

Holocaust Memorial Museum First Person
Susan Warsinger
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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. David Bayer, 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. David 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 David 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 June 6. 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 David is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. We begin with this 1945 portrait of David Bayer after liberation taken at a studio in his hometown. David was born in Poland on September 27, 1922. David will be 97 this year. On this map of

Europe, the arrow points to the approximate location of Kozienice, David's hometown. This is a contemporary photograph of David's home in Kozienice, Poland. David was the second of four children. In this 1938 photo of a Zionist youth group, David's brother Joshua is circled.

In 1939, German troops invaded Poland, starting the Second World War. The next year, the Bayers were forced to move into the Kozienice ghetto. This is a view of the Kozienice ghetto through the barbed wire fence that enclosed it.

In September 1942, the ghetto was liquidated and its inhabitants, including members of David's family, were deported to the Treblinka killing center. On this map the arrow points to Treblinka.

David was transported to Pionki, an industrial complex that produced munitions. In 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz. The second arrow points to Auschwitz. Here we see a fence around Auschwitz I, the main camp. As the Soviet army neared, David and the other prisoners were sent on a death march. However, David managed to escape into the forest and was found by the Soviets.

He spent two years at the Fohrenwald displaced persons camp in Germany. In this next photo we see David, who is circled, with friends at an airport near the D.P. camp in 1946. Later that year, David moved to Panama. We close with this photo of David standing next to his employer's horse in Panama City.

After a remarkable year in Panama, David went to Israel as a soldier in Israel's War for Independence and saw a great deal of combat as the State of Israel was created.

Eventually, David returned to Panama before coming to the United States to start a family and his new life.

Today, David and his wife, Adele, live just outside of Washington, D.C. The Bayers have two children, daughter Sandra and son Mark, two grandchildren and a great grandson, Miles, who is now 5 years old. Their grandson Josh, who served in the Israeli Army, is a civil engineer in Virginia. Their granddaughter Jennifer, who is the mother of David and Adele's great-grandson, is here today with her husband Jason Miltonberger. Since 1992 David has volunteered his time in the Museum's Registry. As part of the Registry David researches and compiles lists of those who survived the Holocaust as well as those who perished. Among other purposes the Registry helps make it possible for survivors, family members and others to find those who may have survived.

In addition to our First Person program, David speaks with groups of visitors at the museum especially those who are Spanish-speaking, as David is fluent in Spanish. He says speaking with kids is especially important to him.

With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. David Bayer.

[Applause]

David, thank you so much for joining us and being willing to spend this time with us for your First Person program. You have so much to share with us. We can't possibly cover even the beginning of it, but we'll give it a good try. Let's start first with it was less than a month before your 17th birthday when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. Before you talk about your life during the Holocaust, please tell us about your family, your community, and you in Kozienice in the years leading up to the invasion of Poland. What was your family's life like?

>> David Bayer: I was born in a town in Poland called Kozienice. In Polish, it means nothing happened to the goat.

[Laughter]

I figured that would get a laugh. That's the name of my town, nothing happened to the goat. My father was a religious Jewish student. He married my mother when they were young. And my grandfather wanted him to be something in the synagogue and praying and study the Bible. My father didn't want to do that. He went into business for himself. What did he open up? A shoe factory. And when I was a young kid, started small and bought machinery and everything else.

And it became a big factory. He sold shoes all over Poland, wholesale. To stores. We had a big house and a backyard with 25 to 30 people working. And I went to school. And I had an older sister. In 1939, my brother was 12 years old, and my little sister was 8. And my parents were in their 40s. My mother was religious. She was going to the synagogue every Saturday. My father also went, but he skipped a lot of times.

[Laughter]

And I was happy. I went to school, the Polish government school. And I had a lot of friends. And we lived across from our church in a nice neighborhood. And we had a maid in the house. We had a good life.

>> Bill Benson: David, you mentioned that you lived across from a church. You lived in the Christian part of Kozenice, right?

>> David Bayer: The majority where I lived was a Catholic church. And I had a neighbor, the priest, who was in the house next to our house. And I met him every day practically, and he would tell me to go to the store to buy him cigarettes, to buy him other things. You know, they gave me money for ice cream. You know, I was 12, 13, 14 years old.

>> Bill Benson: David, one more thing before we move on. You told us that the name of Kozenice, meaning nothing happened to the goat. Am I right that your dad, your father's shoe business, they stamped a goat on the --

>> David Bayer: It was a seal of the goat.

>> Bill Benson: On the soles of the shoes? Like a mountain goat.

>> David Bayer: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: David, once the Germans occupied Poland --

>> David Bayer: The Germans came in 1939, September 1. And they came into my town the 9th of September. And the minute they came into our town, they plundered everything. They came into our house. And they didn't ask questions. They took everything from my mother. Dishes. Tablecloths. Towels. The drapes that were for the window. Everything they wanted, they took. My mother was crying, you know. We didn't say nothing. Some were nice, they didn't say nothing, they just looked around. But some of them were very rough characters. They were thieves.

And one day they took my father out to work, to dig ditches. And my mother was staying near the window and crying all the time. And she said, go see your father. Go see your father. So I went out to the church garden and I went to see the group of Jews with shovels and digging, covering up ditches. I don't know what they --

>> Bill Benson: Like trenches? Making trenches?

>> David Bayer: Yes. So my father saw me, and he sneaked away and I took over his job.

>> Bill Benson: You took his job?

>> David Bayer: The Germans came by every five minutes. And so to get the right amount of people, they didn't bother. My father came home. Then I had to go work on the irrigation canal. Before the war, the Polish government was working on a canal because the river -- the Polish river is overflowing and messing up all the fields. So when the Germans came in, they continued doing the irrigation canals, but the Jews helped. Jewish young men with shovels and wheelbarrows. They didn't pay us nothing. They just gave us one piece of bread or sometimes soup. And I had to work over there every day.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to ask you a bit more about the irrigation canal. Your family was forced into a ghetto.

>> David Bayer: My family was still in the house. And we had to close the windows and the doors because we had a factory. They took this over. They wanted to come in and taking all the shoes and everything else.

>> Bill Benson: You lost everything.

>> David Bayer: They came in and everything. But we didn't advertise our factory. So they came in. We closed up the front door. But what happened, I had to work on the canal. So what happened, one day they got my -- the youngest brother. My father had five brothers. And he just got married before the war, and he wanted to stay with his wife. So he asked me if I wanted to be replaced working for the Gestapo as a house boy. A house boy cleaned the shoes, cleaned the room, taking his laundry, you know, taking care of him. A Nazi.

>> Bill Benson: So you replaced your uncle?

>> David Bayer: My uncle went home and I replaced my uncle working for this Nazi. He was a murderer. He had a dungeon in this building. And the building was -- used to be a home for priests. He kicked the priests out, and he took over the farm. Horses, cows, everything there. And also a dungeon, like a jail. And he took me down to translate from Polish to German, whoever couldn't speak German. And I spoke German.

So I went down with him in the dungeon. And he asked the Polish boy, tell me where did you get the gun? They accused him that he had a gun in the barn. And the Polish boy claims that the gun wasn't his. He never saw the gun. But he found the gun in that barn. And he was crying, that boy. He was crying. He was a blonde, good-looking boy. He had raggedy clothes because maybe he was in the army. But I don't know. He didn't want to tell me. The Polish army. But he claimed the gun was not his. And I translated four or five times. The last time I translated, the German went over with the gun and shot him, right in the basement, in front of me.

>> Bill Benson: Right in front of you.

>> David Bayer: The blood was coming out. And I was shaking. I thought he was going to kill me too. Then he told me to take him out and bury him in the field. I buried him. I got a helper from the barn. It was a Jewish boy. And I buried him in a potato field. He is probably still there now. And that's it. And I don't know his name.

>> Bill Benson: David, you also shared -- you told me about when you worked for the Gestapo officer about an incident when some other Germans destroyed Torahs and made Jews dance around them.

>> David Bayer: Yes. I did too. My German came out and took me out of the group. They used to have Germans living there. They took over from the priests and there was a lot of room, so there were plenty of Gestapo living there and working there. They went

out into the town and plundered. They brought in people and Torah scrolls and they made them dance and laughing and clapping and taking pictures.

When I came out, I had a star of David on my arm. So they made me dance too. My German who I worked for came out and took me out of the group. He didn't want me to do that dancing. He was nice to me supposedly. I was scared of him because he shot that guy. I was always scared.

But when I went home in the evening to my parents. He gave me bread. He gave me marmalade. He gave me salami a lot of times. I couldn't understand that. He was a killer, and here he gave me food. And I was afraid that he was going to kill me too.

What happened, he got transferred somewhere else. And I had to go back to work in the canal. From the canal, it was getting cold. The Germans took everybody away and shipped me to Pionki, a munitions factory. Maybe 30 or 40 miles from my hometown.

>> Bill Benson: David, before you tell us about Pionki, all of the Jews had been forced into the ghetto. You were working off on the irrigation. And while you were away, they emptied the ghetto, including your family.

>> David Bayer: My parents had to move out of the house. They had to leave everything in the house that they couldn't carry. There was furniture, beds, everything. We had about four rooms and a kitchen and a showroom, a shoe showroom for salespeople coming by for the shoes.

So what happened, we had to move into one room in the ghetto. All of the Jewish neighborhood. We moved out from the nice neighborhood. And I had to go work from the ghetto to the canal every day. Every morning and come back in the evening.

So what happened, one day the gentleman tell all of the people from the ghetto to get out in the middle of the street, line up and march to the railroad station. And only take a few things in their hands. And they had 100 freight cars on a train and they shipped them to Treblinka and killed them in one night. All of the people in one night.

How do I know that? I was taken away from the canal to Pionki to work in a munitions factory. And there in the munitions factory, about a week later, a guy from the transport from Kozienice to Treblinka came in. His name was Max Rosen Rosenblum. He was a tall, handsome guy who used to be an officer in the Polish army. He escaped from the train. I don't know how he did it. The Germans made him put all of the goods taken away from the Jewish people and put them on the train and ship it to Germany. And he hid himself under the luggage and everything. And then he jumped out from there. I don't know how.

>> Bill Benson: And came to Pionki?

>> David Bayer: Yes. Because his sister was working there. And he came in and he told us what happened to the transport of the people from my hometown. They killed them all, he said. He was there. He saw it. So I had no mother. No father. No sisters and no brother. And I was working in the munitions factory making explosives for the Germans.

>> David Bayer: And that was really dangerous work for you, wasn't it?

>> David Bayer: They taught me how to do it, with chemicals. And I was working with centrifuges every morning until night, every day, five days a week. Sometimes Saturday. Saturday was supposed to be off. So what happened if a transport of coal came in or something, we went to the home and took you out. You were tired and didn't sleep all night, and we had to work again. So we always were tired.

And the Germans didn't like tired people. They beat them. OK. I will tell them about a German who beat us every day. What happened, they came by -- or I was taken to coal mines around there. And also power stations. Jaworzno. And the Germans left me alive -- they put a number on me, B74, tattoo. And they let me live because they expected that somebody will ask for workers for the munition factories, for coal mines, and I was young and healthy. So I am waiting, you know. Whoever came and got me. So they got me to a coal mine.

>> Bill Benson: David, can I ask you a couple of questions before you tell us about the coal mine? Because that was after you left Pionki. While you were at Pionki, you tried to escape several times from Pionki.

>> David Bayer: Yeah. I know. But in Jaworzno, a German came in, a big tall German, a new guy, with a uniform with a red swastika. And they called him Coppel. It means in Italian a sheep. In English is a rat. And he was a sheep, all right. He walked around. He was maybe six to seven feet tall, and walked around with a golf club, a wooden golf club, a long one with a big thing on the end. And if he didn't like anybody, zoom over the head. He killed a lot of people that way. Just because he didn't -- you didn't bow to him or you didn't say hello or you didn't run out fast enough when they tell them to get out of the line and take you to work.

So this was the murderer who was killing a lot of people. So we didn't know what to do. You know, everybody wanted to avoid him. But he -- I went to work in the coal mine. They asked for volunteers. If you don't volunteer, they take you anyway. So I went to work in the coal mine.

In the coal mine, it was the same thing. There was a Gestapo man in uniform who was in charge of that area that we were digging for coal. And there were a lot of also Polish miners, Christian Polish miners, who were working the mine before the war. And during the war the Germans kept them there and pay -- they paid them, supposedly. And the guys were skeletons. But they give us soup and a piece of bread. That's all. And we have to work hard. And a lot of times they couldn't lift the shovel because the shovel was so big, a heart-shaped shovel, and it's very heavy. And we had to produce 18 to 20 wagons a day.

>> Bill Benson: That was your quota, right?

>> David Bayer: Everybody had a number you had to hang up on the wagon. That's what we would do. They were stealing wagons from somebody else, the next shift. I would take their number and put that number. And we cheated the Germans like this. What happened, this German Nazi comes in with a broken stick, with a copper handle, you know, like a miner's -- he is supposed to check where to drill or not to drill. And the Polish miner that was doing the drilling and putting in the dynamite. But you put dynamite, you have to yell "fire in the hole," "watch out," you know. One Polish miner was a Polish patriot, and he was the underground and all kind of things. He made a hole in an area, and he put dynamite. And he didn't yell "fire in the hole." And this German came in and he was checking the ceiling, the walls. And they pushed the button, and a big explosion. And the German got killed, covered up with a whole wall of coal. So what happened, nothing happened. They investigate. But what happened there was this. There was a young man, a Hasidic young boy, his name was Rubin. Rubin was very religious, and he was praying day and night. Whenever you looked at him, he was

reciting the sound. And we called him crazy. And he said to us, I'm not crazy. God will help. God will help.

The reason I mention that is because a lot of people ask me if I believe in God and all of that stuff. We prayed all right, but nothing happened. Only thing when the explosion happened, he came over to me and said to me, am I still crazy?

[Laughter]

>> David Bayer: Because every time they ask me about God, people ask me about God, I don't want to talk about it. We didn't believe it. We didn't know what to do. So the only answer I could give is when Rubin wanted to believe that God helped us and this German got killed because he beat us to death. And he said, I'm not crazy. I still pray to God. And I met him a few years ago in Jerusalem. He became a teacher of Hebrew. Very religious. This happened in the coal mine.

>> Bill Benson: David, in addition to working in the coal mine, you were also forced to do slave labor with locomotives and you were severely burned in a locomotive explosion. Will you tell us about that? You were severely burned in a locomotive explosion.

>> David Bayer: This is a tragedy. This was bad. I went to Pionki. I was working in munitions. I was making powder for the Germans, and I was an expert. I worked on centrifuges. And there were some good Germans and bad Germans. But only they wanted was production. They used cotton to make powder. Cotton. Regular cotton. Bales of cotton used to come in, and they cleaned it and they went on a belt. And they came over to me, and I mixed it with chemicals. And I knew which ones to use. And this was not so bad.

But there were some Germans who were chasing us. There was no reason to chase us because the machinery, we cannot go past the machine -- faster than the machine.

Then the Germans went to rush go to Europe and take Russia. If they were to ask me, I would have told them they were going to lose it. Napoleon lost it. Everybody who went to Russia, they lost. They beat them like hell, and they went back running.

So when they came to Poland, I was working in the munitions factory. All of the equipment, all of the explosives, everything, they shipped it to Germany. And they took us to march. And we went on a death march from Poland to Germany. Whoever couldn't walk, a bullet in the head. We were walking. We didn't have enough food. They gave us the bread.

>> Bill Benson: It was winter time?

>> David Bayer: And the guys -- you had a piece of bread, and they would take it from you. They would steal it from you. You hold on. But you pass out and they would take it from you. And then I had a friend of mine. We were working together. We were holding hands all the time because if one falls down, the other one helped each other. He got chopped because he couldn't get up anymore. They would say, move. And he was lying there. And so I went back -- moved back and got this jacket, and I cried over him. And I prayed a memorial prayer. I said Kaddish for him. His jacket was full of blood, so I cleaned it with snow.

>> Bill Benson: It was a really, really terrible winter too that you were being forced to walk in.

>> David Bayer: Yes. I was cold too. And I went to our camp in Germany. And there in the camp there were American soldiers and British soldiers who jumped airplanes. They had a camp for soldiers.

>> Bill Benson: For the prisoners of war, right?

>> David Bayer: For the P.O.W.s. And there were a lot of Russian prisoners. And I didn't have enough food. I didn't have nothing. Just the clothing on me. And I saw two Russians, and I talked to them. And they said they were on their way but they were scared. They were scared of me too because they didn't want to have somebody hanging onto them. Sneak under the barbed wire. And I saw it. So I did it after them.

>> Bill Benson: After they went, you went?

>> David Bayer: I went after them. And finally they said come on over. So we all stayed together. But before I run out from there, there were warehouses along that camp. Everybody around the warehouses were -- every photo was taken. But there was margarine as well. I put it under my jacket, under my shirt. I was running, and it melted. A mess. And I had the margarine, and the Russians, they said, do you have food? And I said, I have margarine. So we took it from my body and we ate it.

So we had margarine and bark from the trees. That's all we had. And we laid down for six days and six nights. I was lying under a tree, and we looked for mushrooms. Roots. We ate that too. And then the Russians came in. The Germans escaped, and the Russians came in. And I was free. Well, what do I do?

>> Bill Benson: Tell us how you were liberated. How did the Russians find you? Because you're out there hidden in the woods with no food other than bark and the little margarine.

>> David Bayer: The Russians didn't know if we were going to make it. But we were three people. And I was entitled to a few hours in the middle. And then we changed it around. And the snow melted under us anyway. And then we didn't know what to do. We took branches and covered ourselves up. We had shootings going on like crazy. Planes coming and going. But they were not American planes. They were not German planes. They were only Russian. And they throw a lot of bombs not in the forest. Outside. We heard them. But everything was fired. We said we have to get out, because we're going to die.

So we walked out, and there were Russian soldiers with guns waving. And we went over to them and waved to them. They realized that we are prisoners ourselves. And they tried to help. And they helped us. The one Russian had bread. They gave us bread. Something to drink. And they took us into a house where a German woman and their daughter lived. A little small house with a farm. And the woman was crying. The old lady was crying. She was scared of the Russian. The Russians were not so angels, you know.

>> Bill Benson: Just so the audience knows, because you're in Germany now.

>> David Bayer: Yes. It's a German-Polish -- it was on the German border, but the majority is German. So the soldiers told this woman to take care of me and watch me, gave me any clothes that they had. She got clothes from her husband because her husband was in the army. It was too big. But I put them on.

>> Bill Benson: David, how much did you weigh when you were liberated?

>> David Bayer: I weighed maybe 60 kilo. The bones were sticking out. The German woman said I will give you food. And she did. She baked us some soup. She had a cow. The cow looked like me.

>> Bill Benson: I think you weighed about 70 pounds.

>> David Bayer: It was a war. My shoes were wooden shoes. She gave me a pair of shoes.

>> Bill Benson: And then you decided to go back to Poland.

>> David Bayer: I decided to walk to Poland.

>> Bill Benson: Walk to Poland, OK.

>> David Bayer: Go to my hometown. And I went and it took a long time. But I didn't want to stay there for nothing in this world. And I still have a big house there, bigger than this building. There used to be a factory. And a bank on top of the building. It's still mine. I'm the only one left. I couldn't find no family, nothing. I had uncles. Everybody was taken away. And I went to a few cities looking for my relatives, and I couldn't find nobody.

>> Bill Benson: David, you told me that there had been a man who had kept some of your family's belongings for safekeeping. And you went there. And what happened?

>> David Bayer: He used to work for my father. Leo. A Polish man. My father bought him the land, built him a house and everything else. He was a nice guy. But whatever I could take out from the ghetto, I took it over to him. And I had a cross of a Christian. And the Polish people -- well, the Germans didn't know me. They would see the cross. I went out under the barbed wire, and I went to him and I took a lot of stuff. And whatever clothing. And I had a big, big table. And I couldn't take it. So I got a permit from my Jewish community so that he could -- that he bought it from me. He didn't buy it from me. I told him to take it and put it in his house. And I sold it after the war, after I met him. He still had it. And he said sell it for the money.

>> Bill Benson: So you were able to get that back.

>> David Bayer: But I'm still in Poland. My father gave away a lot of stuff to other people, and they didn't want to give it back. And I didn't want to try even. I was checking if I could. And then realized that if I go and ask that you should give me back everything that's mine, they would kill me.

>> Bill Benson: You were afraid they would kill you.

>> David Bayer: So I said I don't need that thing, and I went back to German. I went back to Germany to the D.P., displaced persons camp, established by the United States. There were camps on the Russians side, but they weren't any good. The Russians don't have anything themselves. And the Americans brought us milk and honey. Everything the Americans brought, I didn't need so much. They gave me cigarettes. I don't smoke. So I sold them. The candy, I sold it. Coffee, I sold it. And I made money.

After I making money, I said, I have to get out of Germany. And I want to go away to the United States. I had no relatives in the United States. I had to wait for a quota. I had to wait to get the papers. And it will take years. All of a sudden I got a letter from an American embassy, Munich, that somebody in Panama is looking for me. My name was on a list. And who was the guy? The boy who went to school with me. His parents immigrated before the war, took the whole family, and they lived in Panama. And he had

a list of my name. So he wrote. So I say, I will go anywhere. So I went to Panama. Didn't cost me nothing.

>> Bill Benson: That was 1947. So you were in the displaced persons camp for almost two years.

>> David Bayer: I was there since -- '45 to '47. And who do I sell all the goods? To the Germans. They had the money. They had everything. And I met a lady, a German woman driving a car in a little town. And she had the hood up of the car, and it doesn't go. I stopped by. I was on a bicycle. I went over to her and said, what's the problem? She said, I don't know. Check it out. So somebody came by. Checked it out. She had no gas. So I said, you know what, I have plenty of gas. I'll go get you some gas. And I just had to go up there to fill it. And that house, the American soldiers piled up a basement with tons and tons of gas to carry. And I stole some of it. I took some of it. So I got one, and I went back to her, and I put it in the tank. She became my best friend. She trusted me. She introduced me to a German jeweler in Munich. But it was taboo. She didn't want to introduce a Jew to the German who probably had all of the jewelry from the Jewish people that were killed.

So I said -- she wants to buy jewelry. But for food. And I got the food, so I gave her the food and she took me there. And she bought jewelry. So I bought some jewelry, and I gave it to the jeweler. I didn't have a girlfriend. I had nothing. I didn't want -- I just wanted to get out of Germany.

>> Bill Benson: So you went to Panama in 1947.

>> David Bayer: I went to Panama. And the people who took me there, the friend of mine that took me there had a daughter, and she wanted to get married. I didn't want to get married. I went to work with an Indian tribe on the border in Costa Rica. Real Indians. And I was going to make water for them. They actually was making water, but it was a primitive way. And I got more experience. And I told them I could do it. And I got experience from a guy in Panama who was selling the chemicals. So I was working with the Indians. They were very happy, and I was very happy.

>> Bill Benson: You described to me that --

>> David Bayer: They were the best people in the world.

>> Bill Benson: You said the best year of your life was that year in Panama.

>> David Bayer: I learned Spanish perfect with them. They also spoke the language which I couldn't learn. I was very happy. And then I went to a town called David. In Panama. On the border. There's a big town called David. The town was built by the United States Navy during the Second World War. It was an air base. And the Americans left the base, and it became a town.

And there was a guy, a Jewish guy from Germany. His name was Sam. He had a country store. This was the place the Indians were selling their moccasins and the shoes and everything else. They introduced me to him. And he said to me, when he saw me the first time, he said, you must be crazy to stay here. I have a business. I have an establishment and I have a wife. I'll find you a woman. I'm established. You, what are you going to do here? Why don't you go to Israel? This was 1945.

>> Bill Benson: 1947. Or 1948, right?

>> David Bayer: '48. You know, they are going to establish a country. And the Arabs are attacking. You are a young man. They need people like you. That ship is going to be in the Panama Canal this and such day. You don't have to pay nothing. It was a Jewish

agency ship. They'll give you a job to take care of your transport. The Jewish Agency brought the canal for 180 trucks, big Mack trucks from the Americans, and also about 25 Indians for airplanes. They paid for everything. And they wanted me to watch the cargo. Big ship. They are going to take it to Israel. And you with it. And that's what happened. And when I came to Haifa, I joined the army.

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about the army, if I remember correctly, you towed on the ship you were on, you towed a surplus P.T. boat that had been purchased from the army surplus or navy surplus. And you took it --

>> David Bayer: We had a lot of -- everything they bought in Germany. The Americans after the war, what are they going to do with it? The war is over, and they didn't want to give it to Germany. So they sold it. And who did they sell it too? The Jewish Agency had money and they bought everything. And the army was outfitted to the t. When I came, I didn't have no uniform. They said, wait in a camp. And the camp is called Palavinski. The people will come and get you everything. And who did I met? Rubin.

>> Bill Benson: Rubin.

>> David Bayer: And he said, oh, you are going in the army now? He didn't want to go in the army. He was a religious guy. He was pretty pious, you know, hanging around. And he was happy because he was in Israel. And he prayed day and night. I don't know if he got married or not. I don't have no idea.

>> Bill Benson: David, if I remember right, that boat that you took over was supposed to be the first ship in the Israeli Navy, right?

>> David Bayer: I became a transportation driver. And I drive munitions to the front. And the place where I was stationed was called Faratong. And it used to be Turkish. They had the area. And then the English. And the English was going to give it to the Arabs. But new trucks, new everything. And that's what happened. And then I met a consul from Panama. And he said, you can go to Panama if you don't want to go back to Israel. Because what happened? There was no jobs in Israel. There were tens of thousands of people coming from all over the world. And everybody was looking for jobs. From all over Europe, the refugees were coming to Israel. There was nowhere to sleep, OK? I was in the army. So I got a few days off. I went to Tel Aviv. I met my uncle. There are parks and they have kiosks that sell soda water, candy. Like here. You know, a kiosk. And you can buy anything to eat. So I went over to a kiosk to buy a drink, and an apple strudel. And there was a bench here and a bench here. And there were ladies sitting there, talking to each other and conversing with a man behind the counter. So I heard a lady yelling out to the man, Mr. Bayer. So I said, Bayer? My name is Bayer. And they said, no, no, the man behind the counter.

And the man behind the counter heard the conversation, and he said my name is Bayer too. It was my uncle. My grandfather's brother. When I told him my name is Bayer and I come from Kozienice. He said, where are you coming from? Are you coming from the army? And I told him yeah and everything. He said, do you remember anybody from home? So I said to him, I remember my mother told me a story about a cousin who went to Palestine on a motorcycle. He said, yeah, he is here. His name is Evan Miller. He took me there. He said, ladies, I'm closing up. He took me home, and I was happy to stay. About two blocks away in an apartment with a wife.

And he tells me the story of how he came to Israel. He came by motorcycle from Germany. How did he get to Germany? In the First World War he was a soldier in the

Russian army. He married a German woman. And then they went to Palestine. So I had an uncle already. And his daughter which wasn't married. He took me to his daughter. And the daughter is still alive.

>> Bill Benson: David, did any other family member survive?

>> David Bayer: I couldn't find nobody else.

>> Bill Benson: Nobody else. So you left --

>> Bill Benson: I stayed there for a while, and then I went to Panama.

>> Bill Benson: You went to Panama from Israel?

>> David Bayer: Yeah. In Panama for a while. And then I came to the United States. I came in transit to the United States, and I planned to jump ship. And I did. And I went to immigration, and I told them that I want to stay. And he said you are transit. You better go to Panama. From there, you work yourself up to come back here. So I said, I can't do that. If you don't do that, we'll lock you up. You're illegal. So I was on Ellis Island. And from there, I went back to Panama. And in Panama, I met a Jewish girl from New Jersey working there for the American ambassador in Panama. And she worked for the ambassador of the United States. And I asked her -- I wanted to get to the United States. She said you have a Polish father. I said, I know. So how about try to do something? And she told me I was going to marry her.

[Laughter]

>> David Bayer: So I didn't promise. I didn't say nothing that I will. But we went to the synagogue together. And they introduced me to her and everything else. Her name was Rose Epstein. She fixed me up, and I got a visa. Somebody on the consul or something. I don't remember. But I got a visa. And I got to the United States, and I saw her a few times and that's it.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: This was 195 --

>> David Bayer: Because she had another guy. I had a good excuse.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: David, you arrived here in 1955.

>> David Bayer: And I came here in 1955 legally. And I worked myself up and I went to New York to see some friends. And she introduced me to my wife. And I met her. And she speaks English. And she also spoke Yiddish. And that's what I was looking for, somebody who speaks Yiddish. So I speak Spanish, Yiddish and English. And I met my wife, and she took me to see New York and everywhere else. She was working for a big company, American company. And I got married. And I -- when I wanted to move back to Panama, she didn't want to go because it was too hot. I took her there, and she said it was too hot. So I settled in the area.

>> Bill Benson: When did you get married to Adele?

>> David Bayer: I married her in 1948.

>> Bill Benson: 1958, right?

>> David Bayer: '58.

>> Bill Benson: OK.

>> David Bayer: No, hold it. '58. Right. Three years after I came here. 1958. And we moved to Maryland. And I was working in D.C. And then I bought a house and everything else. And now my wife wants to get out from the house. And I don't want to go out the house. It's too hard. The house is too big for two people. I have two children.

My daughter lives in Annapolis. And she has two children, two of my grandchildren. One granddaughter is right here. And my grandson lives in Virginia. And my son lives in St. Petersburg, Florida. Still single.

[Laughter]

>> David Bayer: He works. He does all right. He's happy. And that's all. And what am I doing now?

>> Bill Benson: Well, David, I think you --

>> David Bayer: I work as a volunteer at the Museum. You don't pay me. I pay them.

[Laughter]

>> David Bayer: I don't need their money.

>> Bill Benson: David, we're going to close our program in just a couple of minutes. But we're going to hear from David again. I'm going to turn back to David --

>> David Bayer: If you ask me about God, don't ask me.

>> Bill Benson: So I actually think we --

>> David Bayer: The question, I'll give you the answer. Rubin did answer. He told me he's not crazy. So I said maybe you're right. So that's it. And what else did I -- I could tell the stories which would take you years to stay. But so many things happened to me that I don't even want to talk about.

>> Bill Benson: David, I'm going to come back to you to close the program.

>> David Bayer: I escaped once from a camp and I got shot here in my leg.

>> Bill Benson: Yeah. You didn't get to tell us about that.

>> David Bayer: And what happened? The Germans didn't even look. They didn't even see me. They shot something in the snow. Machine gun. Two guards got killed and I got shot in my leg. And I laid in the snow pretending I'm dead. So the guys from the camp came over to the barbed wire and dragged me out. And there was a guy named Sigmund. He was from my hometown. He fixed me up. And I was OK. And I went back to work.

Then I escaped another time from the factory in Pionki. Me with an older guy. I have to remember every name. He was a guy, maybe 6 foot something. He looked like a gorilla with big eyes. He walked like this. And his job was to take out the chemicals of the tanks. For the tankers. And he said, I have to leave. We'll join the Polish underground army. So do you want to go? And I said, I'll go with you. We went under the barbed wire, we dug under the ground and went out. We came to a village, past a forest. We were supposed to go through another forest. And the village, I saw a farmer in a field cutting something. And in the village I saw big posters everywhere, on trees, on walls, 10 litres of vodka for bringing in a Jew. In German and in Polish. And he said --

>> Bill Benson: That was the reward, 10 litres of vodka?

>> David Bayer: 10 litres of vodka if they bring in a Jew. And this Polish guy in the field waved to me. And I said, uh-oh, that's wrong. So we made a u-turn and went down the same road and went back to the factory.

>> Bill Benson: In Pionki. David, we're going to close the program now. But I'm going to turn to you for your last word in just a minute. I want to thank everybody here for joining us today. Remind you we'll have programs each Wednesday and Thursday until August 8. We will live stream all of our programs through May 6. And all of our programs will be available through the Museum's YouTube channel. If you can't come back and be with us in person, you'll have the opportunity to see other programs.

I'm going to turn back to David to close the program in a moment. And when he does, after he's finished, we're going to -- because we didn't get to your questions, we'd like to invite anybody who wants to come up on the stage afterwards and just meet David, shake his hand, ask him a question, take a picture with him, whatever you'd like to do. So we welcome you to come up and spend a little time with David if you'd like to do that. It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person gets the last word. So, David, you have the last word.

>> David Bayer: The last word?

>> Bill Benson: Whatever you want to say to close the program.

>> David Bayer: My last word wouldn't be for half a minute, it would be for two or three hours.

[Laughter]

But I don't know what to say the last word. The last word is, you should remember what I told you. Some people, what the hell, Pionki. But this could happen again. And don't -- the German people were good people, and they listened to a crazy man, and they listened to him and they followed his orders. This could happen. This could happen. The First World War, the Second World War, the Germans started the war. They attacked the whole world. You should never know occupation. You are a second class citizen. A 10th class citizen. You are nothing in the occupation. You are nothing. I was a nothing. I always wanted to fight back, and I couldn't. That never left me. I advocate now -- I'm not even joking. Every Jew now should have a gun. Fight back. Don't stay and think, oh, OK, you're right. Yeah, you're right. If you're wrong, you're wrong. You see, there's something in Hebrew, remember. I put it down because I myself want to remember.

>> Bill Benson: And you want everybody here in the room to remember.

>> David Bayer: Don't stay idle and with your hands. Don't be a chicken. If the Jewish population -- I'll give you an example. 3.5 million Jews, the majority were young like me. If we fought back, maybe half of us would have survived. But we didn't fight back because we didn't -- we believed in humanity. That people couldn't be so mean. A German who killed a Polish boy in front of me with a gun and put the gun to his head and the blood spurted out. And he gave me bread and marmalade and salami to take home. Why did he kill that young man for nothing? He didn't have to kill him. He didn't do nothing wrong. He found a gun. There's plenty of guns. After a war, you go out in the field, and you find guns.

>> Bill Benson: David, I'm going to ask our audience to come up on stage and talk with you.

>> David Bayer: You have to think about it. Don't let the other people take over you.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, David.

[Applause]