REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON STEVEN FENVES
JUNE 21, 2018

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>> [CART NOTE: AUDIO DROP. PLEASE STAND BY.]
>> Aleisa Fishman: -- to join the *Never Stop Asking Why* conversation, you can ask your question and tag the museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and the hashtag #AskWhy. You can find the hashtag on the back of your program, as well. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

We begin with this portrait taken in 1940 or 1941 of Steven Fenves and his sister, Estera. Steven was born on June 6, 1931, in Subotica, Yugoslavia.

The arrow on this map of Yugoslavia in 1933 points to Subotica.

Steven's father, Louis, was the manager of the printing plant of a Hungarian language daily newspaper and would later become the editor of that same newspaper. His mother, Claire, was a graphic artist. In this photo we see Louis and Claire at a horserace in Subotica in the 1920s. They are circled.

In this photo we see Steven and his family on an outing to a farm in the summer of 1940. In 1941, Germany attacked Yugoslavia and its ally, Hungary, occupied Steven's town. Life changed immediately for Steven and his family. Jews in Subotica were subjected to Hungarian racial laws which were modeled after those in Germany. From September 1940 to May 1944, Steven's family lived in one corner of their apartment.

In May 1944, Germany occupied Hungary, and Hungarian-occupied territories like Subotica. Soon after, Steven's father was deported to Auschwitz while the rest of the family was forced into a ghetto in Subotica.

At the end of June 1944, Steven and some of his family members were sent to another ghetto and then to Auschwitz. Here we see an aerial reconnaissance photo of Auschwitz-Birkenau taken in September 1944 by the U.S. Air Force. The arrow points to the barrack that Steve was in from June through October 1944.

In October 1944, Steven was sent to another camp at Niederorschel. On April 1, 1945, Steven was sent on a Death March to the Buchenwald concentration camp. He was liberated by the Americans. On this map the left arrow points to the barrack where Steven spent the night before liberation and right arrow points to the U.S. Army field hospital established during liberation.

Steven stayed in the field hospital for four months and then returned to as you know advertise yay. His father died less than six months after returning to Subotica. Steven's mother was killed in Auschwitz. Steve and his sister immigrated to the U.S. in 1950.

After arriving in the U.S., Steve was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1952. After his discharge he enrolled at the Champaign-Urbana campus of the University of Illinois where he would eventually earn his Ph.D. in civil engineering and begin a 42-year academic career in the computing field at the University of Illinois and later at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

After retiring from Carnegie Mellon in 1999, Steve and his wife, Norma, whom he married in 1955, moved to the Washington, D.C. area where he worked for 10 years at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. Steve and Norma have four children, seven grandchildren and a great grandchild.

Upon his second retirement, December 2009, Steve became active with this museum. In addition to participating in the *First Person* program, he also volunteers with the museum's Visitor Services on Thursdays.

His wife is here in the second row, technically third row, as is his daughter Laura, grandson Joel, and a niece Kathy.

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

>> [Applause]

>> Steven Fenves: Thank you.

>> Aleisa Fishman: Hi. Thank you so much for joining us. And being willing to be our *First Person* guest today. You have so much to tell us about what you went through during the Holocaust so we'll start right away if that's ok with you.

So you were nearly 10 years old when the part of Yugoslavia where you lived was occupied by Hungary and your family's life would be forever changed as a result. But before we turn to that time, let's begin by you telling us a little bit about your family, your community -- sorry -- and yourself during those first 10 years.

>> Steven Fenves: Ok. Thank you. Well, first of all, Yugoslavia was a country only 12 years older than I. It was only founded in 1919. And Subotica, which used to be a part of Hungary, was to the new country. The town was about 100,000 people. Roughly a third Hungarians, third Serbs and third Croatian that was moved there from when Croatia was part of Hungary. In that city there were about 6,000 Jews, probably 4,000 belonged to a very large congregation which in Europe was called a progressive congregation. In Hungary it specifically was called a [Indiscernible] congregation and the rest were Orthodox congregations.

I had an upper middle class life. We had a maid, a cook. We got a car, a chauffeur, and my sister and I had a governess. Because in the social setting of my parents, it was imperative that we children learned proper high German. So up till age 10, my sister and I spent more time with a governess than with the two parents together. And German was the language.

Cars were still a novelty but the social setting, again, was that if you could afford a car, you could certainly afford a chauffeur, and set up a little place where the chauffeur and his family could live. My closest friend's father owned a rug factory and he drove around in one of these impossibly tiny Fiats which now you can see on the road. And he was sort of ostracized by the community for not following the social morays of having a driver.

I spent a lot of time in my father's printing plant, getting dirty, of course. We spent a lot of time in the summers on a nearby lake where we usually rented for the summer. My aunt bought a large farm. My father bought a small vineyard. We spent a lot of time there, traveling to Budapest where on both sides of the family there were relatives traveling to the alps. Very rich, entertaining life.

School was -- at home we spoke Hungarian, school was in Serbian. And most of the time we spoke German with the governess which didn't seem to bother us at all. In fact, after my first grade when I learned my alphabet, Serbian, my sister and I and the governess vacationed in a different place than my parents. So I wrote letters to my parents with the tools at my disposal. The words were Hungarian but the letters were Serbic. So when my parents came down from the mountains to visit us, friends came along to visit this kid who wrote Hungarian and Serbian.

One of the weekly highlights which Bill Benson always pulls me back if I don't mention it, Wednesday afternoons the maids and governesses have the day off and we were deposited in our paternal grandmother's home, old sort of farming house with a huge garden, and locked in there for the afternoon. And total mayhem governed. We did whatever we wanted to do. And our grandmother, always laughing, approved it including tricks like soaking up all the labels of all the preserves and replacing them on entirely different things.

>> [Laughter]

>> Aleisa Fishman: Grandparents are good for tolerating that kind of thing, yes.

>> Steven Fenves: So that was the life. I never had any sense of antisemitism -- there wasn't much antisemitism. The only thing, the Yugoslav government was insistent on, Yugoslav government meaning a Serb military [Indiscernible]. They tried to separate the Hungarian-speaking Jews from the native Hungarians because they felt that things like my father's paper exercised an undue influence on this minority which they wanted to repress. But that's the only sense that I remember.

>> Aleisa Fishman: Can you talk a little bit about your father's newspaper? It was very influential.

>> Steven Fenves: It was my uncle's newspaper. He started it very young. And my father immediately after high school went to work in a huge lumber yard in what was then Croatia to support my uncle who went to university in Budapest. My uncle came back, married very well, married my Aunt Elizabeth who came from a family of very wealthy, porcelain, brick mills. So I think largely with my aunt's money he bought the newspaper, became Editor-in-Chief.

And my father, after discharged from the Austrian Hungarian Army came to work for him. During the huge inflation period after World War I, my father bought this enormous two-story-high printing press, antique at that time. There were half a dozen mechanics that

kept it running. I couldn't go to sleep at night until I heard the presses rolling in the background. So it was an integral part of life.
>> Aleisa Fishman: And your mother was a very talented artist.
>> Steven Fenves: My mother was a graphic artist. She was very much influenced by her uncle who was a very famous architect of the Hungarian Art Nuevo style, designed a synagogue in Subotica, many other buildings all over Hungary. And she went to the applied arts or industrial arts university rather than fine arts university because she always considered herself a graphic artist not a fine artist.

She traveled quite a bit: France, Italy, Germany, Austria. And many of her lithographs and etchings are from that period. And afterwards she did largely commercial work. My sister and I sort of squeezed her out of her studio. There were two rooms in the apartment. One was supposed to be the nursery, the other her studio. And after I was born, shortly after I was born, we essentially squeezed her out and her studio became part of the compound for the two of us.
>> Aleisa Fishman: I also understand that as a young person you were a pretty serious stamp collector and that was important.
>> Steven Fenves: Oh, yeah. That was a big enterprise. My father helped quite a bit. He occasionally sent instructions to vendors, advertisers, reporters, etc., who corresponded with the newspaper to always use special stamps rather than the regular stamp. So I made the round at least once a week. I knew everybody who had incoming mail. She usually -- she had a drawer where she put the incoming envelopes. I trimmed them -- soaked the stamps off, sorted them, packaged them, and went -- whenever my father went to either Budapest or Belgrade, I had a shopping list for him, packages of hundreds of these various stamps and the shopping list of things that I wanted using the catalog. When we had to sell during the occupation, that's when I found out that you don't sell at the price in the catalog nor do you buy at the price of the catalog. My father subsidized all of that. So that was a big event in my life.
>> Aleisa Fishman: So all of that would change in 1941 when Germany invaded Yugoslavia and their ally, Hungary, then occupied your part of Yugoslavia. And from the very first day you were really subjected to some profound upheaval. Can you tell us about that?
>> Steven Fenves: Day number one my father was expelled at gun point from his office. The paper and printing plant were confiscated by the government. And all establishments like that had administrators appointed, most of them reliably rabid antisemites. The one who was appointed to manage the plant vowed to -- the first day in office he closed access to my aunt and my father to the personal accounts of the family and charged the 100 plus payroll of the entire plant to that account. And once -- totally took money out of our hands. That was a big shock.

That summer was very hard. One correction to your text that you pointed out, Hungary followed mostly German antisemitic laws except for the so-called numerus clausus laws which preceded Germany by several years. It was promulgated in 1920 in Hungary restricting the percentage of Jews in establishments of higher education to their proportionate population as a whole, which would be about 6%.

Of course, you have to realize that population in a whole included 80% of the Hungarian peasant who were essentially slave laborers. You have to read Tolstoy, the Russian writers, to understand how they lived.

But anyhow, higher education started at fifth grade, the first year of academic high school. And a competitive exam was required. My father was out of work. So he spent the

entire summer with me, coaching me. And I was one of the nine who got accepted into high school, which really didn't mean much because we were treated with contempt, disgust, and hatred by the teachers. Didn't learn much at all.
>> Aleisa Fishman: You learned later you actually had to pay as well, right?
>> Steven Fenves: Oh, yes. A gentleman was compiling a history of the high school, knew me through common friends, and asked for a financial contribution. I sent him one and I said as you go through these papers, will you get me the list of names? So he sent me back a list of names, hand note at the bottom, you know, I found something curious. These people had to pay tuition. Free government school. Nobody else had to pay but those who were restricted, they had to pay.
>> Aleisa Fishman: So just to come back to that first day, you know, when -- in 1941. So your German governess, nanny, she took off. Right?
>> Steven Fenves: Yes. She didn't -- saying she wasn't going to spend another night in a Jewish house and walked out.
>> Aleisa Fishman: And so I understand -- so Jews -- non-Jews couldn't work for Jews anymore. So all of your staff is gone. But you were also forced to house Hungarian military officers.
>> Steven Fenves: Yeah. These two rooms that I mentioned before, sleeping quarters, those were turned over to Hungarian troops which turned out to be a very nice choice because all three of them were young lieutenants in the cavalry. And because of the rank, deserved outside quarters. Two counts and the prince. We tried to address my mother in French. She made it clear that she was not going to act like the gracious hostesses but they offered their Butler to help out so my mother went to the market with a fully dressed Hungarian sergeant carrying her basket. It was sort of unusual.
>> Aleisa Fishman: So your family was confined to a small portion of the apartment and you have these three Hungarian military gentlemen living there as well.

So as difficult -- and that went on for three years. Is that right?
>> Steven Fenves: Right.
>> Aleisa Fishman: As difficult as those years were, it became even worse in the spring of `44 when Germany moved into occupied Hungary as Hungary was about to capitulate to the allies and they moved in also in theory where you lived.

So what happened after the Germans move in?
>> Steven Fenves: Well, it's termed the German occupation. Exactly 600 German soldiers were involved. And in a matter of six weeks they deported 600,000 Jews.

For school groups, I pose the mathematical question: How do 600 soldiers deport 600,000 people? The answer is: They didn't have to lift a finger because the Hungarian state police, the gendarmes, had a fully prepared, rehearsed plan. They started a small part in 1942, only killing 3,000 people on the streets, but they affected the entire deportation. Until I got to Auschwitz, I never saw a German soldier.

Anyhow, the first week all of the leadership, doctors, lawyers, newspaper people, etc., were picked up at night, taken to a place in the countryside and eventually shipped to Auschwitz which we didn't know about. Restrictions became more and more severe. We were directed to move into the ghetto in the city which was a narrow strip of land adjacent to the freight yards. There was fear of bombing. And the myth of Jews knowing everything about everybody all the time, the myth was if they placed the ghetto next to the railroad line, railroad yards, those yards were not going to be bombed.

So we were there for a few weeks, for I think less than a week, again, supervised only by Hungarian gendarmes before we were moved into this village which was sort of emptied so as to take the Jews from the entire region. We were there for a week before we went to Auschwitz.

The worst -- one of the worst days of my life was that deportation. I don't know how it was broadcast that on such and such a date Jews were going to be expelled from their homes. We lived on the second floor. By the time we got the order, the stairway, two stories up, was lined with people waiting to ransack the apartment. And as we walked out with what we could carry, they screamed, yelled, spat on us as we went out. I don't know -- I mean, they were local people but how they got the news I never found out.

>> Aleisa Fishman: And these people had been neighbors.

>> Steven Fenves: Yup. Definitely.

>> Aleisa Fishman: But there was one exception.

>> Steven Fenves: Yes. Yes. In `41 we had to let our cook go as we did all the others. Unbeknownst to us, she joined this may lay, went into the apartment, and my sister and I over the years sort of tried to recreate the path she took from the kitchen, picking up mother's cookbook to the bedroom, picking up mother's diary, to a play room which still had the big drawers of her artwork and stuffing a folder with drawings, lithographs, etchings, etc., and carrying all of that out with her. I still don't know how she did it except that she was a huge, very possessing woman. And she apparently got away with it.

>> Aleisa Fishman: And she kept that through the war and returned it?

>> Steven Fenves: She returned to us. When we escaped, we had to give it back to her. She sent it out in the early `60s. The cookbooks are on exhibition, the previous special exhibit. And we donated that to the museum.

>> Aleisa Fishman: So from there, as you're deported from your home or moved out of your home, you're forced into a ghetto. So tell us a little bit about what that was like.

>> Steven Fenves: Horrible conditions. One or two families per room. Drinking water fountain maybe in every other courtyard, sanitary facilities, medical facilities almost totally non-existent, food doled out on an odd schedule. Again, our cook managed to bring us some food. The fence was porous. People could come in and help out, etc. People could escape out. A couple of my classmates escaped with their mothers. But still horrible conditions.

And then this small village was even worse. We were housed in in a chicken coop or something. And I finally found my aunt and her mother somewhere nearby, negotiated a small place next to it, outdoors, just large enough for a straw mattress. And that was their living space.

>> Aleisa Fishman: So I understand -- I said earlier you were born on June 6. So I understand that June 6, 1944, which was your 13th birthday, you received what I understand you call a welcome surprise birthday.

>> Steven Fenves: Yes. I was one of the few who had a working permit to work outside the ghetto. A former mechanic from the printing plant hired me during the occupation as an apprentice mechanic. And to everybody's great surprise, after we were in the ghetto he showed up with a permit to work outside. So I left the ghetto every morning and came back at night. And in his place there was a clandestined radio and we heard the BBC, the Fifth Symphony, announced every broadcast, and then the announcement that the Normandy invasion had started.

I don't want to be selfish or self-promoting but I could have very well have been the

first person to bring that news back into the ghetto because there were so few of us who were allowed out.
>> Aleisa Fishman: So from the ghetto you were sent to Auschwitz.
>> Steven Fenves: Yes.
>> Aleisa Fishman: And you were with your mother, I believe your sister and your grandmother.
>> Steven Fenves: Yes.
>> Aleisa Fishman: So what happened then?
>> Steven Fenves: Well, I don't know how many of you have seen "Schindler's List" but there is the scene where, by mistake, they are sent to Auschwitz and they are marched out and there's a nice, long, sloping ramp on which very dignified fashion the camera follows as they walked up. There was no such thing. There were railroad cars and the siding and the two choices were jump or being thrown out.

Mengele, dogs barking, guards with whips, soldiers -- inmates as fierce as the soldiers yelling at you why did come, why didn't you listen to the warnings, etc. Eventually consolidated into lines. My mother and my sister and I passed a mound of suit cases. On top of it sat my grandmother who had a childhood -- accident in her youth and had a leg amputated. She was sitting on top of the suitcases without her artificial leg.

And then the order came to separates men and women. My mother and sister went one way and I went the other way. Again, we were in line for advancing. An SS officer in white gloves -- several survivors will tell you that Dr. Mengele selected them. I was not introduced to the gentleman so all I know is that he had white gloves and the insignia. But he went like that, which I didn't understand that. I was sent that way.

Huge crowds. Enormous, cavernous room. We were stripped naked, shorn of every body hair, disinfected with some horrible solution, a cold shower, thrown some broken down clothes, striped inmate uniforms, even worse shoes, all of this taking hours, all of this after not having eaten or drank for seven days before, eventually marched into the barracks.

So that was the introduction to what I still remember about it more than anything else is the stench, the stench of unwashed bodies that what I later found out was the stench of the smoke coming from the crematorium. But that is still in my nostrils.
>> Aleisa Fishman: And you were 13 years old.
>> Steven Fenves: I was 13 years old.

So I was marched into a barrack which was called the youth barrack. Everybody there was my age. Now, Auschwitz is known as an extermination camp but it was also a huge stockyard. That's the only term that comes to my mind having seen the Chicago stockyards before. People warehoused to be selected for slave labor. Most people who survived Auschwitz survived because they had been there four or five days and then shipped out. I was there five months.

So it became obvious -- I mean, you learn very fast. You learn the rules. An inmate's suggestion that you go once a day to pick up a pebble to have something to wipe yourself with. You also learn that very soon the daily visits of German civilians and military looking for slave laborers never stopped at the boys barracks.

Now, if you were looking for slave labor to exploit, you would not need a 13-year-old for that purpose. So we were rapidly turning into walking corpses. The camp's name was -- slang term was muscleman. I never found out the origin of that but that was it you learned very fast that people die in spirit and mind long before their body dies. These walking

corpses, walking around oblivious to everything that's going on around them until one night -- one morning they are carted away with the night's dead, directly to the crematorium. No point in wasting anymore gas on them; they're dead. So they go into the ovens. I found out later that my mother had died that way.

So I was looking for my classmates who were taken, one by one were dying. What saved me is this horrible German governess that my sister and I tried every ruse to get out from under her spell. At that time in Auschwitz, the kapos, the overseers, were German criminals brought from prisons to be the internal guards. The SS were on the outside. They couldn't guard all the time. So eventually these guys looked for an interpreter because they only spoke German and most of the kids only spoke Hungarian. So at age 13 you volunteer for things that adults may not. So I volunteered. I became an interpreter. The only reward was that after the inmates were fed from the barrels with one spoon, I was allowed to scrape out the bottom of the barrels.

That lasted -- I have to reconstruct the dates but the important date that followed was the day that the gypsy families in the compound were exterminated. That was one night. The following morning, new inmates appeared cleaning out the barracks, etc., and new kapos, new overseers appeared and they were Polish politicals. They had red triangles rather than green triangles.

One of them walked over and said he was looking for a German-Polish-Hungarian translator. Well, I had never heard a word of Polish before but I figured it was a Slavic language like Serbian and so I volunteered. And that changed my life. Because these people, all young, intellectuals, college students or slightly older, were determined they would survive, determined they would do something about their survival, and insist that anyone working for them also had the same drive that they had.

So for August, September, part of October, I was with them as an interpreter, often going to the front of the camp, of the compound, escorting German civilians to where they were interviewing inmates, translating for the inmates, making up things during translation.
>> [Laughter]
>> Steven Fenves: I find out they were looking for carpenters, anything that any inmate said that could be somehow interpreted that way I did. So that was one of my duties.
>> Aleisa Fishman: And being an interpreter enable you had to locate your sister. Is that right?
>> Steven Fenves: Yeah. It just so happened that one of the Polish kapos had an inmate girlfriend -- had a girlfriend who was incarcerated as a kapo in one of the women's barracks. So we had to go and see her. How do you go from compound to compound? Well, you form a roof repair brigade, a cart, barrel of pitch, roof paper.

And the barracks were in such horrible conditions. Winter was approaching. We got permission. So we went from compound to compound visiting girlfriends, etc., but also passing information, passing intelligence, and black marketeering. And in one of these compounds I encountered my sister, just a rare event in Auschwitz. As the picture shows, she always had long braids. Now she had about two centimeters, three centimeters of reddish hair, a summer dress in September, arms and legs are raw from the biting wind.

So eventually I managed to -- I found out that she was being shipped out. I managed to carve in -- cash in on my black market goods and converting them to a sweater and scarf and arranged to get it to her before she was shipped out.

She also reminded me that I brought her a kilos of margarine which I expected that she would be dividing with her friends. She told the foundation that she ate it in one sitting and

got very sick, which is not surprising with the diet that she had. So I could help her that way.
>> Aleisa Fishman: So you were in Auschwitz for five months. And the way you got out in October of `44 and ended up at the satellite camp of Buchenwald was pretty astounding. Can you tell us a little bit about that?
>> Steven Fenves: Well, yes. Obviously 13-year-olds were not being shipped out into labor camps. The Auschwitz kapos decided -- tried to locate a safe transport. And that was always a question because the SS occasionally played the game of organizing a transport, putting them on the trains, turning the train around, and bringing it back and putting everybody -- taking everybody to the gas chambers. Some form of diversion.

Anyhow, they pressed me in the line. I got tattooed which by that time only outgoing people got tattooed. Incoming inmates didn't get tattooed. The number was not worth for a much longer time.

And we arrived, after three days on trains again -- this time at least once a day allowed to go to the -- the train stopped. You could go out to relieve yourself and maybe have some coffee or something. Arrived at this camp. Commanding officer speaks, forman speaks, translator speaks. And just before we are dismissed, the forman comes up to me and says, "What are you doing here? I didn't select you." I was his interpreter in Auschwitz.

Well, the kapos in Auschwitz coached me at least as thoroughly as presidential candidates get coached before debates but this was not one of the eventualities that they coached me for. So I had to think fast. And I said, "Well, sir, with this many new people, they thought -- "They" -- thought that you need another interpreter." And he said, "Eh, that's a good idea," and walked away.

That wasn't it because as soon as we were seated, which was big news for us, the interpreter sat on one side of me, another Hungary-speaking inmate on the other side, really crowding me in and started questioning me. Who are you? Where are you coming from? How come the foreman knows you? How come your clothes are so much better than everybody else's? How come you don't have the stripes cut in and your clothes a swipe of red paint? Hours.

That night they took me to the kapos' room and the questioning continued. The kapo was a German political in camp since 1933. So imagine what 11 years of concentration camp does to a person. The camp also had Russian and Soviet POWs because Germany did not honor the Geneva Convention with respect to the Soviet Army. And one of the orderlies was a gypsy.

So they all started questioning me in all of these languages. The Russian tried to check my Polish. We quickly realized that Serbian and Russian are much more closer together than either to Polish. So we switched to a much faster language. The gypsy had heard something about Auschwitz but never heard the whole story, etc. So at the end of the night I was accepted into the organization. Worked for a short term on the home detail and then for a couple of months on the assembly line.

I don't know when Mercedes-Benz bought the old German aircraft factory, fighter planes. We assembled the wings. 14-hour workday, six and a half days a week. Every 15 minutes one plane advanced, one wing advanced one station. Hard labor but food somewhat better, considerably better.

The cook was a Czech political who had been a chef in a Prague restaurant before. And everyone who has written about Auschwitz -- about [Indiscernible], mentions the variety and texture of the food more than the nutritional value of the food, in Niederorschel.

>> Aleisa Fishman: So you were there for more than six months, April `45 when you were forced on a Death March. So tell us what that was and where you went.
>> Steven Fenves: Ok. We had anticipated that the factory would be closed. We were getting less and less complete -- turning out less and less complete wings. So on a night of March 31, we were marched out. It's about 150 kilometers to Buchenwald. 10 days. Probably a third of the people dying on the road or attempting to escape. A very hard march. In the process, my arm was broken. When I spoke back to a German guard, he threw his rifle at me. And all I could do was go -- move to protect my head.

Eventually we were encased in this abandoned camp at the foot of the hill where Buchenwald was. We had settled down for the night and suddenly trucks appeared and our guards were replaced by fresh SS guards. And the officers took count of the prisoners. With the officers came an inmate, a kapo again, with red triangle. He seated himself on the running board of the staff cart and made the body motion that you were accustomed to when one inmate wanted to signal another. So I crept up to him and crouched down not directly facing him. Do you speak Polish? Yes. Do you have an organization? Yes. Send me one of the organization. I said, yes, I am one. You can talk to me. He said, ok, stall as much as you can. Buchenwald is being emptied. Trainloads -- the Jewish inmates are being packed into train loads and going somewhere, nobody knows where. If you can stall, stall.

I ran back and at night I told that to the rest of the organization. Following morning, three of the people, one who had been in that camp before, hid in the kilns of the brickyard and the count came up three short. And they kept us there for much of the day, standing much of the day, while portions of the guards were searching. Eventually, for first time we heard gunfire. And the SS got nervous and got started.

So we went up to Buchenwald. It was dark by the time we got to Buchenwald. We just marched in. Kapo was greeted by his longtime friends who knew -- with whom we had served before. So POWs, Soviet, were marched one way. We were marched another way. There were no SS inside the camp. We marched into a barrack. And I collapsed in one of the cots. 12, 14 hours later somebody shook me awake to say that the Americans had arrived. So all of my great dreams of participating in the inmate takeover of Buchenwald that everybody was planning petered out.
>> Aleisa Fishman: So we unfortunately are pretty much out of time here. I'm going to turn back to Steve in a moment. I'm sorry we're not going to have time for questions today but you can come up afterwards. I'd like to thank all of you for being here. I hope you can come back to another *First Person* program. And as I said at the beginning, we have our *First Person* program every Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that the First Person has the last word. But before we turn back to Steven, I'm going to let you know two things. For all of you who haven't had a chance to ask a question, Steven will remain afterwards. And if you want, you can take a photograph with him.

So thank you all again for coming. And I turn to you now, Steven, for the last word.
>> Steven Fenves: Thank you.

Well, one thing that I want you to take away from this is that I was not supposed to be here. Not only because of timing schedule and that -- I'm substituting for someone else for today. It's that 80 years ago I was condemned to death. The location was not specified. The manner of execution, whether by a shot in the back, hanging, gassing, exhaustion, hunger was not specified. The only thing that was specified, that I and six million other of my co-religionists

were to die because we were subhuman, because we were vermin that had to be exterminated. That was reinforced, announced, and executed by the country that nerve Europe considered the most advanced country in Europe. My parents' library was half in German. The German governess was [Indiscernible]. But the entire government participated in the execution -- in the formulation of this order of execution and in the performance of it.

So I'm one of the few that survived and that puts some obligation on me. As a witness, I consider it my responsibility to talk, as difficult as it is sometimes to remind everyone how far hatred, discrimination, persecution can be carried when it goes unchecked. As was said, the worst enemy of the oppressed are the unconcerned, the people who do nothing while typically a minority takes over and does the perpetration.

So that's my hope, that I can convince some of you that presentation, discrimination, xenophobia are extremely dangerous because with the slightest prodding or slightest permission by the government, it can escalate into brutality that the world has never seen. And that's my mission, to do my bit to -- not necessarily to stop but to dampen down this escalation of brutality.

>> Aleisa Fishman: Thank you very much.

>> Steven Fenves: Thank you.

>> [Applause]