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## "First Person"

Allan Firestone

July 18th, 2019.

BILL BENSON: We begin with this 1947 photograph of Allan Firestone, who was born Abraham Wiznitzner, on January 31st, 1933. Allan was born in Kolomea Poland on this map of 1933 Poland the arrow points to the location of Kolomea, part of modern-day Ukraine, Germany and the Soviet union invaded Poland in September 1939, Hungarian and soviet forces occupied Kolomea until the German army occupied eastern Poland in 1941. This is a photo of Allan's four older sisters.

Rose, Frieda, Julia and Rachel, and their parents, Clara and Azriel.

Allan's parents and rose were murdered shortly after the German occupation of Kolomea. Allan and his remaining three sisters were

forced into the Kolomea ghetto, where they lived with other members of their family, by 1944, Allen and Julia were the only surviving members of their immediate family.... Allan and Julia escaped the ghetto, and a woman named Frania Palyga hid them in their apartment for more than a year and a half this picture was taken when Allan and his family visited Kolomea in mane 95. The siblings spent most of their days in the attic of the apartment building written a large wardrobe in the dining room. The floor below the apartment was occupied by a store frequented by Nazi officials. The soviet army liberated Kolomea in 1944, Allan and Julia left the apartment in search for other survivors from Kolomea. One of these survivors, eddy Firestone would become Julia's husband. Allan, Julia and eddy soon left pound and were in the displaced,

before immigrating to the United States in 1947 to prevent Allan an orphan for having to apply for an American visa as an individual, Julia and eddy claimed he was Eddie's son from a previous marriage, we close with the family's 1947 certificate of identity, in lieu of passport document. which includes a family portrait, of Allan, Julia, Eddie, and Miriam, Julia and Eddie's daughter...

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

BILL BENSON:

Good morning, and welcome to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. My name is Bill Benson.

I am the host of the museum's public program, *First Person*.

Thank you for joining us. This is our twentieth year of the *First Person* program. Our *First Person* today is Mr. Allan

Firestone, 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](http://www.ushmm.org), provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests. Allan 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 Allan 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  
Allan is one individual's  
account of the Holocaust. We  
have prepared a brief slide  
presentation to help with his  
introduction.

BILL BENSON: And we begin with this  
1947 photograph, of Allan Firestone,  
who was born Abraham Wicznitzner, on  
January 31st, 1933.

Allan was born in Kolomea, Poland,  
on this map of 1933 Poland, the  
arrow points to the location of  
Kolomea which is now part of  
modern-day Ukraine. Germany and the  
Soviet Union invaded Poland in

September 1939, Hungarian then soviet forces occupied Kolomea, until the German army occupied eastern Poland in 1941.

This is a photo of Allan's four older sisters, Rose, Frieda, Julia and Rachel and their parents, Clara, and Azriel. Allan's parents and Rose, were murdered, shortly after the German occupation of Kolomea.

Allan and his three remaining sisters were forced into the Kolomea ghetto, where they lived with other members of their family.

By 1944, Allan and Julia were the only surviving members of their immediate family. Allan and Julia escaped the ghetto, and a woman named Frania Palyga hid them in a corner apartment seen here, for more than a year and a half. This picture was taken, when Allan and his family visited Kolomea, in 1995. The siblings spent most of their days in the attic of the apartment

building, or in a large wardrobe in Frania's dining room, the floor below the apartment was occupied by a store frequented by Nazi officials.

The Soviet army liberated Kolomea in February 1944, Allan and Julia left the apartment, and searched for other survivors from Kolomea. One of these survivors, Eddie Firestone, would become Julia's husband.

Allan, Julia, and Eddie soon left Poland and stayed in the displaced person's camp in Germany before immigrating to the United States, in 1947. To prevent Allan, an orphan from having to apply for an American visa as an individual, Julia and Eddie claimed Allan was Eddie's son from a previous marriage, we close with the family's 1947 certificate of identity in lieu of passport document, which includes a family portrait of Allan, Julia Eddie and Miriam, Julia and Eddie's daughter.



Upon their arrival in the United States, Allan, his sister, brother-in-law, and niece lived in Brooklyn, after graduation from high school, Allan was drafted into the United States Army, at age 19, and spent two years, in Korea, during the Korean war. After his discharge in 1955, he attended city college of New York, on the GI bill, where he majored in economics, with a focus on foreign trade. Graduating in 1957.

Following graduation, he went to work for the Internal Revenue Service. Allan married his wife, Barbara, in 1959, Barbara is also a Holocaust survive survivor. In April they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary, they have two **DAURLTS** Karen born in 1963, received her Ph. D. In biology which took her to Australia occur where she lives now in Sydney with her daughter. Allan and Barbara's Australian

granddaughter will begin her freshman year this fall at the University of North Carolina. Daughter Sharon was born in 1967, and lives in New Jersey with her husband. Allan and Barbara moved to the -- Washington, D.C. in 1962, following Allan's retirement from the IRS in 1988, he became a consultant for the international monetary fund. For ten years, then continued consulting on international trade, for various organizations, including the world bank. Until his retirement from consulting in 2014, he traveled extensively on business, throughout the world, including to many countries in Africa, all of the former Soviet Union countries except one, and much of Asia, including Mongolia, Thailand Myanmar **SCLNG** Pakistan and others, and Barbara was able to join Allan on many of his trips and they still like to travel.

Following his retirement from international trade consulting Allan began doing volunteer work and became active with this museum, in May.

You will find Allan here on Monday afternoons at the survivor's desk, where he talks with visitors about what we went through during the war and the Holocaust. Allan has now begun to speak about his experience, and other settings, such as at the University of Maryland, recently. And this is his first time, with us, at "First Person".

His wife, Barbara, is next to Allan in the front row; and with that, I would like to ask you, to join me in welcoming our "First Person", Mr. Allan Firestone.

[APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: Allan I'm going to seat you right here.

Thank you, for joining us today, Allan, and we are just grateful that

some -- you've been willing to do this, and -- and especially, for your very first time with us, so thank you, for that>>ALLAN: Thank you.

BILL BENSON: If we could spend the entire rest of the day and tomorrow, and still not hear all that you have to say, so we're going to try to do what we can in one year, so -- I mean, in one hour, so we'll get started.

[LAUGHTER] BILL BENSON: World War II began when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland in September 1939.

Before we turn to the war years, and the Holocaust, tell us what you can, about your family and their life, and your life, before the war began.

>>ALLAN: I was born into our family, with four older sisters. My parents had an -- operated a small grocery store, and a bar that served surrounding villages, my parents

were relatively welloff.

They lived in a very fine home.

They had a couple of -- two or three, rental properties in the neighborhood.

And I found out, many, many years after the war, that when I was born, my father opened a bank account for me, in one of the banks in England. And so, that kind of indicated that there was some money in the family.

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BILL BENSON: You were considerably younger than your four older sisters.

And you told me that your birth, was a big deal.

>> Absolutely.

BILL BENSON: Tell me a little bit about that.

>>ALLAN: well, I was the fifth child, son after four girls, I'm sure my parents loved their daughters, but when I was born, it became a big production. I, of

course, didn't know about it; but I heard from many people, how wonderful things were, a big celebration, this was.

BILL BENSON: Allan, I know you don't know a whole lot about most of your sisters, but tell us, a little bit, about what you know about them and the age -- what you know about their ages at the time of your birth.

>>ALLAN: When the Holocaust started, I was about eight years old, and I certainly did not think, it important enough to get into a lot of things.

It became more important, as time went on. So a question I -- of my sisters, they were all wonderful girls, but by the time I became aware of things, they were studying at a Jewish high school, which -- had a Polish curriculum, and they -- whether they like it or not, I was the apple of the eye, and

made sure that I was well-off, and well-taken-care-of.

Age wise: My youngest of the four sisters was approximately 15 or 16 years old.

When I was approximately nine.

The next older one, the one who survived the war, Julia, she was about ten years older than I, so she must have been about 19, when I was nine.

The second of the older sisters, was probably about -- in her early 20s, and the oldest of my sisters, was about 24.

BILL BENSON: Allan, you started kindergarten before the war began.

>> Yes.

BILL BENSON: What do you recall of that?

>>ALLAN: My only recollection, was that I was very embarrassed, because I was the only one, who was accompanied by the family name to make it to the kindergarten.

Nobody else, as I recall, had that kind of service provided; so I was -- again, was somewhat highly well treated.

BILL BENSON: You also shared with me, and I hope you don't mind me sharing this but you shared it with me, your biggest accomplishment, when you were in kindergarten according to you was that you learned to smoke.

[LAUGHTER] >> yes, well, that was when I graduated from kindergarten! (Allan).

[LAUGHTER] >> Allan: I think I must have been about seven years old or so, at that time; when I went to a Hebrew day school, and what I must remember about it is that I learned how to steal cigarettes from my father. And how to smoke behind the latrine. In that school.

BILL BENSON: Allan, with the start of the war in September 1939, when you were just six years old, your



town was occupied, by the Soviet army until June of 1941.

Do you recall much about what it was like, for your family, during that 21-months or so that your family lived under Soviet control?

>> Allan: Well, the major recollection I have, is that, my father, who would run -- have a grocery store and a bar, before the war, obviously, could not continue because of the occupation under the Soviets, did not allow, for private enterprise.

So I remember, my father and mother occupying themselves with trying to raise geese, from which they would sell, from their house.

Other than that, the major recollection that I had, was that, my older sisters, all of whom by that time, were studying, they were very upset, because their whole Polish curriculum was turned upside down. They now had to study

Russian, instead of Polish; and Soviet history instead of Polish history.

And they also... had to study Yiddish, which, we normally did not have to study at **HOM** home or speak at home. They spoke Polish like good Polish citizens.

**BILL BENSON:** In June 1941, Nazi Germany turned on the Soviets, and very quickly your town was occupied by the Hungarian army, which were allied with the Nazis, the Hungarian occupation, was for a short period. Do you recall anything about that short period when the Hungarians were in control?

>> Allan: The -- the Hungarians, as I recall, the occupation, was relatively speaking, benign.

The only problem, that I remember was that the Hungarian troops were to round up Jewish men, to the extent they could find them; and put them to work, changing to the Soviet

gauge, which was higher and wider than the western European, to good get the German army to send their supplies and troops into the Soviet Union. But that was relatively benign, and very unimportant, as far as, especially, for myself, when I was at an age, when I was not -- in a position to do any usable work.

BILL BENSON: You also shared with me, that, during that period, there had been a number of Hungarian Jews that had fled; and some were staying in your home, during that time.

>> Allan: Yes, the -- I did not think much of it, and I therefore, did not remember to tell you about it; but my parents had a space in the former grocery store, and a former bar, where a number of young women, refugees from -- from Hungary were housed. This happened for a few months; and afterwards, they came and they want -- I did not know anything about them.

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Allan: Being, again, of a young age, I was not interested in things like that. I do remember, again, that after -- many years after the war, one of my cousins, who remained in Germany, happened to have met up with two of those young ladies. And they were telling my cousin, how grateful they were for all their help, that my parents gave to them. That's my only memory of that experience.

BILL BENSON: And, of course, that -- that time in with the Hungarians, was so short. Very quickly the Nazis took control of your town, and circumstances for Jews became horrific.

You said to me, quote, my story begins with a first major roundup of Jews in our town, in January 1942. Tell us what happened to your family, with that roundup.

>> Allan: well, once, the German

army, or German -- or the Nazis, took over from the Hungarian occupation, they started implementing all the rules and regulations, to make life difficult for us Jews.

They ordered all adults, again, being of a young age -- I was exempt -- but the the adults had to start wearing armbands, showing that they are -- they were Jewish.

Then afterwards, they were removed and prevented us Jews, from using public transport; from attending theaters, and movies, shows. The Jews were required -- also were required to turn over to the German government, their jewelry, their furs, which, again, as you mentioned, the real disaster struck in January, 1942, when my parents and my oldest sister were arrested by the Germans, with the assistance of the Ukrainian militia.

At that time, my oldest sister, was

already married.

And had -- a baby, which was approximately, two, two-and-a-half years old.

So, in January of 1942, the militia showed up at our house, and arrested my parents, my sister and her husband; and we never, of course, knew whatever happened to them.

But that was the beginning of the disaster, for -- for me, and my three remaining sisters.

So that left my three older sisters, and myself, and 2 1/2-year-old baby, totally adrift.

BILL BENSON: Can you recall what you thought had happened to your parents and your older sister? Did you have an idea what had happened to them and didn't know exactly what happened -- but --

>> Allan: well, at that time, we did -- we did not really know, what was happening when I said, they were arrested; that's because, we all

were under the impression that they were being jailed. We didn't know, then, that what in fact, was happening was that they were taken to a small forest right outside of town, where they were promptly executed.

BILL BENSON: You told me -- you shared with me that your remaining sisters, thinking that your parents had been imprisoned, went and tried to get them out of prison.

>> Allan: Yes, as things happened, in situations like this -- there are always people who think -- who prey on.... survivors; and they seem to know somebody who knows somebody, for payment of whatever ransom would get people out of jail. Of course, that was all, as we would say, nowadays, a big scam, because by the time, these people were trying to get some money out of my sister's -- my parents and my older sister, they were all dead.

BILL BENSON: Do you -- do you have any idea, or insight at all, as to why, when the Nazis took your parents and your older sister and your husband, why they didn't take the other sisters and you? And your nephew?

>> Allan: No, I don't really know, and I'm sure it's a very interesting question.

My only thought is that, this just added to our misery. Being left adrift, with no guidance from parents, no help; limited amount of food; and just.... left unto our own devices, with the additional burden of taking care of myself, who was, then, about nine years old -- and more importantly, my little nephew, two-and-a-half years old, which required a lot of attention,.

BILL BENSON: Several months after you lost your parents, and your -- your oldest sister, you and



your other sisters and nephew were, then, forced, along with the other Jews in your town, forced into a ghetto.

What -- tell us what you can, about what it was like for you, in the ghetto; what it meant for you and your sisters.

>> Allan: Well, there was -- there were three of my sisters, myself, and a baby nephew, which made a total of five people.

We were -- forced to abandon our comfortable home.

And move into the ghetto, where we all five of us, shared one room. Because the purpose of the ghetto, was to limit the... life of certain people in the ghetto. Limit their access to food.

The fact that we were all squeezed into one room, was not as important as the fact that the amount of food we had, was beginning to be very, very limited.

I say so -- my main occupation at that time, was to watch for the man with a horse and buggy, who came around, through the ghetto, collecting corpses of people, who died of starvation the night before.

BILL BENSON: You -- you shared with me, when we met, you told me, that before long, hunger started gnawing at us and that you were starving in the depths of the ghetto.

How did you get any food while you were there?

>> Allan Firestone: One of my sisters... somehow managed to find work, outside of the ghetto.

It so happens, the work was harvest... the industrial type of eventually used for sugar production, and she would go out with a -- a bunch of other workers from the ghetto; to the local farms, harvest the beets and come back at night.

My sister, was able to smuggle some

beets into the ghetto. And for a period of approximately vtwo months or so. That was our main sustenance.

I guess, I won't tell any secrets, but to this day, I can't stand the sight of beets.

[LAUGHTER] BILL BENSON: And -- your sister was caught doing that.

>> Allan Firestone: Yes, my sister was caught one day, and she was caught, arrested; but we never heard from her again.

The presumption was that she was, together with other people, from the ghetto, they were marched off to the local farms, and murdered there.

BILL BENSON: So now it's you and two sisters, and you shared with me a -- that -- that one of your sisters, or both of your sisters, took you to a part of the ghetto -- because you said there were different sections to the ghetto, where there was a -- food

was available, for orphans.

Can you share that with us?

>> Allan Firestone: The ghetto, was basically, composed of three sections:

Each one -- there were guards, allowing... people to move from one section to the other.

which was not very enjoyable to do so. Because one never knew, how much trouble one would get into, with the guards in the different sections; however, it was more or less the center of the ghetto.

There were some organizational functions, and one of the things that was -- there, was an orphanage. And the orphans, were -- served one a day meal. Since we didn't have anything, and I was, at that point, an orphan, legitimately, one of my sisters took me, to the other section of the ghetto. And the people in charge, that I was a legitimate orphan and entitled to

some help.

After some period of time, I was handed a bowl of some watery soup. It probably wasn't as long a period of time, as I thought. But to me it seemed interminable; however, that was the only time, I went to this orphanage for my food. There was a rumor, floating that the next time, there was going to be a roundup in the ghetto, the Nazis would target the orphans, and indeed, my sisters never allowed me to go back to get my ration of soup; and indeed, when -- the next roundup occurred, the orphans were all captured, and moved on.

BILL BENSON: Allan, you -- you lost your nephew. As well. Will you tell us about that?

>> Allan Firestone: well, the -- once the uh -- my sister, who was smuggling beets into the ghetto, was killed or placed no longer with us -- my two remaining sisters, felt

that there was too much of a burden for them to take care of the 2 1/2-year-old baby.

They prevailed on his paternal grandmother, to take him and maintain him.

It seemed like, maybe two or three weeks afterwards, there was another major roundup, where the Nazis and their local militia, captured as many Jews as possible, to march them off to the forest, for execution.

The grandmother was arrested, together with others; and was marched off.

The 2 1/2-year-old, he was used for target practice, so that basically left.... my two sisters and myself as the survivors. This kind of brought us to the summer of 1942. Possibly, late summer, when it was becoming obvious that.... the ghetto was going to be liquidated, sooner or later.

My older sister, tried to save

herself by leaving the ghetto and getting on a train, and going to a larger city, and.... unfortunately, for her, she was recognized, as being Jewish. And reported to the local police. Who, then, arrested her, and we got word of what happened, but we never heard what happened to her. Personally.

Most likely, she was taken by train, to the closest concentration camp.

In a town called Belzac. But that's only a supposition. That was the end of my sisters, which left, basically, my third -- of the four sisters and myself as the survivors.

BILL BENSON: And this sister, Julia, was your second -- 2nd youngest of the sisters.

>> Yes.

BILL BENSON: You shared with me, there were as you put it, some in the ghetto, that were -- that were luckier than you; and you -- you mentioned, particularly, a friend of

Julia's.

would you say a little bit about that?

>> Allan Firestone: Yes, well, life in the ghetto, was becoming extremely difficult. One day, my sister, told me to go to visit our distant family, to see if they could possibly give us some --

BILL BENSON: They were in the ghetto too.

>> Yes, they were called the Russian family, presumably, there was some relationship to Russia, I don't know. (Allan Firestone) but -- I was told we went to see the family. The wife was very unhelpful, and telling me that they had no food, and they couldn't help me whatsoever.

The husband, was a little bit more... trying to be helpful.

But, because his wife, told me, there was no food, he was very.... round-about in telling me, well, you



know, when you came in here, you saw there was this barrel of apples under the stairs, you didn't steal any. And, of course, being a pompous little ass, I said, no, of course, I didn't steal any. That was my experience with my Russian family.

which was only after I left, that -- my God, what an idiot. He was recommending to steal the apples.

[LAUGHTER] BILL BENSON: And you didn't.

>> Allan Firestone: Right. But that was one of my more embarrassing experiences. If I may say so.

However, leaving my sister, and myself, my sister had a boyfriend. He, apparently, came from a well-to-do family, because they had all sorts of help, including a maid. And he convinced the maid, that she would hide him; and my sister, when the time came to leave the ghetto.

He delayed too long, to escape the ghetto.

And was arrested, like, all the other Jews. And was shipped off to the local forest. My sister, who had -- the foresight to scale the ghetto walls, and to go to the woman and convince her that -- to hide her.

BILL BENSON: This was Frania Palyga.

>> Yes, Frania Palyga, a lady from one of the local villages, who was the maid for this friend. That left me pretty well on my own, in the ghetto. (Allan Firestone) and it was, then,.... about ten years old; and the ghetto was getting depopulated. When my sister left, I tried to keep myself occupied by wanderinging through the ghetto. Usually there were other children my age, who kept each other company. But it was pretty empty. And so, I soon walked back to the apartment,

and just stayed there, for three or four days. When I, then, get a message, from my sister, that she wanted some of her clothing.

BILL BENSON: Allan before you continue with that, just a QUESTION: Do you recall what you felt, at that time? I mean, it had to have been not just lonely, but terrifying. What do you recall that now, by yourself, in a largely depopulated ghetto.

>> Allan Firestone: I think at that point, I was simply numb, my sister was killed, because she was arrested first; my next sister got killed, because she was smuggling beets into the ghetto. My third sister, was arrested, on a train. By the time, my remaining sister left the ghetto, I was -- well, that's the way life was.

BILL BENSON: Yeah.

>> Allan Firestone: It was scary, but really, basically -- that's --

BILL BENSON: The way life is....

>> Allan Firestone: Yeah.

BILL BENSON: So you were telling us that you got this message though from your sister, hidden with Frania Palyga.

>> Allan Firestone: Yes, this was the one who gave -- sent a message, and the one who came to tell me about it, was a friend of my sisters.

who, apparently, was able to buy for herself, documents certifying that she was not Jewish, that she was Christian; and so she was able to move around without being in too much danger.

So she came into the ghetto.

Relayed the message.

I had nothing else to do; because I was just -- I don't recall at this point, whether I ate anything or not. But I bundled up some clothes, which I thought was appropriate; and climbed over the fence of the part

of the ghetto fence, and delivered the clothing to my sister.

And I might admit that I did not get the right clothes.

[LAUGHTER] >> Allan Firestone: In case you think that a 10-year-old boy knows what women's clothes are. It was not --

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Allan Firestone: However, again, having nothing to do, and knowing that my -- I simply said to my sister, okay, you keep this stuff, and I will just go back to the ghetto, and try to get you some more appropriate stuff.

My sister thought about it for a while and said, no, don't go yet. Let me talk to Frania. She went and talked to this woman.

And convinced her, that, in fact, the boyfriend was not -- no longer alive.

And would she, then, hide me with my sister?

BILL BENSON: Uh-huh.

>> Allan Firestone: By a stroke of luck, she agreed.

So my sister's boyfriend's -- this woman agreed to hide me. That's how my sister and I spent the next roughly year, year and a half.

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Allan Firestone: Hiding in her apartment.

BILL BENSON: And as we noted in the introduction, of the slide presentation, there was a store underneath her apartment that was frequented, by Nazis.

>> Allan Firestone: Yes.

BILL BENSON: As you said, you were there for almost a year and a half. Tell us what you can about what that was like, to be hidden there; under those circumstances.

>> Allan Firestone: well, it was... the apartment was a very small apartment.

And... my sister and I spent our

time, primarily in a wardrobe. It was supposed -- not a closet, like, we are used to here in the states, but a wardrobe, and if you have seen stories in the book of Narnia, where the British kids climb into the wardrobe, and then they walk out.

And on the other side of the wardrobe, they have wonderful --

BILL BENSON: Right. There was no -- side.

>> Allan Firestone: There was no other side. And my experience was nowhere near that. We spent our time, sitting in the closet. In that wardrobe.

We basically as quiet as possible.

The woman had guests coming, on occasion; and if we had enough

forewarning that people would come,

we would climb up into the attic,

from that apartment. And basically

wait out until the guests departed

the. The attic was -- gave us a

little more breathing room, from not

sitting in a closet; hoping nobody would open the closet door. But it was pretty miserably cold during the winter; and brutal -- like, the climate we have today, during the summer.

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Allan Firestone: But that's how we basically spent our time, trying to survive, as long as -- as much as possible.

My main objective was to just, make myself, invisible. Never knowing when somebody would find us, nobody would...

BILL BENSON: If you don't mind, if I can share, something that you said to me, you said that, that you -- you completely understood, as a little boy, the gravity of the circumstances that you were in, and that for you it was quote, just a matter of pure survival, pure terror.

Say a little more about that...



>> Allan Firestone:

I'm just about repeating what you said. Basically, I knew how terrible the situation was.

And how much -- how little difference there was between survival and being captured by the Nazis, and being murdered, like, all my other sisters.

So.... I tried, as I said, to be invisible, not to cause any problem, or difficulty. To anybody. Just purely -- go from day-to-day. Try to survive.

BILL BENSON: You had shared with me that you were very afraid that you might anger Frania and you might lose your hiding place. Tell us a little bit about Frania.

>> Allan Firestone: This woman, was a... farm woman, who came from one of the local villages. She was... illiterate. But yet she had a wonderful heart to be willing to... take the risk, to help us.

If she were to have been discovered hiding Jews, not only would the Jews be killed; but she, and -- and anybody else in that apartment, would have been equally killed.

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Allan Firestone: So it was -- I can't say enough about how grateful I was to that woman. But yet at the same time, there was always a risk, even my sister would get mad at me and tell me to go, out of there, or Frania would say, I've had enough with you people. Go get lost.

It was a very horrifying situation, and I was quite aware of all the risks and all the -- how little there was between life and death.

BILL BENSON: Fortunately for you, it came for an end. You were liberated in February of 1944, right after your 11th birth.

Tell us about your liberation, and then what you and your sister did from there.

>> Allan Firestone: During the last few days before liberation, we kept hearing the canonfire, which indicated to us, that there was fighting and some with the Russian army was moving. So we spent our days praying that indeed, the Russian army would be successful. When the day finally came, Franja, came into the apartment, and she said the Russian tanks are in town. This was the wonderful news that we had been praying for, for a year and a half.

BILL BENSON: Right.

>> Allan Firestone: And sure enough, my sister and I left the apartment for the first time, in about a year and a half. And so, the Russian tanks, going through the streets. Those were... Russian tanks that, unlike in 1939, they weren't coming as liberators; they were coming as fighting troops, and didn't care for us, we just were

ignored.

BILL BENSON: You said there was no fanfare. Liberated?

>> Allan Firestone: Right. So my sister became aware that there were other survivors, in town.

And we all sort of congregated, in a.... house, which so happened to be the house of one of the more prominent doctors in town. He, of course, and his family, were no longer alive.

So a dozen or two of us, survivors, congregated there.

And that's where my sister, who would eventually become her husband, she met him. He was helping us.

A rumor spread, that the German armies would be counter attacking.

The possibility was that we would be -- find ourselves in the -- under German occupation, again. So my future brother-in-law, arranged for us to leave the town, Kolomea, and move east,. It happened -- we ended

up in a Romanian town, where we spent, the rest of the summer of 1944. Hoping that the fighting would move west.

BILL BENSON: And then when you finally were convinced that there would be no German counterattack; that they were being pushed back -- what did you do then?

>> Allan Firestone: well, by that time, we were -- we moved back to the town, which was late in 1944. At that time, it was known that that part of what is to be Poland, would remain part of the Soviet Union. The authorities there, did -- were not too happy about having a large Polish population, in the town. So they encouraged us, all, including those of us Jews, who survived, and who were Polish citizens -- to move west, into Poland. So we -- we fled that town, and ended up in Poland.

We.... eventually ended in a town,

of what used to be the called a territory, the German territories, that were now being settled by the Polish population.

And we ended up in a town called Beslav in Polish. We had a fairly good life there.

Until, 1946, when there was a Polish pogrom in the town of Celzat. This was a major destruction of a bunch of survivors.

And it became clear that we were not destined to live in Poland.

So, again, those of us, who survived, together with many others, again, ended up on a train, going from Breslav, into the American zone of occupation of Germany.

And my sister, and -- at that time, her husband, they ended up, in Frankfurt. I ended up in an orphanage, in a displaced person's camp, in VP camp, where I lived through the -- three months or so. At that time, basically, I -- I was

beginning to go to school, and lived in the orphanage.

The major subject of study there, was Hebrew; because we were -- those of us in the orphanage, were expected to eventually be smuggled into what was then Palestine.

My sister, and her husband, decided that, they did not want to go to Palestine; they wanted to come to the United States.

They applied for visas, and they applied for a visa for my -- for me. The rules, at that time, were such that I did not qualify as a member of the immediate family.

So I could not come with my sister and her husband, and by that time, they had a -- a baby of their own.

BILL BENSON: Let me stop you for just a second, they applied for visas from the U.S., your sister actually found relatives in the United States by that time, right?

>> Allan Firestone: Yes, which she

found -- my father's brother, and my father's sister, they were living here in the United States.

BILL BENSON: They had come before the war?

>> Allan Firestone: Right.

BILL BENSON: Yeah.

>> Allan: And they were willing to certify that they would support her and her husband, and they would not be subject to a burden to the U.S. government.

BILL BENSON: And if I remember right, not only were you under the rules, not considered part of their family; so you couldn't come under their visa. It also meant, because they were coming under a German visa --

>> Allan Firestone: Yes.

BILL BENSON: It meant you had to go at it alone and come in with a Polish visa as a very young boy.

>> Allan Firestone: That's correct.

BILL BENSON: Yeah.



>> Allan Firestone: So my brother-in-law, then, came up with a scheme, whereby, I became his son, by a previous marriage.

And so I, then, was qualified to come with the family. To the States.

BILL BENSON: A nuclear family at that point considered that legally.

>> Yes.

BILL BENSON: 1947, in fact, the 4 -- you came to New York. In the little time we have left, tell us about your trip to the United States.

And -- and what -- what it was, like, after all that you had been through, to adapt here.

>> Allan Firestone: well, while -- when the decision was made, that we would all travel, as a family, quote/unquote. To the United States.

-- my sister, arranged for me to be tutored in English.

So by the time, we came to the states, I had an inkling of how to speak English.

(A pause).

>> Allan Firestone: We were, obviously, extremely happy to leave Germany, and to come to the States. . We had a wonderful time, of seeing the statue of liberty. What I didn't realize at the time, since we traveled in -- in the wintertime, we ran across terrible storms, and the ship that we were on, barely survived.

But, we didn't know that.

BILL BENSON: Until you saw the massive gash on the side of the ship after you docked there -- yeah.

>> Allan Firestone: So, then, of course, I started going to school. Initially I went to a Yeshiva, a Hebrew school. That helped with the transition. Because I knew a little bit of English and I knew a little bit of Yiddish.

And so, the first year, in school, was -- reasonably well; but for some reason, I did not care for the religious part of the school curriculum.

And so they transferred my sister and her husband -- transferred me to a local public school. That's when I first started coming alive. For the first time in my life, I was in a school, where I was not afraid of being attacked and I was Jewish; but that I was being befriended by people, classmates, it was a wonderful experience, and a wonderful life.

BILL BENSON: You know, we don't have time to talk about, you know, what happened after that, but if you'll permit me, you know, I mentioned that he was drafted in the U.S. Army and Korean war and I said what was that time like for you he said I reveled in it, I was free, it was a marvelous experience. You saw

the far east.

You know, first time you had ever been on your own, truly.

Allan, we didn't have time for you to ask Allan questions -- he's going to close our program, in just a moment. But when he's done two things are going to happen our photographer Joel is going to get up on stage and take a photograph, with Allan with you as the background.

So please stay here for that. And then when Allan is done, we're going to invite any of you -- all of you -- to come up on stage, afterwards, if you would like, meet Allan, ask him a question, get your picture taken with him; whatever you would like to do in that regard. And we really do encourage you to do that.

Thank you for being with us. We have a few more programs this season.

we'll conclude on August 8th. Each

wednesday and Thursday, until August 8th. All of our programs, are on the museum's YouTube channel, so you can see them there, if you can't come back this year; so thank you, for being with us!

It's our tradition at "First Person", that our "First Person" has the last word... and so, on that note, I'm going to turn it back to Allan to close today's program.

>> Allan Firestone: well, having survived the Holocaust and having come to the states, and having gone to a public school, where I was not attacked, but, rather, befriended, and.... made part of the Community, I became a very strong believer in the United States.

I love this country.

I was very proud to be drafted, and to serve in the U.S. Army.

Even though, I ended up in Korea, I still was very happy. So I'm very... a very great believer in

this country.

And... and to repay this country for what it's given me, I guess that's why I'm here, spending my time, telling you my story so that nothing like this ever happens again.

BILL BENSON: Thank you, Allan.

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[APPLAUSE]

(Allan Firestone, July 18th, 2019.)