Wednesday, July 3, 2019

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This transcript is being provided in rough-draft format.

"First Person"

Josie Traum

July 3rd, 2019

BILL BENSON: (Continuing) here we see Josie with the Debrackalaers, Mr. and Mrs. Debrackalaer are on the right. To the left are neighbors of Josie's grandparents, their grandson is in the front in the middle of Josie to the right. The Debrackalaers' daughter is on the left.

Allied forces liberated Belgium in September 1944. Soon after, Josie was found by one of her aunts who was one of Fanny's sisters, here, we see Josie, Fanny after they were reunited in Belgium. Josie would eventually marry Freddie Traum, also a Holocaust survivor, we close with this wedding portrait of Josie and Freddie -- and was this 61 years ago yesterday?

>> June 24th.

BILL BENSON: June 24th. June 24th.

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"First Person"

Josie Traum

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

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BILL BENSON:

Good morning. Welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I am 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 **Mrs. Josie Traum**, 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.

Josie will share her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows we will have an opportunity for you to ask Josie 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
Josie is one individual's
account of the Holocaust. We
have prepared a brief slide
presentation to help with her
introduction.
And we begin with this photograph of Josie Aizenberg walking on a street in Brussels,

Josie was born March 21st, 1939 in Brusssels Belgium to Jacques and fanny Aizenberg, the arrow on this map of Belgium points to Brussels, the German army conquered Belgium in May 1940. Shortly before the occupation, Josie's father left Belgium to join the British army. In this photo, we see Josie with her parents in Brussels.

In 1942, Josie mother, Fanny, was able to secure a hiding place for Josie, in a convent in Bruges Belgium, here we see Josie and Fanny shortly before Josie went into hiding. Soon thereafter, Fanny, who worked with the Belgian underground or the resistance, was denounced and she was deported to Auschwitz.

After six months of hiding in the convent, and growing Nazi suspicion, the Belgian underground relocated Josie to hide with the Debrackalaers, a Christian family in Brusssels. Here we see Josie with the Debrackalaers Mr. and Mrs. Debrackalaer are on the right to the left are neighbors of José's grandparents, their grandson is in the front in the middle with Josie to the right. The Debrackalaer's daughter is on the left.

Allies forced liberated Belgium in September 1944, soon after Josie was found by one of her aunts who is one of Fanny's sisters. Here we see Josie Jacques, and fanny after they were reunited in Belgium.

Josie would eventually marry Freddie Traum also a Holocaust survivor. We close with this wedding portrait of Josie and Freddie. After moving to the United States with their parents in 1949 and then completing her schooling in Patterson, New Jersey, Josie went to Israel to study for a year.

On the return trip, on ship, she met Freddie. The ship's chief radio officer, who is also a Holocaust survivor. Upon her return to the U.S., Josie attended Montclair state teacher's college for one year, Josie and Freddie were married on his ship a year after she met him, and she moved to Israel, where they lived for five years, while in Israel,

the Traum's son Michael, and daughter, were born. The Traum's relocated to the United States in 1963, to obtain medical care for their disabled son, Michael,
Their third child Jonathan who is also disabled. Eventually the work brought to Virginia, Josie returned to school and graduated from the Catholic university of America school of social work and began her career in child welfare. She retired in 2007 from her work as a clinical social worker for abused children in Montgomery County, Maryland.
Today Josie and Freddie live in silver spring, Maryland. Josie's volunteer work at this museum includes leading tours of the permanent exhibition for law enforcement, including police officers, the FBI, judges, and others.
Josie speaks publicly about her experience, as a Holocaust survivor, in various settings, including local synagogues and schools in Maryland and Virginia, I'm pleased to let you know that Freddie is with Josie today right here in the front row and on the 24th of June, they just celebrated their 61st wedding anniversary.

[APPLAUSE]

and with that I would like to ask you as you've already done to join me in welcoming our "First Person", Mrs. Josie Traum.

[APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: Josie, thank you for joining us and your willingness to be today's "First Person", so thank you for that

JOSIE: Absolutely, fine! Pleased to be here.

BILL BENSON: We have such a short time with you and you have so much to share, we'll start. Your parents, Josie, your parents Jacques, and Fanny Aizenberg were married in early 1938. You were born in March, 1939

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Just months before World War II began when Germany

and Russia attacked Poland. Tell us about your parents and their life in Brussels, in that prewar time. What was their life like

JOSIE: As far as I know, my parents, were pretty assimilated in Belgium, they both had professions. They worked. They were happy, they were newlyweds.

And they actually lived near my mom's parents.

And so there was a lovely relationship, with my grandparents. And they worked. They were happy. Really, I don't think realizing what would happen. Very, very soon.

BILL BENSON: At that time, your great-grandparents were still alive, I believe, at that time?

JOSIE: My -- actually, just my grandparents.

BILL BENSON: Just your grandparents, okay, I thought your great-grandparents were.

Tell us about your mother's work, I think -- the audience will find that fascinating and then about your dad

JOSIE: My mom went to a -- I guess you would call it a vocational school.

Like, a college, where you learn textiles and designing; for clothes.

And when you graduate from that school, the family would send some messengers from their -- from the palace, from the royal family, to pick out one or two students from the graduating class, to come and work, with the royal family.

For their clothing, for designing for all the things, and apparently, my mom was chosen, as one of the people to work in the royal household. And that was a real big deal, my mom --

BILL BENSON: It was a big honor, absolutely

JOSIE: It was quite an honor for her. So my mom, actually, did that, she

worked for the royal family.

And my dad was a tailor, also, he was kind of, in the same business, but not working for the royal family.

BILL BENSON: But tell us about his earlier career.

JOSIE: My dad was not always a tailor.

He was, actually, a violinist.

And I know you probably can't imagine this, but in the 20s and 30s, movies were silent. There were no -- no talking. So every moviehouse has a little quartet, a violinist, a cellist, four instruments so people could hear music while the movie was being shown, and so my dad did that. He worked in the moviehouse, played the violin, and then the talkies came in.

Movies started having sound. And all these people lost their jobs.

So my dad went to tailoring school, and learned to be a tailor.

So that's how he became a tailor.

BILL BENSON: Your parents were married in 1938 and that was a pivotal year, for Nazi power. That was the year of Kristallnacht, or "Night of the Broken Glass".

You were born, just born after that, March 1939, do you know from what your parents later told you -- do you know if, at that time, they were fearful about bringing a child in to life? And fearful about the future at that point?

JOSIE: I think they were. I think most people were because they really didn't know what was going to happen.

And my parents actually were listening to the radio, just about every day. Mainly the BBC. And there were many calls there, by the British people, asking people, from Europe to come across the channel to be in the British army

because Britain was really expecting, war, to break out.

BILL BENSON: Right

JOSIE: So that's when my parents actually decided that my dad would go, and volunteer, and join the British army, in England.

I don't think they really knew what would happen. I don't think anybody did.

BILL BENSON: Right

JOSIE: It was a pretty fearful time.

BILL BENSON: On the night of November 10th, what we call, Kristallnacht, the "Night of the Broken Glass", violence, violent acts against Jews all over Germany and Austria took place that night. I think 300 synagogues were burnt. As a result of that you ended up -- your family sheltered a Jewish child, I believe from Germany for a period of time

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Tell us about that

JOSIE: A little girl -- as far as I know my mom sheltered, this child.

Who was older than me. And they sheltered her, until they found some results -- actually, that's when my mom joined the underground.

BILL BENSON: At that point?

JOSIE: At that point she joined the underground, the resistance.

And tried to help out. And helped other people also, stay in our home, until they found a safer place to be.

BILL BENSON: So that -- that was the beginning of sheltering people there. Really refugees and fleeing at that point

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Of course, war began September 1939, but the full effect of the war didn't come to Belgium until May of 1940, when Nazi Germany invaded Belgium France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg. As your mentioned your father fled to join the British army.

Tell us a little bit about your father going -- do you know how he got to England at that point?

JOSIE: My dad who was a tailor, really -- I'm sure consulting with my mom and discussing the issues, decided to actually go to England, and volunteer.

And he decided to go -- his brother, my uncle, who is also a tailor -- decided to go with him. They both decided to go and they actually left on one of the last ships that left and was able to cross the English channel, because it was at the time when dunkirk --

BILL BENSON: Right

JOSIE: The entire grouping had to actually leave and go back to England.

My dad was not part of that whole unit going, but it was very soon after -- and then, really, the -- the English channel started being bombed; and ships were, actually, torpedoed and bombed and my dad and uncle got to England, and went to volunteer for the Army.

But they got there safely -- by the way, my mom, never knew whether he ever got to England or not. Because there was no communication.

BILL BENSON: Didn't even know if he made it that far

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: And we'll come back later to that but it would be a long time before she would find out

JOSIE: Right.

BILL BENSON: Your dad leaves, you and your mom and grandparents, what did your mom do at that point?

JOSIE: My mom, actually, I believe she was still working.

But she was also doing work for the underground, doing resistance work; she was actually, like, delivering leaflets of things -- of plans, of agendas of meetings. And different things. And housing people.

So she was kind of --

BILL BENSON: This was under the Nazi occupation

JOSIE: Which was really secretive everything she was doing.

BILL BENSON: High-risk behavior.

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: You and your mother were together in Brussels under the Nazis until 1942 when your mother made the incredibly profound decision to place you into hiding.

Tell us what you can, really what led to her making the decision to the extent, you know, and then what it was, like, for her, and for you, for her to give you up, into hiding.

JOSIE: I think my mom must have realized the dangers of what was happening around people were being deported.

They were being taken to concentration camps.

And I think people were very fearful, especially with their children, they didn't know what would happen to the children; so my mom, being part of the underground, had connections, there was, like, a whole network. And she was able to get people to come to our home, and to pick me up and put me into hiding.

My mom, by the way, was not allowed to know where I was going to be

placed into hiding.

The underground realized that, when the Germans would come to your apartment, to arrest a Jewish person, they would say, "Where's the rest of your family? Where is your husband? Where are your children?" And they realized that if a parent or -- yes, if a parent didn't know, where their child was being placed, there was no way....

(A pause) I tear up, but I could still talk.

There was no way, that a parent could tell, because they really didn't know. So my mom actually let me go. Not knowing if she would ever see me again, where I was going.

And I think that must have been such... a tremendous decision to make.

You know, having children, and grandchildren, myself now, I don't think -- I'm not sure I would be able to do that to just.... You know, put your child away and not knowing where they were.

So my mother, actually, did that.

And I was taken to a convent in Bruges, which is a beautiful little city in Belgium, full of convents and full of canals.

And so I actually, was there, without my mom knowing where.

BILL BENSON: Where you were

JOSIE: Where I was.

BILL BENSON: If you don't mind, I'm going to take you back just a little bit. Of course, we really just jumped two years from the occupation by the inivation of the Nazi from May 1940, 1942 during those two years your mother was doing what she was doing with the resistance, she also was raising you

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: And they were clearly unbelievably prucarious and perilous times we haven't talked about the restrictions the Nazis imposed incredible restrictions but one of them you mentioned to me was even something like -- you were an infant, a baby, taking you to healthcare. Say a little bit about that

JOSIE: Once the Nazis came in and took over, there was no longer clinics for children.

When there's a newborn, the parent takes them vaccination, and inoculations -- you know, weighing them, formulas -- everything that you need to do to take care of a newborn -- all those clinics were actually closed to Jews.

Jews were not allowed to get any care.

So my mom was kind of fending on her own with me.

And... we were pretty much to ourselves in the apartment. Once the Germans came in, we all had to have identification cards.

And in the identification cards, they stated if you were a Jew. So people were really scared to go on the street, to go out; so we didn't go out very much and stayed very much to ourselves.

BILL BENSON: Of course, you were so young then, but you shared with me that you have a few fleeting memories and one of them you told me about, was about being on a bus, with your mother

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: Will you tell us a little bit about that

JOSIE: My mother and I -- she decided to take me on an outing, so we did, we went out which we did very infrequently, we went on a trolley, in Belgium they don't have buses; they have trolleys. And so we got on the trolley and we went

to the -- there were two seats on either side, two, and two.

And my mom and I went on -- onto the trolley. And we went to the last row, to sit down.

And while we were riding in the trolley, you know, of course, whenever you went out, anywhere you had to have your identification card with you.

We went out, and we went to the last row in the trolley; and while we were riding on the trolley, a Nazi came on -- on the trolley.

And he asked everybody's identification card to be ready because he was walking to the back from row to row, asking for people's identification card.

And my mom was sitting in the back row with me and she was shaking.

And, of course, I was very young, two-and-a-half years old, maybe. I didn't understand why, all I knew is she was shaking, and petrified.

The Nazi went from row to row, asking for people's identification card; and when he got to the last row, he turned around, and left the bus, the trolley -- and I don't know why, but somebody was watching over us, but that was -- the closest call, I think, I came to.

BILL BENSON: When you were with your mother?

JOSIE: When I was with my mom.

BILL BENSON: Before we turn, Josie, to your time in hiding, which would be about three years -- what happened to your grandparents during that time?

JOSIE: My -- well, when I was taken to the convent, in the meantime, my mother was arrested. She was deported, along with my grandmother. The two of them were deported, arrested together; and taken to Auschwitz.

My grandfather had been taken a few months before, and he was eventually also taken to Auschwitz.

So my mom and grandma were taken together.

BILL BENSON: Together, but your grandfather had gone earlier?

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: The deportations, as you just described, of your grandfather, before your mother went, really, really picked up

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: -- in 1942 and that's when your mother took action

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Found the hiding place, with you in the convent and you remained in the convent for about a year

JOSIE: Actually, it was for six months.

BILL BENSON: Tell us about what you know about that period, and then what led to -- forcing you, then, to end up going somewhere else

JOSIE: Yes. I was placed in a convent, which was more, like, an orphanage.

You know, food was rationed, in Belgium, and most of Europe, I think; and there was so little food, I think many parents were putting their -- their children in a convent, thinking that there might be a little bit more food there.

So the convent was more or less like an orphanage. Peoplewit put their children there, hoping to get them out when things would be a little bit easier, so there was very, very little food, but it was full of children.

And full of nuns.

And this convent -- by the way, you know, in Belgium, as in most countries in Europe, if -- if a nonJew was found hiding a Jewish person, and a Nazi found them, they would just be shot on the street. No questions asked. You would just be shot. So the nuns, I always -- you know, think they were very, very strict.

I don't know if any of you saw "The Sound of Music". Well, the nuns were dressed very much like the nuns in "The Sound of Music".

Except they didn't sing.

[LAUGHTER]

JOSIE: But these --

BILL BENSON: And they were pretty strict

JOSIE: They were very strict. But, you know, they risked their lives by saving me.

We were playing a lot in the courtyard, with the rosaries, but they were very, very strict. You know, a three-year-old just wants to be hugged or held; and they really didn't do that.

And -- but one day, apparently, a Nazi came.

Unbeknownst to me, there were three other Jewish children being hidden there.

I found this out -- after the war.

And apparently, the Nazis knew there were Jewish children there, and they told the nuns they would come and pick up the children, and the nuns said well, you know, come back tomorrow, we don't have them packed. Their clothes aren't ready; and so what the nuns did during the night, they smuggled me and the other Jewish kids out of the convent into Brussels, which is where I was from and placed me with a Christian family.

So my stay in the -- in the convent, was rather short.

But it was safe. While I was there, they saved me, they really risked their lives by hiding me.

Then I was taken to a Christian family, a mother a father and a little

girl -- as you saw in the photograph, being shown -- and they actually kept me for the entire duration of the war.

BILL BENSON: Do you know anything about how moving you out of there to this new family, to the Debrackalaers -- how was that made possible? Do you know anything about that?

JOSIE: You know, I think they took me by car.

And I can't totally remember, all I know is that we went by night.

And I think the nuns must have told us to be quiet. Which we did.

And we all got to Brussels, and I was placed with the family.

BILL BENSON: And I imagine, that the -- the arrangements to find the Debrackalaers, as a family that were willing to do this, for example, was all handled probably by the underground

JOSIE: I'm sure.

BILL BENSON: I'm sure that's how it was done

JOSIE: I think they have families waiting who were, receptive and working with the underground, willing to take children. And I actually stayed with them. As I said, they really risked their lives. The man was part of the underground.

He also was part of the resistance, doing all --

BILL BENSON: Mr. Debrackalaer?

JOSIE: Debrackalaer, yes, they were. And, in fact, he was often taken out for interrogation at night.

And I know he would come back... the next morning, black and blue.

And because they would really -- they would beat him. But he never told on me. He never told them what he was doing with the underground. I really had no idea what he was doing. What he was up to, and what he was involved

with.

BILL BENSON: And you were with the Debrackalaers, until liberation, until September 1944

JOSIE: Yes, until Belgium was liberated.

BILL BENSON: What do you remember about your life living in the home of the Debrackalaers? What was that like?

JOSIE: Well, we stayed very much inside, I played with the little girl. We didn't go out much.

And so I think even the neighbors didn't know that we were there, or that I was there.

I think things were done very much in hiding; and things were not in the open.

So I don't think people knew that I was there.

Mr. Debrackalaer was part of the underground, and he was really -- he was out a lot, and I don't know what kind of things he was up to.

Food, by the way, as I mentioned was rationed, and they shared it with me.

BILL BENSON: That's an important point:

There is the Debrackalaers and their daughter, right? So there's three of them

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: They get rations for three people

JOSIE: Because I was there illegally.

BILL BENSON: You were there illegally. So you were the fourth person but they could not go out and obtain additional foods

JOSIE: No.

BILL BENSON: They could only get the rations for three

JOSIE: They actually shared the food they would get. You know, you would go, like, it to a distributing place once a week and get the basics.

BILL BENSON: Yeah

JOSIE: And they would bring us home and, of course, everything was made.

BILL BENSON: So for the family to decide to take you in, not only the risk they faced doing that but even the hardship --

JOSIE: Existing, of course.

BILL BENSON: Absolutely.

The... you mentioned at the convent that they -- they didn't hold you, and do those things, because they were doing what they were doing.

What was it like in the Debrackalaer home

JOSIE: You know, the Debrackalaers, as I mentioned, they kept me safe.

They were very close family, the parents and the little girl.

However safe they kept me, I wasn't really part of the unit.

And I don't think that was meant.... they were meant to do that. I think that was my own perception, my own feeling that it wasn't really, like, my family.

And.... You know, it's something that I've felt, I think was missing.

They saved me.

BILL BENSON: They saved you, right,

JOSIE: And, really, risked their lives.

BILL BENSON: And that was for -- really, a considerable time.

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Over two years with the Debrackalaers

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Of course, the wars raging around you and then in September, 1944, Belgium is liberated

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: Tell us what happened to you then, there you are, living with the Debrackalaers, they had been your family --

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Essentially or at least your caretakers for the previous two-plus years

JOSIE: Right.

BILL BENSON: So war is over, what happens?

JOSIE: Well, in the meantime my mom had two sisters, my two aunts who were also hidden through the resistance.

Through the underground. They were hidden in churches. And, you know, the underground, there was a whole network, you could find people. And apparently when Belgium was liberated, my two aunts -- wide awake set out to find me through the network of the underground, they found me. And they found me at the Debrackalaers' home, and they brought me home.

BILL BENSON: Brought you home

JOSIE: And I stayed with my aunts, really, for the rest of the time.

BILL BENSON: The -- your aunts also I believe had children

JOSIE: Yes, my one aunt, my aunt Elise had three sons, cousins, a little bit older than me, and so, the three -- my three cousins, they -- I went home, with them, with my aunts.

BILL BENSON: Had they all been hidden elsewhere as well?

JOSIE: Yes, through the underground through churches.

BILL BENSON: But they were not with your aunt

JOSIE: No.

BILL BENSON: Just, like, with your circumstances?

JOSIE: Yes, but once I got to my aunts, it was just so wonderful, being with family.

Really, the three boys, my three cousins spoiled me rotten. It was great. I was, like, their little mascot. It was really wonderful being with family. There was really a difference, and I felt it.

BILL BENSON: When -- when Belgium was liberated, September 1944, of course, the war, itself, was still continuing and would until May 1945

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Do you think anything about what that period was like, for your -- your aunt? And your other aunt while they were trying to take care of you, and their children, while the war's still going on?

JOSIE: Well, first of all, food was still rationed.

BILL BENSON: Right

JOSIE: So things were really difficult. My uncle, my aunt's husband, was also part of the underground and he actually was very active in the underground.

And so, you know, it was -- it was hard existing with food being rationed; and... things being all very hard all around you.

BILL BENSON: Tell us about this uncle -- you have to share this!

JOSIE: Yeah, my aunt's husband, my uncle Maurice, very shy... meek, man, lovely, lovely man, very shy, though, and very quiet.

And after the war, he was... decorated by the Belgian government, for

having been an actual hand-to-hand combat and killed about six or seven Germans. Which we -- we couldn't believe.

I mean, he was such a.... a gentle, gentle man. I don't think I could imagine; but it was safety. He was fighting for all our lives.

BILL BENSON: He was recognized by the Dutch government for that?

JOSIE: By the Belgian government.

BILL BENSON: I'm sorry by the Belgian government

JOSIE: He was recognized, awarded and got a special medal which was really, something.

BILL BENSON: And during that time, as your aunts are taking care of you: How did they resume their lives?

JOSIE: Well, people put their lives together somehow.

They didn't know what happened to the other members of their family.

My grandmother, they didn't know what happened to my mom.

And other members in the family really people just disappeared.

And we didn't know what happened. They lived and they existed. And they made do with whatever they had.

BILL BENSON: In April of 1945, right before the end of the war, in what must have been certainly, to your aunts and to you, unbelievable miracle

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: When your mother, Fanny, was able to survive Auschwitz, and return home

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Tell us about her, and -- and what you know and about her coming home to you.

JOSIE: Okay. My mom, first of all, my mom survived Auschwitz.

You know, most -- most concentration camps, were killing centers. You got there and they killed you. Auschwitz had a subcamp, a labor camp, call burke Birkenau, which is where they made ammunition and my mom being young, they selected her not to die. To work, in the factory.

My grandmother, immediately, when you got off the cattle cars, as a prisoner, got off the cattle cars and got into Auschwitz, they had a selection, where the healthier, younger people were put in one line and the older folks and children, were put in another line; and killed immediately.

My mom, and her mom were separated, immediately; my mom luckily, she was young enough. She must have been in her 20s, and my grandma, was considered an old lady. She must have been 50.

So they separated you, and the younger people, were able to remain alive, by working in the factory, making ammunition, filling grenades and bombs, because war was very much -- Germany was really preparing for the war.

And trying to get as much ammunition, and things that they needed.

So my mom, actually, was kept alive. She was separated from her mom immediately.

And when she was separated, actually, she went to be back with her mom. She went to the other line, to be with her mom; and the German actually hid her, and said, "You go where you're told." And she never saw her mom again.

So during that whole time, my mom was in Auschwitz, was working in labor camps.

BILL BENSON: As a slave laborer under unbelievably harsh conditions

JOSIE: Very, very hard, getting very, very little food, just liquid with maybe a

potato peel or carrot peel every night. And they would go to sleep for a it few hours, and the next morning go back to making the ammunition.

My mom actually survived this. How, I have no idea. Paragraph.

She was young, and I think that contributed to it. But, she also.... You know, when the Germans saw that the allies were approaching.

They started emptying some of their concentration camps, taking the prisoners towards Germany. There were labor camps that they could use them to work. Anyhow my mom was put -- what they call a death march. Because so many people died, while they were marching, they were just marching, day and night; and she was put on the death march in January '45; and, actually, until April 1945, when the Russians, actually, had their last battle with the Germans on the river, and that's when the prisoners on the death march, from Auschwitz, were actually liberated, and taken by the Russians and the red cross to a hospital. So my mom was actually liberateed. She was on the death march for four months, which is incredible!

And she must have weighed about 65 pounds, had typhus and meningitis and she was taken by the red cross, treated; and then brought back to Brussels, and, of course, the first place she went, was her sister's apartment.

And she knocked on the door.

And I was there.

BILL BENSON: Her sisters your aunts didn't know she was coming

JOSIE: No, none of us knew she was alive.

BILL BENSON: Knocked on the door, you had not been with your mom for three years

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: What do you know about what that was like for you?

JOSIE: Well, my mother.... tells me, that I -- I remembered her, and, you know, we kind of held each other.

And then from then on, I was in -- with my mom. The entire time.

BILL BENSON: Your -- Josie's mother passed away last year.

At age 101.

JOSIE: My mom.... my mom was very active and quite a character.

She was.

And she came -- she came here, every Sunday to volunteer.

She sat at the survivor desk, I'm sure you saw the desk, where there's always a survivor, who people want to talk to them, and hear, what their experiences were, so my mother came, every single Sunday.

And she passed away, in August, she was 101.

She was active; she was -- she was quite amazing, she was formidable in every way.

BILL BENSON: She sure was! Josie, one of the things you said to me, is at that point, after the war, quote, I was just a little kid who needed to be held.

Will you say a little bit about that.

JOSIE: I'll start crying.

BILL BENSON: We will elaborate on that. So your mom is back. Now, in 1946, your father comes back...

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: A year -- almost a year after the war is over

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: Tell us about your dad

JOSIE: My dad -- my dad had been working, interestingly enough, the -- the British -- my uncle and my dad, when they went to England to volunteer -- they were both tailors; and the Brits, we wondered -- afterwards, I wonder what would they do with those?

And apparently, they put them in a factory making British army uniforms.

Which is probably the best and safest place they could be.

However, my dad and my uncle, were living in a house in London.

And I'm sure you know, that London was bombed, pretty heavily by the Germans.

And the house that my dad was living in was bombed. And he was valley injured pretty badly and he was in the hospital for two years.

And he really couldn't come back before then, he was getting treatment, and help, and he was in the hospital.

So eventually, he did come back.

And which was very hard.

Because, you know, all three of us, had totally different experiences, my mom had really gone through hell.

BILL BENSON: Literally,

JOSIE: In Auschwitz. And my dad, also was not easy for him, and I was just a little kid. You know,.

BILL BENSON: You remember your dad coming back?

JOSIE: I do. He came -- he came by ship, across the Channel, and I remember him going down the steps.

And my -- you know, I didn't know my dad, because he left when I was about 13 months old.

And so I remember my mom saying to him, "There's your father." And that's when I first saw him. I really didn't know him at all.

BILL BENSON: No, of course, not

JOSIE: So it was hard, the three -- as you can imagine, three of us having totally different experiences.

Being put together.

BILL BENSON: Did his brother -- did his -- the other brother, who left,

JOSIE: Uncle ben survived and came back after the war.

BILL BENSON: He -- so now, you -- you're born in '39, so when your dad comes back you're about 7 or 8 years of age, so you started school

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: So what was your sort of trying to get back to some semblance of normal life like?

JOSIE: Well, it was very, very hard.

My dad was able to start work right away. We had a shop, in the apartment building we were living in, my dad had a tailoring shop, on the bottom floor, where people came to get suits made. You know, in those days you didn't get a suit ready-made; you came to a tailor who fitted you, who made a pattern; and you would come back a few weeks, every time, for a fitting to see if it -- how it was.

The customer would pick out a bolt of material for the suit they wanted; somy dad really started working pretty much immediately. My mom was really taking care of me, very much, and it was -- my parents decided that they really did not want to stay in Europe. After everything that had happened. So they made an application, they decided they wanted to live in the United States.

We made applications and applied for visas; and it took four years.

BILL BENSON: Four years?

JOSIE: In 1949, we were able to come here.

BILL BENSON: So the three of you move here, four years later and start a whole new life in the United States

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: What was that like for you?

JOSIE: That was -- well, first of all, my mom had an elderly aunt, in New Jersey; and so we moved in.

BILL BENSON: Okay

JOSIE: -- with her, because you usually go where you have a relative. So we went to New Jersey, lived with my mom's elderly aunt, for about a month.

Until my parents found jobs and an apartment and we were pretty much on our own, I started school. I was ten years old, I didn't speak one word of English.

Which was really hard.

And when I first came to school, they put me in first grade.

BILL BENSON: You're ten years old

JOSIE: I'm ten years old. Well, I was never very tall so I didn't stand out.

BILL BENSON: Right into first grade, little chairs

JOSIE: I was ten years old and put in first grade.

Spoke no English whatsoever.

After we -- I think I learned a few words after a week and then they put me in the second grade. After a few more weeks they kept on putting me ahead, until I graduated with my own class.

CART FILE

BILL BENSON: Yeah,

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: You -- very shortly after you got here and started school, you were beat up at school

JOSIE: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: I know that's an awful thing to talk about -- but --

JOSIE: -- I know, it was my first week at school.

In Patterson, New Jersey, I got -- at the end of the day I got out of school and there was a gang of girls waiting for me, and they beat me up I had no idea what it was about because I couldn't speak and I gave -- didn't really know, but my mom, I got home and I was pretty beaten up.

My mom had the guts next day to go to the principal, to go to school and complain, which -- it's always amazing, because she spoke no English. She got there and, you know, really wanted to make sure that it wouldn't happen again, and it didn't. And I don't know why it happened.

I have no idea.

BILL BENSON: I think you shared with me, that the principal offered some --

JOSIE: Consolation.

BILL BENSON: -- because they thought you were German or something like that

JOSIE: Which didn't make much sense.

BILL BENSON: Which didn't make much sense, exactly.

Tell us -- well, first of all, I was going to ask you about meeting Freddie, but before you do that, how many of your family, extended family, did not survive

the Holocaust?

JOSIE: All in all,... well, my grandparents, my father's siblings... their children... I would say probably ten people.

BILL BENSON: Ten people from your --

JOSIE: Yeah, from my family.

BILL BENSON: Did your two aunts, did they remain in Belgium?

JOSIE: No. After the war, my one aunt, came to the United States.

And the other aunt, the older -- there were three -- three sisters -- five years apart. And the older one went to live in Israel with her children and my uncle.

BILL BENSON: Went to Israel

JOSIE: They went to Israel.

BILL BENSON: Josie, you talked about your mother. In fact, as Josie said, she passed away last year at 101 and in 2017 she was sitting right where Josie was sitting at age 100.

And was just amazing!

Your husband, Freddie, is a Holocaust survivor.

In fact, after the war, for a period Freddie was in the British army, like, your father was -- all three of you speak -- and your mom spoke -- and you two continue to speak.

What is that like for you? What does that mean?

JOSIE: I think it's a very important -- I think it's crucial, I think people have to know, what happened.

I just feel it's important that people need to know... the history so that in order -- that it would never happen again, and I'm really gratified to see students

interested, when I go to schools -- middle schools, high schools -- they're so interested, which really makes me -- it makes me feel so good that there is hope for our future; that young people are very, very interested.

BILL BENSON: Before we turn to our audience, to ask them if they have any questions. I've got just a couple of more for you, Josie.

One is that you talk -- I've heard you talk about in the past today, at the end of the war you were a child who needed to be held, when you were in the convent they saved your life, but it was not a warm and nurturing place.

And when you got to the Debrackalaers, they also cared for you, but you didn't feel like part of the family unit.

So those things that a child really needs -- you shared in the past, though -- you felt you had an amazing foundation. Before that will you say a little bit about that?

JOSIE: Sure, I strongly feel, working as a social worker, and seeing how important bonding is, a child, to a caretaker -- you know, that bond that you form doesn't have to be with the parents. It could be with a strong -- a caretaker.

A child knowing if there's always someone there to nurture, to give them love, to hold them -- to hug them.

I feel I have -- for the first three years of my life, which, I think, made me stronger so I have that foundation -- I think it's really crucial for a child to have that.

I think once they have that, they can really withstand a lot.

And... I've always -- in social work, I've always worked with that, because I think it's so crucial.

BILL BENSON: And it was you -- you explained to me it was not just your

mom, but you had grandparents

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: So there was strong adult family caring for you

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Josie, are you ready to take some questions from our audience

JOSIE: Sure.

BILL BENSON: We'll see if they have any questions, we would welcome you to ask a question of Josie.

We have two microphones, we ask that you go to a microphone, if you have a question to ask. Try to make your questions brief as you can. I will do my best, to repeat the question so that we all hear it.

And Josie will respond to your questions.

So while we're waiting for our first brave soul, Josie -- oh! Come on down to the mic. And while she's coming down, Josie, tell us about meeting Freddie real quick

JOSIE: Okay. When I was -- I studied in Israel for a year; and on the way home, you know, in those days it was in the 50s, you didn't go by plane. Planes were very expensive.

And not affordable.

So I went by ship.

And by ship, I met -- Freddie was the chief radio officer, and he was socializing with the passengers, I being one of them.

And we socialized, and we got to know each other; and we were married a year later.

[LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: And --

JOSIE: Are you clapping for me or him.

BILL BENSON: For both of you, and when he was sailing in the merchant marine, you would actually -- you would sometimes be able to go with him

JOSIE: Yes, -- when he was a radio officer, I was able to be a passenger, and travel with him.

Which was wonderful.

BILL BENSON: I bet. Okay, yes, ma'am.

>> Hi, I'm so sorry for what you and your family went through and I think it's amazing, what you do, and your mother, and your husband, do my question is... Q. What prevented a Jewish person from not registering and why did you have to say you were Jewish, how would they prove it? When you had to register as being a Jew

BILL BENSON: Okay.

>> Q: What prevented someone from not registering, why can't you just lie, how do they know you're Jewish.

BILL BENSON: The question is when the Nazis required Jews to register so they knew where you were, what would happen if -- if somebody just didn't go along with that.

>> A: Well, the Nazis, first of all, were part of the government. They --

BILL BENSON: They ran the government

JOSIE: They ran the government so they knew demographically they knew where most of the Jews were, and your I.D. -- everybody had an I.D. card, and if you were Jewish, there was a J.

Saying, for a Jew, I mean, there was no way of hiding. Really.

BILL BENSON: And, in fact, one of the things that you didn't share with us, Josie, when your mother was arrested and deported, she was arrested because somebody denounced.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Right.

JOSIE: You're right bill, I hadn't mentioned that.

So many Christian people helped us.

Helped the Jews, hid the Jews, making sure they were safe; but there were many people, who didn't.

In fact, our neighbors, denounced my mom. They actually told the Germans, where we were living.

Where my mom and my grandparents were living; so most people were very, very good, many people were not.

I -- I don't know how people react during wartime, when they have to make a decision.

BILL BENSON: Yeah

JOSIE: You know, what do they do or not?

BILL BENSON: Thank you.

>> Q: Again, thank you for sharing and my question follows up with that. This sense of being left.

Or being treated as less -- how -- how did you -- how did you grow up knowing that you were not less?

BILL BENSON: The question is the sense of what you were going through, into the Nazis of being treated as less, a lesser person, after that, how do you come to grips with trying to deal with those feelings that you had, and

certainly, your mother would have felt, and others felt that --

>> A: Yeah, you know, I felt -- personally, I don't think I ever felt lesser than other people.

I think I -- I was frightened. I was scared; but I don't think I ever felt less.

In value, or as a person.

BILL BENSON: Thank you, okay? Yes, sir.

>> Q: Hi!

[APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: Thank you.

>> Q: I wanted to thank you for sharing, and my question was, do you have any contact with maybe the ancestors of the Debrackalaers or the daughter you used to play with when you were young.

BILL BENSON: Thank you, the question is have you had any contact with the Debrackalaer family, or their descendants

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Including the young girl that was your playmate for a while?

JOSIE: Right. My husband and I went back -- actually, my husband was in Belgium, in 1989, for work; and and joined him there.

And we tried to find the Debrackalaers. We found the neighbors, that were in the picture, my grandparents' neighbors -- and we found them, and we -- we saw them, actually, and they told us, that the Debrackalaers, they had all died.

Including the little girl who was my age.

And I never found out why. Or really, what happened.

BILL BENSON: And this was the late 1980s

JOSIE: Yes, '89.

BILL BENSON: '89

JOSIE: So I don't know what happened to them.

BILL BENSON: Okay.

>> When you got back with your father, did you have, like, a relationship with him after that or --?

BILL BENSON: When you were reunited with your father what was your relationship with him

BILL BENSON: What was your relationship, like, with him.

BILL BENSON: What was your relationship with him, when you came back as you said that was the first time you had really seen him?

>> A: It was difficult.

Because, I think he wasn't used to children.

[LAUGHTER] >> A: You know, here I was, 7, eight-year-old, and he really -- (pause) -- I think he really didn't know what to do.

BILL BENSON: Yeah

JOSIE: It took a long time for us to get used to each other and to know each other.

BILL BENSON: When did your father pass away

JOSIE: He passed away, in the '80s. Not war-related at all.

BILL BENSON: Yeah

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: He lived a fairly long life

JOSIE: He did.

BILL BENSON: When the Nazi soldier came onto the trolley, do you have any guess why he didn't check the left row?

BILL BENSON: Good question, is when the Nazi soldier came on the trolley, and he almost got to the last row, any idea why he didn't get to you

JOSIE: I don't.

You know, I really don't. I always thought that somebody's watching over us.

I don't know.

It's, like, almost like a miracle.

I don't know why.

BILL BENSON: Uh-huh.

JOSIE: But it was good. I'm happy.

[LAUGHTER] BILL BENSON: It was a good thing, yes, thank you very much for a great question, one more -- we have two more, I'm sorry. Time for two more.

>> BILL BENSON: You're accomplished at this, I can see.

>> Q: How did you feel when your mother was taken away?

BILL BENSON: How did you feel when your mother was taken away? Of course, you were gone, then, but --

>> A: I was actually taken away first, so I didn't know what happened to her.

But I was taken away -- all I know, my mom told me later, I was kicking and screaming. Because I really did not want to leave. And I didn't know these two ladies. I had no idea where I was going. So it was kind of scary.

BILL BENSON: We're going to go with these last two questions, if we

can do them quick.

>> Q: On a scale of 1 to 10, how -- strict were the soldiers were they afraid to punch or hit or slap you down.

BILL BENSON: Repeat that. Get close to the mic, if you can, I know it's tall.

>> On a scale of 1 to 10, how, like, strict were they? Were they afraid to, like, knock you down, even the kids? The soldiers? Yeah.

BILL BENSON: Somebody help me out here.

>> On a scale of 1 to 10, how strict were the soldiers?

BILL BENSON: That's what I thought she was saying, thank you

JOSIE: I didn't hear.

BILL BENSON: On a scale of 1 to 10, how much stress do you think you felt in those years? How stressful were things for you?

JOSIE: I guess would be a different number every year.

You know, as a three-year-old, you don't quite comprehend what's going on.

And I really -- most of the time I didn't understand what was going on.

BILL BENSON: And a very different answer for your mother and your aunts, of course, yes,

JOSIE: Yes.

BILL BENSON: Maybe you can't even measure, the number for that. I'm sure. That's true. That was a great question, thank you so much for that.

Our last QUESTION:

>> Q: Can you talk a little bit about the reunification process amongst survivors? All these kids here grow up with cell phones, and Internet and you just would have to

Google where is my mom? But can you talk about what that looks like? What that looked like? How families found each other?

BILL BENSON: The reunification process, given the time as opposed to the point she's making is today people with Google use cell phones, you know, here's the -- aftermath the chaos of war, how did people find each other?

>> A: You know, there was a whole network -- people found each other. Names were written on boards, and -- and there were places and centers where you actually wrote your name, so you could look for people, and people could find you.

It was amazing! Because people were redistributed all over.

And people were coming back from all over after the war from concentration camps.

And somehow, they found each other. It's amazing.

Actually, this museum, is also very... it is used -- the international tracing service.

BILL BENSON: Thank you

JOSIE: So many survivors, or other family members, come here, and you could find and look up families -- your name and people you knew, and where they were born, and it's amazing what you can find! My husband found his parents... (a pause).

BILL BENSON: Thank you

JOSIE: On the deportation list.

BILL BENSON: Only because of -- in recent times, because of what we have here?

JOSIE: Right, right. You can actually find names of what happened to people.

So...

BILL BENSON: We're going to hear from Josie again in just a minute. I'm going to -- well, first, I want to thank you, all, for being with us.

Remind you that we'll have programs each Wednesday and Thursday, until August 8th. All of our programs are available through the YouTube page. So you can come back, you can see any of our programs, on the page.

We're also going to invite anybody in the audience, that would like to, when Josie's done, please come up on the stage and join her, get your photo taken with her, if you want; just give her a hug, if you want, I guess that's okay

JOSIE: I love hugs!

[LAUGHTER] BILL BENSON: So that's okay, and so we really mean that. You're welcome to come up on the stage and do that. I want to thank those who asked questions, great questions, thank you so much, I apologize if I stumbled in listening.

[APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: It's our tradition at "First Person" that our "First Person" has the last word. So with that I'll turn to Josie to close the program today

JOSIE: Thank you, it's my usual -- I have a saying here, written by... a Lutheran minister, named Martin Neimuller and if you go to the museum you'll see it on the second floor as you leave. Martin N was a Lutheran minister and he was at the beginning of the war, he was very proHitler because, you know, hiltler promised so many wonderful things for his people, once he saw what Hitler was doing, he was very much against him and actually he was imprisoned.

I always read this, because for me it is so meaningful, and in a way it's what the museum is about.

So let me read it to you... first they came for the socialists.

I did not speak out, because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionist. I did not speak out, because I was not a trade union.

Ist then they came for the Jews. I did not speak out because I was not a Jew then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me. To me this is so important, each one of you, especially young people, can really make a difference, you can speak out. If you see somebody being mistreated; or bullied.

Or made fun of -- you can actually intervene, you could say something.

You can stop them, you can tell them that that's not acceptable. You can all make a difference.

In fact, that's why I'm here: Because people spoke out.

They did something.

[APPLAUSE]