

REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
FIRST PERSON JOSIE TRAUM
AUGUST 8, 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 Mrs. Josie Traum, 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. The museum's website, www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests. Our 2018 program ends tomorrow, August 9. The museum's website will provide information about *First Person* in 2019.

Josie will share with us her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust, and as a survivor, for about 45 minutes. If time allows, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Josie 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 Josie is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

We begin with this photograph of Josiane Aizenberg walking on a street in Brussels.

Josie was born March 21, 1939, in Brussels, Belgium, to Jacques and Fanny Aizenberg. The arrow on this map of Belgium points to Brussels.

The German Army occupied Belgium in May 1940. Shortly before the occupation, Josie's father left Belgium to join the British Army. In this photo we see Josie with her parents in Brussels.

In 1942, Josie's mother, Fanny, was able to secure a hiding place for Josie in a convent in Brugges, Belgium. Here we see Josie and Fanny, shortly before Josie went into hiding. Soon thereafter, Fanny, who worked with the Belgian Underground, the resistance, was denounced and she was deported to Auschwitz.

After six months of hiding in the convent and growing Nazi suspicion, the Belgian Underground relocated Josie to hide with the Debrackalaer family, a Christian family in Brussels. Here we see Josie with the Debrackalaers, Mr. and Mrs. Debrackalaer are on the right. To their left are neighbors of Josie's grandparents. Their grandson is in the front in the middle with Josie to the right. The Debrackalaers' daughter is on the left.

Allied forces liberated Belgium in September, 1944. Soon after Josie was found by one of her aunts, who was one of Fanny's sisters. Here we see Josie, Jacques, and Fanny after they were reunited in Belgium.

Josie would eventually marry Freddie Traum, also a Holocaust survivor. We close with this wedding portrait of Josie and Freddie.

After moving to the United States with her parents in 1949 and then completing her schooling in Patterson, New Jersey, Josie went to Israel to study for a year. On the return trip on a ship she met Freddie Traum, the ship's Chief Radio Officer, who was also a Holocaust survivor. Upon her return to the U.S., Josie attended Montclair State Teachers' College for one year. Josie and Freddie were married on his ship a year after she met him and she moved to Israel where they lived for five years. While in Israel, the Traums' son, Michael, and daughter, Yael, were born.

Upon the advice of medical experts in Israel, the Traums relocated to the United States in 1963 to obtain medical care for their disabled son, Michael. Their third child, Jonathan, who also is disabled, was born in the U.S. Eventually, Freddie's work brought them to Vienna, Virginia. Josie returned to school and graduated from the Catholic University of America School of Social Work and began her career in child welfare. She retired in 2007 from her work as a clinical social worker for abused children for Montgomery County, Maryland.

Today, Josie and Freddie live in Silver Spring, Maryland. Josie's volunteer work at this museum includes leading tours of the Permanent Exhibition for law enforcement including police officers, the FBI, judges and others. Josie speaks publicly about her experience as a Holocaust survivor in various settings especially local synagogues and schools in Maryland

and Virginia.

I'm pleased to let you know that Freddie is here with Josie today, as are their good friend Joel Appelbaum.

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

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Thank you for joining us today and being willing to be our First Person. I was worried we wouldn't get you this year with our closing tomorrow. So glad we were able to make this work.

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Josie, we have just a short hour and a little less now so we'll get started. Your parents, Fanny and Jacques Aizenberg, were married in 1938. You were born in March 1939, just months before Poland was attacked, beginning World War II. Tell us about your parents and their life in Brussels in that pre-wartime, before the war began.

>> Josie Traum: Ok. As far as I know, my parents, as you mentioned, were married in 1938. They were really newlyweds. I was born a year later. Prior to my being born, both my parents had professions they were comfortable in Belgium. There was a lot of assimilation. The Jews in Belgium felt very comfortable. In the atmosphere they were assimilated and so quite comfortable. I think really they didn't realize what was going to be coming.

>> Bill Benson: We saw in the beginning, the very first photograph in our presentation about you, you're a little girl in that dress. And I don't know if anybody noticed it, the pockets, looked like potted plants. Your mother made that. That was part of her occupation.

>> Josie Traum: My mom was a dress designer. Actually she went to kind of like a textile academy where you learn how to design, how to use cloth. And at graduation the Royal Family in Belgium would come and pick out a few students who they wanted to work in the Royal Household. My mom was one of those. So she worked in the Royal Household when which she was very proud of. It was a big deal.

>> Bill Benson: Yeah, that's a big deal.

>> Josie Traum: So my mom was designing clothes. Most of the pictures on the slide show, really what I'm wearing were made and designed by her.

>> Bill Benson: What about your father?

>> Josie Traum: My dad was a tailor. However, he did not start out as a tailor. He was a violinist. In Europe, in those days -- you know, the movies in the 1920s and 1930s, the actors did not talk. So because there was no talking, they usually had a quartet, a violinist, viola, cello, and they would play while the picture was being shown, the movie was being shown. So my dad had a job where he was working in movie houses. However, the talkies came in and all of these people lost their jobs. They no longer accompanied the silent movies. So my dad went to school actually and learned to be a tailor. Both of them were actually in the designing and clothing industry.

>> Bill Benson: Josie in late 1938, November 1938, in Germany and Austria, what we call Kristallnacht or Night of Broken Glass, when there was assaults on Jewish businesses, 30,000 Jewish men were arrested, over 300 synagogues were burned during that terrible, terrible night. As a result of that, I think you ended up sheltering a Jewish child in your home in Belgium.

>> Josie Traum: My grandparents and my mom did. My mom was actually part of the underground and she would often have some Jewish people who had been fleeing from other countries in Europe where the Germans had already invaded or become part of the

government there. So there were some young Jewish people who were looking for safer places to live. So my mom would often house some of them. And they would be housed with her for a while until they found a safer place to move on.

>> Bill Benson: The war began with the German attack on Poland September 1, 1939. But it didn't really affect your country until May of 1940, when Germany invaded what we call the low lands, including Belgium, The Netherlands, and France. Your father left to join the British Army just before the Germans invaded Belgium. Tell us what you know about your father's decision to do that and then what that meant for your mother and you.

>> Josie Traum: Sure. It was rumored in the Jewish community in Belgium that when the Germans were to invade, it was thought that they would only arrest the men and leave the women and children alone. So my parents had been listening to the radio continuously, especially the BBC. And there the British people were asking people to volunteer to join the British Army to fight against the Germans. And because my dad at that time thought that my mom and I would be safe, he decided to volunteer. And he and his brother, my Uncle Ben, who was also a tailor, decided to go to England and to volunteer to be in the British Army. Actually they left Belgium on one of the last boats to leave and to cross the English Channel.

>> Bill Benson: Before the Germans came in.

>> Josie Traum: Before the Germans came in.

>> Bill Benson: Once he left, the Germans came in right away. Did your mom hear anything from him?

>> Josie Traum: No. We had no contact whatsoever. In fact, my mom didn't really know if every made it or not. No contact. My mom and I were living with my grandparents, my maternal grandparents. And we kind of made due on our own. My mom had really no one to support her. So she was living with her parents as I was also.

>> Bill Benson: Was she able to work during that time, in the early part of the occupation?

>> Josie Traum: As far as I know, she did not.

>> Bill Benson: You and your mother, with your grandparents, would live under the German occupation until 1942. So that was for the better part of two years.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And then your mother made the very profound decision to place you into hiding. Tell us what you can about the events that led up to her making that decision and then what it was like for both of you, for you to go somewhere else, to be hidden, and then what you know of what it was like for your mother.

>> Josie Traum: Sure. As you said, my mom made the profound decision to actually put me into hiding -- I'm sorry -- not knowing if she would ever see me again. And she wasn't allowed to know where they were going to put me. Because she had connections with the underground, she was able to get someone to come and pick me up. And it was decided by the Belgium underground that people who were the resistance fighting against the Germans, kind of doing secret things, it was decided the parents were not allowed to know where their children would be hidden because they knew when the Germans would come and arrest you at your apartment -- thank you -- at your apartment, they would torture you until -- the Germans would say where's rest of your family, your husband, children, anyone, and they would torture you until they got it out of you. And the underground decided that if the parents didn't know where their children were being placed, there was no way for them to be able to tell them.

And therefore, my mother really did not know where I was, how long I would be there, if she would ever see me again. I realize now how extremely difficult that must have

been for her having children of my own and grandchildren.

But one day these two ladies who I didn't know came to our house, to our apartment, and came to pick me up. From what I understand, I was screaming and crying. I didn't know these people. I didn't want to go. I didn't want to leave my mom and my grandparents. And they took me to a city called Brugges, which is in Belgium as you saw on the map. It is full of canals and full of convents. In fact, it's called a Venice of Belgium. It's beautiful. It's really full of canals. I was placed in a convent with nuns, and full of other children.

As far as I know -- after the war I found out that of all the children being there, there were three other Jewish children and myself. So we were four Jewish children all together being hidden there. The rest were children from the area. It was more like an orphanage. And people -- food was rationed. There was very little food. Conditions were pretty difficult. So people would put their children in an orphanage and hope that they would pick them up when things got a little bit easier and better. So this orphanage was full of kids and four Jewish children that these nuns were hiding.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to come -- have you tell us more about -- from what you know what it was like to be there. But before, I want to ask you a couple of questions. You do have some fleeting memories of when you were young. And one of them you shared with me you were on a bus with your mother. Will you tell us about that?

>> Josie Traum: Yeah. Once the Germans came in, you know, people -- we pretty much -- we had an attic apartment. And we pretty much stayed to ourselves. Once the Germans invaded and took over -- you know, everybody had to have an identification card. And in it was stated if you were a Jew or not. There was a large J. And it usually said "Juden" which is Jew in German.

Everybody has to have an identification card so when you walked on the street, the Germans could just stop you and say "Show me your identification card" and it was up to them, their choice, what they would do with you, either arrest you, deport you or take you away.

One day my mom and I decided to go on an outing. We did very, very seldomly. We got on a tram, like a trolley but a bus but one of these connected electrically to cables. So we got on a tram, my mom and I, and we went to the last row to sit down, watching the view and seeing things that were going on. During the trip, a German officer got on to the tram and was asking for everybody's identification card. He was going row by row by row. And my mom was actually -- I was standing next to her. I was only 3 years old. My mom was shaking. And I really didn't know why. I really didn't understand why. The officer came from row to row. He got to the last row where my mom and I were sitting and he turned around and left. And I thought, Oh, my God, somebody must have been watching over us. Of course I didn't know why my mom was shaking. I really didn't understand. But that was one of the really close calls I had.

>> Bill Benson: You remember that.

>> Josie Traum: That I remember.

>> Bill Benson: You shared with us that your mother was active in the resistance. Do you know what she did? Do you have any idea?

>> Josie Traum: I know she also delivered leaflets. She would gather people and tell them where to go, what time, and everything else.

>> Bill Benson: The act of just delivering an anti-German leaflet --

>> Josie Traum: Was dangerous.

>> Bill Benson: Punishable by death.

>> Josie Traum: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us -- during that time of course the deportations had begun in earnest. Tell us what happened to your grandparents. And if I remember correctly, you still had at that time great grandparents who were still alive.

>> Josie Traum: My father's parents were alive and my mother's grandparents -- I'm not sure.

>> Bill Benson: Your grandparents?

>> Josie Traum: My grandparents, well, my mother and her parents were arrested. My grandfather was not arrested at the same time. He was arrested a while shortly before my mom and grandmother were arrested.

From Belgium -- you know, there were many concentration camps all over Poland, in different countries, in Eastern Europe, but from Belgium my understanding is all the Jews who were arrested and deported all went to Auschwitz. They took them all to Auschwitz. So my grandfather and my mom and grandmother were arrested and taken, they were deported to Auschwitz.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother was denounced, as best you know, right?

>> Josie Traum: Yeah. There were many Christian people who really, really helped. They hid the Jews. They helped us. If you were found on the street hiding a Jew, there would be no questions asked. The German would just shoot you. The same thing goes for the convent where I was. The nuns would have been killed. They would have been shot.

I always say, you know, these nuns were very, very strict. They really were. They would dress like the nuns in "The Sound of Music."

>> Bill Benson: But they weren't like --

>> Josie Traum: They weren't like that. And as I always say, they didn't sing either.

>> [Laughter]

>> Josie Traum: But they saved my life. I was thinking -- I was only 3 years old. A 3-year-old child just wants to be held and hugged. They didn't do that. And I don't think it's because they didn't like us. They were like that with all the kids, not just because I was Jewish. They were really kind of cold and pretty strict with all the kids. Maybe it was because of what they were wearing, that gear.

>> [Laughter]

>> Josie Traum: You know, nuns today I think wear clothes like we do whereas then it was very, very different. So they saved my life. They really did. They were very strict but they did save my life.

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely, but one of the things you shared with me is that probably the most significant impact besides saving your life was just the lack of being nurtured, held, and that had a big impact on you. But I was also struck, you said that you think what was so important is that you had had that nurturing before. Will you say a little bit about that?

>> Josie Traum: Sure. I'm a strong believer in the need for a child to bond with a caretaker. It doesn't necessarily have to be a parent but it could be a caretaker. It's usually a parent but very often it's not. I really feel that a child needs that special nurturing, bonding. A child knowing that somebody's there to take care of you at all times no matter what. And I really feel I had that very strong nurturing for the first three years of my life with my grandparents, grandmother especially, and my mom. I really had a very strong bond. So I feel that nurturing really stood me well for --

>> Bill Benson: What was to come.

>> Josie Traum: What was to come, yes.

>> Bill Benson: Your name was changed to Von Berg, I believe. Was there something

significant to that name?

>> Josie Traum: It was because my name Aizenberg was a very Jewish name. I was changed to Von Berg, which was more like a Dutch name. Belgium is bilingual, Flemish and French; Flemish being more like Dutch. So my name was changed so that it would, more non-Jewish.

>> Bill Benson: And was there any distinction between being Flemish or French? Did that matter?

>> Josie Traum: No, it did not.

>> Bill Benson: Josie, at some point, of course the nuns who had been caring for you, they made the decisions to take you out of the convent.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: What do you know about that decision?

>> Josie Traum: As far as I know, after being there for six months, the nuns found out that the Germans, the Nazis, were going to come and pick up the four Jewish children. Of course not knowing what would happen to us, the nuns -- when the Germans did come to pick us up, the nuns actually said, you know, the children aren't ready; we need to get their clothes ready is come back the next day. And during that night the nuns actually smuggled the four of us out, the four Jewish children, and took us to Brussels, which where I was originally from, placed each one of us -- I don't know where the other three were placed but I was placed with a Christian family. You saw them on the screen. Their name was Debrackalaer. I was placed with them and actually stayed with them for the remainder of the war.

>> Bill Benson: And tell us about the Debrackalaer family. What do you know about them and what do you remember of your time with them? Because it was a fairly lengthy period.

>> Josie Traum: Yes, it was. The Debrackalaers were a husband, a wife, and a little girl my age. The man was -- they were decent Catholic people. The man was very involved in the resistance, also in the underground. He was also taken out of his home, the department, and taken out for interrogation. And he would come back black and blue. They would torture him. He never told on me, nor did every tell them in the things he was involved with. So they were really risking their lives.

Also, you know, food was rationed in Belgium. You would pick up a basic amount of food, pick up once a week at one of these food centers. You would pick up for however many people were in your household. There were three of them. I was there illegally. So they picked up food for three people and they would, of course, always shared with me. They never told on me. They protected me. I was very, very fortunate to be there.

>> Bill Benson: The third person was their daughter who was, I think --

>> Josie Traum: My age.

>> Bill Benson: What do you remember about her?

>> Josie Traum: Well, we played all the time. We really never went out so we really kind of played. We were playmates. That was pretty much it.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know if neighbors knew that there was a fourth person there, thought it was maybe a relative of theirs or were you unknown to others? Do you know?

>> Josie Traum: I don't think anybody knew.

>> Bill Benson: Ok.

>> Josie Traum: We never went out.

>> Bill Benson: You never went out.

>> Josie Traum: And we were pretty much indoors most of the time.

>> Bill Benson: Do you have any recollection of what that was like for you, a little girl to

essentially be locked in a house all the time and not able to go out for a very long time?

>> Josie Traum: You know, these people, as I mentioned before, risked their lives. They fed me. They made sure I was safe. But I never really felt like I was part of the unit. You know, you feel that -- the parents and the little girl were very close. And as I said, they weren't mean to me. They fed me. I was safe. But I wasn't part of the unit.

>> Bill Benson: So, again, the nurturing that you would get from a family unit, you would hope you would get from a family unit.

>> Josie Traum: Which I did not.

>> Bill Benson: You did not.

>> Josie Traum: And I don't think they did any harm. I was just not part of it. It could have been just my own feelings.

>> Bill Benson: But you felt that.

>> Josie Traum: I did feel that.

>> Bill Benson: So Debrackalaers protected you and took care of you until the war's end, which in Belgium was in the fall of 1944 when Belgium was liberated.

Your Aunt Theresa, one of your mother's sisters, was able to find you. What do you know about how she was able to find you and what that meant for you?

>> Josie Traum: Sure. My mom had two sisters who actually were hidden by the underground. They were hidden in churches. Aunt Theresa had three sons --

>> Bill Benson: She is the one who came to get you?

>> Josie Traum: She is the one who came to get me. As I said, they were protected and they were safe but they were hidden through the underground. The underground was like a whole networking. You could find people. If you were part of the underground, somehow there was a network; you could find someone. And they were able to find me. My Aunt Theresa was able to find me.

She went to the apartment where I was hidden and took me to her home which was wonderful. I was family. She had three sons, my three cousins, three brothers. They were just a little bit older than me. Once I was with them, they spoiled me rotten. It was fantastic being with family again. It was really great. I think I was like their little mascot. And they played around with me. And it was wonderful. I stayed with them until actually the end of the war.

>> Bill Benson: Which didn't occur until the following May.

>> Josie Traum: Right.

>> Bill Benson: So the better part of about eight or nine months during that time.

Tell us -- I don't know if it was Aunt Theresa's husband. You had an uncle --

>> Josie Traum: Yes, Uncle Morris.

>> Bill Benson: Tell them.

>> Josie Traum: My uncle, Aunt Theresa's husband, after the war got special citations and decorations because he actually captured and killed Germans. He was part of the underground. This is a very shy, meek man. Nobody in the family could believe it. I mean, he was quite strong in the underground. It was quite amazing.

>> Bill Benson: All of that came out much later.

>> Josie Traum: All of that -- [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: And your other aunt also survived.

>> Josie Traum: Yes. My mom had two sisters. Each one was -- they were five years apart. So my Aunt Rose was younger than my mom, five years older, and my Aunt Theresa five years older than that. She also was hidden in a church. Really we were very lucky that our family

was really hidden in churches. Many Christian people really came out and helped the Jews. But as mentioned before, not all the population in Belgium was helping with the Jews. There were many people who did not. Our neighbor, actually like mentioned, denounced my mother.
>> Bill Benson: Which meant going to the authorities and saying there's a Jewish woman in that house.

>> Josie Traum: Right. And sometimes people would get paid or they would just be on the side of the Germans. So my mom was denounced by her neighbor. But there were so many people that did help Jews, really.

>> Bill Benson: When the war ended for you in the fall of 1945 -- 1944, excuse me, but the war did continue for another nine months. Were your aunts and family that found you, were they able to have sort of a sense of normalcy even though the war was going on? There must have been worries, for example, that the Germans could come back. I don't know if there were but do you know what that time was like?

>> Josie Traum: I think people were very much on edge because really they didn't know what was happening. They didn't know what happened to my mom. They had no idea, nor their parents, Aunt Theresa. It was really a very difficult time. There was some normalcy but you kind of follow through with your routine and with your life. But people didn't know where other family members were.

>> Bill Benson: And conditions had to still be difficult with the food and things like that.

>> Josie Traum: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: During that time. It must have seemed like a miracle that your mother, Fanny, survived Auschwitz. She returned to Brussels after her liberation in April 1945, and was reunited with you and her sisters. You were 6. You hadn't seen your mother in three years.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: What do you remember what that was like? And then tell us how your mother survived, how she came back.

>> Josie Traum: As you said, my mother did survive. She's still alive. She's 101 years old. She volunteers at the museum every Sunday, which is incredible. She was actually liberated by the Russians. One of the last battles between the Germans and the Russians, and she was taken by the Russians and the Red Cross. She was a pretty sick woman, weighed about 65 pounds and had Typhus and meningitis. She was taken by the Red Cross and treated. And eventually they brought her back to Brussels to Belgium. And the first place she went was her sister's apartment, which is where I was. She knocked on the door and there I was.

>> Bill Benson: That must have been just extraordinary.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: I know it's very painful to even --

>> Josie Traum: You know, it's been quite a number of years and I still cry. So please forgive me.

>> Bill Benson: I think everybody understands that.

Your mother's ordeal was horrific. She was subjected to medical experimentation.

>> Josie Traum: She was. And she worked in a factory. You know, most concentration camps were killing centers. You got there and they kill you. Auschwitz had a subcamp, a labor camp, Birkenau, where they made ammunition, which Germany was very, very enthusiastic about. They were really building up for the war.

So as soon as my mother and her mother, actually, when they were deported and put on a cattle train, as soon as they were deported and taken to Auschwitz, when they got off

the train, the cattle car, there was a section immediately. There were guards and dogs separating new lines, putting the younger people who they felt could work in one line and the older folks or the people with children in another line. They felt if you had a child, the child would cry, you'd go to the child first rather than do your work.

So my mom and her mom were separated immediately at the selection line. And my mom wanted to be with her mother. And the Germans saw that. He really -- he hit her pretty badly. And he said, "You go where you're told." And so she had to go back in line and never saw her mother again. Her mom was killed, my grandma, was killed immediately. But my mom survived. She worked in this ammunition factory filling grenades and bombs with chemicals. And she somehow survived.

>> Bill Benson: She was liberated, I think, in April but it took -- she had --

>> Josie Traum: Also she was on the Death March.

>> Bill Benson: She was on the Death March before that.

>> Josie Traum: Death March from January to April. The Germans, once they realized the allies were approaching, tried to empty some of their concentration camps and made the prisoners really walk back towards Germany. There were still labor camps. They thought people could work. So they took people out, gave them each a blanket, and they marched day and night. My mom marched from January to April when she was actually liberated by the Russians they marched without food. They would pick up scraps on the ground, peels, grass, whatever they could find. And that's how they survived.

You know, it's amazing to me that my mom did survive.

>> Bill Benson: She got to you -- it was not until June that she got you. What did your mom do once she was back home and reunited with you? Without her husband, what did she do?

>> Josie Traum: We actually went back to her apartment where my parents lived, and I, and we stayed there until my dad eventually came back.

>> Bill Benson: Which is another extraordinary thing that happened.

>> Josie Traum: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: When did your father come back? And tell us what he had been through.

>> Josie Traum: My dad, you know -- my dad, when he got to England -- by the way, the British kind of evaluated my uncle and my dad and they put them both in a factory making British uniforms, which was probably the best place they could be. However, you probably heard about England, London, how they had bombing by the Germans, especially the blitz. My dad was living in an apartment in London and his house was bombed. So even though the war ended, he had to stay. He was in the hospital for two years. He was injured pretty badly. And he didn't come back until 1946. I was 7 years old.

>> Bill Benson: You remember when he came back, right?

>> Josie Traum: Yeah. I met him kind of for the first time because he left when I was 13 months old. And I really had no recollection of him.

We went to the port city in Belgium where the ships come in after crossing the channel. We went to meet his ship, my mom and I. My mom saw this man coming down. I distinctly remember he was wearing a hat. In those days older men wore hats. And this man came down these steps. And my mom said, "There's your father." And that was my dad. And that's how we kind of were reunited.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know at what point when your mother learned that he was, one, alive and that he was coming home?

>> Josie Traum: It was at the end of the war, when the war ended.

>> Bill Benson: So she did learn then that he was alive.

>> Josie Traum: They started corresponding. My dad and my mom wrote to each other. They couldn't before because letters couldn't be sent. So we found out he was alive. He did eventually come back.

>> Bill Benson: After another year.

Once you were reunited it would take another three years before you were able to move to the United States, in 1949. What was that time like for your family? How -- go -- how did your family go back to earning a living, make ends meet? What was that time like for you?

>> Josie Traum: Before my dad went to England -- my dad had a tailor shop. You know, a person would want a suit, they didn't just go to, like, Macy's and get a ready-made suit. A person would come in and pick out the bolt, the kind of material they wanted, you know, tweed or whatever they wanted. And they would pick a style of suit. My dad would make a pattern in paper, cut it out. And the person, the customer, would come a few weeks a duration, before the suit was made because they would come for fittings, for cuttings, for all kinds of things.

So my dad had this tailoring shop at the bottom of the department building which had four floors with the top being the attic where we lived. The bottom was the store. So once my parents got reunited, the store was opened again and my dad started working. He made suits. People -- customers came in.

It was very difficult becoming -- really adapting to each other again. Don't forget, my dad didn't have a child until I was 7 years old. So he meets this kid who is 7, and not having experience with a child -- my mom had gone really through hell. And I was kind of caught in the middle. So I think it was hard for the three of us.

>> Bill Benson: It had to be.

>> Josie Traum: It was very hard. And my parents realized, or decided, that they really did not want to stay in Europe after everything that had happened and decided that they wanted to come to the United States.

>> Bill Benson: It took that long --

>> Josie Traum: It took that long, '49. My dad and his brother, with his family, we all came together, on the same boat. We all emigrated. We had our papers. But it took a number of years and we all got to the United States.

>> Bill Benson: So you come to the United States, pick up your lives, move here. What was that like for all of you?

>> Josie Traum: Well, fortunately my mom had an elderly aunt in New Jersey in Patterson, as you mentioned. You know, you usually gravitate where you have relatives. So we actually moved in with her, my mom, my dad, and I. We lived in an apartment there with her until my parents found work. A month later we had our own apartment. My parents had jobs. And I started school. We learned English, because I didn't know one word.

>> Bill Benson: Did your parents? Your father did.

>> Josie Traum: My dad knew a little bit. My mom did not. But she learned -- my parents were so enthusiastic about becoming Americans. They immediately enrolled in high school night classes.

>> Bill Benson: Both of your parents did that?

>> Josie Traum: Both of my parents. They learned English. They learned all the states, capitals, presidents. More than I know.

>> [Laughter]

>> Josie Traum: You know, they were very -- it was important for them to be here, to belong, to be citizens.

>> Bill Benson: You had a little bit of a rough start.

>> Josie Traum: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: I think on your first day of school you got beat up by a group of girls.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And your mom, very upset, went to the principal.

>> Josie Traum: Yes, she did. My first day of school -- you know, I was 10 years old when I came and they put me in first grade because I didn't know a word of English. And they think, you know, you don't know English, you probably don't know very much.

>> Bill Benson: Like started in the beginning with all the first graders.

>> Josie Traum: That's right. So I was there for about two weeks. Then I got to second grade and third grade. And I finally caught up. So I was ok.

However, my first day of school there, not knowing a word of English, when I got out of school, at the end of the day, there was a group of girls waiting for me and they beat me up. And I couldn't understand why. I mean, I hadn't done or said anything to them. And my mom had the guts to go the next day and speak to the principal. She didn't even know English.

>> [Laughter]

>> Josie Traum: I'm amazed how she did it. But she went there and she somehow talked with her hands or whatever and it didn't happen again. The principal said -- for some reason the girls thought I was German. I can't imagine --

>> Bill Benson: That was the explanation? They thought you were German so they beat you up.

>> Josie Traum: Right. I don't think so.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Josie, your mother, Fanny, her husband, Freddie -- your husband Freddie and you, you're each Holocaust survivors and are all part of our *First Person* program. Not only does your mother come here on Sundays but she was last with us at age 100 on this stage, like you are, last year in 2017. I think everybody here would agree that it's extraordinary that all three of you speak. What is that like for you to know that your mom still talks publicly, your husband does? What is that like for all of you?

>> Josie Traum: It means a lot. First of all, it shows me that people are interested. They want to know what happened and they need to know. And I'm always amazed when I go to school the amount of reading that the kids do on the Holocaust from seventh grade on. They're pretty well versed. I think it's so important. And I feel really good being able to go to schools and talk to the kids and have them ask me questions and ask them, you know, what do they think of all of this. I think it's very, very important. I really do. And I feel I'm really doing something positive. People have to know what happened.

>> Bill Benson: And where did you, as a family -- your mother, for example, and you, when did you start talking about what you went through?

>> Josie Traum: That's interesting. My mom really didn't start until the age of 50. When we first came here, she actually wanted to talk. She tried to talk to some of the relatives and they didn't want to hear her. They said, you know, that was bad, past, let's only think about good things now. So she didn't have the ability really to be able to talk. So she didn't start talking.

And I -- you know, I didn't always tell my story. I don't think people were interested. If they were good friends, they would somehow find out. But through my life I haven't been

identified by the Holocaust. But I think it took a long time for people to start talking. And my mom I think it took really -- it was painful for her. She tried to talk and I think because she was stopped, she just didn't do it anymore.

>> Bill Benson: Well, we're so glad that she's able to do it now and is still doing it.

Do you know how many of your extended family perished in the Holocaust?

>> Josie Traum: The exact number, you know -- my dad's brother, his wife, a child, grandparents, my grandparents had brothers and sisters so we have --

>> Bill Benson: A large number.

>> Josie Traum: A large number. I would say at least 12 or more. And I'm not counting my husband's family.

>> Bill Benson: Right. Right.

Josie, you worked in child welfare. You were an investigator in child abuse cases. Your career choice, what you went through as a child during the Holocaust, did that influence your decisions about your career choice?

>> Josie Traum: I'm sure it did. I've always wanted and felt I needed to protect children. I worked in child welfare for 20 years. I know it's terrible and you see a lot of pretty difficult, horrible things but it's also rewarding. You put kids in a very safe place. You work with them and you continue with them. That's always been very important to me.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

Josie, I have many more questions but I think I'd like to turn to our audience. How does that sound? We'll see if you folks have some questions. If you do -- we have one hand up there -- we have microphones in each aisle and we ask that you wait until you get the microphone. Try to make your question as brief as you can. I'll do my best to repeat it just to make sure that we hear it up here and then Josie will respond to it.

>> So have you had a chance to reconnect with any of the people that hid you, just over the years?

>> Bill Benson: Did you have a chance to reconnect with any of those who hid you?

>> Josie Traum: My husband and I were back in Belgium in 1989. He was there on business and I joined him. We tried to find the family, the Debrackalaers, who saved me. I found the neighbors who were my grandparents' neighbors and friends. They told me that the entire family, even the little girl who was my age, had all died. So I don't know of what, what happened.

And I tried to find the nuns because I feel they should be recognized, acknowledged. I've written to the Belgium government. I can't find -- I had the order, at that time, the order that the nuns belonged to and apparently the order is no longer in existence. My feeling is that when an order diminishes and nuns die, they join another order and so that order is no longer in existence. So I have not been able to reconnect unfortunately. I've tried.

>> Bill Benson: Good question. Thank you for that.

Do we have any other questions?

Well, you're going to have another chance to ask questions after if you want to. We're going to hear again from Josie in a few minutes, few moments and when Josie's finished, she's going to remain on the stage and we welcome any of you, welcome you very much, to come up on the stage and meet Josie, give her a hug, get your photograph taken with her, or ask her a question. So there will be another opportunity to do that if you would like.

One more question before we wrap up. Tell us about meeting Freddie. If you don't mind.

>> [Laughter]

>> Josie Traum: Freddie actually grew up in England, was born in Vienna, went to England on the Kindertransport. I don't know if you heard about England taking in 10,000 Jewish children, mainly from Germany and Austria. And his parents also had to make that decision to let him go. Freddie grew up with a Christian family in England and was also an orphan. His parents were murdered.

He did his studies in England and then went to join the British merchant Marines and was working as a chief radio officer on the Israeli passenger liner. I went to Israel to study. I had a scholarship. I went to study in Israel for a year. And we went by ship because in those days, in the '50s, you didn't really go by plane. It was very expensive and not that common. So I came back by ship. Freddie was an officer. He was actually socializing with the passengers, me being one of them. And we were married a year later.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: And you were married on the ship. Right? That wonderful photograph is on the ship. Right?

>> Josie Traum: Yes. We had our guests, like 150 people. It was catered because on passenger liners they made wonderful food. So we were married. And actually I went to settle in Israel with Freddie after we were married. We actually have a lot in common.

What?

>> [Inaudible]

>> Josie Traum: Married 60 years.

>> Bill Benson: 60 years.

>> [Applause]

>> Josie Traum: Are they clapping for me or for him?

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: I think it's for both of you.

I want to thank all of you for being with us. I'm going to turn back to Josie in just a moment. But thank you for being with us. We will end our 2018 *First Person* season tomorrow but we will resume again in March of 2019. So we hope you can come back in the future. And all of our programs are available on the museum's YouTube page. So you can see this program with Josie or any others if you would like to. We hope that you will do that.

When Josie's done, Sarah, our photographer, will come up on the stage and take a photograph of Josie with you as the background. So we want you to be here for that. And then as I mentioned, Josie will remain on the stage so you can come up here and meet her if you would like to do that.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. And so with that, I'd like to turn to Josie to close our program.

>> Josie Traum: Ok. Thank you.

First of all, thank all of you for coming. Thank you for being here. I always like to close the program with this one statement.

Have any of you gone through the museum yet? Yes? Ok. On the second floor, on the wall there as you enter the second floor, there's a saying or a reading by a Lutheran minister. His name is Martin Niemoller. It's on the wall on the second floor. When you leave the second floor, when you exit it, just take notice. To me it's one of the most important sayings in this museum. It means a lot. So let me read it to you.

Martin Niemoller, by the way, as I mentioned, a Lutheran minister, was very pro-

Hitler at the beginning. Because, you know, Hitler promised so many wonderful things to his citizens. However, when he saw what Hitler was doing, he really changed and actually he was jailed. He didn't die in jail. He died in the 1980s but this is what he wrote.

"First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me."

I'm sorry. This really, really gets me. All of you really can make a difference. You can speak out if you see anybody hurting, humiliating, or bullying someone. You can actually interfere. You can make a difference. Each person can make a difference.

And you, the young people here, you really are our future. You can make a difference.

Thank you.

>> [Applause]

>> You can keep clapping if you would like.

>> [Applause]

>> One more time.

>> [Applause]

>> Josie Traum: Thank you all so much for being here.

>> Bill Benson: Again, please feel free to come up.