REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON AL MUNZER
JUNE 20, 2018

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

This 2018 season of *First Person* is made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation with additional funding from The Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation.

First Person is a weekly conversation with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their first person accounts. Each of our guests serves as a volunteer here at the museum and our program will continue through August. The museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about our upcoming *First Person* program and guests.

Today Al will share with us his first person account of his experience during the Holocaust as a survivor for about 45 minutes. And then I will -- if we have time, I will take questions at the end of the program. And if for some odd reason we do not get your question today, please join us in our online conversation, *Never Stop Asking Why*. The conversation aims to inspire individuals and new generations to ask the important questions that the Holocaust history raises. And what this history means for societies today. To join *Never Stop*

Asking Why you can ask the question and tag the museum on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram,@holocaustmuseum and #askwhy. You can find the hashtag on the back of your program today as well.

With that said, we have a brief slide presentation to help introduce our guest today. We begin with this portrait of Al dressed in a Jewish national costume for the Purim holiday taken after the war probably in 1948.

Al was born 1941, November, in the Hague in the Netherlands.

This is a wedding portrait of Al's parents who were married in 1932 in the Hague. Al had two older sisters. Eva is on the left, Leanna is on the right and Al is sitting between them.

The German Army invade the Netherlands in May 1940, before Al was born. Immediately life became very difficult for Dutch Jews. After the invasion, the Munzers remained in their home and endured the pressures taken against Jews. On this map we see the invasion routes of Western Europe in 1940.

In 1942, Al's sisters went into hiding with a friend of a neighbor. Al went into hiding with the ex-husband of a neighbor and an Indonesian immigrant named Tole Madna. Al spent the rest of the war in hiding in Tole Madna's home. Here he was cared for by the Indonesian nanny, Mima Saina, seen on the left of the photo.

This fought photo was taken while Al was in hiding in his home. And Tole Madna is in the middle holding Al.

We're very grateful to have Al. He is currently been a volunteer at the museum for I think 18 years. 18 years. He speaks on behalf of the museum not only in this country but he has done work in other countries for the museum and in his free time he translates for me, which is very little because he's doing so much other work for the museum.

So please welcome Al up on stage.

[Applause]

First I wanted to make sure you can hear me. Ok.

>> Al Munzer: And you can hear me?

>> Suzy Snyder: Ok, good. Thank you.

So, I've known Al for a very long time. And I'll tell you how Al came to know me. One of my colleagues who is a volunteer at the museum and does oral histories did his oral history and suggested that the museum meet with him. And when we first met, Al was very hesitant to share his material, his photographs, his personal artifacts. These were very personal for him. And over the 18 years, Al has donated almost everything that we looked at initially. And every once in a while he comes to my office and says, Umm, I found something else, here's something else. So Al's relationship is continuous. He's been an important part of the museum volunteership, especially for the survivors. And I am very grateful that -- I cannot believe it's been 18 years, but I'm very grateful that you have really done so much for the museum. So welcome.

>> Al Munzer: Thank you. Great to be here with you.

>> Suzy Snyder: Thanks.

So your parents actually -- let's talk a little bit about your parents. Let's just start by saying that because you were born in 1941, your memories don't begin with your parents. They really begin with the madness.

>> Al Munzer: Right.

>> Suzy Snyder: So a lot of the information that we're going to talk about today about your parents' lives, were shared with you by your mother.

>> Al Munzer: Correct.
>> Suzy Snyder: So they were born in Poland. And they emigrated separately to the Netherlands, your mother by way of Germany. Correct?
>> Al Munzer: Correct. Yes. My mother was born in a small town in Eastern Europe called Rymanow and my -- they were towns part of the Austrian Hungarian Empire until the First World War and then became part of Poland and because of anti-semitism, whether they became incorporated with Poland, there were a lot of pressures for young people to leave their home towns. So my mother joined older siblings in Berlin when she was about 18 years old. And my father, instead, went directly to the Netherlands to the Hague, where he started a men's clothing business.
>> Suzy Snyder: And what did your mother do while she was in Berlin?
>> Al Munzer: I think she worked also. Her siblings there had businesses. She worked there. But what she told me is what she really enjoyed was for the first time really being in a big city.

Now, ironically my mother arrived in Berlin just about the same time as Adolph Hitler's book was being published. She was 18 years old and not terribly interested in politics and certainly not in reading Adolph Hitler's book. So she was really totally unawares of the first stages really of the development of the Nazi regime. So she was very content to be in Germany until she finally joined my father at the end of 1932.
>> Suzy Snyder: And you said that she joined your father. Did she know your father previously?
>> Al Munzer: Yes. They had been childhood friends. Sweethearts. They had known each other for many, many years. The two towns where they were born were only about 30, 40 miles apart. In fact, they were distantly related because they had the same last name, Munzer. So, yes, they really had been longtime sweethearts.

When my mother join mid father in Holland, where they were married December 1932.
>> Suzy Snyder: And so they were living in the Hague.
>> Al Munzer: In the Hague.
>> Suzy Snyder: Which was?
>> Al Munzer: Well, the Hague, although people think of Amsterdam as the capital. In actual fact, it's sort of a complex system, but the Hague is the seat of the Dutch parliament. So to the Dutch that is really the capital, and certainly to people living in Hague, that's the capital.
>> Suzy Snyder: Also a very large city.
>> Al Munzer: Yes.
>> Suzy Snyder: So your parents had a business.
>> Al Munzer: Correct.
>> Suzy Snyder: And they were assimilated in The Netherlands? Were they religious Jews?
>> Al Munzer: Well, they came from very religious backgrounds, Orthodox religious backgrounds, but like many other young people at the time they were also rebelling against their backgrounds. So they were very much integrated into the community, made many friends in Holland. Most of them not Jewish, actually. And that's where their closest friends were. Although they still continued with traditional Jewish observances.
>> Suzy Snyder: Describe, if you can, if your mother conveyed this to you, describe the neighborhood in which they were living in in which they had your sisters, you, what kind of a neighborhood was it. Was it mixed, Jewish?
>> Al Munzer: This was not a typically Jewish neighborhood in the Hague, actually. It was on

the street. It's about three blocks from the Peace Palace, the headquarters of the World Court. So really a nice neighborhood. And my father had his business downstairs, his tailoring business. And they lived on top -- in an apartment over the store actually. A very nice apartment.

Interestingly enough, the sign that was on my father's business is still in the portico of the store. Which is really an amazing experience when I went back to Holland a few years ago and I saw that sign which may well have been designed by my mother.

>> Suzy Snyder: And your parents -- so they remained in The Netherlands. They built a nice life. And your sisters were born in --

>> Al Munzer: My older sister, Eva, was born in July 1936. Again, you know, an irony there. This is when the infamous Berlin Olympics were held. Just about the same time. Another step in the rise of the Nazis and my parents actually were married just about the same time that Adolph Hitler finally became chancellor of Germany. So all of these coincidences. The history of the family was really interrelated with what was happening in Germany. But my father's business was thriving. They had many friends in Holland. As I said, mostly not Jewish.

>> Suzy Snyder: Which was vital for them.

>> Al Munzer: Exactly. So in July 1936 is when they celebrated the birth of their first child, and that was my sister Eva.

Then in 1938, November 1938, is when my second sister, my sister Leah was born, Leanna, was born. Another amazing coincidence because that is just about three days after Kristallnacht, Night of Broken Glass, when the full fury of anti-semitism was unleashed in Germany.

>> Suzy Snyder: Which sort of changed the direction of the lives of the Jews for sure in Germany and Austria.

>> Al Munzer: Yeah.

>> Suzy Snyder: So your parents continued to live their lives, business. They had children. Then your mother became pregnant in 1940 -- 1941.

>> Al Munzer: Yes, 1941. Prior to that, of course, in May 1940, there was a big major change. That's when Holland was invaded. My parents on the night of May 10, 1940, had been asked to host a man who was a member of the Dutch resistance movement. And according to my mother, he had a briefcase with them in which he carried plans for the preemptive destruction of a big railroad center in the city.

he idea was if the resistance could destroy the railroad center, it would slow any invasion from Germany. But in actual fact, that morning, May 11, 1940, my parents and their guests were listening to the radio and they heard that the port city of Rotterdam had been bombed and had been destroyed. And a few minutes later, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, came on the radio and announced that Holland had surrendered.

My mother told me that the first person to speak up was their guest, the man from the resistance movement. And he said in Dutch, "Zijdank Is Voorbij," thank God it is over. He had done anything he could to avoid invasion and now would have to live under occupation. He didn't feel threatened; whereas my parents knew what happened in Germany. They knew what was happening in Poland. So they knew that things were going to get very rough for them.

>> Suzy Snyder: And so how did they plan for this? Could they plan for it?

>> Al Munzer: Well, initially they tried to go on with normal lives as much as possible. Even though they had to register as Jews, even though my father had to take a new middle name,

Israel, to always identify him as being Jewish. They had to register all of their property. They were even banned from using public transportation or from going into public parks. But in spite of all of that, they tried to go with their normal lives.

My mother, for example, told me in spite of prohibition of going into a public park, she would take my little sister, Leah, into the park and, you know, just in our neighborhood and just sort of ignore this prohibition. And one day, she told me, a German woman approached her and the baby carriage. And my mother's heart almost stopped. And then the woman, you know, went to my little sister and she sort of played with my sister's hair and she saw blond hair, blue eyes, and she turned to my mother and said, "You can tell this is good German Aryan blood". And, of course, my mother never went back into that park again.

But, you know, they had photographs taken of the family. Even one of my father's brothers who managed to get across the border from Germany into Holland, now became -- was a member of the family.

>> Suzy Snyder: And what about their business? How was their business doing?

>> Al Munzer: I really don't know exactly but they certainly had to register their business. As far as I know, it was still continuing. Although, you know, certainly the German occupiers forced them to basically register everything they owned so that eventually it could be confiscated.

And then early in 1941 is when my mother found out that she was pregnant again. She consulted her obstetrician and he told her in no uncertain terms to have an abortion. He told her that it would be immoral to bring another Jewish life into the world. My mother wasn't, as I said, very religious but at that time she turned to the Bible for advice. And she read the story of a woman called Hannah, a woman desperate to have a child and who would go to the temple every year and pray she might conceive. And it was in reading of Hannah's agonizing desire to have a child that my mother decided she could not possibly have an abortion. Her obstetrician fired her as a patient.

So November 23, 1941, is when I was born at home with the help of a nurse. And that brought about another dilemma in Jewish life because traditionally Jewish male children are circumcised when they are eight days old. And my parents' friend said don't have him circumcised; it will identify him as being Jewish. But this time the answer to my parents' dilemma came in the form of a worried look on the face of a pediatrician who had just examined me. My father asked the pediatrician, "Is there anything wrong with the baby?" And then the pediatrician said -- smiled and said, "No, there's nothing wrong. It's just that your little boy needs a minor operation we call a circumcision."

So at that point my father told him of our Jewish tradition. And, indeed, eight days later family and friends all gathered in our living room to observe this first milestone in the Jewish life.

>> Suzy Snyder: And there are actually photographs of this milestone. We have them on our website. They were not included in the PowerPoint. But if you just Google Al's name, you will see on our website we have these two photographs. We can talk about how the photographs survived later but -- so your parents went ahead.

>> Al Munzer: Right. About eight months later is when Jewish men were beginning to get notices to report for labor duty. And that meant really going to a concentration camp, a concentration camp still in Holland. But they also knew that it was certainly a high risk of being sent on further east, as it was called, towards Germany and Poland. So this was a signal to go into hiding, which many Jews did at that time, sort of August 1942.

My parents made the decision to go into hiding. Now, some families like the famous

family of Anne Frank, decided to hide as a unit, as one family unit, the famous attic in Amsterdam. But my parents decided that as a form of insurance, so that if one person was taken, at least the others might survive, the family would break up and we would hide in different places.

The first one to go into hiding was my father. He went -- he pretended to commit an act of suicide. And that gained him admission to a psychiatric hospital. And that's where he went into hiding, pretending basically to be a patient.

My two sisters were placed next. A woman, very devout Catholic woman, told her priest that she had a dream in which the Virgin told her to take Jewish children into hiding. So she -- the priest told my parents' neighbors. They told my parents. And so my parents entrusted my two little sisters to that family.

>> Suzy Snyder: So I just wanted to back up a little and say that your mother didn't really know the people with whom she was entrusting her three children. So it was sort of an act of faith to make a decision not knowing whether or not you were going to see your children again.

>> Al Munzer: Absolutely. This was really an incredibly, incredibly difficult decision. And it was really done on the word of two priests who were involved, whom I met subsequently after. I remember meeting them after the war. And they are the ones who told me much about the story of my sisters. You know, it was really on their word and my parents' neighbor, a woman I call Tanta Yo, Aunt Jo. It was on their word that my mother trusted this woman to take in my two sisters.

>> Suzy Snyder: Tell us about who took you in.

>> Al Munzer: Well, Jewish male children were more difficult to place but finally a neighbor of my parents, a woman who lived across the street, agreed to take me in. Her name was Annie Madna. And she had been friends with our family, close neighbor. And then Annie Madna -- and then after that, my mother joined my father in the same psychiatric hospital in hiding. In her case pretending to be a nurse.

Now, Annie had had bad run-ins with the Nazis she got scared and was afraid that the Nazis might come after her and me. And so she passed me on to her sister. And it turned out that her sister had a neighbor who was a member of the Dutch Nazi Party. Holland had the second largest Nazi Party in Europe. So she got scared, passed me back to Annie. And then finally Annie decided to pass me on to her ex-husband. She had been married to a man born in Indonesia.

>> Suzy Snyder: And she was not. She was born in the Netherlands.

>> Al Munzer: She was born in The Netherlands, Caucasian Dutch, but she had been married to a man born in Indonesia. Indonesia was a Dutch colony so many Indonesians had come to Holland in the early 1900s. So she asked him to take me in. The plan initially was that I would stay with him just for a short while. And then, you know, they would try to find a place further north in Holland where most Jewish children were placed.

His name was Tole Madna. He had three children. He had custody of those three children or partial custody. He had a nanny called Mima Saina, a woman born in Indonesia as well of a very, very poor background. She had worked in a restaurant that he managed. He trusted them to become a nanny for his children.

>> Suzy Snyder: Did she speak Dutch?

>> Al Munzer: She did not speak any Dutch. She was completely illiterate, could not read or write. But she's the one who now became my mother. They sort of voted and decided that they did not want to part with me. And they decided keep me, a tremendous risk to their lives really.

>> Suzy Snyder: Let's talk about the emotional part of it. The risk is clear but the emotional part of it, you had once described to me that Robbie, the youngest Madna child, was 12 years older than you. Correct?
>> Al Munzer: 10 years older.
>> Suzy Snyder: And his life sort of changed when you came into their life.
>> Al Munzer: Yeah, he was sort of jealous. As I said, he was about 10, 11 years old when I came into the household. He had been very attached to the nanny. He was the youngest kid. And, you know, he felt -- he sort of felt threatened actually by this new baby coming into the house that was demanding all of her attention suddenly.
>> Suzy Snyder: How did Tole describe your sudden presence in the house? Did they know you were a Jew?
>> Al Munzer: I don't think so. It's just that I was left with them for safe keeping. That's I think as much as they were told. The older children were certainly aware of what was happening. They had many Jewish classmates. They realized their Jewish classmates suddenly were not appearing in school. So the two older Madna children, Dewi and Will, were very much aware of what was happening. So they knew what it meant to have a baby suddenly placed in hiding with them. I think actually thinking back now, I think Dewi told me that they were aware of the fact that I was Jewish. Because she remembers counting in her head how many different religions were suddenly in the family. In the household.

Mima Saina was Muslim with heavy Buddhist influence. Papa Madna was probably Christian, Catholic. The children were brought up as protestant. And then she said they suddenly now had this Jewish baby in the household. So five different religions.
>> Suzy Snyder: And when you look at the picture, they're not white and you're white. And I know that you were physically in the house. But you also described that maybe it could be that the neighbors knew what was going on, knew that there was a Jewish child.
>> Al Munzer: There were very few neighbors who knew. There was one family --
>> Suzy Snyder: You described people visiting.
>> Al Munzer: There were two little kids. I think they were in the photograph you saw earlier. They were allowed to come into the house. I wasn't even allowed to look out of the window because then people might see on the outside in a there was a baby that did not belong there. So the only view I had of the outside world was what I could see through a mail slot.

But these two little kids were allowed to come in and play with me. They were neighbors of the Madnas. And the reason they were trusted is that their parents were German but they were German Communists. So they were very staunch, anti-Nazis so they were trusted to come in and play with me.

And Papa Madna told me, or I heard from others, the stories that he made up to explain at the times when the house was being searched to explain the presence of a Caucasian child. A little baby boy in his household. He told the Germans and people that I was the illegitimate child of his ex-wife and that she had a new boyfriend who did not want me around.
>> [Laughter]
>> Al Munzer: It's the kind of story that he was able to fashion. He was a man with tremendous sense of humor also. It's one thing that allowed him to do this.
>> Suzy Snyder: Describe your everyday life that you remember, anything that you remember, your earliest memories are really quite late in the war.
>> Al Munzer: Sure. Well, I do remember, for example, periodically being told to go into a

closet to go into hiding. And that was when the house was being searched. I didn't know it was being searched. All I remember is going into a closet and playing with the Christmas decorations that were stored there. That's a very clear memory.

I also remember my two foster sisters, Dewi and Willlie doing their homework. And I remember taking a pen and sort of imitating them. Making scratches on a piece of paper. And they started to laugh. And what I remember is how angry I got at them, at their laughter. I really felt terrible. I felt humiliated. And it's also, again, one of the memories.

And then another memory, very clear memory, that I have was late in the war. By that time there was very, very little food in Holland. Tremendous hunger. The only thing that was left to eat, actually, was tulip bulbs which Holland has many of. So people would grind up the tulip bulbs and sort of turned them into a soup or something. And that's what we would eat.

I remember one night waking up and seeing the table set and feeling very hungry. So I sat down at the table. I fell asleep at the table. And the following morning the family found me with my head on the plate. And that's how I had fallen asleep. So that's some of the memories that I have being with the family.

And they're happy memories also. I remember Papa Madna playing the piano. I also remember some melodies. And it took me -- it wasn't until after the war really, many years later, actually, that I was able to hear that melody again. And it was an Indonesian lullaby.

>> Suzy Snyder: And you realized what it was.

>> Al Munzer: I remembered hearing it. Mima Saina used to sing it to me.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you were attached to her at the hip.

>> Al Munzer: She was an amazing woman. She would walk miles every day just to get milk for me. Because I was in the household, illegally. So there were no ration coupons for me. So people had to scrounge around just to get milk for me which she did. And I slept in her bed. And I'm told that she kept a knife under her pillow vowing to kill any Nazi who might try to come and get me.

And also, you know, a few years ago I was in Holland and a woman said: You know, you used to drink my milk. So I asked her what do you mean. She said, "Well, all school children in Holland were given a little bottle of milk and my mother told me to save half that little bottle for the baby next door. And you were the baby next door." So here you have a young girl 8, 9 years old already participating really in saving a young life.

So I'm still finding out things like that.

>> Suzy Snyder: So your parents, at this point, they are in the psychiatric hospital. And then what happened?

>> Al Munzer: Well, they were only there for a very short period of time. They had one more visitor, actually, with my two sisters. That was on Christmas Day, 1942. Then New Year's Day 1943, all staff and all patients in the psychiatric hospital were sent to concentration camps. The hospital was closed. And that's when my parents were sent to their first concentration camp. It was in Holland, a place called Westerbork, which turned out to be a major transit camp. And then from there they were taken to a place called Vught, another concentration camp in Holland, located in a southern part of Holland.

And that's where they slave labor for the Philips Electronics Factory. And my mother told me that one day while she was in that camp, every morning, very early in the morning, there would be a lineup of all the prisoners. And one day they were addressed by none other than Hitler's second in command, Heinrich Himmler, she told me. She told me he said as long as you keep working, nothing bad will ever happen to you. And my mother told me that while

he was speaking, she spotted the spire of a small Dutch church. Holland is very flat. She said it would be so wonderful if at that moment she could run -- if peace were to break out at that moment, she would run to that church, fall on her knees, and thank God for having been freed. She didn't care whether it was a church, mosque, synagogue. Just a place to thank God for having been freed. And sadly that wasn't to happen.
>> Suzy Snyder: It's interesting because when I was reading your oral testimony and you talked about Philips, I was interested in Philips because they actually did have slave labor but the goal was to keep Jewish people from being deported on.
>> Al Munzer: There were apparently two groups of Philips prisoners and I don't quite know exactly where my mother fit in. But all I know is that that really did not succeed. Because three months after Hitler's famous speech, that camp was emptied and all the prisoners, including my parents, were sent to Auschwitz. And that's where my parents were separated.
>> Suzy Snyder: Can you describe what your mother's experiences were, as she explained it to you?
>> Al Munzer: Sure. Well, my mother, as I said, Auschwitz is where my parents were separated. And my mother was sent on to another camp called Reichenbach which she continued to work for an electronics factory. This time it was Telefunken. What she had learned through the grapevine, one task that was very important to the Germans was assembling radio tubes. So that's what she learned to do. And that's what really kept her alive, assembling radio tubes.

She told me what gave her courage at the time was that she worked alongside German soldiers who had fought on the eastern front in Russia and who had lost an arm or a leg or otherwise badly injured, were no longer fit to fight. So they had been sent back to work in this factory as well. And she said they had become so anti-Hitler that they did everything to try to sabotage the workings of the factory. And encouraged my mother and others to start their own acts of sabotage.

So my mother told me that towards the end of her stay there she would spend a whole day assembling a radio tube and then when the siren was sounded, indicating the end of the day, she would disassemble the radio tube, put it back in the drawer and start the process all over again the following day. And it's the kind of acts of defiance that my mother told me is what kept her alive and kept her going.
>> Suzy Snyder: And your mother actually was in a better situation, not having been deported, transferred, from Auschwitz to slave labor because in Auschwitz they were choosing people all the time.
>> Al Munzer: Absolutely. She was fortunate in that sense not to be killed.

The other thing that kept my mother alive was two little photographs that she had with her. These were the photographs we mentioned earlier. The photographs that were taken at my circumcision ceremony. They're only this big, 1-by-1.5 in size. My mother kept those two little photographs hidden on her body. She told me she had this feeling this superstition, that if she ever lost those photographs it would mean they'd been killed.
>> Suzy Snyder: And what would have happened if the photographs had been discovered on her by the Nazis?
>> Al Munzer: They probably would have killed her. You know? It's really amazing. Fortunately my mom survived, the photographs survived, and I survived. And, of course, those photographs were so valuable and so fragile that I did not dare keep them in the house. So they are now part of this museum.

>> Suzy Snyder: And how did your mother keep them when she was at Auschwitz?
>> Al Munzer: She told me she kept them in her hair. I'm not sure about that.
>> Suzy Snyder: Somehow she managed to secure them.
>> Al Munzer: There were other women who had other objects that they were attached to and was sort of a link to a normal life. So my mother told me that one of her friends, a woman I met, after the war, who had kept -- brought her corset somehow to the camp. And this will corset became sort of a symbol of normal life. And the women would pass it around, wash it take care of it. And that's another link to a normal life. It sort of kept them going.
>> Suzy Snyder: And did your mother -- one of the things that I have often heard is that you had to sort of pretend like you were going back your normal day. You got up. You didn't have toothbrushes. You didn't have soap. But you did what you could to prepare for the day. And this sort of kept the victim moving.
>> Al Munzer: Absolutely. This is really, you know, tried to keep spirits up. She tried to encourage. Some women, she told me, were totally focused on the lack of food and who would, you know, dream up these elaborate menus for dinners and all of that, which just made their hunger worse. So my mother told them, no, don't think about food. Think about your families instead. It's really trying to find that link, the one thing that was positive that they could hold on to as a memory to keep them alive.
>> Suzy Snyder: And what happened to your mother after she was sent to slave labor?
>> Al Munzer: Well, she witnessed, actually, the bombing of the concentration camp, the Telefunken factory by the allies. she told me when she saw that factory go up in flames, she recited the traditional Hebrew prayer of thanks to God for having survived to see that particular day. She grew so grateful to see that going up in flames.
>> Suzy Snyder: Also to have survived years in slave labor.
>> Al Munzer: But unfortunately that wasn't end of her ordeal. Because like many, many others, when those camps were discovered or factories were bombed, they were put on Death Marches. So my mother was put on a death Death March that just took her to one camp after another. All in all my mother was in 12 different concentration camps.

She developed terrible swelling of her feet, something that she tried to take care of for the rest of her life. She was very, very self-conscious about that. She wanted to erase all memories of what had happened. But that was her little reminder for the rest of her life, just from those Death Marches in ice-cold weather, walking with just newspapers, she said, that were wrapped around her feet. Until she was finally liberated at the Danish border through the intervention of a man, the head of the Swedish Red Cross who negotiated the freedom of several thousand women actually.

My mother told me that all of a sudden the guards removed their uniforms. And everybody was so friendly and nice and polite suddenly. And there was this man, a member of the Swedish aristocracy, who insisted on embracing all the prisoners. And my mother told me she felt so bad about the way she looked and all of the women did, so they tried to create belts for their dresses and make themselves -- these prison dresses that they were wearing, and try to make themselves more acceptable to this man who insisted on personally greeting and embracing every one of the prisoners coming off the train.

And then eventually, of course, I was reunited with my mother.
>> Suzy Snyder: She ended up making her way back to the Netherlands. But it wasn't until late summer. Correct? 1945.
>> Al Munzer: She was actually sent to Sweden to recuperate. And she remained there until

August 1945. And at that point, I was reunited with her.
>> Suzy Snyder: And when did she find out what happened to your father?
>> Al Munzer: Well, my father remained in Auschwitz for about six months. And in fact, a few months ago, I found a little slip of paper through the museum that had his number as a prisoner. And then it said premium employee in German. So I asked what this was. And no name, just a number. And the researchers said -- researchers at the museum told me that the wages that the slave laborers earned had to be paid to the SS, to the Nazis and father warranted a higher salary. Just amazing, the things I'm still finding out.

Eventually he was sent from Auschwitz to Mauthausen in Austria, and then to three more camps in Styr, Gusen, one worse than the other I'm told, and then finally to a place where he worked assembling rockets in abandoned salt mines. Horrible, horrible heavy work with almost no food. But nonetheless he witnessed liberation by the U.S. Army, the 80th U.S. Army. But he was so weak that he died two months later. And he's actually buried in that concentration camp which is now just one huge cemetery, the Ebensee concentration camp.
>> Suzy Snyder: What did your mother find out about what happened to your sisters?
>> Al Munzer: Well, sadly, you know, while I was safe and happy with the Madna family, a fight had broken out in the family that was taking care of my sister. And the husband denounced his wife as hiding two Jewish children. So his wife was put in prison by the Nazis, eventually freed. But my two sisters were immediately taken to Auschwitz and that's where they were killed. They were only 6 and 8 years old at the time. So the fate of my sisters very, very different from mine. So I never met my sisters.

It took me a long time to begin to understand what had happened to them. I was a child who survived the Holocaust, immediately after the war I saw these portraits on the wall of my sisters. And my mother's friend, Aunt Jo, whom I mentioned earlier, would tell me what a beautiful handwriting my sister, Eva, had when she was only about 6 years old and how sweet a child Leah was. So I grew up actually feeling somewhat jealous of my two sisters. I thought I could never live up to their reputation.
>> Suzy Snyder: That was one of the things that I wondered. Because they were a presence in your life even though they had not survived.
>> Al Munzer: That's correct. So it took me a while to begin to understand what had happened to my sisters.

And then I began to hear people talk about people who had come back and others who had not come back. I never heard the term survivor, survive. It was coming back. And I began to understand that my sisters had gone to a place and somehow did not come back. And that was my first understanding of what happened to my sisters.
>> Suzy Snyder: Did your mother know this before she was reunited with you?
>> Al Munzer: I don't think so. It's something I found out very recently, actually. Because Dewi Madna, now 88 years old, I got together with her a few years ago and we were going through the whole story. And she told me that my mother had come to the house to her mother's house where I had been hid hidden originally looking for me and my sisters. And it fell to her, to Dewi Madna who was then about 15 years old, to tell my mother that my sisters were not around and to tell her where I was hidden. So I think that that's the first time my mother found out what had happened to my sisters. I'm not sure, entirely sure of that. But I think that's what seems to be very likely.

And then, you know, she told my mother where I was hidden, that I was now with her father and with Mima Saina. So that's when my mother came to the house to get me. That's

the very first clear memory that I have, very clear memory. I remember being asleep in the back room of the house. Dewi Madna coming to get me. I was cranky, unhappy about being awakened. She carried me into the living room. And the whole family was sitting in a circle. And what I remember is that the family did what you do with a crying child. You pass it from one lap to the next. And I remembered that happened, that there was one woman whose lap I wouldn't sit in, one woman I kept pushing away. And that was my own mother because she had a complete stranger to me.

And so my mother knew it would be very, very difficult to separate me from Mima. And so the plan was that for Mima to continue to take care of me while my mother went out looking for work.

>> Suzy Snyder: And tried to rebuild her life.

>> Al Munzer: Right. Exactly. That only lasted a few months. Because about two months later Mima Saina had a cerebral hemorrhage and passed away. So I have almost no memories of Mima Saina. Just, as I said, some memories of what people told me about her, visiting her grave which I did many times, and then this lullaby.

And that lullaby came back to me many, many years later, a few years ago actually when for the very first time I shared my story with a group of Indonesian students here at the museum. And I told them the story just the way I'm telling it right now. And at the very end I said, you know, my Nana used -- Mima used to sing a lullaby to me. And I found out it was called Mimabobo and all of these children started singing it in unison. It was an amazing moment. It brought back the meloody to me. That's one of the few memories that I have of this amazing, amazing woman.

>> Suzy Snyder: So you and your mother sort of rebuilt your lives in the Netherlands. Can you describe that briefly?

>> Al Munzer: Sure. First of all, my mother acquired a cosmetic store which she felt gave her time, an opportunity, to continue to care for me rather than having to travel around on business, which is what she was doing initially. Trying to continue my father's business which turned out to be much more complicated. And Jewish life began over again in Holland.

So that first portrait, that first picture you saw, was taken at the Purim festival. It celebrates the victory of Queen Esther over the evil. And it's traditional for Jewish kids to dress up in costumes.

This was fairly close after the war. The wounds were still fairly raw for my mother. And I remember that she really wasn't in any mood to make a costume for me. And then I sort of had to ask her to make one. And that's when she came up with this idea of creating this costume of a collection box for the Jewish National Fund. And I got first prize with that costume.

>> Suzy Snyder: How was your relationship with her?

>> Al Munzer: I very quickly certainly got used to being with my mother. Mom told me that early on she moved into the house with the Madna family. And she said just to get me used to being alone with her. She had given Mima a ticket to go to a movie, which was really a novelty right after the war. So she said a few minutes later, Mima came back into the house and she turned to my mother and she said, "Don't hit him". Because that's how protective Mima was of me, that she didn't even trust my own mother to take care of me.

>> Suzy Snyder: We have about eight minutes left. I wanted to leave some time for questions. Two things I wanted to ask you. You ended up going from The Netherlands to Belgium and then from Belgium to the United States. The first question is: How did you maintain a

relationship with the Madnas? And the second question: Can you talk about the last place you really stopped before you left Europe to come to the United States?
>> Al Munzer: Well, as you said, we left Holland 1958. And the Madna family -- well, Papa Madna remarried. He and his second wife and three children found their second marriage from the second marriage, came to see me off, see us off when we left for the United States. And I've always, always remained part of his family. And I last saw Papa Madna about two months before he passed away, well into his 90s. He told people that he wanted to see his son from America one last time. Because that's how he always considered me.
>> Suzy Snyder: But that's how you considered them as well.
>> Al Munzer: I continued to call him papa for the rest of his life. His last words to me, he said, "Take care of your mother." That's the kind of person he was. Much more concerned about the other than he was about himself.

People asked him why did risk your lives to take in a Jewish baby. The life of your family. And he said, "What else was I to do?" To him there really was no option.
>> Suzy Snyder: And I just want to point out one more time that it wasn't easy for him. You were a boy. You were white. They were not white.
>> Al Munzer: There was no food.
>> Suzy Snyder: No food. It was wartime. He's raising his own three children.
>> Al Munzer: Right.
>> Suzy Snyder: Didn't mean to interrupt you. But also, tell me about you and your mother finally leaving Europe.
>> Al Munzer: Well, my mother had visited my father's grave sometime in the 1950s. And then just before we came to the United States she felt it was important for us to visit his grave again. And this time I accompanied her. It's the first time that I really felt the loss might have father is when I was standing at his grave in his concentration camp. And I burst out in tears. And it's really the only time that I shed tears for my father, the only time that I really felt what I had lost, his companionship.

And it's really that loss hasn't diminished over the years. It has actually grown more so as the years have gone by. And I sort of sometimes mentally, you know, imagined what life would have been like if he had survived and if my sisters somehow were still around. That remains something -- it's a loss I still consider to think about.
>> Suzy Snyder: So I wanted to open it up for questions briefly. Do we have mics? Thank you. Does anyone have questions for Al?
>> Could you wrap up the rest of your life from the time you came to the United States, how old were you? Where did you go to school? And what has happened to you the rest of your life?
>> Suzy Snyder: First of all, how long have you been in this country?
>> Al Munzer: I came -- 60 years. That's right. Exactly 60 years July 25, 1958 is when we arrived in the United States. I attended high school for one year, Yeshiva University High School in Brooklyn. And then went to Brooklyn College. And then I started medical school. I became a physician. Then a lung disease specialist and eventually President of the American Lung Association.
>> Suzy Snyder: Clearly not a smoker.
>> Al Munzer: Clearly not a smoker. And I remain very active in antismoking activities right now. So a long career in medicine. Retired about two, three years ago. Now devote myself to speaking to groups like this, sharing my story.

>> Where did you go to medical school?
>> Al Munzer: In Brooklyn, New York, State University of New York, Downstate Medical Center. Then went to Johns Hopkins for my training in lung disease and University of Rochester in between.
>> Suzy Snyder: Yes, right here in the front.
>> [Question Inaudible]
>> Suzy Snyder: Let me repeat. What made your mom decide to come to America?
>> Al Munzer: I think it was really she really needed to get away from all the memories. She was tired -- also she told me -- of being called the Widow Munzer. That was sort of customary, certainly in Europe at the time in the 1950s it was still unusual for women to have a career to go to work. And which she needed to do. And it was really getting away from all the memories.

My mother never went back to Holland. She traveled extensively. I think what kept my mother going, really, was just simple defiance. My mother's very, very last gesture, just before she passed away -- again, she was in her 90s -- it was to raise her fist like this. And then to take my arm and try to get me to do the same thing. Defiance. I think she really -- people ask me how did she keep going after these losses. I think that was it. She did not want Adolph Hitler to have the last word.
>> Suzy Snyder: All the way in back. Oh, I'm sorry. We'll do this and then all the way in back.
>> Do you have children? If so, how did they take your stories?
>> Al Munzer: I don't have any children of my own. I have many adoptive children that I talk to every day. I don't have children of my own. And it's always a real experience to share my story with young children. It's one of the museum's -- one of the things that the museum does extremely well. And it's in the hope that the next generation might learn the lessons of the Holocaust and leave the world a little bit better than what I went through.
>> Suzy Snyder: One more question in the back, white shirt. Nope. Yeah.
>> [Question Inaudible]
>> Did [Inaudible] know the faith of your family?
>> Al Munzer: I don't know. I doubt it.
>> Suzy Snyder: Communication was probably not great.
>> Al Munzer: I think his health was extremely poor at the time. I've seen photographs of the liberation of the Ebensee concentration camp. Whenever I see those photographs, I can't help but try to find my father's face among all of those skeletal men lined up over there.

It's really -- the many prisoners, actually, were transferred to hospitals, to field hospitals. My father was felt to be too sick. And he was actually cared for in a convent where many of the Jewish prisoners ended up. And he died in that convent which I have since actually visited. Again, an amazing experience to talk to the nuns over there who took care of the Jewish prisoners.
>> Suzy Snyder: I have one last question. Sorry to take the last question. Briefly we talked before this and I asked you do you know what happened to the husband and wife who were hiding Leanna and Eva and you told me that your mother --
>> Al Munzer: My mother -- I didn't even know their name until very recently when Dewi Madna told me and told me the house where my sisters had been hidden. But what I do remember is that after the war my mother insisted that we visit the woman that -- who had hidden my two sisters. I remember going to visit this mother -- this woman because my mother felt very strongly that she wanted to thank this woman for what she had tried to do and wanted this woman to know that at least one of the three children had survived.

It's something that again, took tremendous courage on the part of my mother. To this day I don't really know what happened to the husband, that woman's husband, whether he was ever prosecuted or not. I really don't know.
>> Suzy Snyder: It's our tradition to let you have the last word so I'm going to let you do that.
>> Al Munzer: Well, I think, you know, as you go through the exhibition of the museum, you'll learn how horrible the story of the Holocaust was and the tremendous loss. Six million people went through, including my own family, if you multiply the story I just told you a million times over just to get a feel of what the losses were. But nonetheless the other amazing thing is that there were people like the Madna family who even when surrounded by all of this evil were able to do what is right and to listen to their conscience and to save a human life. And that's really the lesson that I want to leave people with.
>> Suzy Snyder: Thank you so much.
Thank you.
>> [Applause]
>> Suzy Snyder: Al will remain up on stage if you'd like to ask any questions that you didn't get to ask. He'll stay up here so please feel free to come up.