

Holocaust Memorial Museum First Person
Freddie Traum
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>> Ladies and gentlemen, please silence all electronic devices. The 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 today. We are in our 20th year of the First Person program, and our First Person today is Mr. Freddie 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.

Freddie will share with us his "First Person" account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have an opportunity at the end of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Freddie a few questions. If we do not get to your question today, please join us in our online 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 Freddie is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction. We begin with this photo of Alfred "Freddie" Traum, who is on the left, pictured here with his cousin, Joseph. Freddie was born in March 1929 in Vienna, Austria.

His mother and father owned a business and he had an older sister, Ruth. On March 12, 1938, German troops marched into Austria, and life for Freddie and his family changed dramatically. Freddie and Ruth were forced to leave public school while Freddie's non-Jewish friends joined the Hitler Youth and quickly separated themselves from Freddie.

After Freddie's parents learned about the Kindertransport, a rescue effort which brought thousands of refugee Jewish children to Great Britain between 1938 and 1940, they decided to send their two children to England. On June 20, 1939, 10-year-old Freddie said goodbye to his family and left with Ruth for England. This photo was taken on the afternoon of Freddie and Ruth's departure for London. Pictured from left to right are Ruth, Freddie's grandmother, his father, Freddie, and his mother.

Here we see Freddie's passport that he used on his journey to England. Freddie and Ruth were placed with a Christian family, the Griggs. When England declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, the Traum children, along with thousands of others, were sent to live in the English countryside. Freddie spent the next three years of his life there. Here we see 12-year-old Freddie and his sister, Ruth, at an evacuation residence near Luton, England.

After the war, Freddie became a merchant seaman and eventually moved to Israel. He met his wife, Josiane, who is also a Holocaust survivor, on an Israeli ship upon which they would be married. We close with this photo from Freddie and Josiane's wedding aboard the Israeli Passenger Liner SS Zion in 1958. After the birth of Freddie and Josie's first child, he gave up his career as a merchant seaman and went to work for IBM in Israel. Their daughter Yael was also born in Israel.

Upon the advice of Israeli medical experts, Freddie and Josie relocated to the United States in 1963 to obtain medical care for their son Michael, who is disabled. Freddie was able to transfer to IBM in New Jersey, and they began their new life here. Their third child, son Jonathan, who is also disabled, was born here. Eventually, Freddie went to work for Boeing as an engineer in telecommunications, and they moved to Silver Spring, Maryland, where Freddie and Josie live today.

Freddie is retired from Boeing. Josie retired 11 years ago as a clinical social worker for abused children with Child Protective Services in Montgomery County, Maryland. Josie and her mother, Fanny Aizenberg, are both Holocaust survivors. Fanny, who passed away in 2018 at age 101, was last with us for First Person in 2017 at age 100. Josie was our First Person guest several weeks ago on July 3. And I'm pleased to say that Josie is here with Freddie today in the front row.

For many years Freddie chaired the local Kindertransport Association, which is made up of fellow survivors of Nazi persecution. His volunteer work here at the Museum has included being a researcher with the International Tracing Service archive, and serving as a tour guide for the Museum's special exhibitions including the exhibition on Nazi Propaganda, State of Deception: the Power of Propaganda, and the 2008 exhibition about the 1936 Nazi Olympics.

Freddie has also spoken about his experience as a survivor on behalf of the Museum at various colleges and government agencies, including such places as the Federal Housing Authority, Black River Technical College in Pocahontas, Arkansas, and Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida, and the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi. Freddie is a contributor to the museum's publication, Echoes of Memory, which features writings

by survivors who participate in the museum's writing class for survivors. Please join me in welcoming our First Person, Mr. Freddie Traum.

>> Bill Benson: Freddie, I'm going to put you right here. Freddie, thank you so much for joining us and being willing to be our First Person. We're so glad to have you here.

>> Freddie Traum: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: We'll start, just because we have such a short time together and you have so much to share with us.

You told me, Freddie, that you had a happy childhood. Let's begin with you telling us about your early childhood and what you know about your parents' life before the war and before the Holocaust.

>> Freddie Traum: Well, I believe I had a good childhood. I only have one mine to judge by. We lived on the outskirts of Vienna. And there were some Jews there, but not in the street around us. I used to play happily with all the kids. Never had the slightest problem. And everything changed once the Germans moved in.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to that, Freddie, a couple of questions for you. Your father was a disabled veteran of the First World War.

>> Freddie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: How did your parents earn their living?

>> Freddie Traum: Well, there was a time before. My parents would order things and give it to the customer and then collect on a monthly basis for that. So they probably bought wholesale and sold it at retail, and that way, without having an established shop.

>> Bill Benson: So they did that from the home?

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. My mother used to go collecting. And sometimes I used to go with her. She'd go to places like Vienna Woods, where it was very nice. It was only a tram ride away from where we lived. And people were very nice. And kind of strange how people changed. Because once the Nazis came there and they said, well, you don't have to pay anything. If you owe Jews anything, don't pay, and then people would slam the door in our face.

>> Bill Benson: They would no longer pay their bills for the debts they owed your parents. Freddie, how significant was your father's disability?

>> Freddie Traum: He needed two canes to get around.

>> Bill Benson: Two canes? OK.

>> Freddie Traum: But surprisingly, he could get around quite a bit. He never went anywhere outside. He couldn't manage that. He would have to get a taxi. But otherwise, he was very gifted. And he could do anything. Art -- artistically and all kinds of things. He could make shoes. Make clothes. All kinds of things. He had a sewing machine. Which incidentally a neighbor down the hall called the Gestapo and said we had a transmitter.

>> Bill Benson: It was a sewing machine?

>> Freddie Traum: I don't know how he thought that would transmit or make some noise. It was a sewing machine. But they came in and they rifled everywhere and all of that sort of thing.

>> Bill Benson: Because that came a little bit later. As Hitler's influence grew, your friends started to -- the kids that you knew started to belong to Nazi youth organizations. What do you remember of that and what can you tell us about what your experience in the time that led up to the Anschluss or the annexation of Austria by Germany?

>> Freddie Traum: Well, as soon they began to join these organizations, they all had uniforms. And they used to come and show off that they had little daggers. And they seemed to be having a great time. And I was a little jealous, if anything. But I didn't know -- didn't realize the sense of things that lay behind it in Germany. We would talk to them. But then they would shun me. And then after they became abusive. And these are the same people that I grew up with.

>> Bill Benson: That you had been playing with just a few years earlier.

>> Freddie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: And you began to experience other forms of anti-Semitism. You had an incident at a park, if I remember right. Can you tell us about that? Where you had a statue taken away from you?

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. In Vienna, there were little railings around there. And you went around and played on the grass. And what was so special about it was compared to England where in front of the palace where the green park lane was down there, and you could get sandwiches and enjoying life. But Vienna was different. The kids -- I used to go to the park on my way home. And the kids tore my school bag from my shoulder and threw it on the grass. And so I stepped over this little rail and went to pick it up. And as soon as I did, there was a policeman there. He got me by the neck and started giving me a dressing down, that Jewish kids don't appreciate the beauty of Vienna and all of that kind of stuff.

Anyway, days later there was a letter telling my mother to come to school. So she came there. And the practice in Vienna was in the classroom if an adult comes in, all of the kids stand up as respect for the elders. And so she came in. And the kids stood up. And the teacher told them, sit down, sit down. You don't have to stand up for her. And then he started giving her all of the kinds of nonappreciation of the beauty in Vienna and all of that.

>> Bill Benson: So ridiculed your mother in front of all of the students.

>> Freddie Traum: It was very embarrassing. But then they dismissed her. And after that I was actually expelled from that school. And sent to another school which was much further away. But it was for Jews. Not to be confused with a Jewish school, where people would select that because they want to have a particular education for their kids.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Freddie Traum: But we had the benefit of a very good teacher. He was a professor. Had taught at the university level. And because he was Jewish, he was let go. So now their loss was our gain. And he was actually a wonderful teacher.

>> Bill Benson: Freddie, your sister had a friend, and in late November in 1938, Kristallnacht, which was the night of November 9-10 in Germany and Austria where there was some violence against Jewish businesses and 300 synagogues were burned. Jewish -- 30,000 Jewish men were arrested. And one of them was Ruth's friend's father. He was arrested and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah. Strange thing. He was sent there. In a sense it was his ticket to life because when he was released a couple of months later, he was told that they had to leave within a certain date. So the parents, they just headed for the border. And they had made arrangements for their daughter to come on the Kindertransport. So she stayed in our home until she could go.

>> Bill Benson: This was Lily, Ruth's friend. So she went on the transport with you?

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. Her parents made their way to Palestine and started a new life. So in the beginning, they didn't have the killing machine in place. In the beginning, they just wanted to be rid of them. And the Germans they called it to be free of Jews. So if you could leave and go somewhere, they wanted you to go. Except you couldn't take any money or anything of value.

>> Bill Benson: Just leave basically.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah, just leave. But then afterwards -- I forgot the question. But the Germans -- nobody wanted to let the Jews in. And otherwise they had nowhere to go. So therefore he was free. To do whatever he wanted. And that's what he ended up doing.

>> Bill Benson: Freddie, you shared with me recently that you had recently recalled an incident from that time when you had drawn a picture of a Nazi in his brown shirt.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah. I used to like to draw. And I must have heard it somewhere. But I drew a picture of an S.S. guy, and I wrote on the brown vest. You know, I colored it in brown. And I showed it to my parents. I thought I was going to get -- make them proud of my beautiful drawing. They said something like that, you can draw with your hands. So they threw it in the fire. And told me never to draw anything like that. And it was hard for them to restrict a little kid like me, who wanted to do all kinds of things. Keep my mouth shut and keep quiet. It was a tough assignment.

>> Bill Benson: It wasn't long after that horrific night of Kristallnacht November 9-10, 1938, and the incidents that you have just described to us that your parents then made this really profound decision to send you on a Kindertransport to England.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah. And it should be remembered that Kristallnacht, when that happened, another concern in England, Jews and non-Jews, Quakers, appealed to the government, do something, at least help the children. And they had a parliament session, and the discussion was to accept refugees. And the result was the same day they made the decision to admit an unspecified number of children, up to the age of 17, to come to England. And so that's how the Kindertransport was born.

By December 2, which was only 12 days later, the first train arrived in England, left from Germany. And then there was pretty regular trains going. By the time the war started, September 1939, about 10,000 children had arrived in England. Had the war not started then, let's say six months later, it could have been 20,000. Which was a real gallant effort. Nobody else was doing it.

>> Bill Benson: And you and Ruth were among those 10,000 children. Tell us what you know about your parents' decision to send you away. Tell us what you know about your parents' decision to send you away.

>> Freddie Traum: Well, there was an atmosphere of disbelieving. Four of my cousins had gone to Palestine. Other members of the family had gone somewhere else.

America. And there was just a general feeling of excitement, of people going to new horizons. At least being -- and I was too young to remember, but I used to tag along with my sister, who belonged to the Zionist Youth Organization. And there was this feeling even back then. So it wasn't something unique.

My father tried to make it for me like an adventure trip. I had been away from home, to my aunt in Czechoslovakia several times. So it wasn't the first time I had left home. But they tried to make it and build it more into an adventure. And we'll be together soon after.

>> Bill Benson: So the sense that this is not permanent, that this is temporary.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah. So although I was sent, I didn't go afraid.

>> Bill Benson: In the beginning of the program, there was the photograph on the day you left. When you will you say a little bit more about that?

>> Freddie Traum: My dad was an amateur photographer. And so he set up the camera in the backyard. And put it on a delayed timer so he could join us in the photograph. And I think the photograph captures our feeling. It's a sad picture. But it was taken the same afternoon that we left.

>> Bill Benson: In fact, Freddie, I think there was a second photograph, and your father had etched into the negative.

>> Freddie Traum: He wrote "the farewell" in German, yes.

>> Bill Benson: You went to the train station with your -- you and your sister with your mom. Your father didn't make the trip, did he? Your mom took you?

>> Freddie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: When you got to the train station, share with us what happened with your -- your teacher.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah. The train was full of children. And we stood by an open window holding hands with our mom. We didn't really know what to say to each other. We just stood there. And then all of a sudden, my teacher was there with his 5-year-old son under his arm. He knew I was leaving then. And obviously had managed to get his son accepted on the Kindertransport. He was looking for me. And then he asked if his son could sit with us so we could keep an eye on him. And once we got to London, somebody will come and pick him up. And so that's what happened. And I don't know what ever happened to the little boy.

>> Bill Benson: He basically handed him to you through the window and said --

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. Like a piece of luggage through the window.

>> Bill Benson: Take care of my son.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Did your parents -- did they make any efforts to leave Austria?

>> Freddie Traum: They must have done because they had received affidavits from the United States, from some family member. But an affidavit isn't enough. You have to have a visa.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Freddie Traum: And the challenge actually going anywhere -- their chance of going anywhere was next to nil because first of all they didn't speak another language. They didn't have any money to speak of. My dad didn't have transportable kind of occupation. And he was limited. So putting all of those things together, their chance of going anywhere was nil.

The people who were maybe well off went to England and became gardeners. As long as they were physically fit, they would take any job. But he couldn't do that. So I think they resigned themselves that whatever happens will happen. As long as we were safe.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember anything about the actual trip from Vienna to England?

>> Freddie Traum: Not a great deal, no. I remember breakfast because there was a banana, which in England -- in Vienna was kind of an exotic fruit and hard to come by. But England, with all of the Caribbean islands and what have you, had plenty of

bananas. So I was very proud of that. And then I had my first taste of English tea, which was tea with milk. And I couldn't understand how anybody could like that.

[Laughter]

>> Freddie Traum: But England has built a big empire on that. And so it can't be bad.

>> Bill Benson: So you arrive in England with your sister. This is late June 1939, just 80 years ago in the last few weeks. What happened once you got to London?

>> Freddie Traum: We were picked up at the station. Actually, it was someone who was a business partner of my father who was in England. So he came and picked us up and took us to the Griggs family. And they had two children of their own, very close in age to my sister and I. The only thing is of course they didn't speak German, and we didn't speak English.

And as nice as they were, they were kind of traditional. At mealtimes, you don't talk and all of that stuff. You concentrate on eating your meal. And then if you want to get up, you say may I leave the table, please, and all of that kind of stuff. Talking and everything all the time, from our house. So that was kind of a strange environment. And of course I knew that it was very rude to speak in German in front of them when they couldn't understand us. So as a result, I didn't speak to anybody because my sister, she had a room with their daughter. And went to a different school. And so we didn't actually have any conversations. So it was quiet for quite a while. I made up for it later.

>> Bill Benson: And you did start to school when you were with the Griggs.

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. Went to school. And playtime and recess a kid came up and said something to me. And I thought he wanted to play. So I used my one word, yes. Next thing I knew he punched me. And I soon discovered I've got to increase my lexicon.

>> Bill Benson: His question was do you want to fight?

>> Freddie Traum: Well, the next thing that meant a lot to me was when a staff member came in and asked me to be excused. She took me to a storeroom and took out a gas mask and began to fit it on me and all of that sort of thing. And when she was satisfied it was fine, wrote my name on it. And sent me back to class. And the reason that was so special is because in Vienna a lot of people were walking around with gas masks. Of course Jews didn't get them because they weren't considered worth saving. They didn't matter. And here all of a sudden I was given this gas mask. So it was just a normal thing to do, but to me it meant a lot.

>> Bill Benson: Once you left Vienna, were you able to hear from your parents?

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah. In the beginning, before the war broke out, we got many, many letters. And, you know, communication was good. But once war broke out, we got an occasional letter sent to us from Switzerland. One of our cousins lived in Switzerland, so it would arrive to him and he would forward it.

>> Bill Benson: Switzerland was a neutral country, so they could write to him there.

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. And then in 1942, we got a Red Cross message, 25 words, and that was the last communication. I'm not sure what those words were now.

>> Bill Benson: Do you still have some of those postcards that you received and letters from them?

>> Freddie Traum: No. I donated them to the Museum.

>> Bill Benson: You weren't with the Griggs for very long because you were evacuated to the British countryside, along with thousands and thousands of other kids.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about the evacuation and about where you were sent, where you lived the next three years.

>> Freddie Traum: Well, the women's laundry service, W.L.S., really deserves recognition. They did a fantastic job in even beforehand scouring out the countryside, which houses were available, could take children and all of that. So when war broke -- actually, it was the day before, the day that the Germans marched into Poland.

>> Bill Benson: September 1.

>> Freddie Traum: The 1st. Our school was being evacuated, and I went with my class to a little place outside Luton. That's outside of London. And the W.L.S. woman met us there and she went house-to-house dropping kids here and there. I was with my sister because the Griggs had asked for us to stay together. And we came to this house. And it was a young couple. Actually, a young woman. And she really didn't want to have anybody. And so the woman said, well, if you don't want to have the kids, maybe your family is evacuating from London. There are a couple of soldiers who are billeted in a camp down the street. So she thought at least there would be three if she took the kids. And then she said to them, I need to tell you that they are evacuees but they are also refugees, Jewish refugees from Austria. And boy, she bristled at that. She said, I don't care much for Jews. But we finished up there just the same. I was there for about 3 1/2 years.

>> Bill Benson: If you don't mind, Freddie, tell us some of what that period was like for you. That was a very long time. This was the Clissold family.

>> Freddie Traum: I should say that the kids that I met there in the countryside in England were wonderful. But I didn't like this house. I was only in the house when it was time to eat or to sleep. And the weather in England isn't that wonderful at times. So I used to shelter in the doorway of a shopping center there. And I would come back and stay out of the rain and ask people the time so I wouldn't be late coming home. I had a nice dog. We were friendly. I could take the dog out for a walk and specify distance and back. And then after school finished, take him out again. But I liked this dog, and it was a friend in the house.

>> Bill Benson: Otherwise, you were only allowed in the house at mealtime and after your dinner you were expected to just go to bed. After dinner you just go to bed.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: You did find a job picking potatoes, I think, during that time.

>> Freddie Traum: Oh, yeah. They announced that they were looking for help for potato picking. So I volunteered. And there was a farm close by, the Ainsworth. And so I did the potato picking there. But then afterwards I stayed on there, and I helped in the dairy and they were wonderful people. And they seemed to like me. I was even invited for Christmas dinner. And altogether I enjoyed going there.

>> Bill Benson: Did Ruth have a similar experience with being there with you? What was Ruth's experience like, your sister's?

>> Freddie Traum: She went to a special school. Home economics and like that. And had a very good friend and spent a great deal of time with her. And so her experiences were different. Plus the fact that a year after we were evacuated, Mrs. Griggs died, and

my sister was asked to come back to London, even though she was only 15 or so, to keep house for Mr. Griggs. So she did. And so she actually had somewhere to go.

>> Bill Benson: When you were I think 14, in 1943, you left the Clissold family, returned to London. Why did you go back to London? And then what happened to you?

>> Freddie Traum: In those days, unless you were slated to go to high school or some other kind of educational facility, school ended at 14. So I wasn't signed up for anything else. So when my 14th birthday came, and they didn't wait until the end of the school year. On your birthday, that's -- that's your ticket out of there. And so I went back to London. And Mr. Griggs was talking to his brother, a big discussion was me. What jobs I should go for and what kind of work and all of that. And they were both very keen and nice guys. So they said, well, I should go somewhere where there's a good union. They already had me picturing or something. I was barely 14 years old.

And anyway, the brother said no matter what the situation is, you can paper the walls there. That sounded like a good idea to me. There was a street in London, Fleet Street, which is kind of a news capital of the world. Most papers have some presence there. So in the morning I went there, walked down the street, and then there was The Daily Telegraph, big windows, and photographs and captions of things, articles that were appearing in the paper.

So I was standing there looking at that, and next thing I knew a boy came and stood next to me, about my age, and he was dressed in a page boy kind of uniform. He had one of those pillbox hats. So I said to him, what is it like working for The Telegraph? And he said, oh, it's wonderful. Are you looking for a job? And I said, yes. And he said, well, the head office, I'm going there now. Come with me. So I fell in to step with him. And then we were in front of another building. A big brass entrance. And I could just read, Telegraph, at the bottom. And he said wait here. And I said OK.

And a little while later, a guy came out and said, I understand you're looking for employment. And so I said yes. He said, come into my office. I went in there. And he said, what kind of work are you interested in? And I said printing. I had visions of a gigantic newspaper printing machine that you always see shown on the television. So I he said, well, we don't do our printing here. It's about 30 miles north of London.

And, anyway, he offered me a job. And I don't remember the exact conversations about compensation, how much or all of that sort of thing. But the things when you hire someone. But he gave me a ticket. 8:00 in the morning, on Monday morning, Euston Station. Take the train. When you get there, there will be a bus there and they'll be taking all of the employees up to the main place.

So I did that. I got a job there. And so my sister was a little disappointed that I wasn't going to stick around, but she came soon. And when I got to the train, I said, is this for the Telegraph? And they said yes. And there were 20 or 30 other people that got on there too. When I got off at the place, the village called Hasto, and one of the managers was there. Hasto House. And as soon as I got off there, a woman came and she said, oh, you must be our new man. And I said, yes. And she called me inside and she said, there's a guy there. Like an odd job. And he took me to the house where we would be sleeping. And just up the street. The woman's son was in the Navy, and so she had a spare bedroom.

And the village hall became a place where they had a cook, and we had all of the meals there. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And also had -- and the woman said, go up and see

them and ask them if you can stay. So I went there. And Mr. Carter was the manager. So there were a lot of -- a bunch of machines chugging away there and printing things. About 10 pages. So I said, where do they print the newspaper? And he said, what newspaper? I said The Daily Telegraph. And he laughed. And he said, this is the exchange. We print statements. And they print them and send them to London where they get mailed out to the subscribers.

Well, it was a little bit disappointing that they didn't have these big machines. But actually it turned out to be these American machines. But it was a good profession to learn because I was glad -- they were glad to get somebody as young as me because everyone when they get 18 they get called up. So they could get a few years out of me before I get called up.

>> Bill Benson: And in fact we're going to turn to you getting called up in just a minute. But you would --

>> Freddie Traum: What?

>> Bill Benson: We're going to turn to you getting called up in just a minute. So you didn't begin your newspaper career there, but you had a job.

>> Freddie Traum: It was a very good job. The place was like an extended family. The mansion with a big common room and a big fireplace and 80 chairs. And we used to get together in the evenings and it was a wonderful, wonderful place.

>> Bill Benson: And you stayed there until the war's end. You stayed there until the end of the war, which was May of 1945, when the war --

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. And my sister would come and visit from London.

>> Bill Benson: Once the war was over, it wasn't long after the war was over that you had the opportunity to get English citizenship.

>> Freddie Traum: That's another thing that was good. 1946. They found they had thousands of kids, now some of them young adults, who had no citizenship. My passport said stateless. And most of them were in the same category and nowhere to go home. So they offered citizenship. You didn't have to do anything. You didn't have to learn anything special. You just go to the government office and identify yourself and they -- you got a citizenship from being stateless. And you could get a passport. And I was very happy to exchange a passport from my alien identity card that I had. Enemy alien, I should say.

>> Bill Benson: Enemy alien passport. Once you had your citizenship, of course, now you're eligible for the draft. And so you got drafted.

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. All of the boys, all of the ones I knew, were older than me, and they were in the service. And I wanted to get into that. It wasn't a threat that was hanging over me.

>> Bill Benson: So what happened once you got your draft notice?

>> Freddie Traum: Oh, yeah. That's a strange thing because I got my draft notice. And I went into the service office in town. I had my medical and all of that kind of things that you do beforehand. And passed that A-1, fit for service. And then they said go home and you'll be notified.

May 14, the State of Israel was declared. And there was a prime minister. And Israel was immediately attacked by surrounding countries. Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt. And I thought, this is crazy, me being in the British army. They're not being attacked. I should go into the Israeli army. So I wrestled with that idea for a while.

And then I decided that I would do that. And there was a kind of an underground recruiting system going on through the Zionist organizations. And I contacted them, and the next thing I knew I was on my way to Israel. So I was there. And there was nowhere to report. They found that because I had experience in radio repair that they needed me and I received a bunch of walkie-talkies, but not in working condition. They all needed work. So I was in this workshop doing that. Until about 1949, when the troops were delayed, and all the volunteers, about 4,000 volunteers, were then discharged. Most of them, not like me, most of them had been through the war in different positions. Fighter pilots and others who had experience came.

And Czechoslovakia became a super store and sold all of their armor and everything you could think of. I mean, everything was from Germany because Germany was disarmed after they lost the war. So all of the armaments were there, and they needed money. So Czechoslovakia came there. So they bought them and found volunteers from other countries that came, which was God saving because they really didn't expect Israel to resist. But with the help of all of a sudden having weapons to fight against strafing. And essentially there were troops and that became the 49 Line, which still exists today. And still argued about today. But the fact is, if it hadn't been for that, Israel wouldn't be there today.

>> Bill Benson: Freddie, in the little time we have left, there's a couple of other things I'd like to ask you about. I just wanted to mention this, that when you were discharged in Israel, you went back to England and of course when you left England, you had been drafted but you went to Israel. So they were waiting for you.

>> Freddie Traum: A.W.O.L. 18 months.

>> Bill Benson: And you ended up serving in the British army.

>> Freddie Traum: I had no idea what happened to me because I didn't know anybody else who had been in the same situation. And I felt I needed to do this. So I went back. And in Dover, when I got there, they had me documented wanted by the army. So when I came to the police station, they had a file on me. And a couple of weeks later, I got my draft, to go report in Yorkshire. And so I went there.

>> Bill Benson: And ended up serving in the British army.

>> Freddie Traum: Yeah. And they treated me very well, and I did not get in any trouble. Which is kind of remarkable.

>> Bill Benson: And there's so many other remarkable things you could share with us. But I did want to ask you just a couple of things. When did you learn what happened to your parents?

>> Freddie Traum: Well, the details in this Museum.

>> Bill Benson: In this Museum.

>> Freddie Traum: Yes. I used the International Tracing Service. And one day I was going through deportation lists. And I had the list from Vienna. And everything very neatly arranged. And I went down to the t's, and there was my mother and my father, my uncle and my aunt, my cousin. It had each one's name, present address, place of birth, and date of birth, and then I knew they were being shipped. And in my parents' case it was Minsk. And I had already heard from a person I work with that Minsk was known as a place where they have these killing fields. You go there, you get tramped over to a place where there are marsh ditches, and everybody is just shot and you fall into the ditch. And so I realized that this is what happened to my parents. They were

shot. And you just hope they would die very quickly. They would fill the ditch up. It's a horrible thought. But that's what I learned.

>> Bill Benson: Freddie, I know this is so hard for you to talk about your parents. But one of the things you shared with me is the self-confidence that you have, you believe really stems from your early years with your parents and your dad. Can you just say a little bit about that before we close?

>> Freddie Traum: Well, you know, my dad, he used a sewing machine. He could do photography. He was good in drawing and taught me all about that. And I think with that he imbued in my mind that I can do anything. So I did some stupid things as well.

[Laughter]

>> Freddie Traum: When I came back from living in the country and I saw there was a sailboat, 16 by 32, so I thought, I can do that. So I went there, and I managed to hire the guy that works for the ship company. And I did the rest. Strange as it may seem. And from that, I don't know, I changed engines. I just did it without some manuals about the different cars.

>> Bill Benson: The first time I met Freddie, which is a number of years ago, I visited with Freddie and his wife, Josie. And they had had beautiful add-on room. I mean, magnificent. And he -- I said, this is beautiful. And he said, I built it. He just said, I picked up a manual and just built everything. He did every bit of it himself. And he really did say, this is my dad who made this possible for me to do this. There's so much more we could have gotten into. We obviously can't. We didn't even touch on his career with the Israeli merchant seamen and all of that, that led to meeting Josie onboard a ship and marrying her and sailing around the world on that ship for a while before settling down in the United States.

I want to thank all of you for being with us today. We will have programs tomorrow and then for the next two weeks and end our season. All of our programs are on the YouTube channel of the Museum. If you get a chance to come back, we'd love you to do that. Before I turn back to Freddie to close our program, I want to mention just that when Freddie is done, because we didn't have a chance for you to ask him any questions, when he is done we're going to get Freddie upstairs, up to the top of the stairs, and he's going to be up there and answer any questions you have, or if you want to just shake your hand, get your picture taken with him, whatever you want to do, he will be there waiting for you and hopefully you can take advantage of that.

It's our tradition at First Person that our First Person has the last word. And so with that, I'm going to turn back to Freddie to close today's program.

>> Freddie Traum: Well, first of all I want to thank you all for coming. I think I'm living proof of the fact that when somebody takes it to heart and hears that there's a need that they could fulfill, instead of looking past that somebody else should, when they take it on themselves, they can make a difference. And I'm here because of that. So thank you. Have a wonderful day.