Holocaust Memorial Museum First Person
Albert Garih
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Remote CART Captioning

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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. Albert Garih, 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.
Albert 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 Albert 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.-- 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 Albert is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. We begin with this school portrait of Albert Garih, taken in 1945.Albert's parents, Benjamin and Claire Garih, were born in Constantinople, Turkey, but moved to Paris in the 1920s. Albert and his twin brother, who died in infancy, were born June 24, 1938 in Paris, joining older

siblings Jacqueline and Gilberte. We see all three siblings, including Albert on the left, in this 1941 photograph. Albert's father worked in a garment factory, and the family lived there in the janitor's apartment.
In May 1940, Germany invaded France and occupied Paris. The arrow on this map of France points to Paris. The Garih family fled south, but they soon returned to Paris, where they were subjected to France's new anti-Jewish legislation. In 1943, Albert's father was deported to a forced labor camp, and Albert's mother and the children went into hiding with Madame Galop and her husband for the next six months. When they returned home in 1944, police were sent to arrest the Garihs, but agreed to say instead that the family was not home if the family would leave immediately.
Albert was placed in a Catholic boarding school for boys and his sisters in one for girls in a northeastern suburb of Paris. When Paris was liberated in August 1944, Albert's mother was able to bring her children back to the city. Claire and her children are shown together in this photograph. Albert's father, released from the labor camp, walked from Belgium to Paris, returning to his family in September 1944, on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year.
The Garih family remained in France after the war. Albert received his Baccalaureate degree in 1957, then earned a degree in English and Spanish to French translation from the School of Advanced Translation and Interpretation studies at the Sorbonne in 1962 and immediately began his career in translation, which he continued until last year, 58 years later, when he reached the age of 80. His early work was translation of scientific and technical documents and publications and later translation of political and economic documents. Albert speaks French, English, Spanish and Judeo-Spanish.
Albert’s work took him from France to Cameroon in Africa, to Montreal and then eventually to the United States. The organizations for which he worked included, among others, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and the United Nations. His work with the World Bank brought him to Washington, D.C. in 1976.
In 1967 Albert married Marcelle Ohayon, who had moved to France from Morocco in 1960. Albert and Marcelle have three daughters, Judith, Dalia and Noémi, who have given them eleven grandchildren, ages 24 years to 4 years. Albert describes himself as a real movie buff, enjoys photography and loves to read, and he loves to travel. Albert and Marcelle have been to China and South Africa. They went to Australia and New Zealand in 2018. Last month, they returned from a trip to Israel, Vietnam and Cambodia.
Albert volunteers here at the Museum, speaking very often to classes of students from all over the country, sometimes by teleconference, in which he tells his story. And he sits at the Donors Desk where visitors can talk to him. With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. Albert Garih.
[Applause]
>> Bill Benson: Albert, thank you so much for joining us and for your willingness to be our First Person today. So thank you for being here.
>> Albert Garih: You're welcome.
>> Bill Benson: We just have a short hour, so we'll get started as quickly as we can. World War II began in September 1939 with Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland. The following May, in 1940, Germany attacked France. You were nearly 2 years old. Before

we turn to The war years and the Holocaust and what it meant for you and your family, let's have you tell us about your family and their life before Germany invaded France.
>> Albert Garih: My parents were born in Istanbul, Constantinople at the time. In Turkey. They were descendants of Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492. And they spread all over the Mediterranean. And my parents ended up in the ottoman Empire. Turkey was part of the Ottoman Empire at that time. And that's where they were born, and there they spoke Judeo-Spanish, which is a form of Spanish that was the Spanish that they brought with them from Spain, which evolved in a different way over five centuries. But they kept it around for five centuries, which is remarkable. And the last generation who can speak it. Unfortunately, my children don't speak it. But they can understand a few things because I use some expressions with them. But they don't speak it.
>> Bill Benson: So your parents when they moved to France, at that time, they moved separately, right? They did not know each other.
>> Albert Garih: Yes. No. They moved in 1923. What happened is that during the First World War, 1914-1918, the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany. And when Germany was defeated, in 1919, there was a conference in Versailles outside of Paris. And the Ottoman Empire was dismantled. And then came to power a strong man in 1923. The father of modern Turkey. And at that point, the Jews were scared. They were concerned because they had seen that -- had witnessed what happened to the Armenians who were massacred on their way back to Armenia.
And so when he came to power, there was a very strong Greek community, which is on the Asia Minor part of Turkey. And they were pushed out literally by the Turks. And they went back to Greece. So the Jews, they thought maybe we are next. First the Armenians. Then the Greeks maybe will be number three.
So some of them -- a lot of them actually immigrated at that time. And since my parents had been educated in a school -- in an organization, they were perfectly fluent in French. So France was a natural destination for them. And a lot of Jews from the Ottoman Empire immigrated to France. So they immigrated in 1923.And they met in '27, and they married in 1928.
>> Bill Benson: You described your father to me as a very smart but a self-educated man. Tell us a little bit about your father.
>> Albert Garih: My father had to go to work at the age of 10. So he was self-educated actually. He didn't go to school very long. He had to, you know, to help the family to make a living. Conditions in Turkey for people who were not millionaires and there were very few rich people, the majority, they were poor. And they had to struggle. So he had to help his family by working. He started working at a very young age.
>> Bill Benson: And how about your mom? She was very educated.
>> Albert Garih: My mother went to school -- yeah. She got what they called at that time the equivalent to the Baccalaureate. Yeah. And she was very educated. And her French was absolutely perfect. She told me a story. When he first came to France, she got a job as a secretary in a company. And one day she had to write a letter. The address was Boulevard Hausman. They built all of these large avenues in Paris. Modernized Paris in the 19th century. But the only Houseman that she knew was a servant by the name of Houseman. And her colleagues made fun of her. And it was her boss who

defended her and said when you speak a foreign language the way she speaks French, you can then compare.
>> Bill Benson: With the move from Turkey to Paris, what was your parents' citizenship status?
>> Albert Garih: As soon as they immigrated from Turkey, they lost their citizenship. And they stayed that way until 1948, stateless.
>> Bill Benson: So they had no citizenship.
>> Albert Garih: They were the first to be targeted by the Germans and by the collaborationist government, but when France was invaded the French army capitulated. And most of them were taken prisoner. The government resigned. And a new government was formed, which was a collaboration government. And the head of it was a hero of the First World War. He had grown old. I shouldn't say that, because I'm about the age -- well, he was still older than me when he came to power. He was 85. And he started collaborating with the Germans. And the prime minister was even worse than him. And the French police were doing all the dirty work for the Germans.
>> Bill Benson: Your sisters are older than you. You were the youngest. You were born in 1938. And that was a pivotal year to the power of Nazi Germany. And a time for your parents that you described as ominous.
>> Albert Garih: Yeah. You know, 1938 was the glorious year of the Anchuss, the annexation of Austria by Germany. And then it was also the year of the Munich Conference, where Hitler promised that if he were allowed to take the land that is today the Czech Republic, that would be the end of his territorial ambition. He wouldn't go any further. And it was also -- and we know what happened. That was in September 1938. In September 1939, the German army marched into Poland, and the rest is history. And it was also 1938 was the year of Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht was a huge pogrom performed all over the Reich. It was comprised of Germany, Austria. So they were all over. They destroyed stores. They destroyed apartments. They raided apartments. They destroyed synagogues, burned synagogues all over, and they killed 90 people --
>> Bill Benson: And imprisoned 30,000.
>> Albert Garih: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Germany invades Poland to start World War II in September 1939. But it wasn't until the following spring, May 10, when Germany invaded France. As they advanced on Paris, there was a mass exodus of people leaving Paris. I think as many as 80% of the population fled Paris.
>> Albert Garih: I'm not sure about the exact proportion, but anyway, the vast majority of people of Paris fled south by train, on foot, on bicycles. By whatever way they could.
>> Bill Benson: You were part of that?
>> Albert Garih: We were part of that. We took the train, and we ended up along the river Loire, which is famous for its beautiful chateau from the Renaissance. Actually, my mother told me because from that period I have no recollection. I was 3 years old. So what I'm telling you from that period is what I got from my mother. From 1942 onwards, it would be my experience because I remember everything.
I was 4 years old. And when you live under such circumstances, you are bound to remember for the rest of your life. So during the -- in 1942, when France was invaded, it was a massive exodus of the people of Paris. And the north of France actually. It wasn't only Paris. And we ended up on the River Loire, and we slept in a chateau.

>> Bill Benson: As you were fleeing Paris, not only is it tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people on the road. The Germans are attacking. They are dropping bombs and strafing. Tell us what happened to your family.
>> Albert Garih: Well, that's where we sustained our first losses actually. My grandmother was -- she went out to get some food for us. And she was killed by strafing. It was the German Air Force and the Italian Air Force also. It was called a stab in the back. And so my grandmother was killed then. And my mother had also a brother and sister and two nephews, and a bomb fell on their car. Their car was on a bridge, and they bomb fell on it and they were killed. These were the first losses that we sustained during that period.
>> Bill Benson: As you were fleeing Paris, was your father with you at that time?
>> Albert Garih: No. My father decided to stay behind. I don't know the reason. Probably he wanted to keep on working. But, you know, that's all I can -- that's the only explanation I can find about that.
>> Bill Benson: So you ended up staying in a chateau. But you did return to Paris, right?
>> Albert Garih: Yeah. But let me tell you some funny story about the chateau. Of course we were sleeping on the floor, on straw, I guess. And my mother didn't have much to feed me. And I was a 2-year-old. When you have a 2-year-old who is not fed, what does he do? He cries. And it was bothering -- I was disturbing the peace of everyone who was trying to sleep. And a soldier that had escaped and was also staying in that chateau gave my mother -- he had a flask of schnapps. He gave her a shot of schnapps and said, give that to your son. That will keep him quiet. And it worked.
>> Bill Benson: It worked, huh?
[Laughter]
>> Albert Garih: Yeah. But, you know, it's a chance that I didn't become an alcoholic after that.
>> Bill Benson: But you did return to Paris. And after you returned to Paris, you would remain in your apartment for another two years until June of 1942. Tell us a little bit about those two years from what you know and the events then that led to you having to leave your apartment in 1942.
>> Albert Garih: Well, when -- as I said when France capitulated and the new government was formed, they started to enact laws which were patterned after the Nuremburg Laws in Germany that were depriving the Jews of most of their rights, basic rights. Doctors were not allowed to practice medicine. Lawyers were debarred and teachers were kicked out of public schools. And we were not allowed to go in public transportation, for instance.
And a story about that. One day my mother, you know, we were really branded. We had a census. And they put a stamp on the identity cards, Jewish. And that was, you know, if you had to show that to a policeman, they would put you aside and send you to a camp. So one day my mother had to run an errand in Paris. You know, I have no recollection of that because I was probably very young, but she told me many years later. And she took me along. And when we came out of the subway, we had to take the subway, and when we came out of the subway, there was an identity check. And an identity check, you know what it means, meant if you show your I.D. with the stamp Jewish on it, they put you aside and they send you to a transit camp and from there to Auschwitz.

So my mother took me in her arms. She told me she was pretending to look in her purse. She walked between two police. They didn't stop her. If one of the policemen had said, ma'am, I need to see your papers, I wouldn't be here today. That's how close it was. And we had a few close calls like that anyway.
>> Bill Benson: You told me about an incident that stuck in my mind where your mother was chatting with neighbors on the balcony in your apartment, and she handed you over to them.
>> Albert Garih: Yes. You know, we were in a -- actually in July 1942, we were expelled from our apartment. And my father was working in the garment factory. He was their accountant. He was doing the payroll. And with the news that you are Jews, the garment factory was expropriated. They put in a new manager. And we were living in the janitor's apartment at that factory. That was an arrangement with the owner and my father. But when the owner was -- had to run away, we were expelled from that apartment and went to find an apartment in no time.
It was in July 1942. And from then on, all I am going to tell you is what I really remember. Because, you know, when you are 4 years old, you are forced out of your apartment, and you end up in a tiny apartment like that, I still remember the wallpaper. I was a kid, you know. I was 4 years old. And in one of the two -- it was a two-room apartment with one toilet and a small kitchen. And that was it. No bathroom. Nothing. And so I remember that in the bedroom what was our bedroom, the children --
>> Bill Benson: Your two sisters?
>> Albert Garih: Yes. There were flowers like dahlias. They looked like faces. They were frightening to me. I was looking at them, and I didn't like that. So anyway, that's where we ended up. And they started rounding up people in 1941 actually. It started really for good in the fall, I think, 1941. And it didn't stop until the very last moment, just one month before the liberation of Paris in 1944. And there were trains going from Paris to Auschwitz.
>> Bill Benson: That summer of 1942 is when they really intensified, and that's when you were forced out.
>> Albert Garih: Yes. And at that point also with my parents being aware of the round-ups that were taking place -- and actually July 1942, when we moved, it was the month where the biggest round-up of all took place, where they rounded up -- the Germans and asked the French police to round up 20,000 men. They were not able to find 20,000 men, but they rounded up 13,000 people, men, women and children, elderly people, sick people, everyone, you know. And they took them and put them in a stadium called the Velodrome, which is where they used to have bicycle races on the track. And for about one week. And it was in July. It was very hot. The conditions were deplorable because they were soon out of order. It was not designed to house 13,000 people for one week nonstop. So it was terrible.
And after -- I think it was about one week the people from that round-up were sent to transit camps south of Paris. At least the mothers and the children were sent to transit camps. Close to the river Loire also. And they stayed there for a few days. And eventually they were sent to Auschwitz. And out of them, out of 13,000, there were 4,000 children. And none of them came back.
So my parents were really concerned and very afraid about what could happen to us. And they decided to send us into hiding. They sent us into a farm out of Paris. But

without telling the lady -- it was two ladies who were tending the farm. The men had been taken prisoner with the French army at the beginning of the war. So there were only two women there, and I was with my sisters. My sisters were to go to school and I would stay with the ladies.
And we spent about, I don't know, the winter of 1942-43 like that. And I remember that winter was very cold. There was a lot of snow. And my sisters would go to school, and they would walk -- brought back some songs that brought me back to that period, like "O Tannenbaum," but it in was French. Today it is a famous park there. In those days it was just farmland.
So I was staying with the ladies. But my parents had not told the ladies that we were Jewish. They just said that they could not feed us in Paris. There was no food. It was too scarce and too bad. So that was the only reason they gave. But in the conversation one day, as a 4-year-old, I was very social. I was talking to them. And one day in the conversation I said, yes, we're Jewish. And that's all it took for the ladies to send us right back to our parents.
So at that point when we went back home, my father took me aside and said don't ever, ever say that you're Jewish. It was really dangerous to say that you were Jewish in those days. What did I know? I was just a kid. But that stayed with me. And that stayed with me for quite a few years even after the war. You know, it was traumatic to me, a traumatic experience, to think of the danger if anybody could find out that we were Jewish. So we went back home. And we stayed with our parents.
>> Bill Benson: And in September when you went back, September 1943, your father was then taken for forced labor to the Channel Islands.
>> Albert Garih: Yes. My father was taken in for deportation in the Channel Islands, which is smaller islands off the coast of Brittany. Which was the only British territory under Nazi occupation. And they were building the camps there. And my father was sent to -- he was with 900 detainees there. And they were building the -- what they called the Atlantic wall. They were building block houses and bunkers, things like that. And my father --
>> Bill Benson: Because they thought the Allies might invade.
>> Albert Garih: Yes. It was called the Atlantic wall. It was supposed to stop an invasion from the Allies. And my father had a very bad accident when he was there. He was carrying a block of cement on his head, on a scaffolding. He stepped on a loose board. The loose board came to hit him on the head, and he fell off a cliff. And he was picked up a couple of hours later by the soup truck. He was losing his blood. And he was almost killed actually. But he was very strong, and he survived that.
But at that point, we -- you know, in that camp, he was still able to communicate, to send us letters at home. And my mother was able to write to him also. And when we heard that he had had that accident, we thought we would never see him again.
>> Bill Benson: So with your father gone to forced labor, your mother needed to put the kids into hiding at that point.
>> Albert Garih: She was terrified because she knew that at any moment they could come and take us away. That's how it would happen, you know. In the middle of the night. You would hear boots on the stairs. Bang on the door. And come out. You know, they would take us to -- sometimes it was the Germans. Most of the time actually it was the French police. The big round-up that I mentioned earlier was performed by 4,000

police officers, the French police. So the police was, you know, following the orders of parliament which was actively collaborating with the Germans.
>> Bill Benson: So your mother needs to find hiding for you. Tell us how she found the place.
>> Albert Garih: She was desperate. It was in September 1943. My father had been taken away. And she was -- she knew that at any moment they could come and take us away. And she met this lady in the street market. She didn't even know her. And she told her about her story, her fear that at any moment they could come and take us away. And this lady, Madame Galop, went home and told her husband. She came the next day. And we took whatever we could with us and we went to live with the Galop family. The Galop family was a Protestant family. Interesting point because in my life I was hidden by a Protestant family, a communist family, and a Catholic boarding school. So I have a broader spectrum of help actually.
So to me -- they had two daughters, 4 and 3. I could play with them. And Mr. Galop was a sculptor. He was making sets for the movie studios. And they had a big warehouse behind the house where we could play hide and seek game in that warehouse. For me, it was like a vacation. Mr. Galop was wonderful. He was telling us stories. He was entertaining us. He gave us presents for Christmas I remember. He manufactured himself from pieces of wood some piggy banks. They were shaped like a safe. Painted them in green. I remember that like it was yesterday. And they gave us some -- you know, we had coins at that time with a hole in the middle. So they gave us these coins to put in the piggy banks. So it was -- for me, it was a happy moment. For my mother, it was constant fear.
>> Bill Benson: And for your sisters too, you said, because they were older. They were in constant fear.
>> Albert Garih: Yes, they were. They were aware of the danger. Although that didn't stop them sometimes. Before we got there, and they were younger, you know, it was very dangerous to go to the movies. But they would go unbeknownst to my parents. They would go to see a movie with their favorite stars. You know, if they had been caught in a theater, they would have been taken right away to a concentration camp. So that was dangerous. But later on, they were really traumatized by the experience.
And I remember for instance when there were bombardments when we were still in our apartment. We were living on the second floor. It was an apartment building. And when there was a raid in the middle of the night, the sirens started blasting. We would go downstairs. There was no shelter. There was no underground, nothing. We stayed on the ground floor. And my sisters were scared, they were shivering. I was bothered because I was taken out of my bed in the middle of the night. At 4 years old, it was outrageous.
>> Bill Benson: An intrusion.
>> Albert Garih: It was outrageous. So we -- and that's when we were at home. When we were with the Galops, they had manufactured a small shelter also, and we had a funny story there because the two daughters, they were 4 and 3, and the little one -- and they had the southern accent from France. And this is a musical -- it's a beautiful accent. I love it. And she said that one day we were in the shelter, and she said tomorrow if there's a bomb in the yard, I'm going to pick it up. And these are words from kids, things that stay with you. I still remember that.

>> Bill Benson: In the spring of 1944, you were with the Galops. But your mother had to take you away from there. Why did you have to leave their home? It sounds like it was a good place for you. And where did you go from there?
>> Albert Garih: Well, my mother was always nervous. When there was some visitors to the Galops, we would go to the back room and my mother would keep me silent. Don't say a word. And at that point I was 5 years old. And I stayed quiet. But it was a small street, about 10 houses. Mostly painters and sculptors, artists. And one of the painters, his wife was a sympathizer of the Reich. And she was listening to the radio
>> Bill Benson: She was a Nazi sympathizer?
>> Albert Garih: Yeah, a Nazi sympathizer. And one day she said to Madame Galop, when are you going to get rid of that scum? We were the scum. At that point, Madame Galop and my mother thought it might be safer for us to go back home because she might report us or whatever, you know. You never know. A lot of people were taken away by denunciation like that. People would send anonymous letters. Actually, my father was a victim of one of these anonymous letters. They found out after the war who had sent the letter. It was one of his co-workers.
So we were always in danger of that. So my mother and Madame Galop decided it might be safer for us to go back home to our apartment, which we did. That was in the spring of 1944. And a couple of weeks later, a few weeks later, early in the morning -- it was always in the middle of the night or early in the morning. Around like 7:00 in the morning. A knock on the door. Two French police inspectors. Madame Garih? Yes. We came to take you away. That's what my mother dreaded all along. And she started shaking. And they said, calm down. We are going to report we didn't find you. But you must not sleep in your apartment tonight. You have to find a hiding place.
So where do we go? And so I don't know who gave my mother the name of this social worker. She went to see the social worker. She dressed me very quickly. I was still in bed. And so were my sisters. So we dressed very quickly. And we went to see this social worker. And the social worker said, you have to give me a few days. I cannot find a place like that to hide, you know, overnight, immediately. So in the meantime try to see if you cannot stay with your neighbors. Which we did.
Actually, we were staying, as I said, I was staying with my mother with this communist family next door. It was our next door neighbors. He was -- he had been summoned into labor service. Because, you know, the Germans were requisitioning people to send them to work in factories in Germany. And they had been summoned to go and go into labor service like that in Germany. He had not reported for duty. So he was also wanted by the police, by the Gestapo. So they were also in danger.
They said no problem. My mother and I, we stayed with them. My sisters stayed downstairs with a woman with three young children, 14, 12, and 5. And this woman, probably her husband had been taken prisoner. I never saw a man in that apartment. There was only this woman. And she took my sisters. And the communist neighbors took us.
And it was a very convenient arrangement because they were working on night shifts, so we would take their beds -- sleep in their bed at night. And in the morning when they would come back from work, we would get up and give them the bed. So we stayed like that for -- I couldn't tell you how many days. A few days.
>> Bill Benson: While this person was trying to find a more permanent location.

>> Albert Garih: And eventually after a few days, I don't know how many, this lady -- this social worker came to my mother and said I found a place for each one of you. So my mother was placed as a governess. She was taking care of a family who had eight or 10 children. She was taking care of all of these children. And we were sent to Catholic boarding schools. Outside of Paris in a suburb east of Paris. And my sisters in one for girls and me in one for boys. And that meant I was completely separated from the rest of my family. My sisters were together. I was alone. I was 6 years old in that Catholic boarding school.
>> Bill Benson: What do you remember of that time for you as a 6-year-old, as you said, alone, by yourself now in this Catholic boarding school?
>> Albert Garih: I have good memories and bad memories. The good memory was the headmistress who I suspect was the one who took me into hiding in that school. I was like a -- she was always looking after me. She was motherly with me actually. And she was wonderful. The bad memories is the food. The food was terrible. When I say terrible, it was terrible. Believe me.
>> Bill Benson: And terrible also and not enough of it.
>> Albert Garih: No, no, not enough. But rotten beans. Dog bread. The bread was made out of flour, bran, and sawdust. They put sawdust in the bread to make it more consistent. It was terrible. And we were always hungry. And, you know, we stayed like that. I remember, you know, it was the summer of '44. So it was supposed to be summer vacation.
We had some classes, but very few. When we were in the classes, they were divided in rows, you know. It was a small boarding school. So they didn't have many classes. And I was put with the babies. I was the youngest. I was just 6 years old. The children were from 7 to 14. I was the youngest there.so they put me -- and I already -- my mother had taught me how to read and write when I was hiding with the Galops, having nothing else to do. At least we used our time in a useful way. She taught me how to read and write. So I was there, able to read and write and making strokes like this. Because I was a baby. I was the baby of the class. And most of the children, even probably older than me, could hardly read and write.
So I was doing that. The rest of the time we were on the playground. And when there were adults and parents announcing, we had to go into the shelters, air raids. We went underground. And when the raid was over, Madame would announce the end of the raid, and we would come out and one of our jobs was to pick up pieces of shrapnel on the playground. I had a big collection of pieces of shrapnel like that. And they were very heavy. You know, they were about that big, some of them. And if you got one like that in your body, it would kill you.
>> Bill Benson: But you would gather it up as a young boy and collect it.
>> Albert Garih: Yes. It was my toys.
>> Bill Benson: Your toys.
>> Albert Garih: Exactly. And so we stayed that way. It was the summer of '44. August 25, 1944, Paris was liberated. And my mother witnessed first-hand from the windows, she witnessed the battles in the streets between the German soldiers and the French resistance before the Allies came into Paris. Eventually on August 25, the leader of the second armored division had asked Eisenhower for the privilege of being the one to

liberate Paris. And he was granted that authorization. And he entered into Paris. And Paris was liberated August 25, 1944. We were liberated two days later on the 27th.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us about the incident with the little boy who ran away.
>> Albert Garih: You know, my experience -- my recollection, that is something that I will never forget actually. A kid had run away from the school. And all of a sudden he came back and said, the Allies are coming. I don't know if he was punished or not for having run away. But anyway, we all went on the main street. And we saw the tanks, the Jeeps, the trucks. Soldiers with friendly faces. And different helmets. We were, you know, wary of the dreaded German helmets. These were different. People with smiles giving us chewing gum, chocolate, even cigarettes. Not to me, but they were giving cigarettes to people. And that was our liberators.
And curiously enough it was the first time I ever heard about Americans. Needless to say, I was far from thinking that one day I would be an American myself.
>> Bill Benson: But you had said that, that you had never even heard of an American.
>> Albert Garih: No. I had heard, you know, about the Germans, the Italians, the Russians, the English. But the Americans, where do they come from? I had no idea. I was a kid. I was 6 years old.
>> Bill Benson: What do you remember about reuniting with your mother and your sisters?
>> Albert Garih: As soon as Paris was liberated and as soon as they restored the train service, which was a couple of days later, my mother was on the first train. And she came to visit us. And I remember that day. My sisters came -- because she went first to see my sisters in their boarding school. And they took her to me. And they were hiding. My mother was short. She was easy to hide behind my sisters. And my sisters said, guess who's here? You know what? At 6 years old, it's so easy to forget about your loved ones. I had no idea who could be there to visit us. Of course, when I saw my mother, I jumped into her arms. And she was so appalled to see how I was because I was skinny. I was sick. So she was -- she had, you know, ration tickets. Everything was rationed. She had ration tickets and bought a loaf of bread. We swallowed that in no time. That's how hungry we were. We were starved.
Really. I knew hunger. I know when some people say I'm hungry now that makes me laugh, because they don't know what it is to be hungry.
>> Bill Benson: Right.
>> Albert Garih: I experienced hunger really. So she took me home right away, the same day. And the next day she went -- for whatever reason, she couldn't take my sisters the same day. She had to go back to pick up my sisters. And she left me under the supervision of the next day neighbor, the communist lady. And she had the key. And I was alone in the apartment. And I was starved. And the only food they had there was in the apartment was a green apple. And that was the worst thing I could have eaten because of my condition. And of course I did eat it. And as soon as I finished, I heard a knock on the door, Ms. Menetrier, my neighbor. She said, what did you eat? And I said, I didn't eat anything. I was cleaning my teeth like that. And my mother came back in the evening with my sisters. So we were reunited in our apartment with no more danger of being taken away or anything like that. That was in September 1944.
Meanwhile, my father who was in this Channel Islands, in May 1940, the Allies are making everything they could to make the Germans believe that if there was going to be

an invasion it would be in the Strait of Dover, which is the shortest distance between France and Britain.
>> Bill Benson: And that's where your father was.
>> Albert Garih: So they moved all of the detainees from the Channel Islands to the Strait of Dover, and they were under the bombardments, constant bombardments, from the Allies. My father told me one day when there was a bombardment like that, they didn't go to a shelter or anything. They were laying flat on the ground, hoping to be spared. And my father was laying flat like that next to a German soldier. And when the raid was over, my father stood up, and the German soldier stayed on the ground. He had been killed. So it was touch and go.
>> Bill Benson: That close, yeah.
>> Albert Garih: It was touch and go really. Anyway, when the Allies landed in Normandy, they started pushing the Germans east toward Germany. And so at that point the 900 detainees who were with my father were put on a train bound for Germany.
>> Bill Benson: So the Germans were going to take him with them to Germany.
>> Albert Garih: Yes, they were taking him to Germany either to work as slave labor in a factory or to be killed in a concentration camp. We don't know. Anyway, the train was stopped by Belgians. Because from the Strait of Dover when you want to go to Germany you have to cross Belgium. And they were in northern Belgium. And the train was stopped by Belgium resistance fighters, who had blown up the railroad or a bridge. I don't know what exactly.
But they stopped the train. And there was a battle. And in the confusion the Germans released the 900 prisoners. And my father walked back from northern Belgium to Paris. That's 200 miles. And he arrived in the morning of Rosh Hashanah, which is the Jewish new year. My mother was already dressing me to go to synagogue for the first time since we'd been liberated.
>> Bill Benson: And here is your father.
>> Albert Garih: There was a knock on the door. This time it was a good one. It was my father who came back. And so our nuclear family was spared, survived. But as I said, my grandmother was killed, an uncle and aunt and cousins. Plus my mother and my father lost some cousins who were deported and sent to the camps.
>> Bill Benson: What kind of shape was your father in when he got back?
>> Albert Garih: He was in terrible shape, you can imagine. First of all, he had this terrible accident. So he survived that accident. And then he walked 200 miles to come back home. He was in terrible shape. He was sick. But he came back, and he recovered. He was strong.
>> Bill Benson: Albert, we are close to the end of the time, and we might have a chance for a couple of questions from our audience if that's okay.
>> Albert Garih: Sure.
>> Bill Benson: That's so much more that we could hear, of course. Because the war continued from that point until the spring of 1945. But fortunately you were safe in Paris. And then your family had to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of the war. And you continued, you and your family, stayed in Paris until much later when you --
>> Albert Garih: Yeah. My parents stayed in Paris until they died actually. They died in the late '80s and early '90s.

>> Bill Benson: Do you want to take a couple of questions from our audience? We have a couple of minutes to do that. We have a microphone, one in each aisle. If you have a question, please go to the microphone and make your question as brief as you can. I'll do my best to repeat it just to make sure we hear it, and Albert will respond to it. And otherwise I'll ask a couple more myself. Yes, sir. Right behind you. There you go.
>> Hi. Great honor to meet you and hear you talk. You mentioned when you fled, your family fled in 1940 south of Paris, and your father remained in Paris, and then you mentioned that you did return to Paris. Could you talk a little bit more detail about that, if you learned what the circumstances were? Did your father join you before going back to Paris? Or do you know why you returned to Paris?
>> Albert Garih: We returned to Paris because my father was there. He was still staying in our apartment, and he was working in the garment factory. And, you know, we had nowhere to go. We had no money. We had no relatives who could sponsor us in another country. And so we had nowhere to go.
>> Bill Benson: And you had no relatives in the unoccupied part of France either.
>> Albert Garih: No, no. We were totally on our own. So that's why we returned. We could have tried to cross the demarcation line, but there was no point because we had nobody on the other side. And how we would have survived? Because we needed some money. My father was the breadwinner in the family. He was still working in Paris.
>> Bill Benson: I think we have one more here, and then I think we'll probably wrap up our program.
>> Bonjour. I'm curious. What the ambience in Paris once it was liberated?
>> Bill Benson: What was it like in Paris?
>> Albert Garih: It was euphoria. Once Paris was liberated, it was euphoria. And people -- my experience is that the people around us -- I don't know. There were some collaborators who were probably not too proud and not too happy to see that it was ending. But the population around us resented the invasion. Resented the occupation by the German forces. And they didn't like the Germans. And so -- are you French?
>> I'm from Montreal.
>> Albert Garih: Well, I'll tell you a story. It's in French but I have to tell you. I cannot formulate it. The latchkeeper -- not the latchkeeper but the next apartment building, we saw the Germans leaving, bringing with them all the cows from Normandy. In French when want to insult someone, you say [Speaking in French] And she was not talking about the cows. She was talking about the Germans.
>> Bill Benson: Again, we could spend a couple more hours and get more details and hear about Albert's life after the war, but we're going to close for now. I'm going to turn back to Albert in just a moment to actually end the program. I want to thank all of you for being with us. Remind you we'll have First Person programs each Wednesday and Thursday until the 8th of August. Our programs until June 6 will all be live streamed. And all of our programs will be available on the Museum's YouTube channel. One way or another we hope you can see some more of our programs. When Albert is finished in a moment, he will remain here on the stage and we invite any of you who want to come up and ask a question, just shake his hand or get a photograph taken with him, please feel free to do that. So come out and come on the stage. We welcome that. Albert, you welcome that, right?
>> Albert Garih: Sure.

>> Bill Benson: It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. So on that note, I'm going to turn back to Albert to close our program.
>> Albert Garih: Well, yesterday I was at the desk, Donors Desk upstairs, and someone asked me a question and that gave me an idea of what I wanted to say in conclusion. She asked me, how do you feel about the Germans? Probably expecting me to say I hate the Germans or -- to tell you the truth, at the end of the war we hated the Germans. That's for sure. Five years later, when I went to secondary school and I had to choose between taking English or German, I was given the -- we were given the choice like that. And there was no question I was going to take English. Most of us took English. So that's how we felt about the Germans at that time. And I still have the same feeling about the Germans from that period. But in the meantime, you know, it has been 75 years now since the end of the war, almost. 74 years. And today, you know, I had another experience once at that desk. I see a young lady, maybe 16 or 20 years old, and she was in tears. I said, why are you crying like that? And she said I am German, and I just visited the Museum, and I was so ashamed of what my people did to your people.
And I said, was it your grandparents? And she said, no. My grandfather was 7 years old at the end of the war. He was my age. So it was not her grandfather. It was her great grandfather who was in the Nazis. And she was ashamed about what she discovered in this Museum.
So I think -- and that started this frame of mind started to appear in the mid '80s, I would say. There was a movie -- a German movie called "Nasty Girl." It was a young girl in a small town in German who started to scratch the surface to find out, and she asked her mother, Mom, where was Grandpa during the war? And they started to scratch the surface. And I think from then on -- they also showed the movie, the miniseries, "The Holocaust," with Meryl Streep who was a young star at that point. And it was traumatic for them because a lot of them didn't know because they were not advertising what they had been doing, you know. They were not bragging about it.
So a lot of the new generation discovered what their grandparents had been doing 30 years or 40 years earlier. And they were not too proud of it. And six years ago, I had an opportunity -- I spent one week in Berlin. And that was also an eye opener for me because I saw now the German people acknowledge what they did. They have an exhibit which is very much the same as the one we have here called "Topography of Terror" where they show the Nazi laws, the camps, the war and everything. And when I visited that exhibit in Berlin, I remember there was a group of tourists visiting. And they had a guide. It was a guided tour. And I approached because I wanted to hear. And it was in German, so it was probably a group of tourists maybe from another city, Munich, Frankfurt, I don't know where, who were visiting Berlin.
And in the streets in Berlin, you have columns with portraits of one person who had fled Germany, who came to this country or, you know, who was against the regime. As I was walking in East Berlin -- Berlin is now no longer divided the way it used to be. Now you can go from East Berlin to West Berlin no problem. I was walking in a big avenue, and the -- on the side I see a museum dedicated to Willy Brandt. He became the mayor of Berlin in the '60s. But during the war he fled. He went eventually to Sweden. And he didn't want to have anything to do with the Germans. He was an anti-Nazi. And they had

a museum dedicated to him. He is to me one of the persons that I have the most respect for actually. He was a very decent man. A good man.
So I saw all of that, and that I realized that you cannot -- you know, people are -- generations follow generations, and they are not necessarily the same. And the Germans today I think are not the Germans of yesteryear. And we can see that with the opening of the borders and receiving all of these immigrants now. You know, it's a totally different Germany from what it was before.
So today I don't have any hate for the Germans. I still have resentment for what happened. But I don't blame the new generations for that.
[Applause]
>> Bill Benson: Come up here and greet Albert and get a photo taken with him if you would like.