>> 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. This is our 20th year of the First Person program. Our First Person today is Mr. Peter Feigl, whom you shall meet shortly.

This 2019 season of First Person is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of twice-weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our First Person guests serves as a volunteer here at this museum. Our program will continue through August 8th. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

Peter 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 Peter a few questions. If we do not get to your question today, please join us in our on-line conversation: Never Stop Asking Why. The conversation aims to inspire individuals to ask the important questions that Holocaust history raises. You can ask your question and tag the Museum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using @holocaustmuseum and the hashtag #AskWhy.

Today's program will be livestreamed on the Museum's

website, meaning people will be joining the program online and watching with us today from across the country and around the world. We invite everyone to watch our First Person programs live on the Museum's website each Wednesday and Thursday at 11:00 a.m. eastern standard sometime through the end of may. 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 Peter is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.
We begin with this photo of Peter as a baby in 1930.
Peter was born March 1, 1929 in Berlin, Germany to Ernst and Agnes Bornstein Feigl. Here we see photos of Peter's parents.
In 1937, the family moved to Vienna, Austria. Peter was baptized in the Catholic Church in the hope that he would be shielded from the antisemitism in Germany and Austria.
When Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, Peter's family fled to Belgium but when Germany invaded Belgium in May 1940, his father was arrested as an enemy alien. Peter and his mother fled to France where they were detained in the Gurs Concentration Camp. Here we see a picture of Gurs. Six weeks later, Peter and his mother were released from Gurs and settled in Auch, France where Peter's father was allowed to join them in March 1941. Several attempts to obtain U.S. immigration visas were unsuccessful.
On August 26, 1942, unbeknownst to Peter who was away at a Quaker summer camp, his parents

were deported to Auschwitz where they were killed within a month of their arrival. Here we see a photo of Peter performing in a play at the summer camp in Talloires, France.
With the help of the Quakers, Peter was sent to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a predominantly Protestant village, where nearly 5,000 people seeking refuge from Nazi persecution were sheltered. Here we see a photo of Peter, who is circled, with other refugee children. Peter was given false identity papers and sent as a boarding student to a high school in Figeac, France.
Peter kept a diary in hopes that he would see his parents again. He recorded his daily activities. Here we see two pages from Peter's diary.
When Germans raided Figeac in May 1944, Peter was able to escape to neutral Switzerland with the help of the Jewish underground. We end with this photo of Peter in Bern, Switzerland in 1945.
After arriving in the United States in July 1946 at age 17, Peter lived with his grandmother, who had been able to escape from Europe. The following year, in 1947, Peter joined the Air Force. With a top secret clearance he was stationed at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, translating and abstracting captured German technical documents. After leaving the Air Force in 1950 and a short time as a police officer in Dayton, Peter went to work in the aviation industry selling aircraft and ground support equipment for the next 35 years. During the Johnson Administration, Peter worked in the Department of Defense selling U.S. weapons systems

internationally. He spent five years as a senior negotiator for the U.S. Secretary of Defense traveling the world. Peter retired in 1990.

In 1954 Peter married Leonie "Lennie" Warschauer to whom he was married for 64 years. Lennie and her parents were able to leave Nazi Germany in late 1938. After several years of illness, Lennie passed away in October 2018, during which time Peter was her caregiver. Peter and Lennie have two daughters, Michele and Joyce, and two grandsons, Charles and Alex, who are both graduates of Penn State.

Prior to moving to the Washington, D.C., area from Florida in July 2016 to be closer to their daughters, Peter became involved in Holocaust education and eventually began speaking about his Holocaust experience including about the two diaries that he had written while in hiding in France. One of his diaries was confiscated in 1943 and recovered more than four decades later in 1986.

Peter continues to speak frequently. Just last week he spoke to Army officers from Fort Belvoir, which is nearby in Virginia. In September he will speak at Chapman University in Orange County, California. Today is Peter's first appearance with Us on the First Person program. Following today's program Peter will be available to sign copies of Alexandra Zapruder's book, "Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust" which features Peter's diaries. Please join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. Peter Feigl.

Peter, thank you so much for joining us. We are just delighted to have you here. I know you have spoken in many, many other settings, but we are

delighted. This is a first time for you with us on the First Person program. You have so much to share with us, and we only have an hour. So we'll get started right away.
You were born in Berlin, Germany, in March 1929. Hitler and the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933 when you were 4.
Your family remained in Berlin until 1936 when they moved to Prague, Czechoslovakia, then to Vienna, Austria, in 1937. Tell us what you can about your parents and your life in those years in Berlin and your moves to Prague and Vienna.
>> Peter Feigl: I'd be glad to. Thank you very much. Well, my father was actually Viennese and Austrian working in Germany at the time. He was a graduate mechanical engineer working for a company that had offices in several European countries. My mother was occasionally a physical education teacher and basically she was a housewife, as they called them back then. And her number one job was to raise me. I'm an only child, so I was spoiled rotten. And I got a lot of attention. I enjoyed an upper middle class life. We had a big -- my father had a big Mercedes convertible. Nowadays everybody has a car, but back then that was quite something. And my first year in school in Germany, first grade, I learned from my first reader, which was entitled "The Poison Mushroom." On the cover of it is a picture of that mushroom, and everyone in Europe recognizes it as being very poisonous, not to touch it. It had a Jewish nose and a star of David. And my teacher was telling me that Jews were very bad people. They lie, they cheat, they murder. And since my parents were totally secular, I

had no idea that this in any way had anything to do with me. I never identified as Jewish. We always celebrated Christmas every year. Christmas is an occasion when father Christmas comes and brings presents to the children. So I actually was taught to hate Jews. And for reasons that I don't quite understand today, my father was asked to move to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where his company also had an office. I don't know if it was at his request. In any case, we moved to Czechoslovakia in 1936. To me, this was of course a shock because from one day to the next I find myself in a school where they speak Czech, and I didn't know a word of that. But I adapted. And I spent a year in Czechoslovakia. After which my father was transferred to Vienna, his hometown. So he was delighted to go there.
and at that point my mother and my father evidently had a conversation, and said, well, we are in Austria. Austria is 39% -- excuse me -- Austria is 98% Catholic. They have a long history and tradition of anti-Semitism. Why don't we have Peter baptized. So at that point, I was baptized in Vienna. I had my first communion there. I went to catechism. And for the first time I learned something about religion. And from that moment on, of course, I identified as a Catholic. I also served as an altar boy. And life was very nice, very pleasant, no problem.
>> Bill Benson: Until the following year after you moved to Vienna, Germany -- I mean, Vienna, when Germany annexed and seized control of Austria in March 1938, which prompted your family to leave for Belgium. Why did they leave so quickly for

Belgium, and what was it like for you and your family when you got to Belgium?
>> Peter Feigl: On the day of the annexation, the day afterwards, Hitler came to Vienna, and of course I left home. I went down to the main street in Austria. I wanted to see Hitler. And when he finally came, I saw all of these boys in Hitler Youth uniforms. I was dying to join the Hitler Youth. I was 9 years old. With the uniform, came a dagger. To a 9-year-old boy that sounds great. I was gone for about three hours. When I came home, my mother said to me, where in the heck have you been? And I said to her proudly, I saw our Fuhrer. And my mother slapped me left and right and said don't you ever call him ours. I was very confused. I didn't understand. But in a matter of about two weeks we left Vienna with only one suitcase for my mother, my father, and I, each had a suitcase. We had some difficulty upon leaving the Germany. My father was interrogated on the train. Why are you leaving?
And my father kept reassuring them we are not leaving. We are merely going to brussels. My company has an office in Belgium. I thought I'd take my wife and son along. You can see we only have one suitcase either. They finally let us go. and now we arrive in Belgium. There had been rumors already about the possibility of a war coming. And my parents were delighted to be in Belgium because Belgium was a neutral country. And there was nothing to worry about. Belgium, if there is a war, we are safe. For me, the shock was of course this is 1938. I'm 9 years old. And the big, big shock was I had to

leave behind my toy soldiers. My electric train set. I mean, this was a catastrophe to me. I didn't realize at that time that for my parents it was far worse. They left behind everything except for what they were able to pack in a suitcase. And we suddenly lived in a very small furnished apartment. All the furniture, all of my parents' belongings, were left behind. And the other shock for me was that again from one day to the next I'm finding myself in a school where they speak a foreign language, mostly French, but also in Belgium there's a second official language, Flemish, which is something like Dutch. And I had to learn that as well. But at that age, you learn quickly. And within a matter of six months, I was fluent in French. And I had gotten used to living there. and I also understood that one of the reasons my father left so quickly from Austria was that evidently he had incurred the wrath of some of the Nazis when he worked in Germany because he had been requested to smuggle some aircraft engines from the United States into either Austria or Belgium and then transfer them into Germany as agricultural machinery, which was in violation of the Versailles Treaty that ended the first world war. And I think that my father feared that because of his failure to cooperate with the Nazis at that time that he might be on a blacklist, and that it was favored to leave.
>> Bill Benson: Peter, they moved to brussels. It's a neutral country. They feel safe in Belgium. The following September 1939, of course, war broke out with the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany. But the

full effect of the war didn't really come to western Europe until may of 1940 when the Germans invaded what we call the low country, including Belgium. The impact to your family was almost immediate. What happened to your parents?
>> Peter Feigl: On the 10th of May, 1940, they attacked Luxembourg. On that morning my father decided he had to go to his office in order to distribute whatever money was due his employees so that they would be able to flee. And on the way to the railroad station from the office, where it was in Antwerp and we lived in Brussels, on the way there was an identity check. My father pulled out his German passport. And of course the Belgian police said, oh, we've got ourselves a German paratrooper and he was arrested as an enemy. And they took --
>> Bill Benson: By the Belgians?
>> Peter Feigl: Yes. And it took my mother about three days to find out where he was being held. We went to visit him. We were allowed to bring him a suitcase and one blanket. At that point, my father said to my mother, take Peter, yourself, and your mother -- my mother's mother was also in Brussels -- and get out of here as quickly as possible. You don't want to get caught between two armies. You have the Nazis coming from the northeast and the French and the British trying to come to aid the Belgians. They are coming from the southwest. You don't want to get caught between the two.
So we started again with one suitcase each. My grandmother -- my mother and I -- and started fleeing towards France. It took us about 10 days to get to France. On the way -- and you

might have seen newsreels about that period. The roads were clogged with hundreds of thousands of refugees. And about every 20 minutes or so German divebombers would machine gun the roads, and we would jump into the ditch each time. And I could only think of one thing. When I grow up, I want to be a pilot and sit in the cockpit of an airplane and -- that must be a lot of fun. 1940. I'm 11 years old. I didn't know any better. When a cow dropped dead next to me, this is something that young people don't think of. That's something that happens to very old people. And if you don't believe me, just look at how teenagers drive nowadays, OK? Anyhow, it took us 10 days to get to Paris where my mother's sister lived, my aunt. We were there for four hours. Air raid sirens went off. My mother said, I didn't come to Paris to be bombed here. I could have stayed in Brussels for that. We managed to get onto a train and got to the south of France along the Atlantic coast. There my mother's German upbringing -- you know, very correct, must do everything prescribed by law, went to the French police to register. And the French policeman said, now, let me see. You're a German. You were born in German. You married an Austrian. You married an Austrian. There is no more Austria. You come from Belgium with your mother and your son. You don't have a Visa. You don't belong here. I don't know what to do with you. Go to the gendarmery. Same thing there. he said go to the sort of county government administration. There the man said, madame, I know exactly what you have to do. You're going to take a train to go to a place with experts that

will know just what to do with you. We took the train. We got there.
upon arrival the train was surrounded by French gendarmes with machine guns. They loaded us onto an open truck, and 20 minutes later they dumped us into the French concentration camp called Gurs. Gurs was a camp with a capacity of 14,000 human beings. It had been constructed about two or three years earlier primarily to detain refugees from the Spanish Civil War. But we were as far as the French concerned enemy aliens. And we lived in barracks. 60 people to a barrack. No beds or anything. You slept on the floor. Straw strewn on the floor. There were no hygienic facilities within the barracks. Only one cold water spigot outside. The toilets called latrines were located about 150 yards or so away. In order to get there you a muddy path to go through. And they were just open trenches. This is now -- we are now at the mid to late May 1940s, almost summertime in the south of France. It's hot. France is famous for making perfume. That ain't the place where they made it.
Food was practically nonexistent. Breakfast a Lukewarm dark liquid called coffee. Lunch another lukewarm liquid. If you found a carrot slice or two, you hit the jackpot and you got another slice of bread. And dinner was pretty much a repeat of what lunch was. We were all hungry. Even though there were no beds, we had bedbugs. We had lice. Body lice. Fleas. It was hell. And my mother who had been made barracks chief just couldn't wait to get out of here.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us why she

was made barracks chief.
>> Peter Feigl: Because she had been a physical education teacher. She was a strong person. She was articulate and spoke French fluently. And the barracks chiefs were given a briefing from the camp commander about once a week or so to tell them what is going on in the outside world from which we were totally separated. We had no idea. We got no newspapers. There was no radio. Obviously no television. And the only news that we had about what was going on in the outside world was from new prisoners that were coming in. And that was a rumor mill. Everyone had their own interpretation of what is happening in the rest of the world.
So finally on the 22nd of June, France surrendered to the Nazis, signed an armistice. And a few days later, my mother learned that a German army inspection team was coming to Gurs. So she decided if it's the army, then it's not the Gestapo. It's not the Secret Police. I'm going to try to get out of here. So she took me at the entrance of the camp, and as soon as the German officer arrived, she rushed forward toward him with her passport, her German passport in her hand, yelling as loud as she can, I am a citizen of the great German Third Reich. I demand to be released from this stinking hell hole where these lousy no good Frenchmen have been holding me, my mother, and my son. He looked at the passport and turned to the French camp commander and said, you call taxi for madame. You pay taxi. Taxi takes madame wherever she wants to go. And 20 minutes later, we were in a taxi.
Where to, madame? My mother said take us to Spain.

He said, Spain, impossible. Why? The Spaniards don't allow anyone into Spain, and the Germans and the French don't allow anyone out of France. Where can you take us? I can take you north. Start driving. We are driving for several hours. We come to a large town in France called Toulouse. At that point my grandmother said to my mother, look, your sister -- in other words, my aunt -- had managed to get to Toulouse. I don't know how my grandmother found that out. Anyway, she said you've got your hands full with Peter. Good luck. I'm leaving you here now. We continued driving in will we came to a town called au C h. My mother saw a large building. And it turned out it was a convent. And the sister that opened the door, my mother explained her situation, and she said, we will help you. Come in. And they put my mother in touch with a food distribution center that was in the center of Auch. It was operated jointly by the Swiss Red Cross and American Quakers. Nothing to do with Quaker oats. It's a religious denomination, and they do good work far beyond their numbers.
Anyhow, that gave my mother a temporary job. With that job in hand, she could go to the police, register and get position to reside in Auch. With that she was able to get a one room -- and I mean it was a one-room apartment.
>> Bill Benson: For the two of you?
>> Peter Feigl: For just my mother and I.
>> Bill Benson: Peter, did you at that time, up to that point, did your mother know anything about your father's status?
>> Peter Feigl: No. At that point, she did not know. We had no idea what happened to my

father. Again, rumor mills. As we left Belgium, the rumor was that the men who had been arrested were being sent to cayenne. Cayenne is the devil's island where the French penal colony off the coast of south America. And everybody was horrified at the thought, because there were terrible tales about no one ever comes back from cayenne. Later on it turned out it wasn't Cayenne. It was Cayonne. But it took my mother a good three months until she discovered that my father had been sent from Belgium first to a camp to the Mediterranean cost. It was destroyed in October of that year in a storm. And the men from there were ultimately transferred to Gurs also. And my mother was able to go and visit him in Gurs. And finally in the spring of 1941, in March of 1941, my father was released on a temporary convalescence leave. My father was 16 years older than my mother. He had developed heart trouble during the time that he spent in the camps. And I think the camp commander felt that he probably wouldn't live for another 30 days, so why pay for the burial? My mother succeeded in nursing him back to health and getting leave every 30 days. At least we were together. But under the Vichy laws -- Vichy was the southern part of France which was governed by a collaborating French government, collaborating with the northern part of France, which was occupied by the Germans. The Vichy laws restricting the activities of Jews were even more rigorous and more restrictive than the Nuremberg laws, which restricted the coming and goings of Jews in Germany. So my father was prohibited from doing any work

whatsoever. He did some work undercover, tried to make a few pennies here and there, which was difficult. But we managed to --
>> Bill Benson: In fact, you stayed together in Auch until July 1942 when you were sent to a summer camp run by the Quakers. And while you were at the summer camp your parents were arrested in late August 1942 and deported to Auschwitz. And although you didn't know where they had been sent, the news of their arrest prompted you to start your first diary. With your parents gone, where did you go from the summer camp, and what did you know about your parents at that time?
>> Peter Feigl: Well, the lady in charge of the summer camp was a devout Catholic lady who took me to 7:00 mass just about every morning. And she announced to me that my parents had been arrested the day before on the 26th of August. She told me this on the 27th of August. They were to be going to an unknown destination. There had been rumors that the Jews were being sent east for, quote, resettlement. No one really quite knew what that meant. It didn't sound good. And so she then proceeded to notify the Quakers that she had a Jewish child on her hands, especially two days later when the gendarmes came to arrest me. And she begged the -- told the Quakers, look, you've got to take this kid off my hands. The gendarme are going to come back and arrest him. So the Quakers said, you're in luck. We have gotten permission from the Vichy government to send 500 orphans to America, and the Americans have agreed to take them in. So have Pierre -- I was called Pierre then -- Pierre fill out

these forms. I filled out the forms, the name, place of birth, date of birth, religion. I put down Catholic. And about three days later, the lady in charge got a letter from the Quakers saying, you don't understand. We're trying to save some Jewish children. So she wrote back -- by the way, this is all documented. We have been able to find this in archives. She wrote back four pages. No, you don't understand. When the gendarmes come to arrest him here, and I show them his baptismal certificate, they say this child is Jewish. Please reconsider. They did reconsider.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to that, you started your first entry in your diary on August 27, 1942. What prompted you to start that diary?

>> Peter Feigl: OK. The reason I started the diary was that with the arrest of my parents, my world came to an end. My parents were everything for me. As I said, I was an only child. I had no other relatives anywhere in France. I was concerned what is going to happen to me, who is going to take care of me. I'm only 13, 13 1/2 years old. And on top of that, Mrs. Cavionne assured me I had nothing to worry about. She was going to organize nine days of rosary prayers. At the end of the novena, your parents will be restored to you. So I just wanted them to know that on a day-to-day basis what I was doing, that I was doing everything that they would have expected of me, and at the end of nine days, my parents weren't there.

and I asked, where are they? And, well, be patient. We did get a postcard from them from a transit camp indicating that they were on their way to an

unknown destination and begging Mrs. C avionne to please take care of me. Obviously, they must have had a premonition they may not come back. And she did everything in her power to save me.
In early November, she took her 4-year-old daughter, a beautiful little girl with blue eyes and curly blonde hair, and she said with my daughter in tow, we are less likely to be stopped by the police for interrogation. We look more like a family. And she brought me down to Marseille from where the ship to get to America was supposed to leave.
>> Bill Benson: One more interruption. May I take the liberty of just reading a little something from your diary?
>> Peter Feigl: Please.
>> Bill Benson: As you said, you knew your parents were arrested. You didn't know where they were. You did get a postcard from them. On the 29th you wrote, the mailman was here. I run to ask if there is something for me. Praise the lord, a postcard from you telling me that you are together at Camp du Vernet. But from that point forward the rest of your diary is very painful to read. Almost daily you just wrote things like, nothing from you, September 7. Still nothing, September 11. And the next day you wrote, I cried today. Who knows where you were taken to? And it goes from there.
and you would not see that diary for another 40 years. Do you recall what it was like to write those entries?
>> Peter Feigl: Honestly, no, not today. But as the diary reflects, and as I mentioned, my parents were everything. And I missed them terribly. And I constantly reflected that in my diary when I was desperately

waiting for word to find out where are they, what is happening to them, will I see them again. And that's quite evident in the diary entries.
>> Bill Benson: It sure is. Peter, I interrupted you. Here you are thinking you're anything going to leave for the United States in FOEF November 1942.
>> Peter Feigl: I arrive in Marseille on the 6th of November. Turned over to the Quakers by Mrs. C avionne. I was told that the ship would leave on the 24th of November. On the 10th of November, the allies at that time primarily the British, the Americans, and some Australians and New Zealanders, without consulting me, I might add, decided to land in north Africa. And that was the pretext that the Nazis used to go ahead and occupy the so-called free or unoccupied zone of France. And the first thing they did was block all ship traffic in and out of Marseille. In my diary I said, goodbye, America. I came to the realization that I'm not going to be leaving on the 26th or the 27th.
>> Bill Benson: You were literally almost on the whatever.
>> Peter Feigl: Right. It was another shock.
And I was then bounced more or less from one orphanage to another. The Quakers had to shut down their operation in Marseille at that time. And I didn't know what was going to happen to me. And ultimately in January, rumors began to circulate in Marseille that the Germans and the French were about to round up all the Jews in the area. And so I was told to get ready to leave on a moment's notice. And ultimately I was given a railroad ticket and specific instructions on

where to change trains and so forth. And as I indicated in my diary, I arrived in a place called Le Chambon sur Lignon at 1:00 in the morning on a very cold day in January. I think it was January 15 or 16. Where I was met by a young man, Daniel Trocme. He was there on a bicycle. And we hiked for about two hours or so before we got to his home. And I had no idea where I was. And I was dead tired by then and fell asleep. The next morning, I learned that I found myself in the village of Le Chambon.
>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about that, there's one thing that you shared with me that I think took place before that. After the Germans occupied the southern zone, a Wehrmacht camp was located near you.
>> Peter Feigl: That's a story I don't like to talk about. I did some pretty foolish things. What happened there is that in one of these orphanages, all of the other kids were Spaniards, children from refugees from the Spanish Civil War. We had very little food. We were obsessed with eating. The farm across the street from where I was was requisitioned by some S.S. with armored personnel carriers and so forth. They were having a ball, they were singing and they had music and they were eating. I spoke German. So I went over there and I started to talk to them. And they invited me to have spaghetti and meatballs with them. And I got chocolate from them. And it was wonderful. Finally one of them said to me, what's a nice German boy doing here in France at this time? And I said, sshhh, don't tell anybody. My father is in the Gestapo, and the secret police. How come? And I said, well, my father has been here, and I have

been here now since before the war. I speak French fluently. I go to school, and I report to my father everything that my classmates are telling me about what their parents are talking about. And that helps my father in his work. And they said, oh, very good. Very good.
But the director of the home had seen me go over there, and when I came back, he read the riot act to me. And he said, you're getting out of here. I don't want you here anymore. I begged him not to send me away. This is all in my diary. He sent me away about a week or 10 days later. He took me back again because I begged him to please take me back. But as I said, I did some pretty stupid things at the time. Somehow, some way, I got away with it. I don't know. I was lucky. Maybe I learned from my mother, the way she bluffed her way out of Gurs. I found a story that was intimidating to the other Germans, OK? Everybody was afraid of the Gestapo, the secret police.
>> Bill Benson: So you ended up at Le Chambon, and that is a remarkable place.
>> Peter Feigl: Le Chambon is unique in the annals of the second world war. It's on a plateau and elevation of about 3,000 feet. Very windswept, very cold. The earth, the land, is not very fertile. But the area was populated back in the 16th century when Catholics in France were killing off Protestants. There was an infamous massacre of St. Bartholomew when in one night some 10,000 Protestants were slaughtered in Paris. These refugees, these Parisian refugees, known as huguenots, were able to settle on that plateau and survive. They are -- many of them are fundamentalist Christians. They believe what

the Bible says. There's a movie made about them. Anyhow, in Le Chambon and the surrounding area, they saved some 5,000 refugees, among them some 3,500 Jews. And there was a movie made about this called "weapons of the spirit," which is the words of the pastor of the village, Andre Trocme, on the day France surrendered to the Nazis, he said, now is the time to fight the enemy with the weapons of the spirit. And the villagers understood what that meant. And I had the fortune of having a small role in that movie, "Weapons of the Spirit." There's a scene which I find especially touching. An elderly woman is shuffling toward the temple, and she is clutching a book in the crook of her arm. And the film director asked her, tell me, madame, why did you do this? You could have sold your food on the black market and enriched yourself. What you were doing was punishment by immediate arrest. You could have been killed for it. And she says, it's in the book. It says here, if someone is sick, you go to their bedside. You bring them cheer. If someone is hungry, you ask them to table and you share what food you have. If someone needs shelter, you open your door and you provide shelter. So these good people did actually put into action what the good book told them to do. They didn't just talk about it. The village was named -- there's an organization in Israel that have sought out non-Jews who helped and protect Jews during the war. And the entire village and surrounding area was named by them.

>> Bill Benson: Soon after you got to Le Chambon, your diary stops abruptly. What happened?

>> Peter Feigl: What happened

was that the man in charge, the man who had had met me at the railroad station, Daniel Trocme, the nephew of the pastor, saw me writing in the book. And he said, what is this? And he looked at it. And when he realized that it contained dates, names, addresses and so forth, he confiscated it because had it fallen into the hands of either the French police or the Nazis, it would have been compromising for a lot of people. So my diary disappeared. And for many, many years, it was gone. I began to doubt whether I had even written it. I did start a second diary subsequently. But not until many months later.
>> Bill Benson: Many months later, on September 1943, and I know we're skipping over a great deal, you were sent to yet another place to be hidden, this time at a boarding school in Figeac. And you remained there, I think, from September '43 until your escape to Switzerland in May of 1944. That's where you resumed your second -- started your second diary. Tell us about your time in Figeac, and the preparations that were made for you to escape.
>> Peter Feigl: Well, I got to Figeac because in Le Chambon, in order to make room for more people that they might save, they took those of us who spoke French fluently and who might pass by providing us with false identities. I was given a false name. I became Pierre Fesson, supposedly born in Auch. With that false identity I together with four other boys --
>> Bill Benson: Interrupting for a moment. You kept your real birthday.
>> Peter Feigl: Yes. This was done so that if someone suddenly asked, what's your birth date, you don't stammer, that you know

that. All we had to do was memorize, make sure that what is your name, you don't come up stuttering. No. You had to absolutely be sure to come up with the right false name at that time.
And we were trained to do that. So with that, we were sent to a school in Figeac, France, which was a high school. And of course we were boarding students since we couldn't go home in the evening. And in Figeac basically again there had to have been someone -- I have always wondered. Two of the five of us, two of them had a Jewish accent. And I realized that there must have been someone in that school who realized that we weren't what we were advertised to be. We were not native Frenchmen. As I found out many, many years later, it was the principal in that school. So here is someone who knew and who at personal risk also did the right thing. And protected us. But in May of 1944, first of all, on the first of January, I began to write my second diary at that point. And I again recorded on a daily basis what I was doing.
Some of us kids were doing things that could have got us into trouble, but sort of a form of resistance. The little sugar we could find we poured into the gas tanks of German army trucks that were parked in the school yard. That gums up the engines. And when the Germans tried to go somewhere, they do not go very far. The engine stops. We punctured their tires or cut the tires to let the air out. Activities which could have gotten us in jail no question about it. But we were kids, 14 to 15. It was a game. It was an adventure for us, OK?
>> Bill Benson: A couple of secondr comments about your

second diary. In the second diary you aren't really talking much about your parents. What did you think or know at that point?
>> Peter Feigl: Well, I didn't know for sure, but again rumors -- by then rumors were circulating that there were people that were being shipped east, that meant Poland somewhere and that Jews were being killed there.
but there was no proof of this. But I -- on the one hand, I kept hoping. On the other hand, there was the stories. And I didn't know. I was praying. I was hoping at the time still. But life had to go on. And in May of -- on the 20th of May,' 44, I'm now 15, an S.S. detachment came into Figeac and ordered all the males between the ages of 16 and 54 to report to the town square, the town hall, for assignment to a labor detachment. Well, I've gotten a little bit smarter by then. And I decided I had better lay low. I was still an altar boy at church that was adjacent to the school. I found my way in there. and I climbed into the bell tower and I hid up in the bell tower from where I could look down in the distance and see the town square. I spent about 24 hours there.
and when I saw the trucks leaving the following morning with all of the men that had reported there, I came down and I discovered that the other four boys that had come with me from Le Chambon were gone. So evidently they were part of that group. Many, many years later, I discovered that one of the other ones did manage to come back to the states. He survived. Why? Because he was in the hospital on that day having his appendix removed. That's how he escaped.

The other three unfortunately wound up in Auschwitz. So I was lucky I escaped.
At that point I was contacted by some underground Jewish boy scouts. And they told me that it was too dangerous for me to remain there.
I had to get ready to leave at a moment's notice again.
Ultimately with only a backpack with me I was given DIRECTIONs again to take a train, to get off at a railway station. I didn't even know it was near the Swiss border. They hadn't told me yet. I was told that at that station I would be contacted by people. Which they did. There were two coyotes, as they are called now, people who for money knowing the area help people, guide them to the border, and give them instructions on when to cross, how to cross, and so forth.
I was part of a group of some 20 kids who were led to the border. It's all described in my diary.
>> Bill Benson: It's the longest entry in your diary.
>> Peter Feigl: Yes. For instance, once I was on the Swiss side, I immediately sketched the layout of the land. There were two rows of barbed wire fences. The first one on French territory. Then there was a no man's land between it and the next barbed wire fence, which was on Swiss land. And the sort of no man's land is an open firing range. Anyone caught in that no man's land can be shot certainly by the French or the Germans.
So I describe the crossing, the weather conditions, how the people were very upset because a child began to scream and they were worried that it would alert the guards. But finally at the given sign I went over the first barbed wire fence. In my back

back pack I had 50 photographs I had smuggled out the Le Chambon. All of those photographs I donated to the museum. Some of them you can find on the second floor here.
And I managed to get into Switzerland. Once I was there I was arrested by the Swiss, of course, as an illegal immigrant. I was sent to a T.R. center outside of Geneva, where they more or less decided what they were going to do with the illegals. On the way to the interrogation, I was told by someone sort of whispered in my ear be careful, they are sending the Jews right back into Switzerland.
And at that point I was interrogated. I have a copy of the interrogation report. Again, just about everything in my tire diary is documented.
And at a certain point I pulled out of the lining of my jacket -- someone had sewn my baptismal certificate into the lining. I pulled out my baptismal certificate. Oh, you're Swiss. You're a Catholic. Welcome to Switzerland. And for me, I write in my diary, I sleep in a free country. I now was in Switzerland. For me, basically, the war ended two weeks before the Normandy landings.
>> Bill Benson: And in that entry, and I sleep soundly in a free country, is almost your last entry in the diary.
>> Peter Feigl: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Do you recall that sense of relief and freedom?
>> Peter Feigl: Yes, there was a tremendous amount of relief, especially after the Swiss authorities decided I could stay. My father had given me the name of a business associate of his in Switzerland. I gave that name to the Swiss authorities.

They contacted that family. And that family then a few days later agreed to take me in. They didn't have any children. And so I really felt comforted. At least I have someone to look after me, to take care of me. And I spent a year in that family. By that time, I was difficult to -- I was a difficult child. Let's put it that way. And after a year, they said to the Red Cross, please take this kid off our hands. We've had enough of him. I was then bounced from one place to another. Ultimately -- well, first of all, by 1945, when the Soviets came across Auschwitz, that was the first death camp to be, quote, liberated by them. In Switzerland, there was free press. For the first time appeared photographs taken of Auschwitz. And articles about the camp. And of course that is when I had the first realization that I had to confront and say, undoubtedly, my parents must have wound up there.
And by 19 -- shortly after the war, May or June of 1945, I was contacted by the Red Cross. My grandmother, my uncle, and my aunt in America, the grand mother who had fled from Belgium with me.
>> Bill Benson: The one who stayed with the aunt in Toulouse?
>> Peter Feigl: Yes. They were all looking for me. And so then they proceeded to try to obtain a Visa to come to the United States. And ultimately in July of 1946 I succeeded in getting a Visa and a ship to come to America. And I came here.
>> Bill Benson: And the rest is history, as they say. You joined the air force.
>> Peter Feigl: I joined the air force. I joined the air force mostly because I had to get away

from my grandmother. The last time she saw me I was 11. I am now 17 1/2. And I am told, I want you in bed at 9:30. I don't want you to go to Central Park. I don't want you to go out with American girls. They have intentions. I was looking for those girls.
Anyhow, I had to get away from her.
The best thing was to join the Air Force.
>> Bill Benson: And in the Air Force, you dealt with captured German documents. There is so much more you could tell us. With the few minutes we have left, should we entertain a couple of questions from the audience?
>> Peter Feigl: By all means.
>> Bill Benson: We have a few minutes for just a couple of questions. We ask that if you have a question you go to one of the two microphones in each isle if you would. That way everybody in the room including us will hear the question.
I'll repeat it as best I can, and Peter will respond to it. So anybody have a question? If not, I'll continue for the few minutes we have left.
>> Peter Feigl: Go ahead. I don't bite.
>> Bill Benson: Here we have someone coming up.
>> Peter Feigl: Very good. Hi.
>> Thank you very much for speaking to us today. I go to college at the university of Arkansas and several researchers there who I have taken classes from have spoken about Holocaust research. And right now there's sort of this thing happening where there's a conspiracy theory that the Holocaust didn't really happen. What do you have to say to those people who are perpetuating this?

>> Bill Benson: What do you have to say to people who deny that the Holocaust occurred?
>> Peter Feigl: Well, there are many answers to this. But the answer that I like best of all for me is that there are some 85 million German citizens nowadays, and they have been paying restitution since the 1950s. And they are being taxed for this annually. And they are spending a lot of money in maintaining the death camps for the world to see what happened. They have monuments. They have reminders all over Germany if you travel there.
in the middle of Berlin you come out of a subway station and there's a big sign, places never-to-be-forgotten with a list of all of the concentration and the death camps. So why on earth would they be doing this? We Americans are all taxpayers. We all complain about that. I guarantee you if there was some way of denying it, they would have done so and would have stopped contributing.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you. Time for one more question.
Yes, sir.
>> First, thank you for your service.
And my question was you went over like the book that you read as a kid "The Poisonous Mushroom."
Did you experience segregation in the European areas? That was kind of like what African-Americans experienced and Mexicans in the United States during the civil war -- not civil war but the civil rights period.
>> Bill Benson: Did you experience personally anti-Semitism and segregation? Or your parents.
>> Peter Feigl: Very good question.

Honestly, I never experienced it because first of all, until I was baptized, I didn't know about religion. And whatever my parents didn't practice anything about Judaism. They were Jews usually have on their door a menorrah -- a Maine me ZUZa. And we never had this.
Many Jews keep menorrahs, candles and stuff. There was absolutely nothing to indicate to me that I had anything to do with this. And once I was baptized, of course, as I said, when I was asked to fill out the documents about coming to America, my religion was Catholic. So I never had that experience. And I don't look particularly Jewish. I don't speak with a Jewish accent. So fortunately for me I never had to be called the dirty Jew or what have you.
>> Bill Benson: However, you were hunted by the French police.
>> Peter Feigl: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: And you know that if you had been found, you would have been treated very harshly.
>> Peter Feigl: Of course. Because they consider this a matter of race, rather than a question of religion or belief.
>> Bill Benson: Peter, we are at the end. But I'm going to take the liberty of saying thank you very much. I think we're going to stop there.
I just have to ask you how you got that -- the short version of how you got that diary back that was confiscated 40-some years later.
>> Peter Feigl: All kinds of weird coincidences. OK. So we have to move up to about 1981,' '82. I had a consulting company at the time. We had a contract with the Algerian government. It was a six-year contract. And the

last year of the contract, we were being sued by the Algerians. I needed an attorney. I went to my attorney here in Washington, Clark Clifford. Some of you may have heard of the name. Clark said, go to Paris. Talk to a man named Samuel pizar. An international attorney. I went to see him. I told him about the problem. He said, gee, you speak French very well. Where did you learn your French? And I said, well, I learned it in Belgium and then in France.

Where in France? Well, I was in Le Chambon. And he said, oh, I have a cousin in Hollywood. He is a film producer. Do you mind if I give him your name? And I said, no, not at all.

So he got in touch with me. He asked me to come to Le Chambon while he is filming his documentary. When the documentary was shown finally in 1987, in movie theaters in France, shortly thereafter I received a letter from a man in Paris. Are you the Pierre who wrote a diary dedicated to his parents? I suspected a scam at first. I went to see the man in Paris. Sure enough, he had my diary. Where did you get my diary? Well, I am a collector of such memorabilia. I bought it at a flea market in France.

Some time three or four years after the war.

And I thought that you had died or that you had been killed, and by the way, I published your diary in France back in 1984 or '85. So I wanted my diary back. So he said, well, I'm a poor man. I had to buy it on the flea market. I had to pay him $265, but I finally did get my diary back. But that's how I got it back.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Peter.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to close our program in just a moment. I want to thank all of you for being here with us today, remind you that we will have programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the 8th of August. All of our programs will be available on the museum's youtube channel. I am going to turn to Peter in just a moment to close our program. When he's finished, he's going to exit the stage, go up to the entrance, and there he will be available to sign copies of Alexandra Zapruder's book. They really are remarkable reading, along with the diaries of other young people from the Holocaust. It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person gets the last word. And so with that, I'd like to turn back to Peter to close our program. When he finishes, before he exits the stage, our photographer Lolita will come up on the stage and take a photograph of Peter with you as the background. So we ask that you stay with us until that photo is taken, if you don't mind. Peter?
>> Peter Feigl: Thank you, bill. I have spoken to many, many high school s, universities, and many groups. And frequently the question arises, what relevance does my story have to you, to the audience? And my answer to that is especially in schools, in high schools, I tell them, look, hatred is something that you have to learn. I was taught to hate Jews, in fact. And I hated Jews. Not knowing any better. And this business of hating mostly minorities is something that unfortunately there's too much of it going on in the world. Normally it is something that is exploited by dictators. And what happens is that in Germany, you had a

situation after the first world war with very high unemployment, political parties fighting with one another, street fights, hyperinflation. Finally someone emerges and says, I am the saviour of the nation. I am going to make Germany respected again. And just follow me, and you know all the problems that we have -- I need a scapegoat. The Jews. Now the Jews represented less than 1% of the total population of Germany. So, you know, if you're a bully, you don't pick on somebody bigger than you. You pick on the little guy. The big guy might punch you. So there is in this room no one and in schools no one who has not either been bullied by somebody or was the bully or has witnessed bullying.

And I am here to tell you that the next time you see this happening, it behooves you to stop it right then and there. why? I'll give you two reasons. The first reason is because it is the right thing to do. And everybody, no matter what your background, you know damn well you know right from wrong. But if that isn't enough reason, I will give you a second reason. And that's called self-preservation. You never know. There may be a time coming where you belong in a minority. Whether that's people with red hair and freckles or someone with dark skin or some people with a foreign accent who are getting -- who are in the minority who are the scapegoats. And that is the other reason why you have to stop it, because otherwise you may be the one who is part of that minority. So when it happens, stop it.

[Applause]

Thank you.