

Holocaust Memorial Museum First Person

Peter Feigl

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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. This is our 20th year of the First Person program. Our First Person today is Mr. Frank Liebermann, 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. Frank 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 Frank 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 Time 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 Frank is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. We begin with this photograph of Frank Liebermann. He was born in Gleiwitz, Germany (now in Poland) in 1929. He was the only child of Hans and Lotte Liebermann. On the left we see Hans

Lieberman and on the right we see Lotte and her first granddaughter Joannie. Both of Frank's parents' families had lived in that part of Germany (now Poland) for several generations. Frank is pictured here with his paternal grandparents, Bernard and Jenny Lieberman. Hitler came to power in 1933.

When Frank began school in 1935 Jewish students were separated from the non-Jewish students and fear of anti-Semitic attacks became frequent. Pictured here is Frank's first grade class on the first day of school. The cones they are holding contain sweets to make school sweet. Frank is in the 2nd row, the fourth from the right.

In 1936 Frank's father was no longer able to practice medicine as a result of anti-Jewish laws. In 1938 the family tried to obtain visas to come to the United States. Hans traveled first, and Frank and his mother followed a few months later in October of 1938. Here we see Frank's mother's ticket for the ship they took to the United States.

The Lieberman family settled in Ohio, and Frank went on to graduate from Western Reserve (now Case Western Reserve University) in 1950 with a degree in chemistry. We close with this contemporary photo of Frank.

Frank graduated from college in 1950 and started a long and successful career in the textile industry in New York City. In that same year he married Marianne, his wife of nearly 67 years, who sadly passed away in August 2017. Frank worked in textile manufacturing until 1992 when he and Marianne moved to the Washington, D.C. area to be closer to their children. Frank lasted three months in retirement before going into the travel business which he continues today, specializing in Europe and U.S. travel, including Alaska. He works with Signature Travel in Maryland. And he just told me that when he finishes the program today, he's going to work. So he will be leaving here to go continue his work today.

Frank and Marianne have three children, two daughters and a son. Their daughters, Nancy and Joan, live in this area and their son, Jerry, is in Seattle. They have five grandchildren with the youngest being age 27. Frank volunteers with the Museum's Visitor Services where you will find him here Thursday mornings. As part of his responsibilities he speaks with various groups visiting the Museum. He also has spoken to wounded veterans at the former Walter Reed Hospital, as well as at other locations.

I'm pleased to let you know that Frank's daughter Joannie and his friends Barbara Green and Jack and Judy Rogers are with Frank today seated in the front row.

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

[Applause]

>> Frank Liebermann: Hello. Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, thank you so much for being willing to be our First Person today and spend this time with you. We'll try not to hold you from getting to work too long. But we're going to keep you for our complete hour. You have a lot to share with us, so we'll jump right in if that's OK with you.

Hitler came to power in 1933. You've said that your earliest memories start in 1934 when you were 5 years old. You also said of that time all-in-all it was a good time for your parents. Tell us why that was so, and what you can about your family and their life in Gleiwitz, and about yourself in those first years of your life.

>> Frank Liebermann: My father graduated from medical school and did his residency in Greslow, which is about 100 miles away. And his teacher at the medical school basically wanted to -- was overloaded, and he sent him quite a few patients in our area

because it's 100 miles away. So that he got settled very quickly. And in fact I usually say three important things happened in 1933. One is my father got a car.

>> Bill Benson: And that was a big deal.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. He didn't need a car for the practice. It stayed in a garage about two blocks away, and we used it primarily to visit my grandparents. So I really got a chance to know them quite well. And very much appreciated that. The other thing which happened is that my mother's parents celebrated the 100th anniversary of their business in cannery, which was about -- which was probably about 40 miles to the west of Gleiwitz. And my father's family was about 20 miles east of Gleiwitz. And we visited them frequently. And the other thing of course was the fact that Hitler came to power. Those three events really influenced our lives considerably.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, you started school in 1935, attending a public school. You told me that recess was the most dangerous time for you. Will you say a little bit about that?

>> Frank Liebermann: Because then we were pretty much in a group, and we generally looked for safety between the boys section and the girls section because the propaganda was beginning to be very effective, that we were dangerous and we were free game. We also got dismissed about five minutes early and could start five minutes early -- late so that we came without being harassed.

>> Bill Benson: So basically they gave you a head start so that you wouldn't be bullied and harassed, a five-minute head start to get home.

>> Frank Liebermann: Correct.

>> Bill Benson: In 1936, circumstances for your parents turned more ominous and became more difficult if not more dangerous. What changed in 1936? And what did it mean for your family?

>> Frank Liebermann: There was a war between 1920 and '21 which eventually led to the Polish state, which didn't exist. Poland was part of the Hapsburg Empire. In order to protect both sides, there was kind of an amnesty of Nazi laws until 1936. And we knew when that would be over. And my parents, for instance, told me I have to learn how to swim because we may very well take an ocean voyage. And I remember my grandfather stayed with me at the pool until I passed the swimming test.

>> Bill Benson: In case you had to take a trip across the ocean.

>> Frank Liebermann: Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: In 1936, Frank, your mother took a trip to Israel. Tell us why she went. What was that trip about and what happened?

>> Frank Liebermann: We were looking for places to go. And at that time Israel had about one doctor for every 100 population. So basically she concluded that he couldn't make a living, and that we had to look someplace else.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned this amnesty that had been created after 1920 or thereabouts and that it was due to expire in 1936. I believe you and your family had gone on a trip in July 1936. When you returned from this vacation, when you returned, that treaty had expired. What did that mean to you?

>> Frank Liebermann: We had the brown shirts guards in front of the apartment building where my father had his office. We had "Der Sturmer," which was the main almost comic newspaper which showed -- which was only anti-Semitic images and basically was part of a major propaganda.

>> Bill Benson: And they were plastered everywhere.

- >> Frank Liebermann: Every street corner.
- >> Bill Benson: One of the things you shared with me is at that time as you mentioned you had this family business for 100 years. The dramatic downhill slide that the business took after 1936. Share a little bit of that with us.
- >> Frank Liebermann: In 1933, at the time of the anniversary, they had a turnover of about 100,000 bottles. By 1938, it was down to 20.
- >> Bill Benson: An 80% drop because of boycotts and all.
- >> Frank Liebermann: Yes.
- >> Bill Benson: So what happened to your father's practice? The brown shirts showed up trying to block people from going.
- >> Frank Liebermann: He also wasn't able to collect insurance. Germany has always had socialized medicine. When the government took care of the bills, and this was prohibited. He was prohibited from using that.
- >> Bill Benson: So Jewish doctors could not collect under the health care system.
- >> Frank Liebermann: Correct. So he realized three weeks later than the people who lived in western Germany that he couldn't make a living. And that it wouldn't blow over.
- >> Bill Benson: And it wouldn't blow over. Once he knew he couldn't make a living being a successful physician that he had been, what did he do then?
- >> Frank Liebermann: Basically he looked at what he can do. He took a trip to the United States where my grandfather was a genealogist. And he found that all of the family was -- had two relatives in the United States who left early, mainly one of the Orgler women in the early 1700s married Michael Grant and settled in Philadelphia where they were one of the leading families. They became financiers of the revolution. And they also started Grant College in Philadelphia, which still exists. And he found out at City Hall that the granddaughter never married so had no relatives. And her brother moved out west. That was Louisville, Kentucky.
- >> Bill Benson: The far west.
- >> Frank Liebermann: And he married there but never left any trail. So his only choice was to visit somebody who had was the son-in-law of my great grandfather. Came to my great grandfather and said, I'm in some financial trouble. I need \$3,000. Which was a load of money.
- >> Bill Benson: This was in the early 1900s, right?
- >> Frank Liebermann: Yes. And he lent him the money. And never heard from him again because he used it to go to the United States. And settled in New York. And in 1938, his son was the vice president of Bendix Aviation. Which by the way an income in 1938 which was the height of the depression of \$38,000.
- >> Bill Benson: Which was a lot.
- >> Frank Liebermann: We got an affidavit from him which guaranteed that we wouldn't be on welfare.
- >> Bill Benson: Once you came to the United States.
- >> Frank Liebermann: Yes. Since we had taken advantage of something that if you took a German boat and went first class, you had a pretty good spending allowance. And basically we lived on that for about a year. And never took anything. But when Kristallnacht came, which was --
- >> Bill Benson: Frank, before we get to that, if I can talk about another couple of things. Soon after your father lost his practice and about the time that he was going to make

the trip to New York to see what he could work out, one of the things that you -- I think if I remember right that in order to make ends meet you had a family garden which was really important, I think, a plot of land where you had a tree. And that was the only safe place to play. I remember you sharing that.

>> Frank Liebermann: Correct. It was a garden which was just outside of town. It was walkable. In fact, I showed my kids where it was. And also the trail where I learned how to ride a bicycle.

>> Bill Benson: When you took a trip with your family.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And you also shared with me that your family did not keep a kosher kitchen. That wasn't what your family did. But when you were at that point that you only bought kosher meat. Will you share why that was?

>> Frank Liebermann: There were about 1,000 families in Gleiwitz. The only way to keep the butcher in business was if everybody bought kosher meat. And that was a way that the community helped each other.

>> Bill Benson: Right. Now of course as you shared, your father went to New York. He was able to meet the son of the man who had borrowed the money to go to New York and get his commitment to get you an affidavit. Tell us what happened in your father's attempts to get the proper paperwork from the embassy that would allow him to then leave.

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, in those days, corruption was rampant. We got a number as soon as he came back, which was for the visa quota. In fact, which is mentioned in our exhibit American Holocaust, which showed that the quota was never filled until 1939.

>> Bill Benson: Until 1939.

>> Frank Liebermann: So that we got the number, and nothing happened. After three months, in April, my father called a friend and said, look, why don't you send a big box of candy to Fraulein Schmidt who is the consul's general secretary? She's been known to help. So we waited about another month.

>> Bill Benson: After he had sent the chocolates.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. And nothing happened. So we called the friend again, and he said, didn't you put \$100 into the box of candy? And with a second box of candy and a \$100 bill, two weeks later we got the request for the physical. And my father took it and got a visa, which was good for 120 days.

>> Bill Benson: And that was a significant thing, that 120 limit, right?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. Because my father had to study for the state boards. He decided to try Ohio, which was passing 50% of all the people taking it. So we didn't want to use any other expenses, so that we took passage in October to be at the end of that 120 days.

>> Bill Benson: Soon after your father got the visa, when he got it before he left, he had a visit from the Gestapo. Will you talk a little bit about that?

>> Frank Liebermann: When we got the -- oh, by the way, all bank accounts for Jewish families were frozen. And you had to depend on what the state tells you you're allowed to spend. And it was forbidden to take any other withdrawals. Germany had the equivalent of a lease where the lessee basically gave a mortgage to the landlord to show that he intends to stay there. And the minute he got the visa, he called the

landlord and cancelled the lease. The day after he got a visit from two S.S. people and said, doctor, you're under arrest. He said for what? You did a major withdrawal from the bank. What did you do with that? So he said, I transferred it to my bank. And he called the bank. Fortunately the president of the bank confirmed that he had deposited that money, and they were satisfied and left. Shortly after that, he left. I think in the beginning of July.

>> Bill Benson: So now your father, he has left, leaving you and your mom behind.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: You and your mother, as you said, were able to leave in October, right before that 120-day period ended in October '38, almost four months after your father left. What was it like for you and your mother to remain in Gleiwitz with your father gone, and then describe the circumstances that led up to your departure in October 1938.

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, we had a couple of things happen. One is playing tag in the garden, I broke my arm. Now there's no way of calling 911.

So I took my bicycle and rode home. And I told my mother about it. And she immediately called the orthopedic doctor who said, I'm sorry, I don't treat your Jewish children. So she frantically started calling people in nearby places, and she did get a positive response in my dad's hometown of Boyden, who said, look, get a taxi. Go to the entrance of the Catholic orphanage, and I'll be there and I'll set the arm.

So he gave instructions to my mother and my pediatrician to prescribe the procedures of stretching. And she did such a good job that my left arm really goes further than my right arm.

[Laughter]

But it's never bothered me.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, the orthopedic surgeon and other doctors your mother tried to get, many had been former colleagues of your father.

>> Frank Liebermann: They had dinners together.

>> Bill Benson: And they would not treat you.

>> Frank Liebermann: No.

>> Bill Benson: What else happened during that summer of 1938 into the fall of 1938 while you're waiting to go? How did your mother make ends meet to be able to feed you at that point?

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, we were able to withdraw what was prescribed from the bank account.

>> Bill Benson: The little bit you were allowed to take. You had that.

>> Frank Liebermann: Correct. And we lived in a furnished home because we had given up a lease. And we survived.

>> Bill Benson: And during that time, of course, your mother is trying to make the arrangements to try to get your belongings, try to get them to go with you. Tell us about that process.

>> Frank Liebermann: We basically rented a container which was called a lift. And at that time we could still take out any belongings providing we paid 100% tax. We were able to use the bank account for that.

>> Bill Benson: You could use the bank account to pay that tax.

>> Frank Liebermann: So my mother besides furniture, which was easily transportable, also my bicycle, and my father's office equipment because again we needed to reduce

our expenses. And there was some -- but there was a customs official who checked every item going forward. And once that was done we --

>> Bill Benson: You were permitted to go.

>> Frank Liebermann: We were permitted to go.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us how much money cash were you allowed to take with you.

>> Frank Liebermann: 10 marks.

>> Bill Benson: 10 marks.

>> Frank Liebermann: Which is probably with inflation about \$50 today.

>> Bill Benson: That's what you were allowed to leave with.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. Now in the meantime you've probably heard of Munich. Where Hitler had a conference with the prime ministers of France and Britain, Chamberlain, during which for two prime ministers gave Hitler permission to invade Czechoslovakia without their consent. This was one of the travesties of pre-World War II so basically it changed the balance of power.

>> Bill Benson: And why was that significant for you at that point in time? Because it affected your ability to leave.

>> Frank Liebermann: In order to show his threat, he called back all ships at sea, which caused delay of four days the Europa, which is the ship we were booked on, had to go back to Bremer. And it took six days to across the Atlantic. And usually one day to turn it around. It's not like today where they turn it around between 9:00 and 3:00. When we got to the port, there was no ship.

We went four weeks -- 3 1/2 weeks later. And we were getting constant cables from my father, get an earlier ship, which wasn't possible because everybody was panicking. And we didn't know what it was because we got no -- all news was totally censored. There was no Internet. It was a capital offense for us to listen to foreign radio stations. For instance, Strasburg had a propaganda station. That's on the border of Germany and France. We had no idea what was happening.

We did hear that we should get back -- we have to stay another day in Bremer and can take the boat train to Bremerhaven, which is where the ship was leaving the next day. The next day which I was very pleased to hear was a holiday in the United States, Columbus Day. And then we got an idea of what was going on.

The rest of the trip was uneventful except this was during the hurricane season. And my mother -- we got the cheapest first class ticket, she got us in the nose of the ship. And my mother never left her room. And I was spending my time in the promenade deck watching the nose of the ship dive into the waves and then kind of stay under. And then when the water got off, we backed up, which was fascinating to me.

>> Bill Benson: For a 9-year-old boy standing out there.

>> Frank Liebermann: At one time I was one of six people in the first class dining room.

>> Bill Benson: Everybody else was ill or staying below.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yeah. But the five people were the captain's table --

>> Bill Benson: And you.

>> Frank Liebermann: And I had a table all to myself, which I thought was very good service.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Frank, so October 1938, you made it to the United States. You joined your father in Cleveland, Ohio, before the three of you would end up moving to Dayton, Ohio. Tell us about your adjustment when you came to the United States.

>> Frank Liebermann: I had a very easy time. In other words, I had a very friendly teacher. Mrs. Emanuel. They put me back one semester. And I had had some English lessons before. And for Hanukkah I got a sled. And it happens -- it wasn't a Flexible Flyer, but a sled that I think was \$2. But we were right at a park that had a hill. So I really enjoyed the snowfall in January. Cleveland gets quite a bit of snow. It's by the lake.

>> Bill Benson: Yes, it does. And that was January of '39. In the fall soon after you got there in the fall of 1938 --

>> Frank Liebermann: It was in February '39.

>> Bill Benson: Right. But I'm going to take you back a little bit while you're in Cleveland before that point. Right before the night of Kristallnacht, if you'll share that.

>> Frank Liebermann: That was probably the longest hour of my life. At 9:00 at night, I got a person-to-person --

>> Bill Benson: And this is November 9, 1939.

>> Frank Liebermann: I got a person-to-person call from my grandparents. I don't know if you know what a person-to-person call was. But the telephone company featured more expensive version where the operator waits for the proper person to answer the phone. And this was I believe on a Wednesday when the local movie featured I think a 25 cent ticket on a Wednesday. And my parents decided -- that was the first time they went out. And they asked a neighbor to look in on me. I wouldn't have a babysitter. But she checked a couple of times.

And when I got that call, I knew something was wrong because from the time was an hour earlier. So I knew there was a six-hour time difference. So the call at 3:00 in the morning.

>> Bill Benson: From Germany.

>> Frank Liebermann: My grandparents would not have called at 3:00 in the morning if something wasn't wrong.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Frank Liebermann: So finally my parents came back at 10:00. And they heard that my mother's brothers were arrested. The business had been confiscated. And they were desperate to try to get at least my mother's brothers out because all the people generally didn't want to leave to take the affidavits for younger ones. So my father took a Greyhound bus to New York and saw the same guy who had given him the affidavit. And he said, I know you didn't use any, but this looks like too much responsibility. Because that was too close.

>> Bill Benson: So he said no.

>> Frank Liebermann: So he said no. And he came home empty-handed. My mother's brothers did manage to get passage to Shanghai. Shanghai and the Dominican Republic were the two countries which welcomed visitors. For their expertise. And unfortunately they went on an Italian ship. In June, just before or rather during the fall of terrorists which caused Mussolini to declare war on Italy and France -- rather on France and Great Britain, and the ship could never get through the Suez Canal. So they went

back. And we really didn't get any accurate information except that we did hear through the Museum that they eventually died in Auschwitz.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, so many things you could share with us. I want you to tell us -- you had mentioned that your mother had made sure to have some of your possessions brought to the United States. Got a lift. Which followed you. The lift arrives in the United States with your belongings, including your bicycle. Tell us about that.

>> Frank Liebermann: Friends had a bicycle store, and they volunteered to pack my bicycle in a bicycle box which turned the wheels sideways and got it in the smallest possible space. And when we unpacked, they had since gotten out of Palestine. And we got a letter from them saying that we should be very careful unpacking the bicycle because inside the frame they packed a good number of gold coins which were prohibited again for severe punishment. And my father was furious.

>> Bill Benson: They inspected everything when you left, but they missed that.

>> Frank Liebermann: They missed that because they had a black cloth over it. But my father was furious that they would think of endangering our lives for personal gain. Of course again you couldn't take any money out. And people got desperate in various ways.

>> Bill Benson: But were willing to endanger your well-being and even your life.

>> Frank Liebermann: Exactly.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, after your father completed the requirements in order for him to be able to practice medicine in the United States, in Cleveland, you then moved to Dayton, Ohio. And your father went there with the intent of starting a medical practice. Tell us what happened with that, because that is so profound.

>> Frank Liebermann: One of my favorite things if you get a lemon, make lemonade. He sent in his application for the medical society in Dayton. As soon as he opened his office. And didn't hear anything. And then all of a sudden, there was an emergency meeting on a Friday night, which of course is a Jewish Sabbath. And you have to realize being part of a medical society is a license for legitimacy. And apparently somebody called the Dayton --

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us that, what did the medical society do?

>> Frank Liebermann: Requiring citizenship.

>> Bill Benson: They passed a resolution --

>> Frank Liebermann: And citizenship takes five years after we filed first papers, which we did immediately.

>> Bill Benson: So here they passed that because your father seeks application to get in, and they deny him because now they have required the citizenship.

>> Frank Liebermann: Correct. The next morning a reporter for "The Dayton Herald" called my father's office. This was a Saturday. And said I'd like to see you. He said, I have an open office. I'm here today. And when he came in, he said, would you please give me your credentials? Where you studied and your license. And any other paraphernalia. I'd like to see it. The next morning "The Dayton Herald" ran an editorial page, freedom of opportunity in the United States. The next Monday my father had 11 new patients. And this really caused our resettlement to be fast.

During World War II and immediately after he obviously couldn't give any affidavits. But by the end of the war he basically gave 107 affidavits to displaced persons in order to do what he couldn't do for his own family.

>> Bill Benson: So our audience understands is what that meant is each time he was able to make that affidavit, he was basically saying, I will take responsibility for this person if they can't make a go of it here.

>> Frank Liebermann: Correct.

>> Bill Benson: 107 people.

>> Frank Liebermann: In fact he got a major award, together with President Truman for the 75th anniversary of the international highest organization, which is a resettlement group for his work as an advocate.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, as you said, he was able to really rescue 107 people but he couldn't save his own family. When did your parents after the war -- when did your family learn about other members of the family?

>> Frank Liebermann: Just as we stopped hearing from them. We used to get Red Cross letters heavily censored until about 1943. From so-called benign concentration camp, which put on a show for the Red Cross. And then went back to their old ways as soon as they left.

But then they basically got a confirmation from Leo Beck. Leo Beck was the chief rabbi in Berlin who had his first pulpit in Auburn, which was my grandparents home, and he married my grandparents. So my mother knew him from old days. And he visited the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. My parents went there, and he confirmed that they were deported at the end of '43.

>> Bill Benson: To Auschwitz.

>> Frank Liebermann: And of course we got the final papers through the Museum who digitalized all of the German papers. The Germans covered all the bases and recorded everything. There's a German word for it that means thoroughness.

>> Bill Benson: Did any other family members survive?

>> Frank Liebermann: A distant cousin. The relationship is Linda Gordon. Shared a grandfather with me. But so she was a step -- a distant stepcousin. They used whatever bribes they had to and got to Panama. They eventually went to the United States. We've kind of adopted them as family here. Which is very nice.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, in the little time we have left, and I know we're going to turn to our audience for a few questions, you returned to Gleiwitz. You mentioned earlier you showed your children. What was that like for you to take your family back to the place that you lived as a child?

>> Frank Liebermann: I resisted doing this even though my three children said they were really interested in seeing where we came from. But something happened in I believe 2003. The city of Gleiwitz, which is now Poland, was kind of reconfirming its history because all of the Germans had left, and all of the Poles who lived in the Ukraine which the Russians took over basically were used to resettle eastern Germany. So they were trying to kind of redo the history.

>> Bill Benson: Redo their history, yeah.

>> Frank Liebermann: And at that point, I said let's go. We all met in Berlin. And we drove to Gleiwitz. And there were seven of us. One of my daughters worked for AmeriCorps. One of my granddaughters rather. And the other two couldn't make it. But my grandson did together with Joannie and her husband. And Gleiwitz happens to be about 35 miles from Auschwitz. They decided to go. I decided I don't need to see it. But this was an interesting experience.

>> Bill Benson: I can only imagine.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes. And I have since taken Joannie's other daughter. When I went hiking with them in the giant mountains between Poland and Slovakia. But it was only a detour of about 50 miles. So we stopped to take a look. And, you know, every time I went there, I kind of went like this. How could I have been part of this? It's hard to believe.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, your mother -- now, before I ask about your mom, tell us how you met your wife Marianne.

>> Frank Liebermann: I was by that time the family driver. And my parents went cross-country twice on different routes. We really wanted to know the country. So we also went to New England. And my parents wanted to stop to rest after a strenuous trip. And settled in a small hotel in Lake Placid, New York, which is very active community in the winter. In fact, the Olympics were held there. But in summer it's absolutely dead with old people.

[Laughter]

>> Frank Liebermann: And we were the only people under 40 in the hotel. So it was kind of -- it just had to be. Not only that, but she went horseback riding with her father, who partly fell off the horse. And since we did -- we exchanged addresses. She wrote me a letter, and I answered it.

And about six months later, my parents had their 25th anniversary and decided to go to New York to celebrate. And I had nothing to do, so I called Marianne who had gone with her parents. She took a course at Penn State, and they also wanted to rest for a week. So when -- after we corresponded a few times, I said, wouldn't it be nice? I have nothing to do over Washington's birthday, which is a long weekend. I'd like to see what Syracuse looks like. I was in Cleveland at Western Reserve. And that started something.

>> Bill Benson: And that is right, started something. And there is a pretty amazing coincidence about when she came to the United States.

>> Frank Liebermann: We were on the same boat. She was on the ship which was called back. Four weeks before.

>> Bill Benson: As they made their escape from Germany as well.

>> Frank Liebermann: Well, from Austria. And they had business connections. And they were fortunate that her grandfather was a physician for an international insurance company. And when he died in 1937, they were able to get the life insurance policy transferred out of Germany. And they got an affidavit without any liability from a client. In Philadelphia.

>> Bill Benson: Amazing. I think we'll stop between us for the moment and turn to our audience. Should we do that? We have time I think for a couple of questions.

We have microphones in the aisle. We ask that you use the microphone. Try to ask the question -- make the question as brief as you can. And I'll repeat it just to make sure we heard it correctly. There we go. Thank you. OK. Yes, sir

>> Mr. Liebermann, thank you so much for helping us not to forget. Listening to you speak and standing in this awe-inspiring place, it's difficult to imagine we see children's plaques and say we will never forget. I'm just wondering -- I'm hearing some things today even among our political leaders here in Washington, Congressmen, saying

things of an anti-Semitic nature. I'm a bit shocked by it. Has it always been there? Are we just more bold about it? Are we at risk for it happening again?

>> Frank Liebermann: I basically cannot make a political comment. But the medical society tells you something.

>> Bill Benson: That anti-Semitism was there very much back then.

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And it remains a tremendous concern, Frank, everywhere, right?

>> Frank Liebermann: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: We'll leave it at that.

>> Thank you for being here.

>> Frank Liebermann: I'm sorry I can't answer it in more detail.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

Yes, ma'am. I think this will be our last question, I think. No, we have one over here. Go ahead.

>> I just have a question. You spoke about your bike that you brought over. I was wondering if you had that for quite a long time. Or if you still have it or what happened to your bike.

>> Frank Liebermann: It had 28-inch wheels and I couldn't get spare tires for it. So reluctantly I traded it in for a Schwinn bike that was much harder to ride and heavier.

>> Mr. Liebermann, thank you so much for being here. I'm with my students today. And thank you for being such an example of the strength of the human spirit. You just have so much joy and hope. Could you just share with us how you maintain that throughout your challenges in your life?

>> Bill Benson: How you many maintained your hope and joy.

>> Frank Liebermann: I have always been an optimist. And our survival helped a lot. And I really -- I never considered myself a refugee. Because of what happened -- oh, one other thing I forgot to say. Monday morning, Good Samaritan Hospital in Dayton, the Chief of Staff called my father and of course asked him to come out. And he was on the junior staff until he was a citizen. And on the senior staff for the rest of his practicing days until 1972.

>> Bill Benson: Frank, we're going to close our program now. I'm going to turn back to Frank for one more time. So we ask that you stay with us. I might also mention your father was remarkable. We don't have time to go into it. But your mom wrote a book about what you all went through and published a book.

>> Frank Liebermann: Basically she wrote a book "My Life in Two Worlds" on the merging of my three children. And she really had trouble doing it because nobody wanted to remember. But we do have it. It's at the museum. And I feel good about it.

>> Bill Benson: I want to thank all of you for being with us today. I remind you that we'll have First Person programs each Wednesday and Thursday until August 8. All of our programs will be on the YouTube channel after we've done them, and all of the programs until the end of May will be livestreamed. One way or the other we hope you'll see additional programs this year. Thank you for being with us.

[Applause]

>> Frank Liebermann: I get another chance?

>> Bill Benson: He gets another chance. It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. And so with that, I turn back to Frank to close our program.

>> Frank Liebermann: When I went to Berlin and Gleiwitz, I decided it was high time that I make peace with Germany. Because hate is counterproductive, and in three generations, and you can't hold children responsible for parents. Or grandparents or great grandparents. So I have now gone back a few times to learn more about what my kids talk about my somewhat generic behavior. And now have to add that in view of what I have said now, I have had a chance to live the American dream. When I said that when we were in Poland I had to pinch myself to think that I was living there, that I might have lived there, I realized how lucky I am. And I want to share that with you. And I want to wish everybody the best. Thank you.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: We invite anybody who would like to come up on the stage to meet Frank, shake his hand, take a picture with him or ask a question. Please feel free to do that. We just ask if you do that you come up on the steps and go back down on the steps. But please we do welcome that.