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Museum

"First Person"

Kurt Pauly

August 8th, 2019

>> Ladies and gentlemen, please silence any electronic devices you have with you. The program is about to begin

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. Kurt Pauly**,
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. Today is our final *First Person* program for 2019. We will resume again in March 2020.

Kurt 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 Kurt 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 Kurt is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

Kurt Pauly was born to Jewish parents on March 26th, 1930, in the city of Aachen, Germany. His mother's family had resided in Aachen since the 18th century.

Here, we see a picture of Kurt, at age 6, in Germany.

Kurt's mother, Selma, was the first cousin of Anne Frank's grandfather, pictured here, with some of Kurt's other relatives at a bar mitzvah in 1912 in Germany, he is the man second from the left. This photo is from the wedding of Kurt's parents, Selma Herz and Hugo Pauly, in 1927.

Kurt's father Hugo, who is pictured here, trained as a chef and worked as a butcher, and also managed several stores for his father-in-law.

Kurt, his parents, and his grandfather, lived over one of those shops in a suburb of Aachen, called Eilendorf.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the situation drastically changed for the Paulies.

Worsening conditions forced the family to close its shops; in 1936, the Paulies immigrated to Palestine, where Kurt's father had a trucking business, here is a photo of Kurt's family in 1936, in Palestine.

We see his mother on the left. In the center behind Kurt is his cousin, Walter and his father is on the right. In 1938, the family immigrated to the United States.

This photo shows Kurt, who is circled, and his classmates in Cincinnati.

After immigrating to the U.S. in 1938, as I said, they moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where they lived until moving to Vineland, New Jersey, in 1948. In 1951, Kurt was drafted into the United States Army. He was severely injured during artillery training and was hospitalized for a lengthy period. After his discharge in November of 1953, Kurt attended the university of Pennsylvania's Wharton school of business, graduating with high honors and becoming a certified public accountant.

While at university, Kurt met jill, who is also a Holocaust survivor, and they were married in 1957.

Kurt went on to a successful career as a C.P.A., with several major national corporations, retiring in 1992.

Kurt and jill had lived in the Washington, D.C. area since 1974, but in 2016, moved to Long Island, to be closer to their children. They have two children, four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren, who are 11, and three years old. One of their grandsons is currently serving on board a U.S. naval ship.

Kurt is accompanied today by both Jill, and their son, Daniel, who are right here in the front row and jill was our "First Person" yesterday.

Upon Kurt's retirement both he and jill became active as part of the first group of volunteers with this museum in 1992, before it opened.

Kurt was volunteer with visitor services. Although Kurt was interviewed about his Holocaust experience by Steven Spielberg's foundation, Kurt spoke here at "First Person", in 2017 for the first time publicly, about what he and his family went through during the Holocaust.

With that, I would like you to join me in welcoming our "First Person".... Mr. Kurt Pauly.

[APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: Kurt, we're going to put you right here, and I want to thank you, for being willing to not only be our "First Person". But to come down from New York, with Jill, and help close out our 2019 year of "First Person", so thank you for that

>>KURT: Well, we're happy to do it.

BILL BENSON: Kurt, Adolph Hitler came to power in 1933. You were just six years of age, when you left Germany, with your parents in 1936.

Before we turn to your parents' decision to leave Germany, and what that meant for you and your family, tell us, first, what you can, about your family's life prior to Hitler coming to power, and the Nazi party taking control of Germany.

>>KURT: Well, my mother's family, as you mentioned, had lived in this -- the area of Eilendorf for centuries.

And the first time, when we went to the -- gravesites, there the Jewish cemetery, a very small Jewish cemetery... my great, great-grandfather, was buried in that, long ago.

They had deep roots there in Germany, but, my father, who was sort of a... an amateur at studying governments, he always wanted to know, what -- all about the governments that he lived under. He -- including here in the United States.

Came to the conclusion, that if Hitler, or the Nazis, ever came to power, we have to leave. He had no idea, how -- how correct he was. Really.

But he just assumed, based on policies and what they talked about, and what happened.... that that would be the only possible --

BILL BENSON: So he say he was thinking about this quite early

>>KURT: Well, he thought about it very early, because he had a brother who had immigrated to the United States shortly before the first world war and he had visited him several times and was very impressed by the United States. And he thought if he had to leave Germany, this is where he would go

BILL BENSON: And we're going to talk more about the -- the way that you eventually got here.

Your -- your father was a veteran in the German army

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: Of the first world war

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: What do you know about his service?

>>KURT: Well, he lived in Bavaria at the time, which is in southern Germany, and there was a still a king of Bavaria, and when my father was drafted, and they found him as a chef, in his father's hotel, he was assigned to the staff, the king of of Bavaria, was to be one of the people in the kitchen

BILL BENSON: For the king of Bavaria

>>KURT: And he said one thing about that, he said we were never hungry

BILL BENSON: I can imagine. Tell us a little bit about your mother.

>>KURT: My mother was also very much involved in my grandfather's meat business.

And so -- and so she worked -- she was a working mother.

And I was looked after by... a young woman, who we later met in Germany again, for all the years that we were there, because -- my mother was working --

BILL BENSON: She was your nanny

>>KURT: Yes, she was my nanny, and we did meet her again after all those years

BILL BENSON: Let's talk about that. You met her, literally, 60 years later, I

think in Germany.

And she was able to tell you some things that you hadn't known, what did she tell you about that time?

>>KURT: Well, she... told us a little bit about the history of the family. And she knew it.

There was a good relationship between -- within the community between the Jews, and the other population, small Jewish community.

But it had survived, all those years

BILL BENSON: All those years

>>KURT: As far as we can trace it back

BILL BENSON: I think one of the things that you mentioned to me that she did tell you about, she remembered after Hitler came to power the brown shirts started boycotting your family business

>>KURT: Yes, my mother was terribly disturbed by that. And I think that's one of the things that influenced my father to make sure he got out as early as he could.

But, unfortunately, sometime after Hitler came to power, uncle max here in the United States had died. And my father had lost contact.

The only contact he really had here in the States.

So his plans of... coming to the States, if he left Germany... as the Irish poet said something about -- something -- what is it? About the wishes of -- of a.... I can't remember it now, but the extent that... the plans that we have can often just simply be -- vanish.

BILL BENSON: And those plans had vanished at that point.

>>KURT: That's what happened.

BILL BENSON: What was that period like, from what -- what you know, mostly from what your parents told you, between when Hitler came to power, in '33, and the decision to leave, and leaving in 1936, so you were there for the first three years of the Nazis being in complete control

>>KURT: Yes.

What happened -- and I really only discovered, all the details after I came to the... to the Museum, as a volunteer, one day -- at the end of one of the history classes, given by the staff here for the volunteers to teach them about -- the period -- the museum was concerned with -- he asked me, he said, "How did you get here?"

And I told him that we went to Palestine in 1936.

And he said, "Ah," he said, "You went under the agreement" which I didn't know anything about.

It seems that the British, in that period -- around 1936, when they were administering Palestine after the first world war.... felt that... if there was a larger Jewish population in Palestine, it would be good for the economy.

And they made an agreement, with the German government, in Berlin, believe it or not, that they would allow German immigrants, to Palestine, to come under more favorable circumstances, than if they came from somewhere else, trying to draw these people in.

And... I guess my father learned about that agreement. My mother had relatives in Palestine.

And her family, there was a Zionist who had gone there, nothing to do with Hitler, they went there to settle the land and create a Jewish presence in Palestine, and they also informed my parents of this agreement. So that --

BILL BENSON: That's how he was able --

>>KURT: Gave him the incentive and we were able to go there

BILL BENSON: Before you -- before you left for Palestine, you started school.

Do you have any recollections of what that period was like?

>>KURT: I do. I became six as you said, in March.

And as I recall correctly the school year started in Germany in spring at that time. So I had to go to school, because when I became 6, or shortly thereafter, and fortunately there was a Jewish school in the downtown Aachen. And I was able to take a trolley, from where we lived -- into the city.

Every day.

My father was a little concerned about this little Jewish boy, riding the trolley all alone, and sometimes he would follow the trolley, with a bicycle, with a... to make sure nothing had happened. I didn't know that at that time.

But because he didn't want to, you know, me to worry, or -- feel embarrassed, that my father was following me, to make sure I got there safely.

BILL BENSON: Which is probably why he didn't ride the tram with you, instead he just followed on a bicycle, just to make sure you were safe

>>KURT: That's right, he had some worries, already then

BILL BENSON: You -- you had told me that you've always enjoyed education and went on to get a great education, but you were not happy going to school at that time.

>>KURT: No, I wasn't, I don't know why. It was just a feeling

BILL BENSON: Just a feeling.

>>KURT: I guess maybe the underlying, unease of my parents, somehow was transmitted to me. I don't know.

BILL BENSON: You're now six years old and your father has been able to figure out a way to get out of Germany, under this agreement. And you move to Palestine.

Tell us what you recall about leaving and what -- what it was like for you as -- because one of the things I meant to ask you earlier is how large of an extended family did you have? You had a lot of relatives

>>KURT: Yes, yes.

And my -- each of my parents had a surviving parent. My mother's father was living and my father's mother was living.

And that picture we saw at the beginning, where I'm standing in front of the fountain -- was taken, in the square, where -- where my grandmother lived on.

We went to visit down there, several -- quite a few times, before we left Germany, and my father tried to influence his mother, and there was a single sister still living with her.

And others to go with us.

And they didn't feel it was necessary, somehow. I mean, I can understand that, you know, a family that had lived there for generations it's difficult to pull up roots

BILL BENSON: Right

>>KURT: And these people, I guess were hoping that this would blow over.

BILL BENSON: That Hitler wouldn't last, the Nazis wouldn't last that long?

>>KURT: That's right

BILL BENSON: So the rest of the family stayed behind

>>KURT: Except for his cousin Walter

BILL BENSON: Who went to the United States

>>KURT: No, who went to Palestine earlier. That was it.

BILL BENSON: Even though I think your father was forced to close one of his stores under the Nazis, he was able to sell the -- the butcher's shop. And there's a really interesting story about who he sold it to. He sold the butcher shop.

>>KURT: Yes, later, after the War, one of -- our trips to Germany, well, let's go back a little bit.

One of the only surviving cousins that I had... was the son of my mother's brother. Uncle Alford. Who had been a teacher of Jewish studies in Germany.

And they... he was arrested on Kristallnacht.

And thrown into jail.

And the only way he could get out -- this was a policy of the Germans, when they did this -- would be if they could demonstrate that they would leave Germany, the policy of the German government at that time was, get the Jews out of Germany.

So they made it as uncomfortable as possible, and as dangerous as possible, to encourage Jews to leave.

And the the only way he could have gotten out, was if he could demonstrate leaving, so his wife started going around, to the various consulates in their area, to find a place where they could go.

With very little success.... but fortunately, she also had family in Palestine.

And they encouraged her -- to come to Palestine, and this -- not with this agreement, okay? At that time, by that time, that agreement was no longer --

BILL BENSON: Right. That was a short-term agreement

>>KURT: Yes, was no longer in effect.

And she had very little success. Of finding a place to go with her husband. Outside of Germany.

Until... these relatives in Palestine said, "Come here. And we'll work with you."

And what happened was, they went to Palestine, with -- as -- as visitors. Visitors visa, and when that visa expired, these other relatives of theirs had found a place for them to hide.

Because the British came around looking for them, to return to -- to Germany.

So they were able -- and then, of course, once the war started, you know, they were now in danger of being sent back again, so then they were able to come out, sort of out of this shelter where they were hiding; and this cousin, became.... a member of the foreign service of Israel.

Later in his life, as he grew up, it was his occupation. And he was assigned to Germany at one period, and he encouraged us to come, at that time, to visit them in Germany, and we would look around, our history, while he was assigned to this area, and that's what we did.

BILL BENSON: Is that when you went back and found that the people that

you had sold the butcher's shop to in 1936, same family owned it

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: When you went back -- 60 some years later

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: And they shared some things with you. I think, if I remember right, they -- the grandson -- or the son of the person who bought the shop from you --

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: -- remembered your grandfather?

>>KURT: Yes, yes, and they said that... when my grandfather was.... picked up by the Nazis, all the Jewish men, and elderly men, particularly; and women -- were sent to the old -- Jewish old age home.

That's a place, they had sort of gathered these people there.

And they said, since they were not too well-treated there, he would come, from time to time, if he could, to see if he -- to ask for food there, at his old shop, in his old house and they would bring him in and they said feed him, because they felt very sorry, it was very dangerous for them as well.

And that was, of course, a very sad story to hear.

BILL BENSON: What happened to that grandfather?

>>KURT: Well, he was sent to... he was sent to Theresienstadt.

And from there, to a death camp, sometime later.

I mean, we -- this was something that was on the records

BILL BENSON: Right, you found this out.

>>KURT: My grandmother, who, for some reason, had been shipped up -- by the Nazis to Aachen, and gathered there, in the same old age home.

Died in Theresienstadt.

BILL BENSON: You shared with me, Kurt, that one of your earliest memories, I believe was saying good-bye to your grandmother

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: Because they weren't going to go with you to Palestine

>>KURT: Yes, as you can see in the picture

BILL BENSON: What do you remember about saying good-bye to her?

>>KURT: I don't know. It was... of course, I was too young to understand, fully what's going on -- what was going on

BILL BENSON: Right, of course,

>>KURT: But I remember, the long conversations my father had with his mother, and sister, about possibly joining us.

And we have a picture, that we donated here to the Museum as well of her. And her -- and the daughter. During... well, I guess it was before the war started; that already, when -- when the Nazis had been in power, and -- the picture shows them standing in front of the building, and the building -- I don't know what's -- what the building was -- but it was hung with -- with swastika flags, and it was kind of eerie to see that.

BILL BENSON: Your grandparents in front of that.

>>KURT: And we know, then, what happened

BILL BENSON: So they both went to Theresienstadt

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: You went to Palestine, what do you remember about going to Palestine, how you got there --

>>KURT: Well, a little boy. On board of a ship. Never been there on a ship before

BILL BENSON: Yeah

>>KURT: It was very exciting. Of course, I didn't know really why we were going to Palestine.

At that point. And it was kind of a fun thing.

Of course, when I got to Palestine, I had to go to school, and, of course, I didn't speak a word of Hebrew. Modern Hebrew, and I came home, for a few weeks crying, I couldn't understand the teacher.

And -- but at that age you learn languages very quickly, and children adjust very quickly. And I felt very comfortable after a while.

And, you know, it was.... I mean, you know, the worries were with my family. I didn't have any worries

BILL BENSON: And for your family, your father had owned businesses, in Germany, when they got to Palestine, how did they earn a living?

>>KURT: Well, as you said earlier, you mentioned he went into the trucking business with his nephew. Walter.

And, in fact, before he left Germany, he had been corresponding with Walter, about what he could do. He knew he wasn't going to be able to open up a restaurant or something like that, because you couldn't take any money out of Germany, so whatever he had -- he had to do something there. And perhaps what it might be --

BILL BENSON: That was an important point you just made, when they left Germany, they were allowed to go, they could go at that time. But you could take no money with you, right?

>>KURT: That's right, you couldn't take any money, and meanwhile, he had written to Walter about what he was going to do in Germany, Walter had said something about well, the trucking business -- he wanted to go into the trucking business.

And Walter, he felt, that that was.... a business that would -- he could make money in, because there was always a need for that.

And my father was able to send a truck from Germany to Palestine.

Which was another good thing, because he was able to use his money, to buy something, and ship it out of the country

BILL BENSON: As opposed to taking it with him, he could do that

>>KURT: That's right, the Germans were only too happy -- you know, Jews... you had to pay more for the goods than other people if they needed

BILL BENSON: I don't know if it was the case at that time. But I know this affected your wife's family.

When -- when Jews were able to leave, when they left; they could take goods with them, not money, as you said, they could take goods

>>KURT: Yes,

BILL BENSON: But they were taxed at 100%

>>KURT: Yes, but I don't know, exactly, the details, but they essentially, had to leave -- they had left with very little money, and that also made it a little tougher than when they got there. But they did go into the trucking business

BILL BENSON: They did go into the trucking business

>>KURT: I could remember they would sometimes take me along, when I was on vacation or something, and if they were carrying let's say, soft drinks, sometimes, they would stop, and.... I would get a soft drink to drink, which

was -- was a big thing for a little boy at that age

BILL BENSON: And I think, as they were trying to get the trucking business going you shared with me that they also took in boarders in your house, you opened up a little restaurant in the house

>>KURT: That's right, they did. My father, they had -- one day a week, where they would be able -- had people who would come in, to eat there. Because they -- the cooking was very good. That was a way of making money

BILL BENSON: But you didn't stay there long. Two-and-a-half years, two-and-a-half years, so in 1938, you immigrated to the United States.

>>KURT: Yes. What happened was, uncle max had died. Yes. We had no contact.

BILL BENSON: So you're one relative --

>>KURT: But my aunt Julia, who was married to another brother of my father's.... uncle Theodore, had family in the States.

A brother, who had emigrated to the United States, very early -- had nothing to do with Adolph Hitler, had settled, gone into business in the Cincinnati area, and married -- and as he learned about what was happening in Germany, he thought it was best to bring his sisters out of the country.

And have them come to the States.

So he had three sisters, be -- two other sisters and their families, besides my aunt Julia, his third sister.

And -- but he brought the three sisters and their families to the States, so now we had somebody there.

And my father wrote to his brother, to see if he could find someone to

sponsor us in the family.

He just married into. And there was. There was someone who was willing to do that.

BILL BENSON: You --

>>KURT: That's how we got to the States

BILL BENSON: And in order to get here, of course, you know, you had to be able to get visas and have somebody sponsor you and you had family members to sponsor you, but you also had -- you had to be able to come in under a quota of different nationalities

>>KURT: Right, after the first world war, the United States immigration policies had changed drastically.

And quotas were set up for every country, I guess -- basically in the world, as to how many people from a country could come to the United States at any given year.

And, of course, the -- in Germany, the Jews had tried... to get visas to come to the United States, and those who were -- and very quickly, you know, there is -- the -- the quotas in Germany, for people coming to the United States, were filled very quickly la

BILL BENSON: Right. So it was very difficult

>>KURT: And besides, at that immediate time, we didn't have anyone here,

BILL BENSON: Right, right

>>KURT: To do this. But, after two years, one of the advantages the British also gave, these immigrants from Germany is after two years they became citizens, of Palestine.

And that was something -- because citizenship, of Germany, had been

taken away from them, by the Nazis.

And they were without a country, so to speak

BILL BENSON: They were, what we call, stateless, they were stateless.

>>KURT: So the problem of emigrating was getting very... fuzzy.

BILL BENSON: Yeah

>>KURT: As to how -- you know, what -- it was -- to come to the States from Germany, became almost impossible.

For most of the

BILL BENSON: So they were able to come under a Palestinian quota

>>KURT: Exactly, the quota for Palestine was a very small quota, I mean, very few because Palestine is a very small country. Not that many people, but it was -- it was undersubscribed and as Palestinian citizens we could come in under the Palestinian quota. And if you look at my naturalization papers and those of my parents, where it says previous nationality, it says Palestinian.

BILL BENSON: Despite centuries of having been in Germany, what do you remember about coming to the United States?

>>KURT: Well, it was December, when we came.

And I remember it was very cold in New York, when we landed.

And I was amazed. New York was an amazing city. And, of course, we were heading for Cincinnati. But my parents -- but my parents were able to -- you know, they couldn't just get off the boat and take the train, to Cincinnati. My father... was -- they were rather exhausted from the whole affair.

And so we... we stayed in New York, for two days, and then... and then took a train -- I think -- well, it was more than two days.

A little more than that.

And then we headed for Cincinnati by train

BILL BENSON: So here, in a span of a little over two years, your family has made two major moves, from Germany to Palestine, Palestine, to the U.S.

Moving to -- in both cases, entirely different cultures

>>KURT: My father was broke

BILL BENSON: Pardon?

>>KURT: My father was broke, he spent the last money for the trip to the states

BILL BENSON: And when you came here it was the depression

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: So here you are, your father is broke, it's the depression, you're now in Cincinnati, what happened?

>>KURT: Yes. So my father wanted to find some work.

And... actually, he spoke -- he had studied English, in Germany.

Because he thought it would be a it good idea to have that. So he was able to -- to -- to get around as far as language was concerned. But he had a lot of trouble finding work. Because of the depression.

And he was an immigrant. And... somehow -- I don't know exactly -- he did get a job. In a very large cafeteria operation. Where he -- all he did was prepare the vegetables for the kitchen.

BILL BENSON: And we neglected to say earlier I think that your father had actually trained as a chef in Switzerland right? Early in his life

>>KURT: Yes, yes, he was a trained cook and chef.

BILL BENSON: Here he is preparing vegetables

>>KURT: And he said one of the advantages was he -- he used to say, he always had a seat alone on the trolley, because he smelled of onions that nobody wanted to sit next to him. So when he came home, he always had a seat to himself on the trolley.

[LAUGHTER]

>>KURT: And one day he's going to work...

And somebody calls out his name

BILL BENSON: On the streets of Cincinnati

>>KURT: On the streets of Cincinnati. "Hugo", he turns around and here's this man, and he was -- a man he had trained with, as you said, in Switzerland, when he was getting his -- he was running his profession, and his occupation, in Switzerland.

This man was there as well. Learning to be a cook. And chef. And he was now a chef at one of the large downtown hotels, in Cincinnati.

So my father -- he says, "What are you doing here, Hugo?"

And he -- my father tells him his tale of woe about having to leave Germany and so on and so forth. And he says -- "And what are you doing?" And he explains it to him and he says what a terrible waste of talent he says.

Meet me in the union... offices, next Tuesday, he said, I'll see that you get a job.

And he did

BILL BENSON: He did.

>>KURT: My father got a job as a cook.

At a restaurant in downtown Cincinnati, two Jewish brothers, who

needed a cook at that moment.

And he very quickly became the chef, because he was a very talented -- very talented in his occupation, and he spent the next years during the war cooking in downtown Cincinnati, and, of course, that... made life a lot easier for everybody

BILL BENSON: And as he was doing that, of course, your mother was trying to contribute to the income of the family, what did your mother do?

>>KURT: Well, my mother started going around, cleaning, as a cleaning woman.

It was hard to find work, for women as well.

To start bringing some money in.

And there were weeks when she made more money than my father had when he was working with the vegetables.

BILL BENSON: And you also took in some boarders again in the house

>>KURT: Yes, yes, we rented the house in the same building that uncle Theodore lived. And aunt Julia. And it was an old -- older apartmenthouse. They had very large apartments in it. Three bedrooms, dining room, and a kitchen with a butler's pantry and so forth; and they rented the three bedrooms out and we lived -- it was the dining room, as the bedroom, and I slept in that bedroom as well until things got a little easier and gradually, we got rid of one renter.

And we were able to afford the apartment.

BILL BENSON: You had shared with me, that as a kid with these boarders, you know, you would sit and listen to what they had to say, or talk to them over dinner because you ate together

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: And just -- this really stuck with me -- that one of the borders was a lady whose husband had been a drummer in the civil war

>>KURT: Yes, yes,

BILL BENSON: Just amazing to me

>>KURT: He was a drummer boy in the Civil War.

BILL BENSON: When you finally came here to Cincinnati, you were I think about 8 1/2

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: What did you do from an education standpoint? You had to go to school

>>KURT: Of course, that was the question, I didn't speak a word of English, but at that age, so they put me in the first grade to learn English

BILL BENSON: You were in with all the first graders

>>KURT: Yes, and fortunately there was a little boy in the first grade who came from a home that was bilingual as well and they spoke German, so he was my translator

BILL BENSON: He was a real first grader

>>KURT: Yes, he was a real first grader. And they moved me up into the second and third grade. I learned English. And that was about one year behind, actually, finally, which I made up when I went to high school, which I -- high school I went to was from 7th to 12, and I would go to summer school; and take a course -- needed course, and by the time I had done that for a few years, I still was able to graduate in 18 --

BILL BENSON: On --

>>KURT: -- so by the time my parents moved which wasn't -- at that year, '48, I had finished high school.

BILL BENSON: During that -- that period, you had left Germany, in '36, to Palestine, United States in 1938; and then here through the war years.

Were your parents able to maintain contact at all, with family members, in Germany, for any period of that time?

>>KURT: Very little. At first, you know, there were these cards, sometimes the red cross would be allowed by the Germans to have people fill out and send to relatives abroad.

So there was a little contact; and then, of course, that ceased when the war started.

Or shortly thereafter.

And... I think we've discussed this before -- during the war, of course, you didn't really know what was going on in Germany.

And my parents, had hopes of maybe... some people -- that their relations would survive the war, and, of course, when the war was over, we found out that that hadn't occurred very much. I had one living first cousin, who was in Palestine, my mother's brother, son, still, of course, in touch with now. And another cousin -- on my mother's side -- who had gone to Belgium from Germany to avoid the Nazis.

And was able to hide her daughter in a convent in Belgium, when the Nazis got --

BILL BENSON: When they invaded Belgium

>>KURT: When they invaded Belgium, and that girl survived the war.

And -- and her mother survived the war.

And so those are the only -- real relatives that I had, except the family that we had in Palestine

BILL BENSON: So the rest of the family -- extended family --

>>KURT: Essentially was gone

BILL BENSON: When did you find that all out?

>>KURT: Of course, I -- I know there was word through the red cross --

BILL BENSON: This is after the war.

>>KURT: And, of course, the question of, you know, if people did survive, they were looking for relatives. There were postings of those names, of course; but there were really, nobody that we had as relatives, besides the ones that are -- in Belgium, and cousin who had managed to -- was living in Palestine -- and those -- those relatives -- those other relatives in Palestine, were really the only people left.

BILL BENSON: Were you --

>>KURT: It was -- terrible for my parents

BILL BENSON: That's what I was going to ask

>>KURT: Because, you know, I mean, I didn't know these people really, I was six years old when we left Germany

BILL BENSON: Right

>>KURT: So... but for them, for, you know, to lose these -- all these

BILL BENSON: And their parents

>>KURT: It was just -- it was very difficult, to get over that. We weren't the only people, who --

BILL BENSON: Right, of course,

>>KURT: -- who were in that situation

BILL BENSON: But when you and I first met you told me it was terribly traumatic for your parents, when they finally understood what had really happened

>>KURT: Yes

BILL BENSON: 1947, I think the family picks up stakes again, and moves to --

>>KURT: Well, in '48

BILL BENSON: And moves to New Jersey

>>KURT: Yes, they had friends in New Jersey that talked them to moving -- my father retired. Wanted to retire.

And he was no longer cooking.

He had -- some years earlier, he had gone into a business -- establishing a bakery with an acquaintance, who was a baker as well; and my father knew about baking quite a bit, because in order to become a chef, you had to know a lot about baking.

And it was cheaper to open a bakery than it was a restaurant. So he went into business with this acquaintance.

And they didn't get along too well, as it turned out; so as he got older, he decided, maybe he would retire to the chicken farm, which would provide him some income, additional income, when he retired. If he left there, you know... and... so but in his retirement, he would be able to live off the -- what -- assets he had, plus the chicken farm.

BILL BENSON: Plus the chicken farm

>>KURT: Moved to Vineland New Jersey.

BILL BENSON: It wasn't long after that, when you got out of high school, you

got drafted into the Army

>>KURT: Yes, yes, shortly -- no, that happened very quickly -- yes, shortly -- in Cincinnati, I would have gone to the university of Cincinnati.

Because it was very inexpensive for residents of the city, to go to that university.

I mean, it was -- you know, something that was easy -- handled. I mean, unless you were really in poverty.

So I would have gone down there, but now I was in New Jersey, and although New Jersey has a state university, it wasn't as liberal, with their -- with its residents as -- as the university of Cincinnati, I think they -- Cincinnati, had more assets, so they were able to offer this very cheap rate for the residents.

So I decided I had to go to work to earn some money, to be able to go to university after that.

I went to work for the local newspaper. In the advertising department, starting at the bottom. Used to take the ads to the merchants to have them look at -- to see that everything was correct, before they were run in the paper, and so forth.

These people were very good to me. They wanted me to learn the advertising business, and -- and newspaper advertising business.

And within a couple of years -- and I saved a bit of money, and then, of course, I was drafted. And the Korean war was on. And I was sent to... to Arkansas.

Fort -- well, now it's fort chaffy, back then it was camp chaffy, for my training and it was artillery training in that camp.

And I decided... I knew where we were going after Basic, I mean, there was no question about it.

But there was some alternatives in the military.

And two of us in the Company were accepted to the alternatives we had selected.

And I had selected OCS as an alternative

BILL BENSON: Officer candidate school

>>KURT: Right. Officer candidate school. But, of course, once I graduated from there, I knew where I was going -- but still, there was a delay, and I figured, this war's got to be over sometime. I mean, it had been on for a while.

And so I took my basic training, and when I finished my basic training, I had been accepted to OCS.

But it was seven weeks later, for my class to start.

So.... the Army doesn't let you sit around for seven weeks doing nothing. So they sent me to something called "leadership school," which was for people who were becoming noncommissioned officers and they said, it's really very good for you. And it was.

I lost all the excess weight I gained from... poor cooking. In basic training.

Because we would -- we were very active group there in leadership school. And as you mentioned earlier, I had an accident.

BILL BENSON: A very serious accident

>>KURT: This was in -- I finished the preliminary leadership so I was in -- worked in advanced leadership school.

And... we were setting up a 105 battery, we were helping with -- people who were training all these trainees coming in -- see we could see how they operated and that's how you learned what you had to do when you were a noncommissioned officer.

And so, we were setting up a -- 105, battery. We were -- we were a man short, in our group.

Because, they had to count on us, and you needed six people to move out.

So that was what regulation was. And we only had five left and the guy says, you'll be able to manage this fine.

So we were moving the Howitzers in position and I tripped over a rock, and very rocky area, where the howitzer-- where we set up these. And I fell forward, and the guy in back of me was being carried forward by it, and the man on the other side, also being carried, and so he let go -- he didn't even think, it was just a reaction, knee-jerk reaction and he let go, and it was, like, one man holding the trail. He couldn't hold it and it fell on my foot. Fortunately, it fell across the sole of my boot, not across the top of the boot, or it would have have cut my foot off, but it turned out, I had a lot of fractures in my foot. And I didn't lose my foot, but it was -- it was.... in bad shape.

I was lucky again here, that hospital turned out to be the orthopaedic center for the Army, medical corp for the southwestern United States, and they had divided the country up into sections, about four or 5, so that returning vets wounded from Korea could be sent to a hospital, that was -- a little closer, to their home, so if they were from New Mexico, they weren't going to be sent to places in Maine or something, so --

BILL BENSON: Right

>>KURT: This base hospital had been designated as the orthopaedic center for the southwestern United States.

I was lucky

BILL BENSON: You got the best surgical care

>>KURT: 90% of the doctors were orthopaedic surgeons, absolutely. And they fixed up my foot

BILL BENSON: Then when you recovered you were discharged

>>KURT: Well, it was very long before that.

But, I got a lot of leave time, because once they have a cast on your foot, what are they going to do with you? So for my first cast, and I had six pins in my foot -- all the way through my foot because all these pieces had -- had to grow back together again. And they were excellent surgeons.

And the doctor said, "This is what -- we can't do much for you for a while" he says why don't you go home, we'll give you a 30-day leave. Wow. And while I was in the hospital, changing my problems, it was healing, I got 3, 30-day leaves

BILL BENSON: 3?

>>KURT: 3 and a half, I got a two-week leave too, so in all that time, I was home a great deal, which was a great joy to my parents, and then when I came out and finished -- and the hospital was ready to discharge me, I had to go to the.... to the personnel section, in the hospital, and this major, was supposed to assign me.

To something, and he looked at my records, he said it says here no marching.

Says no carrying heavy weight.

No standing for long periods of time.

He says --

[LAUGHTER]

>>KURT: But the Korean war was still on.

And the policy was, you don't get -- don't let people out of the army early.

He says finally, after he made a few phone calls, he says, can you type?

Yeah,.

I had taught myself to type, between my junior and senior year in high school, I said yeah I can type, he says, well, you've got to be better than the guy I'm going to be replacing, you're going to be replacing, he says.

I'm sending him to Korea.

[LAUGHTER]

>>KURT: I went down, reported to the medical holding detachment headquarters, medical holding detachment is the unit -- all the patients are assigned to, a big bookkeeping job.

And a lot of filing to do.

And I became a clerk typist.

BILL BENSON: And then, of course, when you finally did leave the Army, you had the GI bill, went on to the Wharton school of business, and very successful career

>>KURT: Yes, by the way, the Army wasn't ready to release me yet.

They had a program, at the -- at the base, it was called the soldier of the month, and every unit, selected a soldier of the month.

Including the hospital medical holding detachment.

And if you were selected, you got... \$75, and the weekend pass.

So I was selected once.

I mean, we had to -- there were very few people who were qualified to be soldier of the month, and -- the organization, everybody had been there already. And I was selected from this unit.

And I went, you know, one of the things, that you had to do there, was you got an interview with the commanding general, of the base.

I went, reported to the office of the commanding general. I see this major, who's, obviously, an assistant to the -- to the general.

He had my personnel file on his desk.

And he says, "Oh," he says, "Pauly," he says, "What happened to you? I see here you were a candidate for officer's candidate school." He said, "Are you still interested?"

And I said, "No, sir," I said, "I don't think I could do it physically. I think it would be too hard for me now" I didn't want to insult the man and say I didn't want to be an officer.

And he thought he was doing me a big favor. But I assured him -- then I got my interview with the commanding general who kept calling me "son," and.... that was it.

BILL BENSON: That was it

>>KURT: And then I stayed until my time was up, and two years in the Army, and as you said, I went to camp.

BILL BENSON: Quite a saga

>>KURT: So, you know, it worked out. People ask me, about how did I manage to get -- go to an IVy league school?

I would say my rich uncle paid.

[LAUGHTER]

>>KURT: Uncle Sam

BILL BENSON: Uncle Sam. I think we are at the close of our program, so we're not going to have time for you to ask Kurt some questions, from the audience, but I'm going to turn back to Kurt in just a couple of moments, to close our program when he's finished, two things are going to happen:

Sarah, our photographer, is going to come up on the stage, and take a photograph of Kurt, with you as the background. So please stay for that, because that makes a nice memento, and Kurt will remain on the stage, and we invite anybody who would like to, to come up on stage and ask him a question you didn't get to ask him just, you know, shake his hand. Get a picture taken with him, whatever you want to do.

So he'll stay behind for that for anybody who would like to come up and talk to him. I want to thank you, all, for being here. Today, this closes our 2019 year of "First Person".

We'll resume again in 2020.

In March, in the spring of 2020 so we hope that you'll come back. All of our programs, we had 44 of them this year -- all of them are up on the YouTube channel, at the museum. So they can be viewed. So we -- we invite you back either virtually or to come back in person, it's tradition at "First Person" that our "First Person" gets the last word, and so our last word of the

year, Kurt Pauly.

>>KURT: Should I --

BILL BENSON: It's right here if you want

>>KURT: Well, when I look back on my life, I think I was a very lucky person. That I'm here. Because if my parents hadn't been anxious to get out of Germany -- I made it out of Germany.

I wouldn't be here.

Quite convinced of that.

No question about it.

And unfortunately, we lost a lot of family.

And my parents were really shocked after the war. It was very difficult for them to comprehend, when the war was on, there was always a chance of hope, in the very beginning of the war, there was even some correspondence with relatives through the red cross and so forth.

And as the war progressed, of course, you lost touch.

But they -- they, and a lot of other people, really had hope -- they didn't really know how bad it was. They knew it was bad; but they really didn't know how bad it was. And when they discovered how bad it was, my mother always hoped maybe one of or niece- -- nephews would survive, and besides this one girl who was in Belgium, nobody.

And... so I -- I consider myself very lucky.

The country has been very good to me. And I hope I've done a little bit for them.

But... it was a terrible shock -- I mean, more so for my parents than for me. But these people were strangers to me in a way.

But, and, of course, when you're that age, you just grow up. You make friends.

You do your thing. I was busy, went to school -- that kept me busy. Met my wife.

And... I was a -- we were attracted to each other.

And had this very similar background, in some ways: And that helped my parents a bit too.

They got another family that they... could be related to.

So... so that's really all I have to say, I was just very lucky

BILL BENSON: Lucky. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

BILL BENSON: If you stand up, I want to take this off -- and --...