REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON MARTIN WEISS
JULY 12, 2018

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

This 2018 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of twice-weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust.

Each of our *First Person* guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Marty will share with us his "First Person" account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Marty a few questions. If we do not get to your question today, please join us in our online conversation: *Never Stop Asking Why*. The conversation aims to inspire individuals and new generations to ask the important questions that Holocaust history raises and what this

history means for societies today. To join the *Never Stop Asking Why* conversation, you can ask your question and tag the museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and #AskWhy. You can find the hashtag on the back of your program, as well.

A recording of this program will be made available on the Museum's YouTube page. Please visit the First Person website, listed on the back of your program, for more details.

What you are about to hear from Marty is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

This photograph of Marty Weiss was taken in the late 1940s, after his liberation and his emigration to the United States.

Marty was born in Czechoslovakia in a town called Polana in 1929. Czechoslovakia is highlighted on this map of Europe.

In 1939, Germany occupied one half of Czechoslavakia and Hungary the other half. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, conditions in Polana worsened. By April 1944 Martin's family was transported to the Munkacs ghetto. The arrow on this map of Czechoslavakia points to Munkacs.

In May, they were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center where Marty and other family members were chosen for slave labor. The first arrow points to the location of Aushwitz.

Later Marty and his father were sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. This Arrow points to the location of Mauthausen. This is a photograph of the rocks that were taken out of the quarry by slave laborers at Mauthausen camp.

Here we see a document that was uncovered only recently in our archives and which was new to Marty. The document describes him as a prisoner. This document is a Prisoner Registration Card which documents Marty's transfer from Auschwitz on May 21, 1944, to the Mauthausen camp. His prisoner number appears in the upper right-hand corner where the red circle is, along with the abbreviation Ung-Jude, which is the abbreviation for Hungarian Jew. His name is in the upper left-hand corner, also circled in red if you can see it, along with his birthday and other family information.

After the war, Marty moved to the United States. He served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War followed by a successful career in the grocery business. He retired 20 years ago. Marty's wife Joan passed away in 2013. Marty and Joan have two children and four grandchildren. One grandson is a lawyer in California, a granddaughter is in London for training for her job in the U.S. Another grandchild just graduated from high school and the youngest is just entering high school.

Marty has been a volunteer here in the museum for the past 19 years. In addition to leading groups of students and FBI agents through the museum, Marty is active with the Speakers Bureau. He has spoken to diverse audiences including at U.S. military bases, such as Fort Buchanan in Puerto Rico and Ft. Sill in Oklahoma, as well as the National Security Agency, the National Labor Relations Board, at prison, colleges and schools. Marty said to me that no matter what kind of school he speaks at, whether private or public or no matter where in our country, the kids "are just fantastic. Judging by them you would never see prejudice in the U.S. Kids are the ones we have to look up to."

Marty recently traveled at the invitation of the Austrian government to the former Mauthausen concentration camp which is now a memorial serving as an institute for learning about the Holocaust. And he is a contributor to Echoes of Memory, a collection of writings by

survivors associated with this museum. Following today's program, Marty will be available to sign copies of Echoes of Memory.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Marty Weiss.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Marty, thank you so much for joining us today and being writing to be our First Person. We have such a short time to spend with you. So if you don't mind, we'll just start right away if that's ok.

>> Marty Weiss: Thank you, Bill.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, you've told me in the past about your life in Czechoslovakia as a child, right before the war. Before we turn to the war and the Holocaust, tell our audience what life was like for you and your family in the years before the war.

>> Marty Weiss: Ok. In the 1930s, when I was growing up, I was one of nine. I went to Czech school. Now, the big decision from Czech was to come later. Under Czech we had democracy. And the school I went to was very night. The teachers were similar. The teachers were mostly from the Czech Republic. There were some men, some women. And most of all, I never realized as a kid -- I should say I didn't realize -- by the time I was 7, 8 years old, I knew about democracy as much as anybody. Because we were -- the way teachers behaved, they were all civilized. All teachers are civilized. But you know what I'm talking about? They were just nice. The reason I say this, where we lived it was not exactly the norm. One of the reasons was because they were Russian, the population where we lived, primarily Russian, Russian-speaking. Not like Russian from Russia itself but they were Russian nevertheless. Their culture and their religion was similar to the one in Russia. So the language was similar but not quite the same. A little different.

So I grew up speaking Russian from the time I was a kid. I remember when I first started. I just knew Russian. But I went to Czech schools. And the Czech schools are different than the Russian schools. The rest of the kids went to Russian schools. The other schools were very archaic. The teachers were very stern, walk around with a rod in their hand, believed in corporal punishment, all kinds of stuff like this. Very similar, I hate to say, as Catholic. Friends tell me what the nuns used to do or whatever. I used to get a kick out of it because it was very similar.

Anyway, we were brought up very good that way. And like I say, by the time I was 7, 8 years olds -- old, I was very aware of democracy. And one of the things I had benefits, I came from a family of nine children. Ok? I had four brothers -- four boy and five girls. All of them were older than I was except I have two younger sisters than I was but the rest were older. Not just a little older. They were quite a bit older. They were already out in the world. I had one sister going to school in the city which was most unusual. Nobody went to school in the city, like college, what they call them now.

But anyway, so not only that, but our family -- we also had a benefit, I also had the benefit, there were summer resorts in our town, a nice one even by today's standards. So we had a lot of visitors come during the summer. And believe it or not, I was a kid, all of this -- you automatically pick it up without realizing. So I was more or less even though I lived in the village, was not so naive. It was like really, I knew what the world was about. Ok? So this was my introduction, when I was a kid.

Anyway, as time went around, 1937, 1938, [Indiscernible] started getting on the soapbox and started screaming, Germany over everybody or something like this. He came in -- they were beaten down from World War I. So he was really very angry.

And by the way, we had depression in the United States but there it was much worse. People were jobless. The economy -- there was no economy. It was just a shambles. The mothers had to take the child and stand in a soup line.
>> Bill Benson: Marty, I'm going to interrupt for a second. Do you have your cell phone in your pocket by any chance?
>> Marty Weiss: Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: Let's take that out. We're going to turn that off.
>> Marty Weiss: I have it off.
>> Bill Benson: You have it off? Ok. All right.
>> Take it out and put it on the table?
>> Marty Weiss: Sure.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you. I think that's causing the problem.
>> Marty Weiss: A problem?
>> Bill Benson: The sound. That's ok.

Marty, before we continue on, your father, Jacob, your mother, Golda, tell us a little bit about them.
>> Marty Weiss: My father -- all the muscle men were stern. He was a father, period. We all had high respect for him. He had his own chair. When he said something, that was gas appeal, that's it. -- that was gospel, that's it. My older brothers, of course, had to do all the work.

By the way, my father had a business. We also had our own land. So we grew our own food and so on. So we had a lot of farming to do. And we also had the business to run. So my older brothers, they were strong, big guys and capable of doing this. So they were doing everything. Then during certain seasons when there was extra work or something, we would hire some peasant and they would dig potatoes and that kind of stuff.

The point was, our life, got older, and I thought we were just ordinary people. And we were ordinary people getting by. But once I came to the United States and I kept hearing about the depression and all -- in 1930s, we lived very well. We had everything we needed.

We didn't have any shortage. Even during the war, we had enough of our own food that we didn't have to worry about food and so on. So we were very self-sufficient to say the least.

Like I say, my brothers were very capable, strong, big guys but as they got older, my two oldest brothers left for the city. They wanted to get maybe their own money, make their own living. And I had one brother at home. He was the closest to me, about seven years older than I was, but he, too, was very capable. So by now I was about 12 years old or so. So I was his helper from the time I was 10, helping him. We used to plow the fields ourselves, all kinds of stuff. It was a given.

My father was very firm. But obviously he knew how to manage everything because everything worked. This went on for a good time. Anyway, 1939, when the war broke out, we were occupied by Hungary. Now, notice Hungary not Germany. One of the reasons -- people always blame everything on Germans, which, by the way, they deserve it because they started the whole thing but they had allies like Romania, Hungary, a bunch of others which I can't even remember the names of them anymore. But anyway there were quite a few of them.

Hungary got our section. That was their prize for joining the Nazis as soon as they came in, we knew we were in big trouble. My father said there was nothing to be afraid because he was in the Hungarian Army during World War I. So he says they're antisemitic and all of that but, you know, they're ok.

Well, it turned out he was wrong. This was a different Hungary. They were already infected with the Nazis' ideology. As soon as they came in, they changed -- deprived us of our not necessarily technically our citizenship, however, they took away all of our rights. We had no rights. They took away the businesses from the Jewish people, our livelihoods. If you were a teacher, you couldn't teach. My sister was going to school. They sent her home. She couldn't stay at school. And so on. So our life was changing immediately.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, one of the things, the way you put it to me besides all of the things you were prohibited from doing, you said whatever you had done that you did legally was now illegal.

>> Marty Weiss: Illegal. Right. So guess what. We lived in a small town. We didn't have electricity, by the way. We had kerosene lamps, you know, lantern, or candles. My father's business was in the meat business. Now, we had slaughtered animals. So we had a small slaughterhouse. We were not that active, just a certain amount for the week. And before it was legally and all of that. And now they took away our capability of doing that but we still had to supply the population that we used to -- that used to get stuff from us.

>> Bill Benson: So it was illegal but you still had to do it.

>> Marty Weiss: We still had the business. The funny thing, most of the businesses were taken away, their licenses were taken away. Somehow my father's they didn't take away. I could never understand why. I don't know if he bribed somebody or what. They were bribeable. But the point is I don't know.

The fact is, is we had to do everything at night. So my brother, like I say, he was very strong and capable, so we used to take the animals literally -- I hate to sound so vivid -- during the night.

By the way, our neighbors were Russian. They didn't like the Hungarians any more than we did because the Hungarians looked at them as inferior because they were Slavic. But what happened, we just couldn't trust them, even your own neighbors. In wartime, you'd be surprised how differently life is. People change. Or they can change.

So we were very careful. So we had to do everything during the night. So my father would buy the cattle and he would have to slaughter it, believe it or not, in the stable so nobody would see us. All we had was candles or one of those lanterns we did all of that work by candle light on the floor. We didn't have a way to hoist up to make it easier, nothing. And this is the way we worked. But we did what we had to do. Because we were always under surveillance, if you will.

So we had to get rid of all the evidence by morning. We didn't have any cars, you have to remember. We had bicycles and horse and wagon, that's it. So it was not as easy as getting in the car and doing something.

>> Bill Benson: But you had to hide the evidence.

>> Marty Weiss: We had to hide the evidence. Then police surprised us. They would come. They wouldn't find any evidence.

And by the way, they used to do that. They used to send sometimes detectives and sort of watch for us. Of course we were always afraid one of our neighbors would inform. We could not trust anybody.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, I'm going to ask you about two of your brothers who were of draft age. Tell us what happened to them.

>> Marty Weiss: My two oldest brothers -- actually, one of them was taken away -- 1940, the only one at the time that was taken away. The rest of them were `40, `41, about `41. They

inducted all the men anywhere from 20 to about 50 into the service, but not the Army but under Military Rule. But they wore civilian clothes. They had regular boots. But they used them, guess what, for slave labor. I didn't know what to coin them after the war so I called them labor battalion.

My oldest brother was immediately sent out to the Russian front. And that was the worst place to be not only for him or for people like him but even the German troops, for punishment, they used to sends them to the Russian front. That's how terrible life was there. It was cold, miserable. There was Typhoid going around, and all kinds of diseases.

My brother was there from as early as 1940 -- and just to cut to the chase, finally got over to the Russian side. Later on he was the Russian front. By the way, you know what they had him do on the Russian front? Burying the dead and picking minefields. But he survived. But we lost contact with him. We had no idea where he was. Everybody else we knew was with somebody. They knew somebody that was with him, saw him someplace. Nobody saw him. And he was in those places.

Finally, what do you call it, just to finish the thought, he got over to the Russian side. And Russia, they set up a Czechoslovakia legion. By the way, one of my second cousins was one of the people that did that, with another general. They set up the Czechoslovakia legion. So all of these guys that escaped or were captured by the Russians, they came on their side, put on a Czech uniform, got a gun, and they started fighting the war. To finish it. But my brother, he wasn't so lucky. He came there and they accused him of being a German spy. Why I don't know to this day.

>> Bill Benson: What did they do to him after they accused him?

>> Marty Weiss: They accused him so they put him in the with the German POWs ok? He was not German. He didn't even speak German.

>> Bill Benson: In fact, they were responsible for sending him off as a slab laborer.

>> Marty Weiss: Slave laborer, German POWs now, by the way, we gave up. We didn't think he was live anymore because nobody was with him, nobody heard of him. We just gave up. I was already in the United States, actually.

Anyway, in 1947, all of a sudden we heard that he was alive. I couldn't believe it. It turned out -- that's when I found out he was a German POW. Now, the Russians kept the German POWs two years after the war. He was in one of those groups. So two years after the war they released him, 1947.

>> Bill Benson: All of that time treating him like a German POW.

>> Marty Weiss: Russian POW. Before he was a German but now he was a Russian. Or Hungarian if you will. But now he was a Russian POW. They treated him as a German. That's what they say. And he was there for a number of years. Finally they released him in 1947. And that's the first time -- somehow he made his way through but he was smart enough to know not to let anybody know where he is or where he's going. He just kept on moving. He came out to our town, saw nobody was there, kept on moving. He was sure nobody -- because the Russians had a secret police at the time. They were very, very nasty. Not dissimilar to the SS in many cases but they were very thorough. And the slightest thing they would arrest you and put new prison forever, whatever. That's just Waite they were. So he kept on moving.

Anyway, cut to the chase, somehow he got over to Slovakia. And from there he found -- by that time somebody told him where my brother was, my older brother was, the Czech Republic. So he got in touch with him. He immediately sent actually a young son-in-law with some papers and some clothes and so on. She brought him over to where he was. He

stayed in the Czech Republic. There he was safe. However, he couldn't even -- even though he was also ordinary, he was a Czechoslovakia citizen originally, but they wouldn't recognize it.

So he picked up -- guess what. I was already gone to the states. Somebody, for a couple of bucks, they got my birth certificate and my birth information from the State Department -- not the State Department, the Interior Department and he ended up with my name and my birthday. He was like 10 years older than I was. [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Marty, during -- you and your family, of course, remained in Hungary under the circumstances you were describing until 1944. How were you able to manage to, under those circumstances, stay surviving, be able to eat for that period of time for those almost five years?

>> Marty Weiss: As long as we were home we were fine. As a matter of fact, we had many people, they were on the run from that area, escaping from massacres and stuff, and they would come through. We would always make sure we helped them.

>> Bill Benson: You told me that by 1944, you just knew that sooner or later you were going to be arrested. Did your family do anything to prepare for that?

>> Marty Weiss: You couldn't prepare. You couldn't do anything. People in the United States don't understand that. We didn't have the means. We didn't have the capability of going anyplace. No country would allow you in. If you did get there -- if you went to Switzerland, the borders were closed if you were Jewish, period. If you went to any country, even France in the early days although France got to be very bad, too, later because the same thing happened in France as in Hungary.

But the point is, there was no -- there was nothing to do. You were literally [Inaudible: off mic] do you leave your children behind? Go into the forest? We didn't know the area was mountainous. There was no food there, except the forest. So my father and older brother, we were thinking of going through the forest. Then you leave your family there helpless. You have women and children. So what do you do?

>> Bill Benson: We're having some technical problems I think. I think your microphone -- can you hear Marty well when he speaks? No. Ok.

>> Marty Weiss: I'll take it off. Can you hear me know? No?

>> Bill Benson: They'll work it on from upstairs. Here we go. It just cut off a moment ago, Marty.

>> Marty Weiss: Better?

>> Bill Benson: Yeah. Marty, I had asked you at one point, had the family considered going into hiding and one of the things you said is there were still a large number of you at home with young kids and where would you go hide.

>> Marty Weiss: No place to hide. First of all in a case like this, you got along without neighbors they were ordinary people. We were not enemies. But we would not trust them. We may have trusted that one person that would do it; however, we didn't trust the neighbor next to him. We never knew -- in other words -- I think we were probably right. Ok?

One thing we didn't want to do is separate the children to be left alone from my mother. So we made these calculations but eventually we decided not to do it.

Anyway, so after a certain time -- by the way, by that time already we heard of the massacres, big massacres from different areas, the whole eastern area. That was not far from us. We were very aware of it. Like I think I did mention before about Slovakia.

>> Bill Benson: You and I were talk about that earlier.

>> Marty Weiss: So we knew about it. It wasn't like we were in the dark. But, again, we didn't

have any newspapers, no radio, nothing of that stuff. We just knew it. So we were already prepared for anything.

However, you are never prepared for what came later with Auschwitz. That was something nobody could have ever thought of.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, let's turn -- [feedback]

I'm going to talk loud. Can most of you hear that? I have no problem according to my kids.

Marty, in 1944, your family was forced into the ghetto but you weren't there. [inaudible: Off mic]

>> Marty Weiss: In 1944, actually, they arrested us [inaudible: Off mic]

>> Marty Weiss: So I have to give credit to the Hungarians first because they are the ones that ruined us. They were the one that initially picked us up.

Now, once we were in the ghetto, we realized we were in big trouble. However, we had no idea -- now, we heard of the atrocities by now in the Ukraine and all of that. We heard all of that so we were prepared -- you're prepared but you're never prepared. Ok? I can't explain. When somebody's going to kill you, you hear about it and you figure it's inevitable but you figure it wouldn't happen to you; it would happen to somebody else. Just the way life is. You know?

But we were there a short time. One day we got orders that we were going on a trip. They pulled up a big train, one the cattle cars, and they stacked us -- they pushed us into the train. In our boxcar we had 125 people in the boxcar. Can you imagine? One boxcar. We had bundles everybody had bundles. People were very old. There were very old and also very young a lot of children. Our population in our area, everybody had anywhere from three to 14 kids. So you had grown-up people but you also had a lot of people under 10 or under 3.

So anyway, they pushed us into these boxcars. By that time -- by the way, I don't even remember if we got any food there. Somehow or another we survived there. We got into the boxcars some boxcars had 125 to 135. Hindsight I still remember certain things. As the train started moving, we came to Poland and we realized we were going eastward. And that scared us because we heard of the massacres in Ukraine, we heard of different things that happened in that area. We figured we were in for it. But we knew that from the start. But you never knew what was to come.

You just could not visualize. People heard of the mass killings, Einzatsgruppen, the machine guns and stuff, but it happened to somebody else, wouldn't happen to you. You know what I mean? I can't explain it. It's a defensive mechanism or whatever.

So we were on the train. We come to Poland. It really shook us up. We realized that was not all. By the way, no more food, no water, no nothing. When the train stopped at the station, to fill up water for the locomotive, crying for water, nobody would give us a drop of water. We kept on going.

Finally, we came, in my case, we came into Auschwitz around midnight I think. Once we came into Auschwitz, to describe the scene is almost beyond description because you just can't. The train stopped. As soon as it stopped, we started getting orders in German. We understood a little bit. We spoke Jewish and some Jewish and German have the same words but not the same pronouncements. So we understand some of it but most of it we didn't understand because it was real German.

We got off the train. The first thing -- oh, some guys came up with the striped clothes, prison clothes. We didn't know who they were. They acted mean. They had big sticks

like broomsticks and threatened to hit you. We tried not to get hit, of course.

Like I say, we were on the ground. Most of all, as soon as we were on the ground -- oh, yeah, the perimeter was circled with flood lights, like a football field, and there were guards all around us as soon as we were on the ground. There were guards all around us. Literally their finger on the trigger. Every five, six feet there was a guard. That was our arrival at Auschwitz.

Well, sometimes you think of hell as being a terrible place. Well, hell wouldn't even compare. As we were on the ground for a very short time -- in the meantime -- oh, yeah. Not only were the guards there with their finger on the trigger but there was this nasty, trained killing dogs, German police dogs. If you ever saw one, they have to hold them back. Not to jump at somebody. They were just trained for that. Automatically. They were right behind the guards. And this was our, how I can put it, our arrival at Auschwitz.

Immediately, right after we were on the ground, they separated us immediately men from the women. The men went on one side. The women went on the other side. When we were in a group of men and a group of women, each one of us had to go through a line. There was an officer standing dressed up -- one thing about the Germans, the SS, they were dressed very sharp, very neat, like a Hollywood movie, really, spic and span. Shiny boots. Would just stand there. You would march up to him and he would go like this or that.

Now, we figured out they do that for people to work or not to work. On the train we speculated that because we would work, our families would be taken care of because we'll be earning enough for them as well. So this is our logic. Because we were ordinary people, right? Well, it turned out that was far from the truth, not at all what it was.

So we went through the line. Like I said, the men, the women. Anybody went to the left, went immediately to the gas chambers. Anybody to the right was picked for work. Of course we didn't know that. You have to remember, literally like the blind leading the blind. We just had no idea. We knew we were in trouble but we didn't expect what was to come.

As soon as we were in the groups, we went through the line. They put us in another group, the one picked for work. And the ones that were picked not to go to work were put in a different bundle or different group, I should say, and they immediately marched them up to the gas chambers. By next morning they were all gone, all killed. When we came to Auschwitz, the killing was 10,000 to 12,000 people a day.

I'll tell you also about the train which I should have mentioned before. The train, because it was a long train we were on, so many people in each boxcar. And our train, I remember, 125 boxcars. Now, how do I know that? I'll tell you what. I was a kid. When the train went on a curve, I used to count them.

>> Bill Benson: When the selection took place, tell us about your family.

>> Marty Weiss: So the selection took place. Like I say, my mother and my younger sisters obviously went straight to the section to go to the gas chamber. But I had two older sisters picked for work. I didn't know that of course. And the same with me. I went through and passed through, my father, my brother. They were big. And I went through and I passed. One thing that may have saved me, I'm not sure -- in the spring of the year, in that area where we lived, too, it's still cold. So I had a couple of extra jackets, like outdoor jackets. I put them on because we were in a cold climate, we'll need the jackets. So I put extra jackets on. I put those extra jackets on. That may have saved me because I was not a big kid. I was like 14, just about 15. But I was not big. Definitely not big for my age. I was not short but I was not big. But I went through.

Now, I didn't know that that was such a big deal I found out later that a lot of kids I went to school with did not come through. So that's later.

Anyway, they put us into one area as a group, all the men that were picked for work. And then I noticed the women were on the other side, like not far, just a short distance across. There was a little empty space. And I noticed my mother was there with my younger sisters. So I said to my father: You know something, I'm going to run across that space, join them because food would be a problem and I'm a little older than my sisters were, I'll be more capable of getting some food.

So I tried to make a dash across. And guess what. When I was half way there, this man in the striped uniform -- which, by the way, we thought they were terrible because they act nasty. They were other prisoners but they had to behave like they were threatening us all the time or hitting us. They didn't hit us but they were threatening. But we didn't know that. One of the guys, as I was running over, he grabbed me by the back of my neck and threw me back, "You can't go there." He insisted I go back to where I came from. And guess what. That man just saved my life. Had I gone to that side, I would have never gotten back. Had I joined their group. It just shows you how sometimes luck is very, very important.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, that is, of course, the last time you saw your mother and sisters?

>> Marty Weiss: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: You, your father and your sisters then were forced to go into forced labor.

>> Marty Weiss: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what happened to you from there.

>> Marty Weiss: Well, from there -- actually I had an older brother. He was very strong. He got separated right there and then from us for some reason. There was something happened that he got separated from us. I never saw him again. He was the healthiest, strongest. He never came back. I did. So figure that out.

From there, they put us on a train. We went to Austria. But this time instead of 125, 130 them in a boxcar, guess how many there was. 25. You figure. There were guards on each --

>> Bill Benson: Each train? Each car?

>> Marty Weiss: Each car. They had two guards there. Why? You couldn't get out. The door was locked anyway. They had a little space for air, that's about it. For the life of me to this day I could never understand why they did have them. We had to sit like crossed-legged, in rows of 25 I think or whatever it was. Yeah, 25 on each side. And we were not allowed to talk. We were not allowed to breathe. We were not allowed to do anything. No food, no water.

We kept on going. And we came to Austria. The reason we knew we were going to Austria, going westward, became outside Vienna. And as a kid, I recognized the architecture of Vienna, the city. So we recognized we were in Austria. The train stopped on a bridge. And then we figured, speculating, now they're going to throw us into the river. Then we said, no, no, if they want to kill us, they would have done it there; why bring us here. You argue with your several because you don't know.

Anyway, after a certain time, most likely it was a red light, hindsight, but we continued to our destination. The train stopped alongside this huge mountain. And I mean it was huge. That was called -- later we found out, on top of the mountain was a camp called Mauthausen. They marched us up to the top of the camp.

Now, this was a camp -- the mountain was built on a stone quarry. As a matter of fact, most of the people there were stationed there worked on the stone quarry. It was the

hardest work you could be assigned to.

The museum does research. They figured out that a person working in the mines, mines are stone, healthy person, could only last just so long. In other words, they want to kill you but they're not going to put you in the gas chamber. They would kill you by working you. And they coined a word for it. What do you call it? Try to say in English, basically it's bone grinder. That if they worked the people the way they did and didn't feed you enough, they really grind you into the ground, basically that's what they said. They had coined the word for it. Could you believe it?

So basically once we were in Mauthausen -- by the way, everything was built out of the stone, the watch towers, everything. It was very scary, let's put it this way.

Over there -- by the way, in Auschwitz it was the spring of the year. It was cold, miserable. We had these thin clothes. We were shaking, shivering. And while I was there, I should have told you that before -- before we went to Mauthausen, when we were there, we saw the crematoriums, of course. We found out what a crematorium was.

The reason I'm backtracking a little bit -- then we saw this big, big fire, like the length of a football field, high flames coming up, hot flames. By the way, by that time, after the showers, they brought us up to a barrack. That's where we saw it. We saw the chimneys and saw the flames. There was a row of pine trees the flames were going up almost the height of the pine trees, I swear, just so hot and high.

So we asked one of the kapos that was there already what that is, what the fire is. He says that's the transport last night that came in during the night, our families. They had a ditch under these trees they had used flammable fluid. They burned the bodies that they couldn't consume in the crematoriums, just couldn't handle the volume, so they burned them in these pits.

Imagine -- one thing I must stress, should have mentioned but am going to stress -- Germany was considered the most lightened, modern, advanced country in the world at the time. We looked up to Germany. And the fact that they were able to do this -- to this day I would like somebody to explain it to me. How in the world does that happen in a civilized society, no matter how nasty they are, what ideology they have. And that's exactly what they did. The same Germans we kept on a pedestal all of these years, were looked up to.

So I just would like to make a point of that. Sometimes we don't think of that. But their culture was really the most advanced culture. Nobody's going to argue about that. And they were capable of doing this. And this is something to this day that bothers me that people could be like this.

That's why today I don't take anything for granted. When I see something that doesn't look good, I have antennas go up. Right away I say: Uh-huh, this is only the beginning. And that's something we all have to remember. When you see something happening, like here in the states we live in a country that we always brag how great we are and all of this. To me I used to believe that, too. But as I got older and I saw things more in a realistic fashion, I am skeptical of everything. But something changes, something passed a law, they shouldn't -- don't have to pass a law but shouldn't get away with, be all of a sudden your antenna goes up. I always maintain that. It's something we all have to be very conscious of. Because we live in a world you never know how your country can change.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, we're getting close to the end of our time. You have so much more you could tell us. You were then sent to a subcamp called Melk and had to do unbelievably hard labor. Tell us about that and then we're going to have to fast forward to talk about liberation.

>> Marty Weiss: Ok, briefly about Melk. Mauthausen had a lot of subcamps like I said, it was a big camp. I was not stationed at Mauthausen. I was shipped out to Melk. They had a lot of subcamps. I knew about 40 but lately the museum said there were as many as 80 which I didn't know about. Anyway, Melk was not far from there but we had to take a train to go to work. They shipped us to Melk, a small town.

By the way, if you take a cruise down the Danube today, you pass Melk. They have this beautiful, muff mountain with castles and churches and monasteries all in this beautiful setting. I'm telling you, like a picture postcard. That's where we were.

But anyway, I was in Melk. The camp in Melk population was only about 13,000. But all of us had assignments of certain work. One of the main jobs they had was building tunnels in the huge mountain a few miles away. We had to take a train to get there. This is what I ended up doing most of the time, digging tunnels under a mountain. But guess how we dug the tunnels with picks and shovels. We had to mix the cement on the ground with the gravel, water, and all of that. And of course carry the cement. Too small to carry a bag of cement so most of the time I didn't have to do it. But the point is, I had to dig. And once you got to the place, to work, you couldn't even straighten up. You had to stand there and dig and dig and shovel and shovel. You couldn't stop for a minute. This is the way you worked. So the labor was very, very hard.

>> Bill Benson: In fact, I think you shared with me that in the winter months, hundreds of your fellow inmates died each week. And a fewer number in the person.

>> Marty Weiss: Right. We had a big number dying in the winter months. Right. And one of the reasons I remember that clearly, too -- if I could back up, actually. Every single month we were getting a replacement. Hungary was shipping out thousands of people. So there were plenty of people to have to replace those people. So Auschwitz was shipping to Mauthausen people constantly, new people. When they came to Mauthausen, some of them would be assigned to Melk. And when they were in Melk, they ended up doing work like we did.

But, every single month they brought 3,000 men to replace the 3,000 that died the month before. In the summer the percentages were much different, much more. But the point is, that's what it was.

>> Bill Benson: A constant stream.

>> Marty Weiss: Constant stream of 3,000 people every month came and 3,000 to replace the people that perished the month before.

>> Bill Benson: And would continue working under those circumstances. Really until your liberation.

>> Marty Weiss: Right.

>> Bill Benson: And when you were liberated in 1945, you were alone and you were 16 years old.

>> Marty Weiss: Right. When I was liberated. Ok. But I had lots of luck actually. When I think of it. When I was in Mauthausen, the war was coming to an end so they sent us on a march. Now they coined it as a forced march or Death March, whatever you want to call it. By that time we were already -- let me tell you, we were not just hungry -- the word hungry I could repeat over and over, wouldn't even do it. It was to a point where -- we didn't get any food. And what we did get -- before when we worked, we used to get a piece of black bread once a day which I found out later was made with a lot of sawdust but that doesn't matter. But this time there was no bread. They gave us -- it was crumbs, literally, put through a grinder. They would take a ladle. The server would take a ladle and put it in the palm of our hand, literally. And this

is the only meal you got for the day. You had no place to save it. But more than that, I remember I looked in the palm of my hand on the bread crumbs, blue, green, and white mildew. In spite of that, you just ate it. That's how bad things were.

So the march, we were sent on a march. We're going to a place, we ended up -- on the march, like I say, everybody was very weak, some weaker than others. People would literally fall down. They couldn't get up. There were guards, you have to remember, on both sides of the column. And the guard would just, without hesitating, take his rifle and shoot him like you shoot a dog. That's it. No nothing.

I'll tell you one incident I am going to tell you. I don't want to take too much time. There was one incident I remember distinctly, still bothers me today. There was a potato on the ground. And one of the men, he was like next to me. And he saw the potato. He jumped for the potato. And another guy from the other side saw the same potato. And he took a leap for it from the other side. And guess what. They started fighting over the potato. Which you may think is bizarre but it wasn't then because the potato is a man's life, period. They were fighting. Only a couple of minutes if even that much. No time at all. The guard was right outside my column. He just picked up his rifle and shot the man right in the face, just like that. And that was already the war was ending. They knew they lost the war a long time before that, by the way. They lost the war bring even went to Auschwitz, they knew they lost the war. They were retreating from the Russian front. I saw them retreat.

The point is -- by the way, they were not SS. They were ordinary Army. They were supposed to be the good guys. Hello? I haven't seen any good guys period. To me, SS uniform, [Indiscernible] uniform. He's did the same thing the SS would have done. And to me, this is something, to understand it -- like I say, I never will -- that the Germans were so sophisticated and so advanced and they were able to do this, ordinary person able to do that.

So anyway, we marched. We came to our destination. And this particular camp was called Gunskirchen. Again, a lucky strike. I came to Gunskirchen. There were about 15,000 men there. A big place. We were like basket cases, like walking corpses. As soon as I got there, I don't remember how long it took, 15,000 people, I ran into a cousin of mine. Now, he was not in a concentration camp. He was in a Hungarian labor battalion.

By the way, my brothers were in that, too. I'm not sure I mentioned.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned that.

>> Marty Weiss: Mentioned that before. They were used for slave labor. But when the Hungarians were retreating because the Russians were already in Hungary, for some reason they took them along with them and turned them over to the Gestapo and they ended up in the camp I did, 15,000 of them.

To this day I could never understand, as soon as I came, out of all of those people, I ran into him. Now, they were in fairly good condition compared to us. They didn't have it good but they didn't have it anything like we did. They were not starved like we were and all of that. So they were in pretty good shape yet. They had their own boots, clothes, some decent blankets. We didn't have that.

Now, to this day I could never understand it but the point is I ran into my cousin. He had a couple of friends about the same age, the same group. Like I said, ordinary 23-year-old men. I looked up to them. When we got liberated, I was with them.

So, again, to cut to the chase, one day we found out, we were told, that the Germans took off, the guards took off. We didn't believe it because we didn't have any way of knowing it. So we spent an extra night. Some people did believe it and they left. We didn't

believe it. We stayed an extra night in camp to make sure it was not a trap, that we go out the gate and machine guns mow us down. That is -- we knew that was their MO.

So next morning we went out looking for food. Again, I'm not going to spend too much time on it but we went out looking for food. By the way, it's a beautiful, sunny day. By the way, did I need sun. I remember, it was like we just discovered it for the first time. It was spring. It was very, very nice.

We walked out of the camp and we saw the American troops on the main road. And then we believed the Americans were there. We started looking for food. And again, I'm going to cut it down but we came to this field and there was an Army truck in a ditch. We look inside the Army truck and there was a tub of lard on the front seat of the truck.

>> Bill Benson: A tub of lard.

>> Marty Weiss: Yeah, white lard, you know. Ready to be used. One of the guys -- like I say, they were in good shape. He took his fist and went right through the glass. It all went into the lard. It sounds stupid. Years later when I remember this, I was like, why didn't he go on the other side to break the window? Why did he do it on top of the lard? I could never understand it. And these guys were not dumb. It was instinctively. It was desperate.

So we took the lard on the grass, scooped out the glass, saved the lard. That was ok. Then we were about to walk away and one of the guys said, let's look what's in back of the truck. We looked in back of the truck and we found a bunch of leather hides all we find already, ready to use. Boy, did we get excited. Each one of us rolled up whatever we could carry. I couldn't carry too many, maybe three or so tops. But we knew we could use them for a coat or for shoes. And in Europe the shoemakers knew how to make shoes from scratch. I had boots made every year from scratch by the Shoemaker.

So we got all excited, rolled up some hides. Each one of us took what we could carry, which in my case wasn't too many. We notices a farmhouse not far away: So we figure we'll walk up to the farmhouse. And we're looking for food. We still didn't eat. So we come up to the farmhouse and all I'm going to tell you something, I had such hatred for the Germans. You can could cut it with a knife, beyond description. That they were capable of doing what they did. Ok?

They came to the house. Mind you, these were big guys. And guess what. They walked up to the door, they knocked on the door.

>> Bill Benson: Of this German house.

>> Marty Weiss: German house. Knocked on the door. Didn't just barge in. The lady, she was home alone. She came up to the door. And I remember she opened the door and I was shorter so I could hardly see her but I saw her face from the back. She asked one of the guys what he wants. So he told her he would like some flour, some egging, and some water. She went back in the kitchen, brought the ingredients to the door and gave it to him. And guess what we did? We never entered her house, never entered her kitchen.

Years later when I started talking about this, which took a long time for me, spoke for the museum five, six years bring remembered this story and now I like to include it. What amazed me is that I didn't object. He acted like this. We mixed up the ingredients. Oh, she had a barn in the backyard. We saw in the front of the barn one of those iron kettles that you put a fire underneath to heat up water. It was like used for the cows to heat up water in the winter to throw some food in there. Cowboy movies you see kettles like this, water.

Anyway, so we took the ingredients, mixed them up and made dumplings.

>> Bill Benson: With the lard.

>> Marty Weiss: Used the lard and the other, flour, eggs and so on. And we made dumplings. That was our first meal. Oh, I remember. That was like real food, first time, first time.

But you see, again, I had the sixth sense. Don't ask me where I got it. To me it was instinctive. I just ate so many, three, four maybe, and stopped. Now when you're hungry like this, understand, if somebody gave you four, five-pound loaf of bread, you would want to eat the whole thing at one time because you'll never see it again. Eat like a pig. People were starving, that's what they do. It's a natural thing. But only had three or four and I stopped. What made me do it I don't know but I did. One of the guys, by the way, he had an uncle, he was older, he ate too many. Guess what. A day or two later he did die because he couldn't tolerate the food.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, we're at a point where we have to close the program. If you don't mind, if I remember correctly, after what you just described, you went back to that German woman and gave her your hides as payments, thank you, for giving you the flour and letting you use --

>> Marty Weiss: Yeah, this is to me very important. We finished. We were content. We had food. Real food. One of the guys says let's take some of the hides and give it to the woman and say thank you. Not one of us objected.

By the way, again when I remembered it, it bothered me. Why didn't I object? Mine was worse than theirs. Theirs was bad but nothing compared to what I went through but we didn't object. We did what he suggested. We took some hides. Each donated a couple of hides, went to the door, knocked on the door, gave it to her and said thank you and we walked away.

To this day I could never understand why we were so civil. But after thinking it over, I had some satisfaction. And that was that in spite of we didn't feel like human beings, we were so dehumanized, but we still had our upbringing came back. We behaved the way we were raised.

>> Bill Benson: Decently. Decently and in a civilized way.

>> Marty Weiss: To this day I could never figure out how come we were so -- behaved like that.

>> Bill Benson: Marty, I wish we had several more hours because there's so much you couldn't even begin to tell us about.

I'm going to turn back to Marty in a moment to close our program. I want to thank all of you for being with us, remind you we'll have programs Wednesday and Thursday until August 9. If you can't come back to another program, all of our programs are available on the museum's YouTube. So we encourage you, if possible, to watch those. When Marty's done, Marty's going to go upstairs to the four and will be available to sign copies of "Echoes of Memory". Because we didn't have a chance for you to ask Marty questions, that will be an opportunity also if you want to ask Marty a question if you have one to ask of him.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. And so on that note, I'll turn back to Marty to close our program.

>> Marty Weiss: Well, at this stage I didn't prepare anything. I should have. I would just like to leave you with one thing. When you see a case like this, something happened to one person, don't think that you're exempt that it wouldn't happen you. In other words, somebody will pick on you and you know it's not right, especially the government, it's just a matter of time that your turn will come, too. In other words, nobody is exempt. And this is something everybody has to understand.

When I speak to students, I always point that out. That if somebody goes to work

and is a bully or something, in school, picks on her, eventually he'll go, get tired of her and pick on somebody else. This is the way racists or what do you call it behave.

My only thing I could leave you with, that we don't realize that we are more responsible for each other than we think. As human beings, we are responsible for each other. It doesn't matter who you are. His life in danger, her life may be in danger next. You never know. Everybody thinks they're exempt but there comes a time the circle rolls around and everybody gets caught in the trap.

One thing I would like to point out. We have to really look out for each other. Like I say, we can't very well discount other people because they are less educate order of a different race or came from the wrong country or whatever. People are basically the same. I learned that. It takes time to learn but we all have to learn that. You have to deal with people on an individual basis because most people I think are nice, decent. But there are always some people that are not but you can't allow those few people to sidetrack you and make you like that.

The one thing I always tell the kids, look out for each other and protect each other. Like I say, danger to one person means there's danger to the next person sooner or later. It just works that way. In any society, by the way. In any society.

I usually don't like to do this but I'll bring up something during the 1950s. Some of you are too young maybe to remember. They were looking for communists on every corner, under every rock looking for communists. They ruined so many, so many lives that you would not believe. Their livelihood, what do you call it. People don't realize this happened in the United States. It could happen anywhere.

One thing I did learn, I don't say, well, I used to think so, too, can't happen here, this is 9 United States. Huh-uh. Things change. And things do change. Things happen. The whole thing is when one group or one person is threatened, we are all threatened. And I'll leave you with that.

Thank you.

>> [Applause]