

Holocaust Memorial Museum First Person

Gideon Frieder

Wednesday, June 12, 2019

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

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>> Ladies and gentlemen, please silence all electronic devices. Our program will begin in just a moment.

>> 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. Gideon Frieder, 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. Gideon 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 Gideon 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.

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 Gideon is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. We begin with this childhood photograph of Gideon Frieder, who was born September 30, 1937. Gideon was born in Zvolen, Slovakia. On this map of Europe the arrow points to Slovakia. The photo on the left is of Gideon and his sister Gita. The photo on the right is of Gideon's parents, Ruzena and Abraham before the war. Here we see Abraham. He

was a rabbi. He was also part of the underground Working Group of the Slovak Jewry, responsible for communications with the Slovak authorities.

In 1944, during the Slovak uprising against the Nazis, Gideon, his mother and his sister fled from Nove Mesto, where they had been living since the beginning of the war. In October they made their way northeast to Banska Bystrica, which served as the center of the uprising. Because of his connection to the Working Group, Gideon's father fled separately. On this map of Slovakia, the arrow points to the location of Banska Bystrica. As the Nazis were nearing Banska Bystrica, the family fled to the mountains where they were caught in a massacre at Stare Hory. Gideon's mother and sister were killed and Gideon was wounded. Gideon was taken from the massacre site by Henry Herzog, who eventually took him to the village of Bully where he was placed in the home of Paulina and Jozef Strycharszyk. This is a contemporary photograph of the home where Gideon was hidden until 1945. After the war, he was found there by his father.

Gideon and his wife Dalia have lived in the Washington, D.C., area since emigrating from Israel to Buffalo, New York, in 1975, then moving here in 1992. They have three children, a son, Ophir, and two daughters, Tally and Gony, and four grandchildren, including twins who are 10 years old. Their granddaughter, Gita, is named for Gideon's sister, whom we shall hear about this morning.

Gideon is a physicist and computer scientist. He earned his doctorate in quantum physics in Israel. Upon his retirement in 2010 as the A. James Clark Professor at the School of Engineering and Applied Science at George Washington University, he was named the A. James Clark Professor Emeritus of Engineering and Applied Science, the first time in the history of the George Washington University that the Board of Trustees kept an endowed chair title for an Emeritus Professor. He also previously served as the school's dean. Gideon has also taught and held dean and chairman positions at Syracuse University, the University of Michigan, and the State University of New York at Buffalo.

He served in the Israeli Ministry of Defense in Research and Development and also served in the Israeli Air Force. He has also been a consultant with government agencies and private companies, served as an expert witness in patent and copyright litigation and holds several patents.

Gideon's son Ophir holds the title of Inaugural Robert L. McDewitt and Catherine H. McDewitt professorship, which is the highest endowed chair position at Georgetown University. He is also a professor in Georgetown's School of Medicine. Gideon and his son have collaborated on several computer projects concerning degraded images, including a computer-based initiative to aid in the recognition of faded documents started nine years ago in cooperation with a German team from the University of Bremen. Gideon traveled to Austria with his son in March when Ophir was elected into the European Society of Arts and Science. This is of great significance to Gideon and if we have time later, Gideon will say more about it.

With that I would like you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. Gideon Frieder. Gideon, thank you so much for being here today and for being willing to be our First Person. Thank you.

>> Gideon Frieder: Thank you. I do a fair amount of speaking, and I'm always amazed that people are proud of you before you start to speak. You clearly don't know what torture you are in for.

[Laughter]

>> Gideon Frieder: Let me just remark that if you want to take a nap, it's a strong light, do not enable me to see in any way if you are awake or not. The only thing I ask is no snoring.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Germany invaded Poland in September 1, 1939, beginning World War II and then soon dominated Europe. But your home country of Slovakia was allied with Germany and therefore it was not occupied by the Nazis until much later. Before we talk about the start of the war and the Holocaust and the events that led up to the German occupation of Slovakia, start first, Gideon, by just telling us a little bit about your family and their life and their community before the war.

>> Gideon Frieder: OK. People ask me where I was born. I tell them Czechoslovakia. And they ask me where were you raised. And I say Slovakia. This place in Europe changes names and countries very, very often. Slovakia was created by the Germans when the so-called enlightenment powers signed the Munich

Agreement giving the rule over Sudeten to the dictator. In Slovakia was created under rule of a fascist party and was allied with Germany. And adhered to the German persecution of Jews and so on on their own.

Sometimes we equate the Holocaust with Germany. Let me tell you one thing about the Slovaks. They paid the Germans a large amount of money for every Jew that the Germans took away to be killed. So my feelings about the Holocaust are not limited to Germany.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, tell us a little -- sorry.

>> Gideon Frieder: But in everyday life, I was a small child. I didn't feel anything but the fact that being Jewish I couldn't go through certain streets because the kids would throw stones at me. Because Jews were not supposed to walk in those streets. But other than that, I had a normal childhood.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, tell us --

>> Gideon Frieder: If being afraid life is normal, it was quite normal.

>> Bill Benson: Your father was a --

>> Gideon Frieder: My father was a very prominent personality. He was part of what was later in history called the Working Group, which was an underground organization trying to save Jews and to communicate with the fascist government. There's a book about him called "To Deliver Their Souls". The Museum ran out of copies so it's not considered good business to reprint books about the Holocaust. There's no big market for it. So the book is out of print and can be acquired on Amazon and places like that.

>> Bill Benson: Your father was highly educated. Is that unusual for the time?

>> Gideon Frieder: It was very unusual. My father graduated from a rabbinical school and apart from that had a secular education in literature. So being a rabbi and having a secular education and also being a Zionist was very, very unusual. He was an unusual man. And when you read his memoirs, which are available on the site of Yad Vashem, but you have to be multilingual to read them. They are written in six different languages.

>> Bill Benson: And he goes back and forth between the languages in them, doesn't he?

>> Gideon Frieder: And you go back and forth. Most of the body of the memoir is written in German. But the documents are written in the original Hungarian or Slovak or

Yiddish. Sometimes Hebrew. He was an unusual man. And did unusual things. For a rabbi to be involved in the religious life of a Catholic country was not usual. But he was very much involved and did some things that if you go back and think about it, I shouldn't be proud of but I'm still proud. You know, to endear himself with the government people in then fascist Slovakia, there was one minister in the government who was responsible for the Jewish question and whose life ambition was to be a well-known academic, to which he didn't have the talent. But my father wrote him a doctorate of dissertation. So he would say how moral is it for a rabbi to cheat? And the answer is, it's not very moral except when after the war you read testimonials by hundreds of people who were saved by this action of my father.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, you --

>> Gideon Frieder: So judging morality in actions in the time is very difficult. When I was a child, like I said the only thing I knew was that the children would throw stones at me. But I didn't feel it. And until 1944, as I said, Slovakia created under the Munich Agreement, which took Czechoslovakia and cut it into little pieces, giving a piece to Germany, giving a piece to Hungary, and giving one piece to be independent Slovakia under the German influence.

In any case, growing up there, I didn't know very much. I was just a child. Until one day that my father was a rabbi with a long flowing beard. So one day I come home and I see my mother, the wife of a rabbi, hugging and kissing a man I have never seen before, which is not a very regular action for the wife of a rabbi to do. And I didn't understand what I am seeing until the man opened his mouth and I understood that it's my father who shaved his beard not to be recognized because it was very clear that the time came for us to flee the place.

When you look at the map of Europe, and you have some military background or interest or understanding, you will understand that the Germans really could not afford to let Slovakia to be under non-German influence because it would cut Europe into two parts and the German army into two parts. So they had no choice but to invade Slovakia, and they did. And they did by proxy, as a matter of fact.

But they had a Ukrainian battalion fighting on the side of the Nazis as part of the S.S., the military arm of the elite Nazi S.S. And they invaded and started to proceed from the south to the north. It was clear that if they will catch us, there will be no due process. There will be no Miranda Rights. No such thing as democracy as we were accustomed to. They would just take us and kill us. Unceremonially.

So my father understood it. So he took my wife -- my mother, my sister, and myself and put us in an ambulance and sent the ambulance from the city toward the German lines. The German advancing army. Nobody would check to see who was in the ambulance if it's going towards the Germans. They would not suspect there are Jews in there. And that's how we flee from this city we were in. And eventually when we were out of the city we left the ambulance, which broke down anyway, and started to walk through the mountains to the center of the uprising.

>> Bill Benson: I want to go back a little bit, Gideon. Tell us about the uprising. Who was involved in the uprising and why Banska Bystrica was the center of the uprising.

>> Gideon Frieder: That's very interesting. The political situation, the political history of that part of the world at the time, in 1944, is interesting. It was already after the Normandy invasion. But in Europe there were fightings not only between the Germans

and the partisans but also fighting between communist leaning parties and western leaning partisans. Banska Bystrica was the center of uprisings in which miraculously both groups cooperated. And we fled to come there. We fled through the mountains.

>> Bill Benson: Did your father go with you when you fled to the mountains?

>> Gideon Frieder: No, our father left us because it was clear that if we were caught together we would be all killed.

>> Bill Benson: And because he was so prominent.

>> Gideon Frieder: He was very prominent. Very well known. He fled separately using his contacts with the Christian hierarchy and was able to flee.

>> Bill Benson: You described to me that for you -- because you were a 7-year-old boy, that the trip fleeing to the center of the uprising was for you sort of like an adventure.

>> Gideon Frieder: It was a great vacation.

[Laughter]

>> Gideon Frieder: We went through the mountains. We ate currants and wild strawberries. And we were fed by the shepherds with cheese and milk. I didn't know that we are in mortal danger. Only it's often my mother would talk to the shepherds and they would tell us don't go this way, go this way, because they knew where the Germans are. So eventually after this almost one-week beautiful vacation in the mountains, we came to Banska Bystrica, the center of the uprising. Because of my father's prominence, his wife, my mother, and us, were very nicely accepted by the community in Banska Bystrica. And we stayed there until the Germans going from south to north started to threaten that particular city. In the meantime --

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about leaving there, what was life like for you in Banska Bystrica?

>> Gideon Frieder: It was very good.

>> Bill Benson: It was very good?

>> Gideon Frieder: You know, the community really liked us. The wife of Rabbi Frieder was someone of value to them.

>> Bill Benson: Did your mom know where her husband was?

>> Gideon Frieder: No. We didn't know anything about my father. All we knew is that he was somewhere else, and we are here. And my father -- my mother befriended some Jewish partisans. Especially one by the name of Adam Herzog. And when the Germans came close, she contacted Adam Herzog who agreed to take us with his partisan group as they are fleeing from south to the north. And we were fleeing in a caravan of partisans and refugees when in a mountain pass called Stare Hory we were caught by the Germans. It was an attack with airplanes.

>> Bill Benson: Planes. So they caught you in this pass?

>> Gideon Frieder: They caught us and everybody else. And there was a big massacre there. A lot of partisans and Slovak civilians were killed. And my mother and my sister were killed. And I was wounded. And Adam Herzog, this partisan, found me standing next to my mother trying to wake her up because when she was shot she died lying on her back with her eyes open. And I couldn't understand why I cannot wake her up. So he took me from there and said, she will come later. Which obviously never happened. And here is where the story diverges. The way I remember all my life was that he took me from that massacre and took me to this little hamlet called Bully. Later on, he wrote his memoirs -- and I was instrumental in publishing them, and I discovered that my

memory is incorrect. He did take me from that massacre but not straight to the village but to the mountains with his partisan group. Now very quickly the partisans realized that a wounded 7-year-old is not a proper part of the partisan group. So they decided to take me to a village and placed me with a Catholic family in the village.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, can I interrupt for just a second? Before you tell us about when you were taken by Henry Herzog to the village and your life there, I want to ask you a couple of things. Do you remember -- because you were so young, do you remember anything about either your mother or your little sister?

>> Gideon Frieder: Very, very little.

>> Bill Benson: Very little.

>> Gideon Frieder: And what I remember, I don't rely upon. I try to find other sources because the memory of a traumatized, wounded 7-year-old is not that reliable. But I survived. And I was brought to this family. And they cared for me and kept me and kept me alive endangering their own lives. The house next to the one I lived in was searched by the Germans. And they found a partisan there. So they doused the house with gasoline and burned it with the partisan and the whole family. That was the way of life then.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, tell us -- so Henry Herzog after you spent a little time with his band of partisans, he takes you into this little tiny village. How did he select the -- do you know how he selected that village and how that family said, oh, we will take this wounded child?

>> Gideon Frieder: Well, here is again where there is a divergence of memories, feeling and fact. He took me to that village for the simple reason it was the closest village. He took me to this particular house because it was the house at the edge of the village.

>> Bill Benson: Closest village, closest house.

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. So he knocked on the door. And I'm sure he looked quite frightening with the grenades hanging from him and submachine gun and possibly unshaved. And what I remember is -- and I always remember, they accepted me lovingly and said to me and cleaned my wounds and got somebody to help. But in his memoirs he wrote that he and his partisan friends came to this house and told the people that here is a wounded Jewish child. His father is a very well-known guy. The war will be over. He will come and take him and reward you. Take him and keep him. And if you will not take him and keep him, we will kill all of you. Now given the choice, there's very little choice.

But I don't remember this part. All I remember is I felt wanted and loved and being taken care of by these people. I am very, very happy to tell you that very late, only now, they were recognized as Righteous Among Gentiles, and they will be -- they are long dead, but their grandchildren will be given proper recognition certificates in January, this coming January.

>> Bill Benson: This coming January. Is that right?

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: That's wonderful.

>> Gideon Frieder: I am very proud. I am sorry that it took so long. What happened is after I -- after my father -- when I was taken from Banska Bystrica by this partisan, each time he met a Jewish partisan he will tell him the wife of Rabbi Frieder was killed, but his son survived and he is in this village with this family. Eventually even before the end

of the war, my father was caught and put in jail. And in jail there was another Jew who heard the story, so my father knew about my survival. And about the death of his wife and child. Before the end of the war.

Toward the end of the war, he was able to flee and found shelter in a Franciscan monastery. The Franciscans knew about him because he was so involved in the religious life of Slovakia. And they saved him. After the war, he sent emissaries to take me away. And he took me from this family. And a year later, he died. So on his deathbed -- well, let me just go back one step.

After the Holocaust, there was an epidemic of marriages. I cannot describe it in any other way. People wanted to rebuild their lives and they married, especially my father had this little child, myself, but he was very busy again in public life. So he married a woman which also sought -- which also lost her husband. And so I had a stepmother. When he was on his deathbed, he died for reasons at the time we did not understand. Now we do a bit more because we know far more about medicine than in 1944 -- 1945.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, can I take you back to the time with the Strycharszyk family for just a minute? First of all you shared with us that you were wounded. Tell us about your wound. When your mother and your sister were killed, you were wounded. That was serious. Tell us about that.

>> Gideon Frieder: I was wounded. It's kind of funny to say that I was lucky when my mother and sister were killed. I was wounded, but I was lucky with my wound. I had two bullet wounds. But neither of them shattered a major bone or severed a major artery or damaged a major nerve. And at that time in Europe little boys didn't wear long pants. Little boys wore short pants. But it was very cold, so boys, girls, doesn't matter, wore woolen stockings. And when I was wounded, my stockings were saturated with blood. But it was very cold, and the blood coagulated almost immediately, creating a pressure bandage over my wounds. And that's how I survived.

I came to that family. In that hamlet there was another Jew hiding who was an ophthalmologist. So the ophthalmologist is also a medical doctor. He took care of my wounds. And that family nourished me and kept me alive for seven months until the place was liberated by Romanian soldiers fighting as part of the Red Army. The communist Red Army.

>> Bill Benson: What were the conditions like with the Strycharszyk family? It was a very simple existence in this little village. What was your life like?

>> Gideon Frieder: Well, the Strycharszyk family which took me, he was a cobbler. And I should have brought it with me. I have some artifacts that I took from the house. And I helped him in stringing the yarn for felt shoes. And all in all, I was just a child there.

>> Bill Benson: Were there other children there with you?

>> Gideon Frieder: There were no other children.

>> Bill Benson: It was just you?

>> Gideon Frieder: The funny thing is I remember that the woman was very fat. Later I discovered that the woman was very, very thin. But she was expecting. And when I left in May, she gave birth to a daughter I never met at the time. I met later on. And this is a long story in itself.

>> Bill Benson: They also gave you an assumed name, a false identity.

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes. When I came there, they did two things. First they gave me a very Slovak-sounding Christian-sounding name. Jan Suki, which is kind of funny. Jan is

the Slovak version of John. And Suki means dry. It's a very common last name. But I was anything but dry. I was dripping wet, and I was bloody.

And they taught me something and they told me when a fascist will come to you and ask you, say this -- this is what you say. And I didn't understand what they said. It was kind of too fast, some kind of mantra. I didn't understand a single word. And I didn't know what it was. But they said, if the fascists would come, and they would touch me on the shoulder and say, say this, and I would give him the mantra, and he would kind of strike my head and say, very nice.

And I didn't know what was this magic sentence which saved my life. Until very, very, very, very, very many years later, I came to the United States. Well, when my father was on his deathbed, he told my stepmother take my child away from this bloody continent and bring him to Israel. And she did. And I grew up in Israel. And Israel was in a constant fight for its life. And the communists were on the other side, anti-Israeli. So I could never contact Slovakia, which was under communist regime. So I never contacted the people.

Eventually, Slovakia became independent, became part of Czechoslovakia, noncommunist, and I was able to go there and try to find the people who saved my life. They were dead. They died. Natural deaths. But I found the daughter, which was born one month after I was taken away from them. In the year I was taken away from them, on a little piece of paper torn from a writing block, I wrote in my childish handwriting a thank you note for the family for saving my life, wishing them a happy new year. When I came to visit in Slovakia, I found out that this woman kept this note. Her parents told her about me. And they told her if she ever meets me, she should treat me as her brother because they intended to keep me as their son.

But I was taken away by my father, who died a year later. And I moved to Israel. In Israel I devoted myself -- well, in Israel for me, the Holocaust did not exist. I didn't read about it. I didn't talk about it. I didn't watch movies. But I did decide that I would do my best to see to it that the Jews will not be put in that situation again.

So when I graduated from high school, everybody goes to the army. I was given the opportunity to join a unit in which the people could go first to university and then go to the army. I was lucky to be admitted and I finished my undergraduate degree before I joined the army. And when I was about to join the army, I was given the opportunity instead of running up and downhill and shooting holes in the air with my rifle, they told me you can either do regular army duty or join this organization, which is doing weapons development. And it took me all of half a second to join the organization. So I spent all my formative time in Israeli Ministry of Defense Weapon Development Authority.

>> Bill Benson: One of the things I think you were going to tell us, is that line that saved your life. You're coming to that. OK.

>> Gideon Frieder: So eventually I went back to visit the family. Found out they were dead. But I found this piece of paper that she kept. And the woman wanted to give it to me. And I said, I am not going to take it. This is a sacred document for your family. But I did have a copy. I intended to bring a copy with me, but I did not. I have a copy of it, which I took. And I have it.

So I came back. And Slovakia is now independent, and I am a dean in George Washington University. In Slovakia, they are independent and they are opening an

embassy. And they invited me. And I hesitated because the flag of the new Slovakia is almost identical to the flag of the fascist Slovakia, almost identical. Not exactly. But I hesitated to go.

But I was a dean, and my public duty was to promote the university and to find students. So eventually I decided I will go. And because what happened was an unbelievable thing. This little stinking Jew, Gideon, me, now became Professor Dr. Dean Frieder, a very respected Slovak. So from being just a piece of trash in Slovakia, now I became a respected Slovak scientist. So I went to the opening.

Slovakia is 85% Catholic, 15% Protestant, and 0% everything else. So it was not a surprise that at the opening of the new embassy they invited a Catholic priest from Slovakia to come and give the opening benediction. So I was there in the audience. And this guy, the priest comes, and he says a couple of polite words in English. And he says it is to apologize because his English is not good enough to do the benediction and everything in English. So he will switch to Slovak. Which he did.

And then he opened his mouth for the benediction. And it was like a lightning struck me, because what he was saying were exactly the words I remembered as this blur mantra, except this time it was uttered by an educated man, and every word was clearly enunciated and separate. And I realized that what I understood was I didn't understand what they told me to recite. It's something important. I just didn't know what it is.

So after the ceremony, I came to him and in Slovak I asked him can he tell me what did he do -- what was his benediction. And he said, oh, this was the Lord's Prayer in Slovak. And suddenly I understood the words.

>> Bill Benson: And that's what the Strycharszyk family had taught you.

>> Gideon Frieder: What?

>> Bill Benson: That was what the Strycharszyk family had told you to say to save your life.

>> Gideon Frieder: They told me because it was clear to them that every little child should know the Lord's Prayer. In the '40s, the Catholic faith used Latin. But there were always three things which were taught in their language of the country from which most people knew two and some people knew part of the third. And the three things, the first one was the Lord's Prayer, Our Father, which is probably the most Jewish part of the Christian Liturgy, the Lord's Prayer. So they knew the Lord's Prayer in Slovak. They knew Hail Mary. And the more educated, which was very, very small minority, knew the credo, I believe in Jesus Christ. But most of them didn't know that. And they recited it as part of a mass. But it was done in Latin and not in Slovak.

>> Bill Benson: Gideon, the -- I want to ask you one more thing.

>> Gideon Frieder: So that prayer saved my life. Just to show you the intelligence of this highly uneducated but superbly intelligent people who understood how to care for a Jewish child. And understood that everybody who wants to be believed to be Christian had to know the Lord's Prayer. Over the years I took effort to study the Lord's Prayer, not only in I think English and Slovak but also in Aramaic, which was the original language used by Jesus.

>> Bill Benson: I want to ask you two more questions before we turn to our audience. One, the Strycharszyk family that took care of you and nurtured you until your father was able to return and get you, why do you think no one ever informed anybody that you were there, that you were hiding in their home, which would have had disastrous

consequences for them? Why do you think no one ever said, there's a little Jewish boy, not only a little Jewish boy but the son of a very prominent Jew?

>> Gideon Frieder: I don't know. For me it's a miracle. I have a very religious friend, and I told him this story. I said it was a miracle. The friend says, nonsense. There's no miracle there. It was all preordained so that many years later you can be part of the Ministry of Defense and care for your people. It was all preordained by God. It was not a miracle. And you were brought to this particular family for a reason.

As a matter of fact, while I am on the subject, eventually the daughter had a stroke and was paralyzed on half of her body. And the financial situation of the family became very dire. It was before Slovakia joined the European Union. So a couple of dollars for them was a king's ransom. So I told them, I am going to send every month a small amount of money in dollars, small for me, but significant for you. And the daughter said, no, no way in heaven. I said, what do you mean, no? Your parents told me that they intended to keep me as their son and we would be siblings. And siblings care for each other. And she said, no, if I accept money from you, it means that my parents saved you for benefit. They didn't save you for a benefit. They saved you because it was the right thing to do.

And I -- you know, during all my life, in my scientific world, and scientific work, I dealt with logic. And I have a couple of basic articles in logic which I even today still quote as being very important. And I told to myself, Gideon, if you with all your knowledge of logic cannot convince this woman to accept your help, then everything you have done through all your life is just crap written on paper. Here is the time where your logic should shine, to be of value.

So I asked her -- her name was Anna. And I asked Anna, do you believe in God? Well, asking Anna if she believes in God is like asking her, are you breathing? I said obviously, you do. I said, so how do you know that God didn't bring me to your parents just so that now in your time of need I'll be here to help? And she did the only thing that a woman like her could have done. She took -- she told her daughter to go to the village priest and ask him what to do. And in 10, 15 minutes, between the time that the daughter went to the priest and came back, it felt to me like 10 centuries. But eventually, the daughter comes back and says, the priest said we mortals really don't understand how God operates. But what the man said makes sense. Take his help.

And I -- when she died, every month we sent a small amount of money which for me meant that we skipped dinner in a restaurant once a month to give money to this family. And I thought I did the right thing. She eventually passed away. And now her parents are recognized by the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem as Righteous Among Gentiles. And I am very proud and thankful.

>> Bill Benson: And that will be this January, this coming January.

>> Gideon Frieder: This coming January. I don't know if I'll be strong enough. I am a man on a leash, as you see. I don't know if I'll be strong enough to go. I hope I will be.

>> Bill Benson: Let's take a couple of questions from our audience. Do you feel up to that?

>> Gideon Frieder: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Let's do that. If you have a question, we ask that you use one of the two microphones. There's one in each aisle. Try to make --

>> Gideon Frieder: Just remember I finished my doctorate a long time ago.

[Laughter]

So do not ask questions about quantum electrodynamics.

>> Bill Benson: And I ask you to make your question brief and then I'm going to repeat it just to be sure that we hear it correctly.

>> I just wanted to ask, in a country that is becoming so politically and ideologically divided right now, what is your advice to us to not separate ourselves from each other and label each other Democrat, Republican, Conservative, Liberal? What's your advice to us to not do that?

>> Bill Benson: The question is, what's your advice to our audience about how we live with each other in divided times? What's your advice for us?

>> Gideon Frieder: Live with each other. One of the most beloved Presidents we had in this century, in this country, was President Kennedy. And he was quoted to say, the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in time of need kept their neutrality. Evil can prevail only if the good people are silent. So when you see injustice, act. Don't just sit there. And don't wait for it to come to you, to harm you. Act each time you see injustice to correct it. Each time you see hatred, act to counteract it. And don't promote it and don't tolerate it.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Gideon. Thank you for that.

>> Gideon Frieder: Let's hope that we all are not -- if we all speak up when we see injustice not only to us but to our group and to our people but to everybody, that eventually injustice will disappear. Evil can survive only if the good people let it survive. I am not very optimistic either. But every place I can go and help and do things, I do. I am not always lucky to be able to do it, but it's often I can come to a community and do some good. And the people in the Museum who are my handlers, so to speak, know that if there's a request from a Jewish organization, they will not send me. They will send somebody else because I like to go to organizations which are non-Jewish, which are nonwhite, which are non-native here.

And there are various funny things which happen if you go there. When I was a dean, I found out that we don't have enough Native Americans in the university. So I sent the guy who was my head of recruiting to go to an Indian reservation. We went to an Indian reservation -- Native American reservation and he goes to the tribal head and tells him, I came to recruit people. And I would like to meet people. So the tribal head asked him, is 6:00 a good time for you? And he said, yes, it's a good time.

So the guy comes to the meeting house at 6:00, and there is absolutely nobody there. Around 6:30, 7:00, some people drop in. Including the tribal head. So he asked him, you said that 6:00 is a good time. There was nobody here. And he said, 6:00 was a good time. We just didn't come. So sometimes things don't go exactly the way we want them, but that's not a reason not to try. It's a reason to try harder.

>> Bill Benson: Let's take one more question, Gideon. Thank you very much. And you'll get a chance to ask Gideon your question, though, afterwards and I'll say more about that in a moment. Yes, sir.

>> So I have a question. Is there anything you want us to do to remember the Holocaust? Because I know that Holocaust survivors are kind of dying off and it's our last chance to see people speak about it.

>> Bill Benson: OK.

>> Gideon Frieder: Please remember I am an old man with problems of hearing.

>> Bill Benson: I'll repeat it for you.

>> Gideon Frieder: Please repeat it.

>> Bill Benson: The question is as you know there are not that many survivors left and we'll have fewer, you know, soon, what advice do you have for us to remember the Holocaust? Because I think the gentleman is talking about how important that is to remember it. And your advice about how do we remember the Holocaust.

>> Gideon Frieder: The best way to remember the Holocaust is not to be passive. When you see evil done, be active. Act. Don't let it happen again. Because if you don't act, it will happen again. Think about it. Think about it. What are the causes of things like the Holocaust?

First of all, don't believe anything I tell you because I am not an expert on the Holocaust. I'm just a rambling old guy telling you what I think. But in order for a Holocaust to happen, a couple of things have to be there. There has to be an identified group of victims, OK? This is a group which you want to eliminate. This is a group you want to suppress. There has to be another group of perpetrators, people who believe that that group should be eliminated. And the third part is that the perpetrators have to have the technology, the capability, financial organizational, governmental, moral or whatever, to do it.

And look around yourself. Are the conditions for a new Holocaust right? Are there groups which are uniformly hated? Are there other groups which would like to eliminate those groups? And do we enable them to have the means to do it? And if we have haters and we have victims but we will eliminate the capability of the haters to do what they do, then we did what we have to do. But whatever you do, do. Don't just sit idle. And don't rely on others to do it for you.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

>> Gideon Frieder: OK.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Gideon to close the program in just a moment. I know at least one person had a question, and others may. When Gideon is done, we invite any of you who want to, come up on the stage. Gideon will stay up here. And if you want to ask him a question then, please do. If you just want to shake his hand or have your picture taken with him, we welcome you to do that at the end of our program.

>> Gideon Frieder: And you know I am paid by the question.

[Laughter]

>> Gideon Frieder: So the more questions you have and the more discussion you want, I'm paid more.

>> Bill Benson: Worth coming up to ask him some more questions.

>> Gideon Frieder: The truth of the matter is that I am paid by your presence. I would not be able to survive what I did go through lately without the support of the people in the Museum and without the feeling I have when I meet a group like you. There's a hope in seeing you. And by the way, thank you for not snoring.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: We hope you'll come back to another First Person program. We'll continue through August 8. All of our programs are available through the Museum's YouTube channel. It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person gets the last word. And so I'm going to turn back to Gideon for his last word. And I mentioned in the

beginning that his son Ophir was honored recently in Europe. And I have a hunch we're going to hear about that.

>> Gideon Frieder: I'll talk about it, although it may be improper. It's boasting. But I will do it anyway.

[Laughter]

>> Gideon Frieder: But in any case, I am very lucky to be able to meet people like you. And to draw from you strength to continue because I know there is hope. So many of you -- that's the thing here. And by the way, about sleeping and snoring, when I was in the University of Michigan, it was an era where computer science was booming. And the introductory classes were overflowing. So one year I was teaching the introductory class in a large auditorium. And on the first row on the right, this young man would come. He came for every lecture. He would sit down and go to sleep. And slept throughout the whole lecture. From all the hundreds of people I had in the class, I didn't remember a single name except I want to know who this is. And the nice thing about it is that he got a straight A in spite of sleeping. He just knew everything. So don't feel bad if you slept a bit.

The goal of the Holocaust was to eliminate the Jewry of Europe. And they did big strides toward achieving the goal. But they didn't achieve the goal luckily. And this March I had the opportunity to essentially say all you Nazis failed. Not only the Jews are still alive, but the Roma are alive and all the other groups you persecuted are alive. And what happened last March, my son who is a scientist with whom I have common papers and we have common patents, but he is far better than I am. He was elected to be a member of the European Academy of Arts & Science, and the inauguration into the academy is done in their headquarters which is in Austria. Now what's and there is that on the border with Germany and the other side of the border are the Bavarian mountains. And a special place which was the favorite place of Hitler. So from Hitler's place you could see the university.

So here there will be integration, and my wife and I go together to the inauguration. And we are sitting there. The inauguration is conducted in three languages. English, Latin, and German. English because everybody speaks English. Latin because the documents are written in Latin. And German because it's Austria, which is the native language there. So my son is called to the podium to be recognized, and my wife kind of nudges me. And I turn to her and say, what's wrong? And she said, nothing. Do you hear the noise? And I said, what noise? And she said, all the Nazis turning in their graves. That a Jew is being inaugurated. And to make things even sweeter, he is inaugurated sitting down. Another man is called and a second man is called. And the man comes to the podium. He is recognized for his a professor of medicine in Oxford and is recognized for his contribution to medicine. But he is an African man from Uganda. And I nudged my wife and I tell her, listen. They are turning to the other side now.

[Laughter]

>> Gideon Frieder: Not only did they inaugurate a Jew, but here is a black man being inaugurated to one of the most prestigious organizations in Europe. You Nazis really did not succeed. Evil doesn't always succeed. And people of goodwill will prevail. And just to add to my boasting, last month my son was elected to the European Academy, Academy European, which is very unusual for non-Europeans to be invited. And, again, the feeling that you failed with all your -- all what you tried to do to eliminate, you did not

succeed. The good prevailed and is rewarded. And it's in your hands to continue it. And you see good things to be done, do them. When you see bad things to be -- which may happen, object to them. OK? And believe that good things matter and act for them.

Sorry about boasting about my son. But I am very proud.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Gideon. Thank you.

[Applause]