selection would take place. If you go into the museum, you go through the cattle car, when you come out of it, you see two lines of people. The selection consisted of people who could not work, who were then killed within three or four hours. My grandparents and my cousin, a year younger than I, were in that room in that line. My two aunts were in the other line. They were women in their 30s, healthy, they were put out to work. They both survived the war as workers and they died of various causes, many years later after the war.

So my grandparents were deported with my aunts, my cousin, my other grandmother -- my fourth grandparent, my father's father, I never knew. He died of totally different causes in 1930 I think, or `31.

>> Edna Friedberg: So before you were born.

>> Manny Mandel: Before I was born.

>> Edna Friedberg: To be clear, for people in the audience, there's a distinction between death camps or sometimes we refer to them as killing centers which are camps the Germans created explicitly for the purpose of mass murder. That is the only purpose of them. And other camps, concentration camps were often prisoners were exploited for slave labor, as Manny described his two aunts and as, indeed, your father was exploited as slave labor.

>> Manny Mandel: He was in the camp. It was a different version of the same thing but not in the camp.

>> Edna Friedberg: But these many hundreds of thousands and millions of people, their unpaid and extensive labor was essential to the war effort.

>> Manny Mandel: They had to replace the man power that was fighting on the frontlines.

>> Edna Friedberg: Exactly. Exactly.

So later spring 1944. Because of the circumstances we've described at this point, the Jews of Budapest are the last intact Jewish community in all of German-occupied Europe. What changes in May 1944?

>> Manny Mandel: Well, even earlier than May Eichmann arrives in Budapest on the 19th of March. And within, I don't know, hours or days two men from kind of a self-appointed rescue committee are able to see him. Now, do understand please Eichmann's situation was such that to see him was about as easy as walk into Rome and saying I want to see the pope. Not easy. But they manage it. And they begin to talk with him about any kind of a deal that could be made.

Now, why a deal? As I said, everybody knew at the time, in the German government, that the war will not end well for them. They were beginning to think about what's going to happen to them after the war. And this was all the way from Eichmann, who was a lieutenant colonel in the German Army to Heinrich Himmler who was number three in the German government, the head of the Nazis. They began to make deals. They made a number of them. I don't know how many but the only one I know about is the one that had to do with me.

They come up with a proposition that says if Eichmann releases one million Jews from the various camps, one million, they will supply him with 10,000 trucks, laden with certainly materiel, to be used in the war effort. Now, there was a major problem with this proposition. If Eichmann wanted to release a million people, he couldn't. He didn't have them

anymore. It was too late in the war.

As far as 10,000 trucks, these guys didn't have a hubcap. Nothing. It was a bluff to the end of the world. One of the two was sent with as a Nazi official to Cairo to Egypt to negotiate with the British about trucks because the British come in Cairo was responsible for all the transport that was in Europe during the war, all the trucks and everything else. He got no trucks. He was put in jail as a spy, survived the war in Cairo jail, and lived after the war for any number of years unrelated to the whole deal.

This deal of 10,000 trucks for a million people obviously was an enormous non-existent situation and it was reduced to the point that the agreement was made that Eichmann will give -- will select 35 cars, boxcars, for about 1,700 people to be taken out of Budapest to a neutral port to be dispatched from Europe. Hitler said I want Jews out of Germany, which he got, Jews out of Europe, which he almost got, and Jews out of the world which he did not get.

They were supposed to board these trains for a ride to whatever port in Spain, neutral country, maybe Turkey, maybe even Germany. But instead of our going directly to the ports, we went north into northern Germany near the city of Hannover to a camp called Bergen-Belsen. You might not know Bergen-Belsen. It was not a death camp. Lots of people died but there was no crematoria. The most famous person who died in Bergen-Belsen was Anne Frank. We were taken to Bergen-Belsen. We were told we were going to be there for three days as rest and recuperation after a nine-day train ride for the purpose of getting ready for a boat ride. Not quite so.

I want to back up for a couple of sentences. The negotiator in Budapest with Eichmann is a Jewish lawyer by the name of Rudolf Kastner who was part of this rescue committee and he was the negotiator. His life is interesting. He later on met with a very fateful death in then Israel for many reasons. I'm not going to delve into that but you need to know the name Rudolf Kastner who perhaps was the most active Jew in the rescue of Jews not Schindler, not non-Jews but of Jews he may have been the most specific person in that particular issue.

Now, we go through Bergen-Belsen. We thought we were there three days. After six weeks, negotiations continued, after six weeks 350 of us were released under German command and taken to Switzerland. I wasn't one of them. Four months after that, for a total of about five and a half months in December, I and my mother, who was with me, my father was not, are also taken to Switzerland.

Now, understand, please, we were a hostage group. It was not in the interest of German government to kill us because if you kill us, you can't trade us. You can't trade dead bodies. The deal was no million for 10,000 trucks but about 1,700 for what they called valuables. As you can imagine, valuables were the things that you would carry in a suitcase: diamonds, rubies, jewelry. Not cash. Money was useless unless you had dollars which nobody had or you had British pounds, which nobody had. But other kinds of valuables which are negotiated worldwide were the valuables for which we were exchanged. They did not get these valuables unless they delivered us alive.

Our life was the same as everybody else in these camps in terms of weather, food, mud, illness. But at least we were not turned out to labor. And as a consequence, most all of us, in fact, survived.

>> Edna Friedberg: I want to pause to be sure everyone's following. I think it is more common to think about the Holocaust as some kind of natural disaster, that once it started, there is no

way to alter the course; there is no discretion. But in fact, what you're describing to us is that local authorities often had a lot of discretion, the power to decide life or death, and had their own personal interests in negotiating or bargaining in this case for different means and different ends.
>> Manny Mandel: Let me point out that Eichmann and others -- you may know the name of Dr. Josef Mengele, the famous physician who was the experimenter in Auschwitz. These guys wound up in South America. Mengele was never found. Eichmann was. But the point is, these people created lives for themselves in South America for the loot that -- not just for muscle, the various groups that were exchanged as it were. I can assure you that Eichmann was not a shoe salesman in South America. He had a very comfortable life because he had these kinds of things that he took his suitcases from the several groups that were able to make the negotiated settlement.

Himmler himself, who will be part of it, was captured after the war, escaped, was recaptured at which point he committed suicide.
>> Edna Friedberg: Manny and his mother and the others in this very lucky group of 1,700 people were really saved from almost certain death. Over the course of approximately two months, over 425,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center where almost all of them were gassed upon arrival.
>> Manny Mandel: But Eichmann arrives in Hungary, begins the deportation of 12,000 a day, 12,000 people a day were taken out. The only thing that limited the 12,000 was the number of boxcars they had. They had a limited number.

Most of you come from communities which are less than 12,000 in size.
>> Edna Friedberg: So these 1,700 hostages, bargaining chips, you described it as those who had certain eligibility. How were you fortunate enough to be in this group?
>> Manny Mandel: The simple and correct answer is I don't know. Not just because I'm a child but this was such a complex system in which some people were involved in apportioning seats on these trains -- not seats, space, to religious groups, political groups, other kinds of groups, to various people of response, various people of certain status. I don't know how we were included. Yes, my father had an important position in town. Yes, my uncle had an important position in some political involvement. So that may have had something to do with us. But specific I cannot tell you.
>> Edna Friedberg: You were 8 years old when you arrived at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. What do you remember about daily life in the time you were there and also an incident with your uncle and his shoes, I've heard about.
>> Manny Mandel: We lived in these barracks. The camp was divided into certain sections, certain number of barracks in each section. They were men, women, and families. Families meant children and their mothers not fathers. I really don't remember. I have to think about whether any fathers and mothers were in the family camp but certainly mothers were. That's where I was. My mother and I and the rest of the people.

The camp was not very warm. We had clothes. We even had some food that we brought. We were told to bring certain food for the ride to the boats. You would be amazed to know that certain food lasts months when you slice it with a razor blade. Let me tell you, my mother packed a number of things. She packed a quart or liter of oil -- no, no, chicken fat, a liter of honey, and a great big slab of some kind of bacon type fat back.

Understand that's very unusual for us. We lived in a kosher home. My father was a religious leader. Bacon was against the rules but under certain circumstances rules are not so

much broken but altered.

The two bottles of liquid, of fat, which is nutritious and honey which is also nutritious and the bacon lasted six months. I don't know how she did it but that's what she did. We also had some other stuff we brought that lasted for a while.

We discovered in Budapest still that there was a man that we knew or people knew who had a factory that could reseal tin cans. So we had a tin can of food and you used what was in the tin can, you could have it sanitized, put new food in it and he would put a new lid on it of some sort and press it in some way. We had some of those with us.

So food in the beginning was not a catastrophe but the weather was. This was beginning to be fall time. There was rain every day. And the most difficult thing every day was the fact that we had to have a census every day. Remember the census? We were told to be out at 4:00 in the morning. They would come and check us at 4:00, 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, 8:00 or 11:00 and we would be outside for all of these hours. Until one of the lieutenants said, this is ridiculous. I will be here at 8:00. You will be here at 8:00. An enormous change for our lives when we could be out there at 7:45. We were there at 8:00. But it's a lot different being out for 15 than for several hours.

Now, as we were outside, the winter of 1944, my parents had a pair of shoes made for me, my mother did before we left. She figured we're going to be in some kind of travel. In those days you didn't buy shoes in stores. You had them made by a shoemaker. The method of shoemaking had to do with taking the shoes, whatever, I'm not a shoemaker, sew the bottom and then put dowels in the bottom that you hammer in because if it gets wet, they expand and keep the sole together with the shoe. But after you're outside in the wet for hours and hours and hours and days and days, they fall out. So my shoes went like this.

My uncle was able to make an arrangement whereby he was able to find somebody who had cobbler's tools with him, shoemaker's tools. My uncle had two cigarettes which he gave to the cobbler. The cobbler fixed the shoes. He said, Son, your shoes are repaired; now don't walk any faster than half a mile an hour because they'll fall out again. Here, again, nothing to do all day long. And I couldn't even run around with my buddies. But at least not when he was watching.

>> Edna Friedberg: Still from malnutrition, exposure to the elements, you eventually got very sick. Didn't you?

>> Manny Mandel: I had some kind of multiple pneumonia. Pneumonia is the disease that is curable by antibiotics which were just being incent vented in those days and, of course, we were not first to get them. We had 35 doctors in the group but nothing with which to treat anything. The only treatment they could give me -- and I did recover, obviously -- is something -- some of you may have some fun remembering or your grandparents told you, they wrapped me in mustard plaster. You take burlap. Don't know where they got the burlap. You take mustard powder, soak it in water, soak the burlap in it and put it on you. The impact is like Bengay or Vick's. It gives a heat. It makes you feel more comfortable. Pneumonia is a disease that makes your lungs hurt. If you breathe, you rub against your ribs and it hurts. This gives you some palliative kind of help, makes you feel better. Doesn't cure the pneumonia. I guess my body did. But the mustard plaster helped me survive the disease for the weeks that I had it.

>> Edna Friedberg: You mentioned your father was not with you. Where was he? Did you have any contact with him?

>> Manny Mandel: No. From `42 to `44 my contact with my father was very limited. He was in

labor camp. From `44 to `46 I didn't see him at all. He was in territorial Hungary in all of these labor battalions until the time approximately that we left Hungary, which he and his groups or whatever they call them were taken out of Hungary and sent to the Ukraine, which is not that far but it's a neighboring country and that's where they did their work.

In -- while we were in concentration camp -- well, we didn't know this until afterwards -- my father and about 20 of his buddies decided to walk away from the camp. The Russians were approaching. The Germans were retrieving. And they were able to get away. They walked at night. They slept during the day. They stole food as well as they could. And they walked back from the Ukraine to Budapest, arriving there in late `44. Before the Russians liberated the city.

>> Edna Friedberg: And you and your mother, in the meantime, in December `44, you were sent to Switzerland which was neutral. Tell us what that was like, your arrival there, how the Swiss authorities treated you.

>> Manny Mandel: The Swiss are marvelous people. Cold as ice but marvelous. Very efficient. I will never forget arriving by German troop -- this is not a boxcar, it's a troop train. It's not first class but it's a troop train with seats. We arrived on one side of the platform from Germany. And on the other side of the platform were the Swiss trains.

Please understand that the Germans and the Swiss had this arrangement. The Swiss made it. The German train gauge is different than the Swiss gauge. You can't drive a German train into Switzerland. It's a good way not to have them invade it.

So we had to cross the platform from the dinky, dark, semi-pleasant trains into the beautiful, warm, heated, full of hot chocolate, Swiss trains on the other side of the platform to be taken to a community, to a gymnasium of a school, a couple of schools because there was 1300 of us. And the first thing the Swiss did was fumigate all of us. They did not want to have any kind of lice, vermin, and other kind of stuff to be invading their country.

We were taken to a beautiful hotel in the French part of Switzerland held by the Red Cross, for several weeks to get fattened up. We were not emaciated but all of us could use a couple of pounds. Later on we were all discharged from there so others could come in. My mother and I were sent to a children's home in the German part of Switzerland where we stayed until we left Switzerland.

>> Edna Friedberg: Why was your mother with you in a home that was for children?

>> Manny Mandel: 20 children from this very lovely hotel were sent to the children's home. They had to be sent someplace. We spoke one language, Hungarian, which nobody spoke. There had to be somebody there who could be our interpreter, our teacher, our guardian and our caretaker. My mother had been an elementary school teacher when she was younger so they decided it's the perfect choice.

My mother obviously spoke Hungarian. She also had very good German from school. And a good amount of French. The people in this school were kids from Belgium and from France. And the leadership was from Germany, mostly German Jews who ran this children's home, what you want to call it, boarding school of sorts. So my mother could become the liaison within us and them and ran the school for 20 kids ages 6 to 14. She was a school mom for this kind of a school. That's why she came along.

Now, being there as a teacher's kid is the best of all worlds and the worst of all worlds. If anything ever happened, if anybody ever did anything wrong, guess who was blamed for ratting on them.

>> Edna Friedberg: But it was extraordinary unusual for a Jewish boy, born in the time and

place where you were, not only to survive but to be with your mother for the duration of the war.
>> Manny Mandel: Yes.
>> Edna Friedberg: Extraordinarily lucky. Do you have any sense -- have you done anything to try to trace what happened to your classmates in Budapest? Do you have any sense if any of them survived?
>> Manny Mandel: Yes. Some. I could detail all that I know. One, for example, was with me both at camp and then in the Swiss home in Heiden, became a world renowned Rice professor at Michigan University. We fell into each other's laps, had some correspondence. Unfortunately he died of cancer some years ago but we did meet two or three times here. He was one. Another one who never left Switzerland I had contact with. By the time I got back to Switzerland he was gone. Another one, three years older than I, became a Hungarian-born, Swiss-educated, German professor in England.
>> [Laughter]
>> Manny Mandel: He now lives in Switzerland. He moved to Switzerland to get out of the current British government situation. And he wrote a book called "Dealing with Satan" which is a story of Kastner, whom we mentioned before, in his negotiations with Eichmann. It's a very fine book that describes our life. He writes in the first person basis. He was old enough to be a man. I was a kid.
>> Edna Friedberg: In the very few minutes we have left -- and I would like to allow for audience questions -- could you tell us what happened to your family, what choices your parents were able to make after the war ended in 1945 in Europe? Where did you go?
>> Manny Mandel: In May 1945, I was in Switzerland in this home. The original notion that was made about our deportation from Hungary and to be placed on ships, we were to be taken to Palestine in those days. My mother made the decision in Switzerland that she would never go back to Hungary again under any circumstances. And she never did.
>> Edna Friedberg: Because it was too painful? What was her reasoning?
>> Manny Mandel: It was too painful and she decided she hated Hungarians. She went back to Yugoslavia but not to Hungary.

That's what we did. We wound up in Palestine in September 1945. By this time she and my father had reconnected. My father had a colleague in Switzerland who because she was Swiss was able to communicate with Hungary. My mother was not. So my mother would talk to this cantor colleague. He would have contact with my father. My father would respond to his colleague and he back to us. This went on a number of different ways my mother said -- my father says come back to Budapest. The apartment is here. I have a job. My mother said absolutely not. Follow us. Which he did.

Eventually we get to Palestine in 1945. My father arrives in `46. As I said, from `42 to `44 I saw him a little bit, from `44 to `46 not at all. We reunited and kind of created a new family. Understand we have changed languages, countries what I called my father was a different word than what I called him before. What he called me was a different word. So we had to kind of restart the family, I at the age of 9 and my parents had to reconnect as husband and wife. From that point on we were together.

My parents decided after being in Palestine and then Israel, my father had an opportunity to come to Philadelphia to visit his one remaining sister and was able to make some arrangements by which you could stay in this country. He decided that rather than income Israel at the time. And my family took a vote and I lost. They wanted to come to the

states. I wanted to stay there. But it was a 2-1 vote. I came to the states in 1949.
>> Edna Friedberg: And what was that adjustment like?
>> Manny Mandel: New language, new school, new country, otherwise it was simple.
>> [Laughter]
>> Edna Friedberg: I think we should open it up to questions from the audience. I have many more things I could ask you but I've been able to hog the stage.

We have microphones so that everyone can hear. That gentleman in the back.
>> Manny, you said you went from Budapest to Bergen-Belsen and it took nine days. What was that journey like?
>> Manny Mandel: The journey was not direct. Cattle cars had to avoid bombings, had to avoid air raids, avoid certain hauls to make changes and the guards. So we kind of meandered. I don't know how long the ride would have been, probably a day's ride. I don't know the mileage exactly. But probably a day's ride from Budapest to northern Hungary -- to northern Germany. But it took nine because we didn't go quite straight.

They were boxcars. We were locked in during the day. It was still July. The weather was good. We could sleep outside under guard. As I said, we were told to bring some food. There were few kitchens brought in. Food was not a problem.

But you want to remember, you can go without air for minutes, water days, and food -- water hours, food days. That was not a problem. I mean a large one. Survivable. Uncomfortable but survivable.
>> Edna Friedberg: Other questions?

A shy group. Yes, there's one there. First this young man and then someone in the center.
>> How many languages do you know?
>> Manny Mandel: Well, I try English. I still speak Hungarian. I know a bit of German, enough to get by, not get lost. And I still speak Hebrew from my time in Palestine and then Israel. That's what I do.
>> Edna Friedberg: So that's four.
>> Manny Mandel: Three and a half.
>> [Laughter]
>> Edna Friedberg: Fair enough. Yes, in the way back.
>> Thank you. Maybe this is a stupid question. I've always wondered it, though. What if you just didn't wear the yellow star, identify you as a Jew?
>> Manny Mandel: Took off the yellow star --
>> Who forced you? What if people just said I'm not going to do this? Identify -- how did they know that you were Jewish compared to, say, a neighbor who wasn't? I've always wondered about that.
>> Manny Mandel: Because you had to have papers with you. You could be examined on the street 42 times a block. And if they found you were a Jew without a star, they would shoot you, period.
>> Ok. So -- all right. Thank you.
>> [Laughter]
>> So they couldn't -- they could examine anyone, walk up to anybody --
>> Manny Mandel: They did!
>> Ok.
>> Manny Mandel: You may want to remember, folks. We never had that in this country, at

least not to my knowledge. There you couldn't cross borders without papers, couldn't cross streets. You had to have identity cards at all times. In this country, how often are you examined for your identity? You are in the airports and sometimes if people with [imitating siren] stop you in the car. But short of that, how often do you have an I.D. card?

In Europe that was not the case, particularly during the war. Identity cards -- you kind of could have walked like this with them because you could have been asked anytime and you were. Why are you on this street in this section? Something like that. And if you had an identity card which said you were a Jew, which has a big J on it because Jews spelled with a J in a number of languages, if you were there without a star, I need not tell you anymore.

>> Edna Friedberg: And I can tell you in the museum's collections we have identity cards from countries across Europe. I'm picturing one from Norway which also has a big red J. But it also reminds you again of communities. If someone could obtain false papers, forged papers, or assume the identity of someone else, that was a way to hide in plain sight as a Jew. And some people did survive that way.

We have only one or two minutes left. It is our tradition -- oh, we have one more question. Wait. We need the mic for you because we're recording and we want everyone to hear.

I'm sorry. Did you have someone there? Go ahead. We'll stay. I'm just forcing you to stay.

>> Manny Mandel: The gentleman I happen to know.

>> Last year we were in Budapest and we were told that after the war was over, Soviet Union came in to occupy and that the atrocities continued greatly, even more severely than the Nazis. Is this true?

>> Manny Mandel: Well, I can't speak to firsthand. I wasn't there. The Soviet Union, remember, liberated Hungary. Liberated Hungary, liberated a number of countries where they imposed their rule. The anti-semitic behavior at the time was difficult in terms of restrictions the atrocities were not daily shootings or marched to the river and being shot and they were not concentration camps but there were significant, significant kinds of, how do I put it, restrictions so it was not the same as the Nazis but it was -- it was better but not by much. Food was rationed. There were lots of difficulties under the Russian rule in all of the Russian-occupied countries including Hungary.

>> Edna Friedberg: Yes?

>> Manny, how did come up with the preserved photographs of you as a little boy after all of these years and after all of these tree veils that you survived?

>> Manny Mandel: When the bombings started in Europe, many people, most people -- all of us had certain kinds of storage lockers, both in the attic of our building and the basement that had earthen floors. What people did, my parents did, they dug up parts of the earthen floor not to bury anything to hide it but to save it from the bombings. If the bomb fell in the building in our apartment, it would destroy everything. They put stuff in several crates. And this protected them.

My mother had certain dishes and certain other kinds of finery and books and pictures and what not that they were able to put there. After the war my father came back, was able to find this and then ship it out. But it was a protection from the bombings, not from anything else. And they were not hidden in a sense of hiding your valuables, just kind of burying them to protect them from the terrible devastation that bombs can cause.

Ok?

>> Edna Friedberg: I do want to mention, Manny told me just before the program, there's a new book about his family's life. It's called "Imi" which is the nickname for Emanuel, Manny's full name. We have it in the museum shop and can fill in more of these details.

It is our tradition at *First Person* that the First Person guest has the last word. So anything would like to share?

>> Manny Mandel: The museum has no more books because we had a book signing here Sunday and Monday and they are out of books. I've asked them to reorder. I guess it takes a while. It is available on Amazon. It's also on Kindle for your information.

I've been asked to do this -- I've done the *First Person* I think 10 times if I'm not mistaken. I usually give an opportunity to make some pity comment at the end. I thought about it and I thought what I would do is give you a challenge. As I said, I'm a docent of the museum. I do certain other volunteer things. I find that most folks, forgive me for being blunt, know very little history, including the history of their own family. So I would like to challenge all of you to the following. I'd like you to go home and either find or buy any kind of a small recorder or use your phone and mark down the history of your own family.

For those of you who do not know your grandparents' history or even your parents' history. I ask kids where do your parents work and they tell me, "The U.S. government." That's not enough. This information has to be retained. I would love to be able to go to the Library of Congress, pull a disk, and have somebody from the Civil War talk to me and tell me what happened. It was impossible. Today it's possible. We should preserve this kind of history.

You remember the man's name but the man who said those of us who do not learn our history may be doomed to repeat it. His name is George Santayana over a hundred years ago. Remember his words in order to not make happen what he talked about possibly. Record your information, your family. It might be valuable in the future.

That's my challenge. And I thank you.

>> Edna Friedberg: Manny, thank you very much. It was an honor to be with you today.>

>> [Applause]