Thursday, June 27, 2019

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Henry Weil

Thursday, June 27th, 2019

>> 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 twentieth year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is **Mr. Henry Weil**, 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. Henry will share 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 Henry 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. The back of your program, has information about the museum's "First Person" Web site.

What you are about hear from Henry is one individual's account of the Holocaust, we have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction, and we begin with this 1939 photograph of Henry Weil, who was born Heinz Weil in Vienna Austria, who was born Heinz Weil on September 22nd, 1935. His father Hugo owned a leather goods store and his mother Marishka cared for Henry, in March 1938, German troops, marched into Austria, and annexed the country. Henry and his mother watched from their apartment window as German soldiers marched through the streets of Vienna, this map shows Austria incorporated, into Germany after the annexation, soon after, anti-Semitic legislation was passed in Austria, restricting the rights of Austrian Jews.

Hugo began preparing to get his family out of Austria, he was able

to -- able to secure an affidavit, from Mr. Richard rice, an unknown man in Boston, who guaranteed Hugo would have work for him upon his arrival in the U.S. Here, we see, the affidavit of support signed by Mr. Rice, and I might just ask you to linger, for a moment, on that, in which Mr. Rice, who earns, I believe, $26 a week, commits himself to financial responsibility for someone that he didn't know.

In April -- excuse me, Marishka's brother, Joseph, assisted in obtaining a visa for Hugo, but Marishka, and Henry were not listed on the visa. Hugo made dozens of trips to the American consulate in Vienna, to secure papers for them as well. In April 1939, the Weils were forced from their apartment. An old classmate of Hugo's hid them until they were able to leave for Paris, from there the family made their way to Southampton, England, where their journey to the United States began.

The Weils arrived in the United States aboard the ship, the Aquitania, three weeks after leaving England. Here we see a newspaper clipping from September 17th, 1939, with an article entitled "Aquitania arrives. Debarks, 1,625 here." Henry, who is circled is seen on the ship, along with two other refugees, eventually they settled in Wilmington, Delaware, where Henry began kindergarten and you can see Henry in the lower right hand corner there. After arriving in the United States, and spending their first year in the Bronx, Henry and his parents settled in Wilmington

His sister, Shirley, was born in 1941, Henry graduated from high school in Wilmington in 1953, then attended the university of Delaware, graduating in 1957.

After earning his law degree from Georgetown law school, in Washington, D.C., in 1960, Henry went into private practice, specializing in personal injury law as a litigator. Henry had two children with his first wife. His daughter Marcie, is

a pediatric oncologist and now medical director of a firm doing cancer research, son Dave is a mechanical engineer, Henry was married to his second wife Mary Francis for 35 years, before she passed away, in 2007 from pancreatic cancer Mary Francis had three daughters from her first marriage, Katherine Barbara and Mary Jo, the 5 children, whom Henry and Mary Francis raised together, gave them eight grandchildren, all of them live in the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

And his youngest grandchild will start college this fall at Louisiana State University. Henry retired from his law practice just last year, now spending a lot of his time reading walking and playing tennis, which he says is his passion, he also likes going to museums and to the opera, for which he also has a passion, Henry became involved with this museum upon his retirement and volunteers survivor's desk speak speaking to museum visitors which he says he loves doing, you will find him here Monday afternoon, he is accompanied with his significant daughter Lennie and Marcie, who are here with parents, so please join me in welcoming our "First Person", Mr. Henry Weil.

[APPLAUSE]

HENRY: Thank you, Bill.

BILL BENSON: Henry, thank you so much for joining us for your willingness to be our "First Person" today.

We have -- just an hour, so we'll -- we'll start. And I might just mention for our audience her sure.

BILL BENSON: Since you're recently retired and this is your first time with us at "First Person."

HENRY: It is, thank you very much and thank you for having me.

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BILL BENSON: Nazi Germany, and Austria, in March 1938 when you were almost 2 1/2 years of age&that was more than five months before Germany invaded Poland starting the second world war. Before you tell us about the annexation of Austria, and what it meant for you and your family, tell us, first, a little bit, recognizing how young you were, a little bit about what you know about your family and your life in those years, before the Anschluss our annexation of Austria.

HENRY: Sure, I was born in Vienna Austria in September 1935, and my family, was a Jewish family. We lived a very comfortable life. My father, worked, with his uncle, in a leather goods store, and as I say they were -- a comfortable family. We were observant Jews.

We lived in a small, confined area in the city of Vienna call the ninth district, and within that district, where we lived were also my mother's sister and her family, and my father's -- my mother's brother, and his family. There were three families, I was the only child with my family, but my -- my mother's sister had two girls, and my mother's brother had daughter and a son; so we were all very, very close and the children all played together and lived a very nice life.

Interestingly enough: About a half a block down from where we lived, was the Sigmund Freud house, which is now a museum, but that's where Sigmund Freud lived and my father would tell me, from time to time, that he and his friends would play cards, with Sigmund Freud.

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: And guess what? My father would say, he seems a little crazy!

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: But that's the way it was. It was a very, very nice life. And... you know, we really -- had a good, good family relationship, with my

cousins and my aunts and uncles

BILL BENSON: Henry, I believe your father was originally from Czechoslovakia, your mother from Hungary, what brought them to Austria?

HENRY: Well, conditions back in Hungary and Czechoslovakia during, before and following the first world war, were not very good, so many families, left their homes, which my father and mother did, and they moved to Vienna, which they thought would give them a better life, and that's how they both arrived there.

BILL BENSON: When you were born, I believe your parents had been married for ten years.

Did they delay having children, because of their getting established in Vienna, or -- no?

HENRY: You know, I never asked that question of my parents, for obvious reasons; but I don't know why.

But it just so happened they were married in 1925 and I came along in 1935 about ten years later.

BILL BENSON: German troops marched into Austria on March 12th, 1938, in what is known as the Anschluss, or the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany

Although you were very young at the time, test what you can about the Anschluss, and what it meant for your parents, your family, and other Jews in Austria.

HENRY: Yes, as I say, I was a young child; so I have a very, very vague memory of the conditions in Vienna, following the invasion of the Anschluss, as it's called in Vienna during that period of time

But what I do remember, and some of the things that I'm going to be

talking about -- are things that I learned later from my parents,

Once the Anschluss occurred, we were all required, whenever we went out of our apartment, or our homes, to wear a Jewish star on our clothing

And I had a cousin, who was about ten years older than I; my cousin, Mary, and she had very blond hair, and blue eyes and she looked very Arian so I'm told that at night, we would send her out, on the street, to try to bring food and necessities to our homes,

Because she could probably get away with it, and she would apparently take her Jewish star and somehow turn it -- her collar over and hide it, and apparently she was never stopped.

And I remember that very vividly; that that's what occurred. But other than that, I don't really have very, very good memory of any -- anything having to do with the Anschluss

I will just tell you anecdotally, when my family all arrived in America, many years later, I talked to my cousin Mary she converted giving up her Jewish religion, became a methodist as I recall, and I asked her why did you do that cousin Mary, she said, "Well, I never wanted to have to be Jewish again and have to walk down the streets, and -- and fear." She said it was just horrible. I just never wanted to experience that again. I remember that.

BILL BENSON: It's not hard to imagine how terrifying --

HENRY: She was terrified.

BILL BENSON: -- to do what she did and the responsibility.

HENRY: She was terrified.

BILL BENSON: You do have -- one memory of the Anschluss, in the occupation itself, women Nazis actually marched into Vienna

You witnessed that.

HENRY: I did. One day, I do remember, being in my apartment, when I heard drums beating,

And I heard soldiers marching

And when I went to look out the window, there were the German troops marching right in front of our apartment building.

I thought it was exciting. I thought it was a parade.

But when I looked over at my mother, she was hysterical, she was crying.

And at that point in time, my parents realized that it was very late.

In September -- this is already very late in the game in terms of people didn't want to leave their homes unless they really had to and some of the people in Vienna and my parents included thought well, maybe this would blow over, it wouldn't be so bad. May be we can stay here but when the soldiers were manufacturing in front of the building they realized then and there that it was time to go, and that's when my father started the process of going to the consulate daily, almost daily as I'm told

BILL BENSON: Before we turn to that, let me ask you this for our audiences benefit we referred to the Anshcluss, annexation of Austria by Germany, just briefly what did that mean? What did it mean to be annexed, because the war hadn't begun yet? What did it mean?

HENRY: They just took over the country. Made it part of Germany, Hitler

BILL BENSON: Took it over.

HENRY: As they later took over Poland and Czechoslovakia and the other European countries.

BILL BENSON: The other ones resulted in war.

HENRY: Poland is the one that resulted in the war, exactly, Austria didn't necessarily bring on the war, but it was the first of the conquests of the German 3rd Reich at that point in time.

BILL BENSON: And as you started to tell us, of course, with the annexation or the Anschluss that really galvanized your parents, your father into action HENRY: That triggered them to take action, because they realized that it was very, very late, and we had to try to leave, make sure that we were able to get --

BILL BENSON: Tell us what he did to try to get you out of there.

HENRY: Okay, so with that you had to have three things: Papers to be able to exit Vienna. You had to have an affidavit from a -- someone in America, who would be financially responsible for you; and that was Mr. Rice, an act of charity, if you will. And you also had to have a close family relative that was already living in the United States, fortunately my mother's brother, Joe, my uncle Joe, he had come to America, shortly after the first world war and was already settled in New York, we had my uncle living in New York the affidavit from Mr. Rice and now my father had to go to the consulate and get the exit papers and that took days weeks and months because of numbers of people that were trying to get away at this time. And also, there was a lot of red tape and bureaucracy involved.

BILL BENSON: While you had a relative your mother's brother living in New York so it made sense to think about the U.S. Do you know if your parents thought of -- knowing how difficult it was to get here, do you know if they thought about or tried to look into going to any other countries? HENRY: I don't know

that. I don't know that. I'm very happy they chose America.

BILL BENSON: Right. Absolutely.

[LAUGHTER] BILL BENSON: Mr. Rice, as we said earlier, an unknown person, and so he makes $26 a week.

Who was this guy?

HENRY: I have no clue, I mean, it's just an absolute... wonder that -- remarkable that he would do such a kind thing and I'm sure -- I'm not sure, but I have a -- a strong feeling that Mr. Rice, probably not knowing us, may have signed a similar affidavit for other families as well. It was just a charitable act on his part. Very, very kind. I tried to locate him, by the way, Bill, and.... some years back and I was never able to find him. I wanted to personally contact him if I could.

BILL BENSON: One of the things that I noticed when we saw the affidavit on the large screen as opposed to you know a picture noticed it said his occupation, he was also associated with the leather industry. So there must have been some --

HENRY: Maybe.

BILL BENSON: -- route that way.

HENRY: I have no idea. My father as I say, was in the leather industry and having worked with his uncle in the leather goods store.

BILL BENSON: Now you do have the affidavit, your uncle I believe was able to provide a visa yet that wasn't enough, I think your words were you told me your father later said to you, actually, getting all the things we needed to get out, was a nightmare. What did that it involve for him? HENRY: As I say, he, every day I understand he went, and tried to get the necessary papers, and there were

long lines, I've seen pictures of lines of people lined up in front of the consulate.

Amazing and ultimately, though, he was able to -- the first thing that happened was he was able to get an exit visa, which only had his name on it.

And my father was a very meticulous man, and he would inquire well, why is my name on it and why not my wife and son's name on this paper? And he was assured that it wasn't necessary, that he could leave; da, da, da and so on and so forth; but he persisted.

And fortunately, he was able to find -- able to obtain an exit paper that had my mother's name and my name included; and that was when we were able to finally leave Vienna.

BILL BENSON: And the time involved in that was really from March 1938.

HENRY: Months.

BILL BENSON: Over a year.

HENRY: Over a year, able to do that.

BILL BENSON: In August of 1939, as your father's now -- has the paperwork together, right about that time, your father's forced -- your family is forced out of the apartment. Where you lived.

Do you know anything about that? And what they did? Still not out of Austria, out of their home, what do they do?

HENRY: Well, all I know, what I'm told is we left in the middle of the night from Vienna, taken by train, to Paris, that was the first stop on our journey to America.

When we arrived in Paris, there were constant air raids, we were there, like -- as I recall, from hearing from my parents -- three or four days and nights,

and most of that time, was spent in an air raid shelter because of the constant air raids.

I have a vivid recollection and memory, of one event. We were staying in some room or someplace, and when the air raids started, my father picked me up and he ran, carrying me, to the air raid shelter.

And he lost his shoe.

And I remember on the way, to the air raid shelter my father losing the shoe, didn't stop to pick up the shoe, and then somehow, continued running to the air raid shelter.

Sometimes when we got to the air raid shelters we were late and the air raid shelters were already full, and we couldn't get in.

So we went into the metro.

And we spent the night riding in the metro.

BILL BENSON: Going back and forth.

HENRY: Back and forth during the air raids, correct.

BILL BENSON: I'm going to take you back for a moment to the last days in Austria you were forced out of your apartment and I think you went and hid with a friend of your father's for that one week.

HENRY: I'm told that my father had a friend, this was before, the -- before the Germans came into power -- had a friend who became a German soldier, or officer, a nonJew.

And he, actually, took us into his home, for a day or two, or however long it took before we could board the train, that would take us to Paris, that's what I was told by my father.

BILL BENSON: Did you ever learn what happened to the friend.

HENRY: I did not. I understood it was a very risky -- you know, very risky thing for that family to have done, obviously.

BILL BENSON: But you did get out and you got to Paris.

HENRY: Got to Paris, here's the interesting thing:

Once we were able to leave Paris, we moved on to Southampton, England.

Southampton, England, was the port city in England, where we were to board the ship, that would take us to America.

Because of this long delay in getting the papers, and getting all the things together that were needed to leave Austria, we arrived in Southampton, too late.

And that ship... has already departed.

Guess what?

That ship was ultimately sunk, by German U-boats.

BILL BENSON: On that voyage, right,.

HENRY: On that voyage, we were too late to be on that ship.

So I always say, I consider myself very fortunate to be able to have left this Holocaust and then to have missed the ship that was sunk by German U-boats.

Now, we were able to -- there were a number of other families that arrived in Southampton, late, and missed that ship; and as a result, we were put on a ship called "the Aquitania" earlier you think you've seen a picture of myself and the other two boys, on that -- on that ship.

And we if you noticed we were required also to wear our life vests. We had to wear them day and night. Sleep with them, because we were also being chased by these German U-boats.

CART FILE

Fortunately, we were able to zigzag across the Atlantic for quite a while on that trip, and we were able to outrun --

BILL BENSON: It was, like, a three-week journey.

HENRY: Yeah, two or three weeks as I recall, because of the zigzagging to be able to avoid the German U-boats, as a matter of fact I don't know if you noticed it. There was a photograph of a temporary ladder, that they put up on our deck, and we were told that -- in the event of a torpedo strike, we were to climb up the ladder to a higher deck, to a safer place, on the ship.

Fortunately we didn't have to do that.

BILL BENSON: Do you recall or know anything else about your trip across the Atlantic?

HENRY: I don't recall anything about the trip.

Except that my mother told me that I spent the entire time on a rocking horse, in the hull of the ship.

[LAUGHTER] BILL BENSON: That's a --

HENRY: Must have been fun, what I do remember --

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: What I do remember, is coming --

BILL BENSON: The ship rocking wasn't enough, get on the rocking horse!

HENRY: What I do remember is coming into the New York harbor.

And seeing the statue -- I didn't know what it was, but there was the statue of liberty. And I remember now, all of the people in our ship, that were in our -- refugees were on the top deck of the ship and everybody's very happy to be an American, screaming America, we made it to America! Very, very exciting I remember that.

BILL BENSON: And the press covered it.

HENRY: Yeah, and -- it was also -- in that photograph, that was shown earlier.

BILL BENSON: You mentioned to me before you came -- came up here this morning that the two refugee boys that were with you, you've tried to -- HENRY: I tried to locate them. They were the Manfred boys, I forgotten their first names, Manfred, and Weiner, was their last name, I have not been able to locate them.

We were -- we were, you know, just put together on that ship, and we spent a lot of time together, obviously.

BILL BENSON: So tell us, Henry, you fled your home country. You come to the United States, what did you have with you?

HENRY: When we arrived here?

BILL BENSON: Yeah.

HENRY: We arrived here with very little. We left Vienna, with basically the clothes on our back in the middle of the night and the few things that I do remember that we were able to take out were my mother's iron.

Don't know why she was so --

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: Hung up on that. But she did bring her iron, and my father was a big opera buff and he had his opera glasses like binoculars, small pair.

BILL BENSON: She at least had something to use. HENRY: So that was what we had.

BILL BENSON: Almost no money.

HENRY: No money, yeah, no money. First, we were taken to Ellis

Island, and we were processed at Ellis Island. And because we had no money, we were fortunate, however, to be able to stay with some family, my mother's sister who had come to America a year before, and they were already living in New York. So we were able to stay with them for a period of time. Until my father was able to find a job, and he found that job in the leather factory, in Wilmington Delaware.

BILL BENSON: And I want to come back to that in just a moment. With you now safely in New York, with your parents, the family members, that you had been so close to, the cousins, and the uncles and aunts, that you described earlier, in Vienna, tell us what happened to them, because they were able to get out.

HENRY: Yes, my cousins my mother's sisters, two girls they were on the kinder transport. Sent to England. That is my aunt and uncle just put them on the boat not knowing whether they would ever see them again and sent them off to England. Fortunately, after the war -- or at some point in time maybe even before the war ended they were able to reunite their parents who were already living in New York, my mother's brother, she had a brother, that also was from Vienna, and couldn't get into the United States, because of the small quotas under the Roosevelt Administration; however, they were able to get into Australia.

Australia, at that time was a fairly new country, and they were looking to -- my uncle was an engineer. And they were looking to develop the country, so they were fortunate -- and I still have cousins living in Australia today.

BILL BENSON: Uh-huh.

And we'll talk a little bit later about other family members who did not get out. And come back to that.

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HENRY: That's right.

BILL BENSON: So here you are in September 1939, you're in the United States, war is now underway in Europe. Because Poland has been innovated by the -- by the Nazis and the Russians.

You're four years old. Tell us -- you started to tell us you moved in with your -- uncle and his family.

Tell us about coming to the U.S., what it was like for you to get started -- and begin a new life here.

HENRY: Yes, my father as I say -- we were staying with some family, so what happened was, it was a leather -- some sort of a leather factory, originally in Philadelphia.

So my father would stay in Philadelphia, and work in a leather factory in Philadelphia, and come back to New York, and be with myself and with my mother on the weekend.

And that went on for a while, until he found a permanent position, in -- as I say in Wilmington, Delaware, where we finally settled.

And it was easy for me. I went right through school, I picked up English just like that, you know, as a young child it's much easier, my parents had a more difficult time. They went to night school. They learned the English language.

They had to make sure that they had enough history of America, to be able to obtain citizenship.

My mother -- I'll tell you a cute story. My mother... picked up the English language a lot quicker than my father. My father took a little longer.

And one day, I remember, my mother saying to my father -- his name was Hugo, "Hugo, when someone says to you or asks you how do you feel? Your

response should be fine, thank you, how are you?" And somebody says how are you, you say fine thank you, how are you?

Some short time after that, we went to a doctor's visit, with my father.

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: You don't know what's coming.

BILL BENSON: I do and I can't help but smile!

HENRY: The doctor says to my father, "Hugo, how are your bowels?

My father said, "Fine. Thank you. How are yours?"

True story!

[LAUGHTER] BILL BENSON: (Laughing) Henry, do you know, once your parents were here, both when they first arrived and as they got themselves established in New York, and then moved on to Wilmington -- were they able to have contact with any of the family members in Austria?

HENRY: Yes. Strangely, there were a number of other families from Germany and from Austria, who settled in Delaware.

And so my father and mother were able to socialize with them; so they were able to sort of grow into the -- into the System, by having friends in Wilmington.

As I said, my father was working in a leather factory.

And my mother who was an excellent cook, cooked for other families.

And yours truly was the delivery boy. I was the -- actually, the originator of wheels on meals! Except it was --

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: Meals by foot. Not on wheels. I delivered the -- the dinners to the various families, in the neighborhood my mother would cook food for.

BILL BENSON: To help make ends meet.

HENRY: My father never made a lot of money.

BILL BENSON: I was curious about -- was your family, were able to stay in touch with the relatives that were in Austria, did you know that they had been able to get out and go to Australia, and the other family members, was there any communication?

HENRY: For a short time, my father was able to send some kind of care packages to one of the sisters, sister, Wilma but after a time that stopped and that's when I assume she was picked up and sent to a concentration camp. And if you like, I'll tell you about my father's siblings.

BILL BENSON: We'll come back to that in just a minute if we can

HENRY: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: I also wonder if your father was able to have some communication with your sister, if -- we were not in the war, of course, until after pearl harbor in December 1941.

HENRY: Forty-one.

BILL BENSON: I would guess all communication with Nazi-occupied countries and therefore, the people that were there, probably stopped completely after that.

HENRY: The only one I remember is the sister Wilma we had contact with. I think he lost contact with his other siblings.

BILL BENSON: In 1941 your mother had your sister, Shirley.

HENRY: Right.

BILL BENSON: Did she -- did she grow up knowing much about what the family had been through? What you had experienced?

HENRY: She did. I'm sure she did and she also picked up the German

language, my parents would speak German most of the time at home, and she speaks fluent German today much more -- I've forgotten a lot because I left to go to school and she was around much longer and she speaks German much better than I do.

BILL BENSON: I do have to ask you about this.

Your birth name, Heinz.

HENRY: Correct.

BILL BENSON: And you're called Henry, there's a story there HENRY: There's a story there.

My -- my given name was Heinz,-Heinz a typical German name and I'm told when my mother came to America, went to the supermarket and noticed Heinz ketchup, baked beans and mustard you're from now on going to be called Henry, and that's how I was Henry, no more Heinz.

HENRY: I don't know, maybe the fact that it -- it was a German name, may have had some part of it, but that's a --

BILL BENSON: I'm curious about that because we're at war with Germany, and you have a German name, your family has a German name, in the United States.

Did you ever experience any sort of hostility or anything like that HENRY: No, I did not. Never did. I was accepted. We lived in a very mixed neighborhood, Jews nonJews blacks whites, and you name it and everybody got along, and it was beautiful.

BILL BENSON: I think you shared you don't remember experiencing anti-Semitism.

HENRY: Not at all.

BILL BENSON: Tell us a little bit more about school for you, because you were able to start once you came here.

HENRY: Yeah, I went right through started in kindergarten went all the way through school there in Delaware and to the university of Delaware, and then I came here following that to attend law school at Georgetown University.

And I've been in the Washington area, ever since that time.

BILL BENSON: Of course, the war ended, in May of 1945.

You had been in the country now for some years at that point. At what point do you think your parents and then you, really understand the full enormity of what happened in Europe in the Holocaust and also what happened to the family members that were not able to get out?

HENRY: Well, I started to say my father had three sisters and a brother. The -- the -- they all wound up in the camps. And... some years later, when I was a teenager, I was driving my parents through a small town in New Jersey, Vineland, New Jersey, some of you may be familiar with Vineland, New Jersey.

And my father, asked me to stop at a farm a chicken farm. There were a number of chicken farms there, and somehow -- and I don't understand why -- but, some of the survivors of the Holocaust, who survived -- wound up in this area, Vineland New Jersey and owned and operated these chicken farms, so my father asked to stop the car, wanted to buy fresh eggs at this particular farmhouse and when he came out he was crying.

What's the matter dad?

Can you imagine this -- the woman who owned this particular farm, was my father's -- one of my father's sisters, cellmate in the concentration camp and she proceeds to tell my father, that a German soldier, working in the camp, gave

her -- gave my father's sister a poison pill to take, shortly before she was going to be taken to the gas chamber. That's how my father found out about how he lost one of his sisters.

BILL BENSON: Extraordinary.

HENRY: It is, it's awful, it was a shocking thing, and later he also learned, he received a telegram from some Jewish agency his other sisters and his brother, they all perished in the concentration camp.

BILL BENSON: If you don't mind, say just a little bit more about that.

Getting that telegram, because I -- I think, as I recall, from what you told me, you and your father came home and your mom had just, opened it.

HENRY: Yes, where I went to grammar school is right across the street from where my father's factory was, and so often, we would meet at lunchtime and walk a few blocks from there to our home, to an apartment, to have lunch together; and when we got there my mother was crying profusely, she was the one who had received a telegram and told my father, and me, that -- what had happened to my father's siblings that they had perished.

BILL BENSON: And that was -- was the war, right after the war?

HENRY: That was it, right after the war.

BILL BENSON: You said earlier well, your father was working in Wilmington, in the leather factory, wasn't earning a lot of money but you said he was so happy to be here.

HENRY: My father was so grateful. Both my parents were but my father particularly was so happy to be in the United States, I mean, we had people here at the Holocaust that are survivors who -- they tell me they just got on a boat they had no idea where they were going to go. Under the Roosevelt administration,

we had some small quotas here at that time in the United States; but we were fortunate to be able to come to this country. My father was so grateful. He was just -- couldn't be happier, to be in America, he was so happy.

BILL BENSON: Uh-huh.

HENRY: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: I want you to share, if you will, something you told me, when you were in college, you joined ROTC.

And decided that you wanted to go to officer candidate school. So you're already in ROTC, and you get accepted to officer candidate school. HENRY: Yeah, well, the state university at the university of Delaware you had to spend two years as a -- an ROTC, it was mandatory and if you wanted to go on to become an officer, you could voluntarily do that and I was interested in doing that and I was put on a train, headed for -- I think it was -- fort bliss Texas, for officers candidate training school.

And the captain, whoever it was in charge, said where is Weil, right here sir, are you an American citizen, I said yes, sir, he says where are your citizenship papers? I said sir, I became a citizen as a child, when my parents were naturalized which was the law as I understood it. And I don't have citizenship papers.

And I think even if I had papers, I wouldn't have had them with me on the trip to Texas.

But he said, off the train, and that was the end of my military career, he sent me back. I'm kind of sorry that I didn't get to serve, I really would have enjoyed that.

BILL BENSON: Right.

You, of course, as we said earlier, you just recently retired from your law practice after a very, very long practice, and now, involved with our museum.

HENRY: Right.

BILL BENSON: Tell us what it means for you to now not only be associated with the Museum, be a volunteer here, but also to share publicly, what you and your family went through.

HENRY: I only wish that I had done this before. I mean, it means the world to me, to come here, once a week, sometimes twice a week -- to share a story. My story is so -- somewhat unlike many of the other survivors, I had it relatively easy compared to some of the other people that you'll run into here, at the museum, who actually were -- interned in the concentration camp, and somehow survived.

I was one of the lucky few, who was able to get away.

So -- but nevertheless, it's still part of the overall story. And so I am so -- makes me feel so good to be able to share this story, with people, who are coming to the museum, who are interested; and learning about the Holocaust. It just gives me such pleasure to do that. It means an awful lot.

BILL BENSON: I also wanted to ask you, Henry, that growing up, during the war, in Wilmington, and then going -- on to high school after the war and then college, in Delaware.

Did you -- did you learn much about the Holocaust in school? And were others interested in hearing about your experience or did you share that at that time?

HENRY: Not really.

I think, the -- the gist of it is, my -- my knowledge came essentially from

my parents.

BILL BENSON: Uh-huh.

HENRY: We didn't have Holocaust studies in school, when I was in school, and I learned about the Holocaust, from my parents, and from reading about it, from coming to the museum, and --

BILL BENSON: Later in life?

HENRY: Later in life, yeah, I had a very, very good, fortunate life. I had a career, I have my family here. I had my children, here and my daughter and I had a wonderful marriage, for 35 years, and now, fortunate enough -- after my wife had passed way I was able to meet a wonderful lady, who is also from Wilmington, Delaware, that we knew each other as young children.

So, I mean, I've had a blessed life. I just can't imagine why I've been so blessed. I ask myself often why me? I don't have an answer for that.

BILL BENSON: Henry, you've been back to Austria.

Will you tell us about that?

HENRY: About 40 years ago -- and I'm taking you back now to, like, the '70s.

My wife insisted that we go back, she wanted to see, where I lived and how this all came about.

BILL BENSON: And up to that point you never -- HENRY: I never had any interest in doing that. So anyway, she -- as most women do -- usually prevail.

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: I went to Austria, well, before I got to Austria, we were on an airplane, landing and the first stop you couldn't get a direct flight. So we had to stop in Munich Germany and landed in Munich Germany and as soon

as our plane started to descend in Munich Germany, I had some really strange feelings, a little timid and I didn't really didn't want to step foot on German soil. But when I looked out the window as we were really landing I looked out and there was El AL airlines right on the tarmac.

BILL BENSON: The Israeli airline HENRY.

: The airline for Israel. If it's good enough for El Al, it's good enough for me, then we went on to Vienna, Austria, now I had a photograph, of my apartmenthouse, that my parents left for me.

So we went over to -- that apartment building, and it was just like -- just as it was in the picture: Everything else in that neighborhood was still bombed out. From the war. Never been rebuilt. But that apartment house was still standing miraculously there.

BILL BENSON: This was 25 --

HENRY: This was 1975, somewhere along in there, anyway a big, wooden door, and I'm banging on the door, to try to get somebody's attention.

And a lady comes down.

And she says, "You know, who are you?"

And when I tell her who I am, she says, "Oh, my God, you are that quote/unquote nice Jewish family that left in the middle of the night."

I remember my parents always talking and asking I wonder if they made it. I wonder if they made it. So happy to see you and I said that's very kind. And she showed me around a little bit.

And she said, now, would you like to go up and see your apartment? I said absolutely.

And picture this: This is 1975 or somewhere along in there.

She said, "Well, the Gestapo officer, and his wife, are still living there, they would love to meet you."

And I said -- that's not going to happen. I didn't say that to her. But that was my only trip back to Vienna.

BILL BENSON: That's astonishing.

HENRY: Hearing how this man was not being tried as a war criminal, or how he was still living in the apartment that my parents had, apparently had all of their possessions I have no idea.

BILL BENSON: This woman's lack of awareness, not only to say you were the nice Jewish family, but they would love to meet you.

HENRY: I don't think she was being mean-spirited.

BILL BENSON: Probably genuine.

HENRY: Genuine, yeah, that's true.

BILL BENSON: Now there's some consideration you might actually go back at some point.

HENRY: There is an organization, called Jewish Welcome, who -- they bring survivors, back to Vienna, at their expense, and they spend a week there, and show you around, different things, and, you know, try to make reparations in some way, for -- for what you had lost.

And so, I'm on the waiting list.

BILL BENSON: Because you had a family member HENRY: Yeah, I may go back.

BILL BENSON: And you had a family member who actually did that right.

HENRY: Absolutely. My cousins have already done that but I may, but I'm retired.

BILL BENSON: When you retire? What about your parents? Did they ever go back to Austria?

HENRY: They never went back to Austria.

BILL BENSON: Any interest? HENRY: No, no, they were very, very bitter.

BILL BENSON: Other than that, how would you describe their lives, as -- here in America? HENRY: I would say they had a wonderful life.

BILL BENSON: Yeah HENRY: They had a really wonderful, blessed life here in America, they were thrilled to be here. They had family here, they had friends here.

They just -- HENRY: .

BILL BENSON: When did you lose them.

>> My father passed away in 1978, at the age of 78 my mother, at the age of 64, they were very happy to be American citizens. Very proud.

BILL BENSON: One last question for you, before we have a chance to turn to our audience for questions.

You shared with me, that now that you come, to the museum and sit at the survivor's desk, and talk with lots of folks from all over, that you are especially just really impressed and fascinated by young people and their interest. Will you elaborate on that a little bit? HENRY: Well, it means so much to me, not only young people, but especially, with the young people that are so knowledgeable -- I have -- eighth graders that come sit at the survivor's desk usually on Monday afternoon and they ask questions that are absolutely very, very fascinating questions about the Holocaust.

It's -- it pleases me to no end to know they're learning about the

Holocaust. It's so important. As I say when I was in school, we didn't have any courses or lessons in Holocaust. So I'm just so amazed at some of the questions that are asked, and -- it's so important for particularly for young people, not to forget, not to know about the Holocaust.

So it was -- never forget what happened.

BILL BENSON: That's a great segue to our audience, I think, should we turn to our audience HENRY: Sure, that would be nice.

BILL BENSON: We would love to have you ask questions of Henry, if you're so inclined. We have microphones in each aisle. We do ask that you go to the microphone if you do have a question, try to make your question as brief as you can, and then I will repeat the question, just to be sure that we -- we hear it correctly, and all of you hear it as well; so, we would love to encourage you to do so.

And we'll look for a brave soul, who is willing to come up and take the microphone.

And here comes our first brave soul, in a second, there we go! Yes, sir and I will -- I will try to repeat it as best I can.

FROM THE FLOOR: I had a question about Mr. Rice.

I know you hadn't met him. But what were the obligations he was assuming, as part of providing this affidavit? And was there any additional assistance, or engagement with him once you made it to your -- to the U.S.?

BILL BENSON: Thank you for that. The question is Mr. Rice, describe a little bit more about what obligation -- was he actually taking on by signing that affidavit?

And then once you arrived, was there any other assistance, provided to

you and your family, from compare HENRY: No, as I say, Mr. Rice -- made $26 a week, according to the affidavit.

And the affidavit as you know is a document that's signed under oath, which meant that he was legally obligated to lend support to my family.

How he was going to be able to do that, I have no idea. And how many other affidavits, he signed, for other folks, I -- I don't know.

But just -- I just -- assumed it. It was just something he felt like he needed to do. Out of the goodness of his heart.

But my family received no other -- no other help. My father never made much money working in the leather factory. He worked as a peace worker, where he had to grain the hides in the factory, and he was paid by the number of hides that he would grain every day, and it was very hard manual labor. But no, he was -- we were able to survive.

BILL BENSON: I think you mentioned this earlier, for the first year or thereabouts, before you moved to Wilmington, he actually was working in another factory in Philadelphia HENRY: He commuted.

BILL BENSON: To New York HENRY: Yes, he did. He did that for a while until he was able to find a permanent job and we were okay.

BILL BENSON: Amazing HENRY: We never complained.

BILL BENSON: Yes, sir?

FROM THE FLOOR: So Mr. Weil, I would like to start by thanking you for coming and speaking, this is a very important and incredible story.

And my question, as somebody who lived through Nazi rule, especially during the annexation of Austria -- what would you say, are the warning signs, for fascism, and Naziism, and how can we help fight back against it and stop it?

BILL BENSON: The questions for the audience is what do you think sort of the warning signs orphNaziism, and fascism, and what can we do to address that? HENRY: Well, unfortunately, we're hearing and reading more and more, anti-Semitism in this country around the world and even Europe today and it's very frightening, rampant on college campuses.

I -- of course, I've never experienced personally, but I -- I just -- am so concerned about what I'm hearing and reading.

And I think the importance of this museum, is that, we should -- we should never forget what happened. Once we forget, it's very conceivable that it would happen again.

So I'm really worried not for myself, but for my children and grandchildren that they're going to be growing up in this kind of an atmosphere.

BILL BENSON: That's why you being here today is so important HENRY: That's why I think all of us being here all the survivors I think it's what motivates us to come here and give of our time.

BILL BENSON: Thank you, very much.

FROM THE FLOOR: Thank you.

BILL BENSON: Yes, sir.

FROM THE FLOOR: First off, I wanted to thank you as well. I live on Bradford street in Massachusetts.

About 10 doors down from where Mr. Rice.

BILL BENSON: Say that again.

>> I live on Bradford street in Massachusetts, about 10 doors down from where Mr. Rice had on.

BILL BENSON: ; is that right?

FROM THE FLOOR: That was stunning, similar to a previous question, I'm curious -- aside from when you were describing, your parents' feelings, you're so generous and kind.

Is there an anger in there? Somewhere? About what happened and what went on.

BILL BENSON: Good question, thank you.

The first part of the comment was he grew up just within blocks of where Mr. Rice's address is on here, and the second question is that, you're so generous, and kind.

Is there, in there somewhere -- I think the word you use is hatred or anger, or -- I would add that to it, because you -- you are so kind, and generous.
HENRY: Well, I don't know about that.

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: But I --

BILL BENSON: We won't ask family members!

[LAUGHTER] HENRY: No, I just -- you mean why do I come here.

BILL BENSON: More -- I guess the question really was, do you carry internally, hatred or feelings, as a result of the Holocaust, and the war? HENRY: No. I -- I will say this.

Growing up, in my home, in Delaware, with my parents, of course, we were full of hate for what had happened, to our people.

But I have learned, now -- I'm a little bit of a of a different opinion, for example, I had a gentleman -- I was at the survivor's desk a few weeks ago, and as I was speaking with a group of people, he was crying.

And I asked him, I said, "Sir, why are you crying?" And he responded by telling me that his grandfather, I believe it was -- was a high-ranking Nazi officer,

and he felt so guilty.

And I was trying to make him feel a little bit better. I don't know how successful I was, I said sir, I've learned one thing.

I do not hate.

I forgive.

Because this generation, has to be forgiven.

They cannot take on the sins of their fathers and grandfathers, I said I can forgive, but we cannot forget. And that's the way I feel about it.

BILL BENSON: Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: Yes, ma'am.

>> I know Ellis Island tens to be one of the major passageways for people coming into the United States, so I was wondering if you had any experiences at Ellis Island in New York.

BILL BENSON: Say that one more time.

FROM THE FLOOR: Ellis Island in New York, did you have any experiences there.

BILL BENSON: Yes, tell us about Ellis Island HENRY: I forgot to mention, yes,.

When we arrived in the United States, back in 1939, it was -- a requirement that you were processed in Ellis Island.

And we did that.

And Ellis Island, as I was told later, we had to get certain shots. And then we also had to do some paperwork, and I think we were there, like, overnight, as I recall. I don't remember this personally, but I think my parents told me that we

were there, overnight.

In order to complete the process.

And once we were able to -- once we completed the process, we were released to come into the country. Ellis Island, by the way, is now a museum, and I would highly recommend it to you folks that if you should ever be in New York, you should visit Ellis Island. It's fascinating and as a matter of fact on one of the walls is a big diagram of my ship, the Aquitania.

On all the walls.

And you'll also find a plaque in my name and my mother's name and father's name at Ellis Island.

BILL BENSON: Something to look for, absolutely. We have time for a couple of more questions yes, sir.

FROM THE FLOOR: Thank you for talking to us today! I've read the Nazis were so efficient at digging into your family tree converting to Christianity wouldn't save you. If you had two Jewish parents you were on the train so it were.

Anyways, also.... my grandfather had a similar story, as yours, except he was a small child but he was leaving Russia, and he was also processed through Ellis Island but one salient feature was that he never spoke about it.

And his parents never spoke about it.

Their attitude was we're in America now, let's leave that behind us.

So my question to you, is the poison pill story where you really started to appreciate, the enormity of what you had escaped -- or -- was it a constant source of dinner conversation?

Or did they necessarily kind of shield you? Like, they wanted you to

have, like, a new life, in a -- new land as it were.

BILL BENSON: The question, if I can paraphrase just a little bit, his grandparents escaped from Russia, came from Russia, went to Ellis Island and never spoke about it.

When you were growing up, what was the kind of the -- the culture around speaking about it? Both within the family, and maybe in the Community, was it something that was spoken about much? Or was there an attitude, you're here, you're safe, let's move on? What was kind of the atmosphere in terms of how one spoke about the horrors that were left behind?

HENRY: I didn't have that experience, I have to say. We didn't talk about it much.

At home... as I say, my father most of the time that we spoke about the Holocaust grieved for his lost siblings, and that's about it.

But -- and we didn't complain about us having to leave Vienna, it was -- happy to be in this country. So we didn't have that experience, I'm sorry to say.

BILL BENSON: Okay. Okay, one last question, sir?

FROM THE FLOOR: Okay, in the news, the -- we have the camps on the southern border, and people have described them as concentration camps.

How do you feel about that?

BILL BENSON: I'm going to take the liberty of sort of -- diverting us from that, just because we're a museum, and we're going to try to avoid political commentary, if we can.

But the question -- I think the question -- the broader question is, relates to your concern about things happening in the world around us and your worries

about that HENRY: Well, I worry when I see terrible things happening in the world, nothing compares to the Holocaust.

This is unique, in history, and God willing, it would never happen again, but there are people that are still -- you know, killing each other, in Syria and Yemen and places like that. And that's troubling. We haven't learned much from history.

BILL BENSON: Thank you for the question! And I think the lesson is for us to come to places like this museum, and hear people like Henry Weil.

We're going to conclude the program, in just a moment. I'm going to turn back to Henry, for -- for him to conclude our program, for us.

I want to thank all of you, for being with us, very much. Remind you that we'll have programs each Wednesday and Thursday, until August 8th.

All of our programs will be available on the museum's YouTube channel. So if you can't come back, in person, you can watch our programs on -- on TV, so to speak, on the YouTube channel, so we hope that you'll do that very much.

When Henry finishes, two comments I want to make: One is that our photographer, Joel, is going to come up on the stage, and he's going to take a picture of Henry, with you as the background.

So we need you to stay, because it makes for a great photo for Henry of being here.

That's one.

Secondly: You may have other questions, you want to ask, if you've asked one or you haven't yet, after Henry finishes, he will stay up here on the stage, and we invite you to come up here, please do that -- and ask him a question, shake his hand, have your photograph taken with him, we welcome

that.

So please know we would like you to do that if you would like to do that.

It's our tradition, at "First Person", that our "First Person", has the last word.

So with that I'm going to turn it over to Henry to close today's program

HENRY: Thank you very much bill, and thank you all, for coming for listening to the story, and thank you for coming to the museum, I think it's an experience that you will never forget.

I have said this before: I come to the museum, to be able to share my story, not a significant survivor story as some of the other survivors but nevertheless it's important to me; and I would like to -- as I say to the -- particularly to the young people that come and talk with us -- that we need to forgive, but not forget.

I am such a blessed person, that I've had the life that I've had.

I just -- I just couldn't be a happier person and a better life. It's just been wonderful, and I thank God, my father -- imparted this to me, when I was old enough to learn what he was telling me -- he said, "I want you to do three things for me for being in America. One, I want you to stay your prayers, every day. And I still do.

He said, "No. 2, never eat as being Jewish never eat pork." I don't.

And No. 3: "Never smoke on the Sabbath" that was good advice back even then, never smoke on the Sabbath but I didn't do that.

So I'm just a blessed person, and I'm so happy to be here today, and thank you, so much, for being here with me! Thanks.

[APPLAUSE]

CART FILE