

REALTIME FILE

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
FIRST PERSON: CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS  
FIRST PERSON FRED KAHN  
AUGUST 9, 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*. Thank you for joining us. We are in our 19th year of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mr. Fred Kahn, 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. This is our final program for 2018. *First Person* will resume again in March 2019. The museum's website, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org), provides information about Our program in 2019.

Fred 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 Fred 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 Fred is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

Fred Kahn was born on December 19, 1932, in Wiesbaden, Germany, to Jewish parents, Selma and Max Kahn. Here we see Fred at about 9-months with his mother and older brother, Hans.

This photo of Fred's father, Max Kahn, was taken around 1935.

The arrow on this map points to Wiesbaden, Germany, where Fred was born. In 1933, after Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany, Fred's father fled to Belgium in the hopes that Hitler's rule would end quickly. Fred's mother joined his father later.

They left Fred in the care of his aunt, Rosa Kahn Nassauer, and his uncle, Siegfried Nassauer, pictured here with Fred. Fred's parents hoped they could return for their son when it was safe. Fred would live with his aunt and uncle for five years. This photo was taken in 1937 when Fred was about 4 1/2 years old.

In 1938, Fred's father asked his aunt and uncle to send Fred to Belgium because he was afraid the border between Germany and Belgium would close. Fred's aunt and uncle sent him first to Aachen, Germany, indicated by the arrow on the right. A woman helped him get to the border of Germany and Belgium, where Fred's father was waiting. Fred's father took him to Verviers, Belgium, to join the rest of the family. The arrow on the left points to Verviers. Four years after Fred left Germany, his aunt and uncle were deported to the killing center Sobibor.

In 1942, Fred's family obtained false identity papers and went into hiding under the Christian surname Lejeune. They moved frequently to avoid suspicion. On September 9, 1944, the area in which they were staying was liberated by the US 1st Army after a fierce battle.

Later, when fighting began again, they moved to Liege, Belgium, and lived in a friend's basement. This arrow shows the location of Liege.

In 1952, at age 19, Fred immigrated on his own to the US. He joined the US Army in March of 1953 and later that year he became a naturalized US citizen. In 1954, he returned to Germany with the army.

We close with this photograph of Fred and his mother, Selma Kahn, in 1954 when Fred visited her in Belgium when on leave from the Army.

Following his tour with the U.S. Army, serving in Army Intelligence, Fred attended the University of Maryland, graduating with honors, then earned a Masters of Arts from John Hopkins University. In 1958 he was appointed by the Eisenhower Administration to serve as a "guide" for VIPs visiting the U.S. Pavilion at the World's Fair in Brussels, Belgium, such as Orson Welles, Harry Belafonte and Sophia Loren, as well as government dignitaries. It was Fred's job to be their host.

In 1963, Fred married his wife Rita, who had come to the U.S. as an exchange student from Taiwan. They got married on Fred's birthday. They live in Bethesda, Maryland, in the same home where they have lived for nearly 45 years. Fred and Rita have a daughter, Anna, and two grandchildren, Beth and Jacob.

And Rita is here, I'm happy to say, with Fred today. She's right here in the middle.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Fred taught at Howard University and worked for the federal government beginning with the Johnson Administration at the newly created Office of Economic Opportunity where he helped launch the Job Corps. From there, Fred went to the Department of Labor where he was a political economist serving under six presidents, retiring at the end of 1992.

Fred is widely recognized for proposing debates between presidential candidates, securing the endorsement of such major American figures as Eleanor Roosevelt, presidential candidate Adlai E. Stevenson and others, with the first debate in 1960 between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Several years ago, Fred was recognized in the Congressional Record for his role in establishing our system of Presidential Debates.

For the past 16 years Fred has managed a worldwide listserv, "Remember\_The\_Holocaust." You will find him here on Monday afternoons when he serves as a volunteer with this museum's Information Desk, speaking with visitors. After today's program, Fred will be available to sign copies of the book, "The Story of Fred A. Kahn," that was written by Marcus Yarboro who was a high school junior at the time, as part of a book series about Holocaust survivors written and illustrated by young authors.

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

>> [Applause]

>> Fred Kahn: Hi.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, thank you for joining us. Thank you for being willing to not only be our First Person but to close our final program for 2018. Thank you for that.

Fred, we only have an hour and you have so much to share with us. We can only do a little justice to the years through the Holocaust and the war much less get into all of those other amazing things you've done since the war but we'll get as far as we can get with it.

Fred, you were born December 1932, just weeks before Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933. Before you tell us what happened to you and your family under the Nazis and during the Second World War and the Holocaust, tell us a little about your family and their life before Hitler came to power.

>> Fred Kahn: My parents married in 1924 when Germany was still a democracy. They had first a daughter but unfortunately she died after three days. Then I had a brother that was born and he lived until 11 years ago he passed away, in Baltimore. And then finally I had another brother who also passed away. We were two to be reared by my parents at first.

Six weeks after I was born, Adolph Hitler was chosen as chancellor of Germany. At that time, Hitler had a private Army called the Storm Troopers, who used to beat up people in the street or kill Jewish men. So my father, who had been, I should say, first a German soldier in World War I and even got decorated -- I have it in my pocket -- by the Iron Cross, the highest medal. He was awarded that by the German marshal, Hindenberg who later on became the president of Germany and who appointed Hitler to become chancellor of Germany.

Unfortunately they thought they would be able to control Hitler because in 1932 there had been three governments in Germany and they never could last long so they thought the Nazis had 38% of the parliament, never had a majority but they decided pick Hitler and hopefully would control him. Of course unfortunately Hindenberg died and then Hitler proclaimed himself the Fuehrer.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to the events after Hitler came to power, a couple more

questions. Not only did your father earn the Iron Cross, he was severely injured as well.

>> Fred Kahn: Yeah, he was wounded as a German machine gunner.

>> Bill Benson: I wanted to also ask you, How large was your extended family?

>> Fred Kahn: My father was a youngest of six children. My father was born 1896. His parents were married in 1881. And actually my grandfather on the paternal side was born July 31, 1855. And at the age of 26 he married my grandmother, Adeleide Kahn, born Ross. And I would get to know her later on. So first -- Hans was the oldest, then Fanny, and then after Fanny, two sisters were born close to each other, Rosa and Selma Kahn, and finally an Uncle Herman and my father, who was born October 28, 1896.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, you started to talk about what happened after Hitler came to power in early 1933. It wasn't long after that that your father made the decision to leave Germany for Belgium. Why did he decide that early, in 1933, to leave?

>> Fred Kahn: As I alluded to, the Storm Troopers, Brown Shirts, would fight in the street. And especially after Hitler became chancellor, they would kill Jewish people, men first, even opened the concentration camp, Dachau, where first Hitler put in political opponents, not Jews but political opponents.

Then March 15, 1933, somehow some of those Brown Shirts went and threw stones into people's business in the city we were living. It was out of control so that the German government under Hitler decided on April 1 there would be a national boycott of Jewish businesses. And, of course, as you know, a month later on May 10, they burned the books.

>> Bill Benson: And that time is when your father decided to --

>> Fred Kahn: And in September, I was only 9 months old, my father went supposedly on a trip to Belgium, as a businessman. And in those days, and still today, when you leave one place to another place you have to sign out, especially in Germany. So my mother later on signed out that he was on a business trip. And, of course, he never came back. But he thought he would come back after a couple of years. He thought Hitler would not last more than a couple of years.

>> Bill Benson: And am I right that when he went to Belgium, he thought that Hitler and the Brown Shirts would leave the women and children alone?

>> Fred Kahn: Correct. At first -- -- at first only men were attacked. Women and children were left alone. The attacks against Jewish men were, as I mentioned, by the Brown Shirts, not legal at all. Eventually the Brown Shirts were eliminated in favor of the German Army with a deal and Hitler's accolades went and killed the leaders of the Brown Shirts.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, once your father went to Belgium, later your mother and your brother, Hans, joined your father in Belgium but left you in the care of your aunt and uncle, Siegfried and Rosa. And you would end up being with them for five years until the fall of 1938. Tell us what you can about what your life was like living with your aunt and uncle and what your parents' circumstances were like with Hans in Belgium.

>> Fred Kahn: Well, my father had a sister who was childless. She offered to take care of me when I was about 1-year-old, until they would return and hopefully Hitler would be gone. So I was reared by an aunt and uncle which I thought were my parents. They were very loving. They hugged me all the time.

And while I was with them, maybe when I was a couple of years older, 3, I became a friend with a German boy, Walter, and he was not Jewish and he would later on protect me when other kids -- maybe I was 4, 5 years old then, who would throw stones after me and call me "dirty Jew" in German, [speaking German] of course, I didn't know anything about the

Nazis and the rest of it. But that has remained in my memory ever since, as young as I was.

Then, also, I was a little naughty boy sometimes. I would go up in the attic and try to look through the window to see how things looked from there. Fortunately my aunt was right behind me and grabbed me by my trousers and I got a spank. Another time they were looking for me all over the place and eventually found me sleeping in the dog house.

>> [Laughter]

>> Fred Kahn: I also went on slides, one time down the hill in front of our house on the sled and hit my nose. Had to go inside. I recall when I put my nose against the window seeing other kids having fun coming down and on the ride.

>> Fred Kahn: You were a kid. You were a typical kid.

>> Fred Kahn: Yes. And occasionally my [Indiscernible] would come to visit, white shirt and trousers, Walter, we grabbed him and threw him -- we got him dirty. But he was five years older than we were. I cannot believe we did that.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Fred, one of the things that happened while you were with your aunt and uncle is your paternal grandmother died while you were with her.

>> Fred Kahn: Yes. Every single -- there were two brothers who married two sisters. You know, they were too far away from each other in a German village. Not my aunt and uncle but the other, also my aunt and uncle, they took care of my paternal grandmother, Adeleide Kahn. And at noon each day -- I don't know when it started, maybe when I was about 3 years old -- I would pick her up at 12:00 noon and walk her from one daughter to another daughter. And unfortunately, as mentioned to you, one day she fell down, up the street. It was June 1938. And she died.

>> Bill Benson: And you were there for that.

>> Fred Kahn: Right. I was walking with her.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, your move to join your parents after five years with your aunt and uncle was a sudden move, in October 1938. Tell us what precipitated this sudden move of you to Belgium.

>> Fred Kahn: On September 30, 1938, it was what we know, the Munich pact, which gave away part of Czechoslovakia to Hitler. At that time, you know, the prime minister of England went back after signing the treaty with the Munich Agreement with Hitler who promised them peace in our time. A picture actually was taken then showing Chamberlain coming back to London with a piece of paper that said "Peace in our time." But my father thought there would be war and, indeed, he was right because 11 months later World War II started in Europe.

Another brother of my father had a Christian girlfriend in the city of Aachen, which is a German city with a border of Belgium. So maybe the day after the Munich pact, he must have made a phone call. His brother probably told him about the girlfriend. And so they arranged for my Uncle Siegfried to take me to the German lady. Her name was Maria Gaor. My uncle, of course, never knew her before but it was arranged that the lady would take me by street car to the Belgian border -- to the German border first and then I would walk through the no-man's land, the space between both countries, alone. They thought -- it was a Saturday afternoon, October 31, 1938, that people would not notice me walking through the frontier.

>> Bill Benson: A little boy, just walking.

>> Fred Kahn: A little boy! Bear in mind, I spoke only German. And the lady told me [speaking German] which means, just walk. I didn't know why I was doing that. But I walked too slow. I walk very, very slow. So by the time I got on the other side I was all by myself looking up with

somebody yelling over the fence, "C'est mon fils!" I didn't understand French. And the custom officer talked to me in a language I didn't understand. So it turned out to be the person who was yelling across the fence was my biological father who yelled that is my son, in French, "C'est mon fils!"

That's the first time I saw my father, at the age of 6 years old. Imagine that some of you wouldn't have met your parents until you're 6 years old. That's happened to me.

So my father then had been five years already in Belgium. He became a champion bridge player. So he made a lot of friends among the Belgians who considered him a fellow bridge player. So maybe through the assistance I was allowed into Belgium as a political refugee and I wasn't even short of 6 years old.

>> Bill Benson: So you got through.

>> Fred Kahn: So then I was put in kindergarten to learn French. Go ahead.

>> Bill Benson: I know we're having to skip over so much and I'm sorry about that. There you are reunited with your parents, living with them and Hans for almost the next year.

>> Fred Kahn: And another grandmother.

>> Bill Benson: And another grandmother. World War II began, as you just noted, with the invasion of Poland September 1, 1939. And then, of course, about eight months later, in May of 1940, the Germans invaded Luxemburg, Belgium and France. Tell us what you recall about the invasion of Belgium and what happened to your family.

>> Fred Kahn: My father had a lot of Belgium friends. One of them was an officer in the Belgium Army near the German border. He called up on Friday, May 10, at 5:30 in the morning, called up my father to say the Germans are close to the border. We had a black Ford. So we piled up in a car and took off with the aim of going to the Flanders because the -- Flanders in World War I -- they fought the whole World War I in the Flanders in Belgium. And he thought it would be a repeat, we would be safe. It turned out now the Germans used Blitzkrieg so before you know it -- and also, they had German planes. When the French and English Army came to the rescue of Belgium, airplanes would come and machine gun civilians. We had to jump out of the car each time. Several people probably were killed. And the reason they did that is to spread chaos and get the French and the English Army, you know -- that's it.

>> Bill Benson: When you were trying to get to Flanders, if I remember correctly, your father was hoping to get to England.

>> Fred Kahn: Right. Before the car broke down, an English soldier gave us -- asked for a lift, hitchhike. He was on a running board. I remember. He was singing "It's a long way to Tipperary."

>> Bill Benson: And you sang another song.

>> Fred Kahn: Another song, he says, "I'll hang our dirty linen on a six-foot line," six-foot line were bunkers in Germany. Like World War I. And the French had marginal lines. That's a reference to that.

>> Bill Benson: So a British soldier hitched a ride with you. Eventually he got off. Your car broke down.

>> Fred Kahn: Yes. And then later on -- because my father was starting to -- was talking to his mother-in-law in German. She knew only German. And some people turned him in and said he was a spy. And the British guys -- fortunately my father knew English and he yelled out and so he was saved by British.

>> Bill Benson: And your Uncle Herman, who you mentioned, he got arrested.

>> Fred Kahn: Yes. While we were on the way, my Uncle Herman was arrested. He had only

one daughter. My father had two. The children, the mother-in-law, and he got himself arrested by the Belgians but my uncle was sent then to Southern France. He made the mistake of coming back after Belgium capitulated, to Brussels where he was arrested by the Germans for coming back. And he was put in a prison for 18 months.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, eventually, before long, you returned to Brussels. You came back to Brussels.

>> Fred Kahn: Yeah. Just before what I just mentioned -- after my father left, hopefully to go to England but he was too late. Near Dunkirk -- they made a movie about Dunkirk where 300,000 Englishman escaped, not falling into the hands of the Germans. My mother then was on her own. And we saw the German soldiers coming down. The French were on the other side. We were going to go into a building but a German lieutenant told my mother, who pretended to be [Indiscernible], descendant of Germans, and he told her don't go into that building, go next door because that building is not solid. Throughout the night I heard like thunder, the exchanging of gunfire of both armies. And in the morning when we got up the house next door was destroyed.

So we walked up the hill. I don't know how we ever got back to where we had come from when suddenly a German bus stopped with a Red Cross and gave us a lift all the way to Brussels where the German Red Cross treated us nicely to hot Coco. Before that, before the bus came along, I saw on the left-hand side a German soldier sleeping. He probably was dead.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, when you returned to Brussels, you're now under German occupation.

>> Fred Kahn: Right.

>> Bill Benson: You went to school under German occupation.

>> Fred Kahn: Right. Then we went back to Verviers. My mother had a friend in Brussels. That's why I mentioned Brussels. But in Verviers, which is a city near Spa, Belgium, in the Province of Liege. It's a French-speaking part, northern part of Belgium they speak Flemish. So I was put in kindergarten to learn French. Then first grade I was the last of the class.

Eventually I was forced to register as a Jew and also turn in our radios for some odd reason the Germans wanted radios from the Jews. I had to go down, only 9 years old. I got Scarlett Fever which delayed my wearing the yellow star. But when I went back to school in the third grade, the kids called me sheriff and pretended they were cowboys and Indians playing around. But then one boy called me "dirty Jew." I took my right fist and broke his glasses. He turned around, got off to the principal.

Now, normally you don't want to get to the principal. But then the principal said, we pay the glasses, apologize, but he mentioned that he is willing to help us out and go into the underground because these people are going to denounce you the Germans as a Jewish family. By that time the Jews were already deported to Auschwitz. In fact, 25,000 from Belgium were murdered and gassed in Auschwitz. Then we also heard on an English radio that the Jews were being killed in Prussia, June 1942. And we received also a postcard of my aunt who had reared me in Germany to say they were going to be resettled the next day to the east. And of course it was clear to us that I would never see her again. And she mentioned like that to that effect.

So the bridge players told my father they have people working for them at the City Hall. And that's how my father got false identity people. So my father became Max Lejeune, mother Adeleide Lejeune and I became Freddy Lejeune.

After arranging for me to leave school, during two years while in the underground,

making sure nobody would know our whereabouts, we concealed our names so that -- the danger was if somebody would suspect that we were Jewish and then would denounce us to the Germans. That's the reason why we moved every two, three months.

Go ahead.

>> Bill Benson: You first assumed the identities as the Lejeune family in 1942. And as you said, you lived under that identity for two years.

Your father was arrested at some point.

>> Fred Kahn: In 1941, before we went into the underground. My father was arrested because his name was Max Kahn and it turned out to be that they interrogated him in the basement of the Commandant, which was the German secret police headquarters. They were looking for Max Kahn, who was a Communist. Well, my father convinced them they got the wrong Max Kahn, that he was decorated with the Iron Cross from the German Army. And then they realized they made a mistake and they let him go. This was before we went in the underground.

>> Bill Benson: As you mentioned a couple of moments ago, you received this postcard from your aunt and uncle --

>> Fred Kahn: June 9.

>> Bill Benson: On June 9. An especially poignant comment you made to me is that you no longer have that postcard.

>> Fred Kahn: Yeah. Unfortunately my late mother was very upset -- when we went in the underground under the name of Lejeune, we disregarded everything that was in our name. And as a result, my mother tore up that card which she regrets she did.

But I also should mention that most of our belongings, while we were in hiding, were put into the basement of friends of my parents. And of course after the war was over, we got all of that back.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, tell us, while you were in hiding as the Lejeunes, there was a German commander living, I believe, right next door to you.

>> Fred Kahn: Right. Before we went in the underground there was a German commander of the city where we lived, lived in the apartment next door to us. So the land lady asked him to talk to my father. And he obviously was not a Nazi because he told my father, "As long as I'm here, nothing is going to happen to your family but if I will leave, I don't guarantee what could happen to you, so you make your own arrangements."

And later on after the war we found out he was a lawyer in Dusseldorf and he was, of course, not a Nazi. But this was before -- probably at the beginning of the deportation of Jews from Belgium.

>> Bill Benson: You referred to your hiding as you were self-hiding.

>> Fred Kahn: Right.

>> Bill Benson: What did you mean by that?

>> Fred Kahn: By self-hiding, we went on our own. Fortunately my parents -- especially on the side of my grandmother, we were pretty well off. They had a big business in Germany. Unfortunately the father-in-law of my father, he died and so eventually -- we had a lot of money. And again, through the bridge players -- one of the bridge players was a director of a bank. And my father entrusted him with his money. That helped us during World War II, during the underground years, to buy things in the black market. Because we were not registered in the various place we lived and therefore we had no ration and had to buy everything in the black market.



And every time we moved from one place to another, the friend of my father who was a farmer would come with his horse and move us from one place to another. He did that -- after the war we asked him why did risk your own life. And he says, well, that was the way you had to do as a human being.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned the farmer. How many people knew your true identities?

>> Fred Kahn: The farmer and the principal.

>> Bill Benson: They were the only ones?

>> Fred Kahn: Right, the only ones that I know of.

>> Bill Benson: You described --

>> Fred Kahn: The bank -- and the bank -- they went through other people.

>> Bill Benson: Through other people for that.

>> Fred Kahn: Right. But they did not know where we lived.

>> Bill Benson: You described the two years of being under the false identity, the Lejeunes, you described that as a lonely time for you.

>> Fred Kahn: Oh, yes, of course. Between the age of 10 to 12 I had no contact with young people my age. It was very lonely. And, of course, I had to invent my own games. I threw a ball up in the air pretending I was a goalkeeper, soccer player. And then -- one thing I didn't mention to you is that we had a game of Backgammon and we played Backgammon all the time. So for two years the whole family played Backgammon and that was our only entertainment.

We had no radio. Toward the end, the last place we stayed, we used to go at night to the land lady and listen to the English radio. And after the liberation -- my father asked the lady whether they suspected that we were Jewish. And she answered no. They thought my father was an English spy since he was always listening to the radio. English radio.

So we hid in farming villages, you know, where people really were not interested in politics, couldn't care less. You didn't see many Germans.

But my responsibility was to be with my grandmother at all times. She spoke only German. People would not pay attention to an old lady with a young boy. So one day we went on a local train. And unbeknownst, you know, never expect any German to come in the compartment of the train but suddenly there's some German officers coming in. And my grandmother was sitting next to me. She panicked. She had a newspaper in her purse. In those days they didn't have pictures in the newspaper. She hid herself behind the newspaper. And then afterwards when we got off the train, I told her, You know what, you read the newspaper upside down.

>> [Laughter]

>> Fred Kahn: When I came back and told this to my parents, that was the humor, you know, in spite of the tragedy.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, you moved to your final hiding place in that village of Oneux-Theux. Belgium was liberated in the fall of 1944 but, of course, the war continued until May of 1945. When did you believe you were free to come out of hiding and then what happened?

>> Fred Kahn: Well, of course -- the day we were liberated, September 9, 1944, the battle went on all day long in the region where we lived. We lived on a hill in a village of Oneux. Below that there was a city of Theux. And then there was a slope on the other side. And suddenly, towards 7:00 at night, we saw -- you know, the noise of the battle, tanks with the orange on top and my father just took off. Went over a bridge that had blown up and greeted the first Americans of the First Army. And then while he was doing that, other Belgians of the

city went to the supply depots of the Germans stealing all the food there, including Dutch cigars.

>> Bill Benson: And you have some.

>> Fred Kahn: Eventually we went there, too. And the next day when the American trucks came by, I gave them the Dutch cigars and in turn they threw me chewing gum. And then when I returned to the city where I went to school -- my classmates thought I had been killed. I gave them the chewing gum.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, you described the day of just constant fierce fighting all day. And when it ended, as you described, your father ran to the American tanks. Your father always said that that was the greatest day of his life.

>> Fred Kahn: Correct. In fact, one day I told my wife what he would answer. I asked him in front of her. I used my wife to witness what happened to me because some of these things were very unbelievable. But I told her, September 9, 1944, I asked him and sure enough he answered that.

>> Bill Benson: The greatest day of his life.

>> Fred Kahn: Right. And another time, much later on when my father passed away but we were in Rehoboth Beach on vacation with my mother, I brought up the subject and this was for her benefit. Arrested World War II by the Belgian police for being a truant, not being in school. It was a mistake of me going away from where we lived. So they grabbed me, took me to the police station, interrogated me, and I pretended to be -- I had been trained. Before we went in the underground as Lejeune. And then I was a Catholic boy. And I also learned to study the Catholic prayers, like the Hail Mary. The daughter of the land lady told me that, Catholic prayers.

So I pretended to be Freddy Lejeune and I said, well, I had Scarlett Fever. I did not want to hurt the other kids. So they left me alone in that room. And I tell you, I thought Germans would come. But fortunately they came back and then asked me, Is your mother blond? And, of course, then I knew we were all right. I said, of course. And so they told me, you leave and don't ever come back.

So six years later, I met them again and I told them, you better let -- don't forget. Wanted to stay away from the police. So I told him to tell my mother how we met previously. In the meantime, one of the two became chief of police and praised my courage. They knew all along I was Jewish, of course.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, at that time, in the fall of 1944, you, your family, and others thought the war was over for you. In fact, you said that everything was beautiful. But that turned out not to be the case.

>> Fred Kahn: Well, the Germans had a counteroffensive called the Battle of the Bulge. The Battle of the Bulge was -- English intelligence, it was a breakdown. It was a surprise. In just three months after we had been liberated, December 16, 1944, the Germans came back. At that time a lot of American troops were green troops who had just arrived. And over two weeks' period, 100,000 Americans, casualties, 10,000 dead, all within two weeks. Most of them were buried in Belgium in a cemetery.

>> Bill Benson: And you told me, Fred, your family hit the road again. Those were your words.

>> Fred Kahn: Oh, yes. It was very dangerous because we had resumed our real name. So we walked in the snow, with a lot of other refugees, toward Liege where we had friends. We stayed there in the basement. At the same time -- American planes could not go in the air because it was cloudy. The Americans refused to surrender. And the colonel there said in

answer to the demand of the Germans to surrender, answer "Nuts." And when the German commander supposedly got that, "Nuts," he said [speaking German], "What is that?" So now every year in the city they have a Nuts Festival. And the general, you know, he's in the history books for that, for the "Nuts".

But the thing is -- unfortunately -- when the German soldiers came back, they also killed not only Americans but also Belgian civilians, not Jews but Belgian civilians. Maybe some Jews, too. For example, even when the Belgians -- in the basement there were reports they were taken out and murdered. And also, at that time they murdered American soldiers in the -- who surrendered in a city and eventually the Germans were put on trial for the murder of the American soldiers. This was during the Battle of the Bulge. Including, also, the first time that black soldiers volunteered to fight and many got caught, tortured, and killed; black soldiers.

>> Bill Benson: U.S. soldiers.

>> Fred Kahn: Yeah, U.S. soldiers.

>> Bill Benson: Your parents, however, they had some rough moments when they were heard speaking German. Can you say a little about that? They were overheard speaking their native language to each other, you described to me a couple of incidents.

>> Fred Kahn: Well, this was in 1940 when they grabbed my father and thought he was a spy because he was talking to his mother-in-law in German. My grandmother, of course -- I did not talk to her in German. I didn't talk to her when I was outside. She pretended she was, you know, dumb, deaf and dumb. Only when we were out of sight of somebody I would talk to her in German. And she was quite a lady. And she also gave me a hard time but I learned a lot from her. I was told she was a very strong businesswoman. They compared her to [Indiscernible], for example. And she was tough. She always said "You are the bad one."

>> [Laughter]

>> Fred Kahn: She said, "If you don't tell the truth, you lie, you go to jail." So as a result, she was responsible for my developing the proper character and also integrity. I had extraordinary parents, both sides, both reared me as aunt and uncle and also my actual parents.

>> Bill Benson: Fred, when did you and your family really, truly feel it was over and you were safe?

>> Fred Kahn: Well, when the war was over. I woke up and I hear all the bells in the church in Verviers and I knew that the war was over. And then I went back to school.

>> Bill Benson: And would stay in Belgium for, what, seven more years?

>> Fred Kahn: Oh, no. More than that. I finished -- during the war the principal would bring me books in French. I studied French, which I did not know before, and as a result when I took the citywide exam, I finished number one of the entire city, in the sixth grade, in French. And also I was tutored for math afterwards. And then my parents gave me total freedom to do whatever I want and I created a soccer club of 18 and under that became champion of Belgium. I still have the cup and a picture of that in a book that is available to be bought outside after when I'm finished.

>> Bill Benson: What prompted you then to eventually decide that you were going to come to the United States?

>> Fred Kahn: Well, I had -- Did I mention? There were two brothers who married two sisters. And one -- the people who reared me were murdered. But others, they left. The reason they left to the United States is because one day somebody threw stones at the house. According to the granddaughter they decided to come to the United States. They wanted to take me

along but my mother in Belgium, which I didn't know about, later I learned about it, wouldn't let me go. That's the reason I stayed behind in Germany.

But they went to New York. So they threw out -- while we were in hiding, I knew their address, 2163 Morris Avenue in the Bronx. And then when the Americans liberated us, I would go to the American soldier, Do you know 2163 Morris Avenue? So eventually he wrote to me and invited me. He would pay the fare to come to the United States. But my parents did not want to let me go until I finished schooling, high school, in Belgium. And so I came to the United States at the age of 19.

In Belgium I learned English as a first foreign language studying in the seventh grade, then Dutch for four years so that when I arrived in the United States, I knew four languages. The reason I'm citing that, that eventually I went in the Army. The knowledge of languages and then working for the State Department, they got me a job there. That's the only time actually the languages were useful. But it helped.

>> [Laughter]

>> Fred Kahn: Go ahead.

>> Bill Benson: There's so much more that we could hear about, about the events leading up to this point in Fred's life much less all that happened afterwards. But I think we have time for a few questions from our audience. Are you game for that?

>> Fred Kahn: Yeah, yeah. Sure.

>> Bill Benson: All right. We have microphones, one in each aisle. We're going to ask that you wait until you have the microphone if you have a question. Try to make it as brief as you can. I'll repeat it just to be sure that we hear it. And then Fred will respond to your question.

Anybody have a question? This is a chance to ask it. We have a gentleman right here, in the green right here. Here comes a mic. From your right.

>> What happened to your uncle and aunt in Germany?

>> Bill Benson: What happened to your aunt and uncle?

>> Fred Kahn: Very good question. They were deported on June 9, as I mentioned. The date of June 9, the postcard of my aunt. There was no doubt about it that she would never see them again. Then I learned later on, maybe 25 years ago, through the German newspaper, about people from Wiesbaden, 1,200 of them, and Frankfurt, that were deported, to the Sobibor killing center. There were 1,200. And they were gassed on arrival. And it also mentioned the train, D18 -- I made a copy of that, three pages of it, which I distribute -- show, when I volunteer on Monday afternoons to visitors.

Recently, as researched further, I went to the central database of victims' names and here is the result. You can read it.

>> Bill Benson: It shows your aunt and uncle's names here it says place of residence, where they got the information, and fate. And "Murdered".

>> Fred Kahn: And this confirms. This comes from the Jewish museum in Israel. But the information, of course, was given to them from the German republic. The Germans, even the Nazis, kept very careful records on everybody, even those that were sent to Auschwitz, and got the numbers, still knew their name, when they were deported. They kept the records. And that's how out of all of that we know, or at least [Indiscernible], in the museum knows the names of four million out of six million victims as a result of the Nazi records.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Fred. And thank you for sharing that.

Do we have another question? We do. Ok.

>> You told us your father's best day of his life. Please share with us the best day of your life.

>> Bill Benson: Say that one more time?

>> The day you would consider the best day of your life.

>> Bill Benson: Great question. You shared with us the day your father thought was the greatest day of his life. What was the greatest day of your life?

>> Fred Kahn: The greatest day of my life was when I married my wife.

>> [Laughter and Applause]

>> Fred Kahn: And I should add that she was an exchange student from Taiwan, China, and when I looked at the passport, she arrived in the United States on my birthday, December 19, 1957 and I married her six years later on my birthday. And we will be married 55 years this coming December 19.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: We're going to close our program in a minute. I'm going to turn back to Fred to close our program. And he also has something else he wants to share with us as well. And we'll do that in just a moment.

I want to thank all of you for being with us today, closing out our 2018 program. We'll resume *First Person* in March 2019. The museum's website will have information about our program next year but also the YouTube page has all of our programs it will have Fred's program and all of our programs so you can see all of them. Ideally you'll come back here for a *First Person* program but certainly we hope you can take advantage of what's on the museum's website.

When Fred is done, two things are going to happen. Our photographer, Joel, will come up on the stage and take a photo of Fred with you as the background. It makes a very nice memento for Fred of this event. And then Fred is going to leave the stage. He's going to go up to the entrance and sign copies of his book. And that's another opportunity for folks to talk to him as well.

It's our tradition at *First Person* that our First Person has the last word. So I'm going to turn to Fred for not only our last word for the *First Person* program today but for our season.

>> Fred Kahn: Thanks, God, I'm alive today because good people stood up to evil. To me they personify the strength, the righteous strength, of the human spirit. Personally I have lived an authentic, honest life for myself and others but I should say something. When I came to the United States, I was shocked to find out that there was discrimination against people because of their skin color. Having survived the Holocaust and being persecuted because of my religion, it was abhorrent to me to see people discriminate against others because the fact that they look different.

So it seems to me, when I think back now, at the age of 85, that I probably resolve never to look down on people because they look different from me or are from different places. So as a result of it, I made a lot of friends all over the world, of all walks of life as a result of it.

And finally, I got involved -- while I was teaching at Howard University, of course on World History, I was involved in civil rights. Among others, 55 years ago, on August 24, end of this month, 1963, my then -- I was not married yet but she was there with me -- a few steps away when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made his historical speech on "I have a dream," right here at the Lincoln Memorial. I would be remiss not to mention why I still have hope in the human race.

When my uncle turned me over in Aachen, he was obviously emotionally struck and had a feeling would never see me again if something would happen to him and so he gave to her the most precious things in his pocket to her, and asked her to preserve it and give it to me

if something would happen to him. And, indeed, a couple of years after the war was over I received a package with a letter explaining what was in the package. It was a gold watch that my uncle gave to her to preserve. No one knew that she had it. She kept it through the war. I never knew her except when I was given to her. My uncle never knew her. And it just happened to be that she was a girlfriend of this other uncle who unfortunately was eventually deported to Auschwitz and murdered on arrival, witness to his being gassed was described in the book that I brought here.

But here it is. Believe it or not -- it was given 90 years ago. And when you push on it -- you push on it. We'll do the same. You got the microphone. It still works.

>> Bill Benson: Push on it right here.

>> Fred Kahn: Right. You pushed on the wrong button.

>> [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: That wouldn't be the first time.

[Bells tolling]

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Fred.

Fred, we're going to get you to go up on the stage and sign copies of your book.

*First Person* yeah. We made it.

>> Bill Benson: We did. We have to get a picture first.

>> [Applause]

>> It's ok if you clap.

>> [Applause]