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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
SPEAKER: JOSIE TRAUM

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>> 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 15th year of the First Person program.

Our First Person today is Mrs. Josie Traum, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2014 season of First Person is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of 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 with two programs a week until mid-August.

The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming First Person guests.

Anyone interested in keeping in touch with the Museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card in their program or speak with a museum representative at the back of The theatre when we're done today.

In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Josie Traum's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave here today.

Josie will share her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes.

If we have time at the end of our program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Josie a few questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades.

What you are about to hear from Josie is one individual's account of the Holocaust.

We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction. And we begin with a portrait of Josie Aizenberg walking in Brussels.

She was born March 31 to Jacques and Fanny Aizenberg. The arrow on this map of Belgium points to Brussels. The German Army conquered Belgium in May 1940. Shortly before the occupation Josie's father left Belgium to join the British Army. We see this photo of Josie with her parents in Brussels. Josie's mother was able to secure a hiding place for Josie in a convent in Bruges, Belgium. Here we have Josie and Fanny before she went into hiding. Soon thereafter, Fanny who worked for the underground or resistance was denounced and deported to Auschwitz.

After six months of hiding in the convent and growing Nazi suspicion, the Belgium underground relocated Josie to hide with the Debrackelaers, a Christian family in Brussels. Here we see Josie with the Debrackelaers. Mr. And Mrs. Debrackelaer are on the right. To their left are neighbors of Josie's grandparents and the front in the middle is their grandson. In the front to the right is Josie and then on the far left in the front is the Debrackelaers' daughter. Allied forces liberated Belgium in September 1944. Soon after Josie was found by one of her aunts, Fanny's sister. Here we see Josie, Jacques and Fanny after they were reunited in Belgium. Josie would eventually marry Freddy Traum, also a Holocaust survivor. We close with this wedding portrait of Josie and Freddy. After moving to the United States with her parents in 1949 and completing schooling in Patterson, New

Jersey, Josie went to Israel to study for a year. On the return trip on a ship, she met Freddy Traum, the chief's radio officer, also a Holocaust survivor. Upon return to the U.S. Josie attended Montclair Teacher College for one year. Josie and Freddy were married on his ship a year after she met him and she moved to Israel where they lived five years. While in Israel, their son Michael and daughter Yael were born.

The Traums relocated to the United States in 1963 to obtain medical care for the disabled son Michael.

Their third, Jonathan, also disabled, was born in the United States.

Eventually Freddy's work brought them to Vienna, Virginia. Josie returned to school and graduated from the Catholic University of America school of social work and began her career in child welfare. She retired in 2008 from her work as a clinical social worker for abused children from Montgomery County, Maryland. Today they live in Silver Spring Maryland. Josie's volunteer work includes leading tours of the Permanent Exhibition for law enforcement, including police officers, the FBI, judges and others.

She also volunteers with Visitor Services. Josie has only recently started speaking publicly about her experience as a Holocaust survivor. She now speaks at local synagogues and schools, such as Christian academy and Walter Johnson High School in Montgomery county, Maryland. Last year she spoke to grades one through eight at legacy school in Carroll County Maryland, which my son attends. She spoke to fifth graders in the District of Columbia and said she was very impressed with these young students who really not only asked great questions but each of them produced a memorial to the Holocaust and presented it to Josie. As part of the Holocaust days of remembrance activities last year Josie joined others in reading aloud here in this museum the names of those killed during the Holocaust. Josie read the names of 100 victims, including 12 from her and Freddy's families. I would like you to know Freddy, who recently had surgery is here with Josie today and he

will be our first person guest on August 6th. We have Freddy on the front row. Glad to have you here with us. With that I would like to ask you to join me in welcoming our First Person, Mrs. Josie Traum.

[Applause]

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Josie, welcome and thank you so much for being willing to be our First Person today. We have a very large and good crowd and you have so much to share with us. We're going to get started right away. Your parents Jacques and Fanny Aizenberg were married in '38. Just before Poland attacked in World War II. Tell us about your parents and their life in Brussels, Belgium during the pre-war period.

>> Josie Traum: First of all, I want to welcome everyone. Thank you for coming. I have a little bronchitis, so bear with me.

My parents, as you said, Bill, were married in 1938, both of them were actually in garment business. My mom had gone to a textile designing school and she was a dress maker and she was actually, before she got married, she was a dress maker for the world family in Belgium.

>> Bill Benson: That was a huge honor?

>> Josie Traum: That was a big deal. Very few students were chosen from the school when they graduate to actually work with the royal family, so she actually worked with them and my dad was not always a tailor, although he was when I was born. My dad was actually a violinist, and I'm sure you can't imagine this, but many years ago they didn't have talking in the movies. They were silent. So when they were silent, they usually had a quartet playing music accompanying the movie. You know, there was usually a violinist, piano player, maybe a cellist, and they had a few people playing music. When the talkies came in, my dad lost his job. They didn't need musicians anymore, so he went to tailoring school and actually became a tailor. And so both my parents were working in that kind of business. My dad had a store where in those days, again, I keep on saying "those days" but I have to

remember that was many years ago. In those days you couldn't buy a suit ready-made off the rack like you do now. You would go into a tailoring shop, pick your material, tweed, regular color or whatever, and then the tailor would fit you and actually make a pattern out of paper and then eventually make a suit. It would take weeks. And actually a relationship was usually formed between the tailor and the customer. So my parents were both working. My mom had not -- was no longer working for the royal family when I came along, when I was born.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us why you're named Josiane.

>> Josie Traum: My mother really liked a French singer whose name was Josiane, which is the way you pronounce my name, but no one could say it when I came to this country, so I became Josie. But Josiane was a very famous French singer, so my mom really liked the name.

>> Bill Benson: Your parents were married in 1938 in late 1938, Nazi power took a very ominous turn in Austria and Germany, with Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, and you were born in 1939. Do you have knowledge from your parents after the fact as to whether or not they were, at that point, living in Belgium? Were they fearful about the future at that time? Here they were bringing you into the world.

>> Josie Traum: I think they were fearful. And it was really, in Belgium, it was rumored and thought that the Germans, when they came and invaded Belgium, that they would only deport and arrest the men and leave the women and children alone. So my dad kind of felt that my mom and I were safe and he actually heard many calls on the radio of Britain wanting volunteers to join the British Army. So eventually my dad and his brothers went to England and volunteered.

>> Bill Benson: We'll come back to that in just a moment. One more question about that pre-war period. Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, which occurred in Germany and Austria, where thousands of Jewish businesses were ransacked and destroyed and hundreds of synagogues were burned, as a result of that, your family took in, I believe, a Jewish child to live with you for a period.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that.

>> Josie Traum: My mom was actually part of the underground and she would bring in Jewish girls, people from countries where the Germans had already invaded and were arresting and deporting people. She was taking in Jews and hiding them. We would always have some people sleeping in our house and until they found another safer place to go. So my mom would be hiding people continuously and she was kind of part of the underground. So there was a feeling of fear.

>> Bill Benson: In May 1940, eight months after Germany attacked Poland began World War II they invaded the low countries, which are Belgium, the Netherlands and France, and as you started to tell us, your father left to join the British Army just before the Germans invaded Belgium. Tell us about your father's leaving and what he did.

>> Josie Traum: Okay.

>> Bill Benson: Knowing this, you wouldn't be able to tell most of it until later because you didn't know.

>> Josie Traum: Yes, of course, because I learned much of this later on.

When I was older.

My dad and his brother, they were both tailors, by the way. My dad's brother, Uncle Ben, was also a tailor and they both decided to join the British Army. So they actually went on one of the last boats that crossed the channel and was able to get to England. This was in 1940. I was 13 months old. And my dad and his brother got to England and there they evaluated these two men who came in and wanted to join the British Army, what could they do, they were tailors. So they evaluated them and placed them both in a factory making British uniforms. And that was the best place they could be. Actually, England had what they called -- they had a Polish contingent of the British Army, and my dad and his brother came under that heading. They were part of the Polish contingent, a part of the

British Army.

>> Bill Benson: Did your mom know what happened to him once he departed and headed for the coast and off to England?

>> Josie Traum: She did not.

>> Bill Benson: She did not.

>> Josie Traum: We knew -- my aunt told us later, my mom knew that many ships that were crossing the channel were bombed and torpedoed, and she really never knew whether he ever got to England or not.

>> Bill Benson: So here you are alone, you and your mom.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: What did she do?

>> Josie Traum: Well, we stayed in our apartment. She was very active in the underground hiding people, and we actually lived with my maternal grandparents, her parents lived with us. We were all together. And pretty much survived the way we were.

>> Bill Benson: And that would continue -- you would live in Brussels under Nazi occupation until 1942 when your mother made the profound decision to send you into hiding. Tell us what you can about the events that led up to her making that decision and then what she did to then send you off to safekeeping, but away from her.

>> Josie Traum: Okay. I think people realized the danger was becoming more and more imminent in Belgium. Germans, Nazi officers were walking up and down the streets. They were arresting people, and she made the decision to put me into hiding. Now, she-because she was in touch with the underground and part of the underground, she had connections, and so one day two strange women -- I was three years old in 1942. Two strange women came to pick me up and they actually took me away and my mother was not allowed to know where I was going. They figured that when the

Germans came to arrest Jews, they would torture them to find out where the rest of their family was. And so they never told parents where they were hiding the children. To me this is almost beyond comprehension, having my own children and grandchildren -- I can't imagine making that decision, but she obviously did it because she wanted me to be safe. But as I said, she didn't know where I was going. Two women came to pick me up and they took me to a village in Belgium, which is called Bruges, which is full of convents and full of canals. It's beautiful. They took me to this convent where there were many, many children. Not necessarily Jewish children. I found out after the war that there were three other Jewish children there, and so the four of us were there, but there were many other children there. It was more like an orphanage. In those days, when people couldn't care for their children, it was wartime, food was very meager, people would put their children in an orphanage. And when they were able to and became more stable, they would be able to take -- pick the children up. So I was in an orphanage --

>> Bill Benson: Before we go on with you telling us about the orphanage, let me ask just a couple of questions about your mother going into that period. And your grandparents. You had been living with your grandparents. What was going on for them at that time?

>> Josie Traum: Well, at that time my mother -- my grandmother worked as a volunteer really for the -- what we call the Burying Society, when a Jewish person dies, there's a special ritual of a burial. You watch over the body, you wash the body. My grandmother was doing that in different places. My grandfather was a scholar and a Rabbi. So they went on with their business really. And my mom, I was at home with my mom. We hardly ever went out. We were very much in hiding, living in an attic apartment, and that's where we were.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know how she was able to feed you, make ends meet?

>> Josie Traum: My grandmother, who worked for this Jewish organization would bring food to the house. First of all, food was rationed in Belgium. We had very meager possibility of getting food in

general, but my grandmother would often bring milk and bread and certain foods from where she was working.

>> Bill Benson: If you had become sick or anything like that, you couldn't get access to healthcare?

>> Josie Traum: No. The clinics for children were closed to Jews. So I really couldn't get any care.

>> Bill Benson: Although you were so young while you were with your mother, you've told me that you do have some fleeting memories. There's one in particular, if I remember correctly, you're on a bus with your mother. Will you share that?

>> Josie Traum: Yeah. You always get that story from me.

It's very hard to tell.

My mom and I were on a bus together and a Nazi officer came up. You know, the Nazis would come and approach people and ask for the identity card. The identity card was, of course, marked if you were a Jew, there was a gigantic J on it. There was no mistaking it. You were a Jew. And both my mother and I had identity cards. We got on a bus to go somewhere. I can't remember now where, but I was sitting in the last row. It was actually not a bus. It was a tram. In Belgium they used trams, you know, by electricity, and we sat in the last row and a German officer got on to the tram and asked for everybody's identity card. He was going from row to row to row.

>> Bill Benson: And he was getting close to your mom?

>> Josie Traum: He was getting close to us and my mom was really shaking. I didn't understand why. I was three years old. And she was really shaking. And they were going from row -- he was going from row to row and for some reason he got to the last row, turned around and got off the bus. And I remember my mother just breathing a sigh of relief. I didn't know why she was scared. I had no idea. But, you know, in retrospect, looking at it now, I realize what was going on inside her.

>> Bill Benson: A few moments ago, Josie, you were telling us how incomprehensible it is to think of sending your child into hiding as a mother and a parent. Has your mom spoken of what it was like for

her when she sent you off with those --

>> Josie Traum: She has. And I think I really think that's one of the hardest things that she's ever done. And one of the bravest things. I mean, I'm alive today because of her.

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely. And once she did that and you went to this convent, you would stay at this convent for about a year.

>> Josie Traum: I stayed there for six months.

>> Bill Benson: Six months. Tell us what you know about your time. And as you said it was really an orphanage and you're there as one of the small number of Jewish children in this orphanage. What do you know of what that was like for you?

>> Josie Traum: For me, first of all, it was run by nuns, and these nuns were very, very strict.

I hear you all smiling.

But not because I was Jewish. They were strict to all the kids. You know, I was three years old and I think all I wanted was to be held, to be hugged. And they just didn't do that.

>> Bill Benson: You told me that they look like nuns from "The Sound of Music," but not like that, right?

>> Josie Traum: No, they didn't sing.

[Laughter]

But they wore these very, very stiff habits. Do you know these -- really like "The Sound of Music," very tight. No wonder they were strict. They must have been uptight. And I was very scared. I was crying a lot. I used to be a very fussy eater. Whatever little food I had, I was very fussy and I would cry. So I was probably not the easiest child to handle, but obviously I just wanted some hugging from them.

>> Bill Benson: And that was not what they did?

>> Josie Traum: That was not a possibility. That was not an option.

>> Bill Benson: While you were there, you were in hiding, did -- I think that's when you had to change your name?

>> Josie Traum: Yes, I did. The government actually changed my name.

>> Bill Benson: The resistance?

>> Josie Traum: Yes. My first name remained the same, I was Josiane, but instead of Aizenberg, they gave me a Dutch name or a Flemish name, which was Van Bergh. Which is a very Dutch name. So I came with that name.

>> Bill Benson: So that was a significant change to give you that name?

>> Josie Traum: Right.

>> Bill Benson: From that time in the convent, as you said, you went hugged or held, what do you think the most significant impact on you personally was from being in the convent for that period of time?

>> Josie Traum: The impact on me?

>> Bill Benson: On you.

>> Josie Traum: Well, I think I had more of an impact before going into the convent, as far as having a very nurturing and loving home. My grandmother was very, very nurturing and loving and hugging and so was my mom, so I always attribute those first three years, especially having, you know, studied child development, those first three years of nurturing and care taking are so crucial for a child's growing and for feeling comfortable, and I really attributed to my mom and to my grand mom.

>> Bill Benson: So you had that foundation going into what you would then live threw for the next several years.

>> Josie Traum: They say as far as child development is concerned, those first three years are so crucial. And it doesn't have to be a parent. It's a caretaker or just is loving and giving, and I had that. And luckily that was kind of a foundation for me. I didn't have it in the convent.

>> Bill Benson: Right. At some point, Josie, the nuns made the decision to move you out of there and send you somewhere else. What do you know about that decision?

>> Josie Traum: My understanding is, you know, first of all, I want you to realize, in Belgium, and many European countries, if you were a Christian and hiding a Jew and if a German found you they would just shoot you, no questions asked. So these nuns, however strict they were with me, they saved my life. They took risks. They risked their lives. They could have been shot. They found out that the Nazis were going to come and arrest or deport or take away the four Jewish children. And when they found that out, apparently, by night they smuggled me out of the convent back to Brussels, which is where I'm originally from and where I was born. And they placed me with a Christian family, the Debrackelaers, who you saw on the slides. So the nuns, they were lifesaving. And they saved the four of us. They placed us all in different homes.

>> Bill Benson: And at that time did your mother know what had happened to you, that you had been moved?

>> Josie Traum: She had no idea.

In the meantime, she had been arrested.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that.

>> Josie Traum: Okay. My mom and her parents were deported. You know, there were many wonderful people in Belgium, people who really risked their lives, but there were many people who informed on Jews, because the Germans got paid. They paid these informers. So although many Christian people helped me and saved my life, there were many people who did other things. For instance, one of our neighbors informed on my mom, and that's how my mom, the Germans realized where she was living and they came to deport her. And they arrested her and my grandparents. And indeed they beat her. And to find out where the rest of the family was, she really couldn't tell them because she didn't know.

>> Bill Benson: She didn't know.

>> Josie Traum: And my grandparents and my mother were deported to Auschwitz.

>> Bill Benson: And I know we'll hear a little more about that in a little bit, Josie. So you moved in with the Debrackelaer family and you would live with them until Belgium was liberated by the allies in September 1944. Tell us about the Debrackelaers and what your life was like in hiding with them.

>> Josie Traum: The Debrackelaers obviously were wonderful people to take me in, risk their lives. They had a little girl my age and we pretty much played together most of the day, but I was very much in hiding. We hardly left the apartment. Mr. Debrackelaer, the father, was very active in the underground, trying to sabotage things in order to help Jews and to kind of sabotage what was happening with the Germans. He was often taken out for interrogation and he must have been beaten, because he would come back at night black and blue. But he never told on me. A really great...

I'm sorry.

>> Bill Benson: I think people understand this is very difficult to do, Josie, very difficult.

So he is working in the resistance. He's got you in hiding. He's got a family. I was struck by you telling me one time that -- because food was rationed and hard to get, they had rations for a family of free.

>> Josie Traum: I was there illegally. Whatever was rationed, they would share with me. I was one of the family. I was fed and I was kept safe.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know-knowing you were there illegally and a fourth mouth to feed in that sense, do you know if neighbors around them knew you were there and if they would say, so who is this fourth person living over there with the Debrackelaers?

>> Josie Traum: You know, I don't know. And I never found out. So I don't know. Because I really hardly ever went out. And I was not school age so I did not go to school.

>> Bill Benson: Right. And you said to me that they were obviously kind and they took you in.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: But you also weren't part of the family structure and you remember that. Are you willing to say a little about that?

>> Josie Traum: Yeah. The family was wonderful. They saved my life, but, you know, I wasn't part of the nuclear family and I felt that. You know, somehow you have feelings as a child, you're just not part of the unit. And I was very aware of that. I was just very aware. I remember the three of them hugging and holding close and me being on the outside and watching. So this is something I became aware of.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know, Josie, if they -- did they live in the city or were you --

>> Josie Traum: In the city.

>> Bill Benson: Right in the city. And they were a Christian family.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember if there was any attempt to have you participate in their religious life?

>> Josie Traum: No.

>> Bill Benson: Not at all?

>> Josie Traum: None whatsoever. Actually they didn't go to church, so they didn't take me and I didn't go out.

>> Bill Benson: Because I remember you saying when you were in the convent, you had to act like all the other kids, so you had to say the rosary --

>> Josie Traum: Yes, in French.

>> Bill Benson: In French, okay. So you stayed there with the Debrackelaers for what was left of the war in Belgium.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: So when the war ended in Belgium in 1944, you're with the Debrackelaers, and one of your aunts --

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: -- finds you or comes to get you. Tell us about that.

>> Josie Traum: My mom had two sisters, my two aunts, and who were also hidden as part of the underground. They were hidden in churches, and they remained alive because of the help of churches and Christian people.

>> Bill Benson: These are your mom's two sisters.

>> Josie Traum: My mom's two sisters. My mom is in the middle. One five years younger and one five years older. And they actually -- there was this whole network in the underground. If you were part of the underground or hidden, you knew how to find people, and so they actually started searching for me. One particular sister found me and brought me back to her apartment and I stayed with them actually the entire duration until Europe was liberated.

>> Bill Benson: Until Europe was liberated the following April. Tell us about your aunt.

>> My aunt is five years older than my mom. She had three sons, and who were all older than me and it was wonderful being with them. They treated me like a little mascot. It was great. I was spoiled rotten.

>> Bill Benson: Just what you needed.

>> Josie Traum: That's just what I needed. I felt comforted and, you know, I was with family and it was wonderful. The boys played with me and I played with them. They kind of dragged me along wherever they went.

>> Bill Benson: Had the boys been in hiding?

>> Josie Traum: They were all in hiding.

>> Bill Benson: In separate places from their mother?

>> Josie Traum: Yes. My aunt actually was a maid, a domestic for very wealthy people and very grand home. And the children were in churches and my other aunt, my other sister was also in the church. My aunt's husband, the one with the three children, he was actually part of the underground. He's a very quiet -- he was very quiet, meek man, and apparently got a special medal for killing Germans, which is impossible to imagine. This is a quiet, meek man. I just cannot imagine him being confrontative or aggressive. But anyhow, they lived through that. And that was -- my mother -- I didn't know where she was, of course, and I stayed with my aunt and I was -- it was wonderful being with them.

>> Bill Benson: Did you know you were Jewish when you went to your aunt's? You're still very young.

>> Josie Traum: I'm very young. I don't think I knew what Jewish was. I had no idea. When I went to the convent, you ask a three-year-old, what is a Jew, and I certainly didn't know. And I don't -- I was not aware of it. You know, I was probably part of the traditions that we did in my grandmother's home, but I wasn't aware that it was something Jewish.

>> Bill Benson: And then as a six-year-old that resumed with your aunt Theresa. Tell us about your other aunt. She too was hid. Did she have children herself?

>> Josie Traum: She did not. She got married but never had children. She came and settled in the United States.

>> Bill Benson: But she was in hiding too.

>> Josie Traum: She was hiding in a church.

>> Bill Benson: How about her husband?

>> Josie Traum: No, she married an American.

>> Bill Benson: After she came here?

>> Josie Traum: She was never married in Belgium.

>> Bill Benson: When your aunt Theresa, particularly, there you are with her three sons and of course you don't know anything about your mother at the time --

>> Josie Traum: Or my father.

>> Bill Benson: Or your father. What was it like for your aunt to sort of redo you mean their life? The war is going on elsewhere and Europe, you're liberated in Belgium, but it's still going on. Do you remember or know anything about how they were trying to resume a life?

>> Josie Traum: They had a store in front of the apartment. Very often when you're a shopkeeper, you have a store the apartment is behind the shop. My aunt and her husband ran a leather goods store. They had purses, handbags, leather coats, and so they resumed their life by working. By making a living, getting food, buying things and trying to normalize their life as much as possible.

>> Bill Benson: So April 1945, the war ends officially in May of 1945. Your mother is liberated in April of '45 in what must have seemed to all to be a miracle.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother survives and essentially shows up. Tell us about that.

>> Josie Traum: My mother had been deported to Auschwitz and she endured and survived Auschwitz. My grandfather died on a cattle car on the way to Auschwitz. My grandmother, who was taken with my mother died very soon. When you got to Auschwitz, they had a selection where they put the healthier younger people in one line and the older folks, although my grandmother must have been 50, they put them on another line. Because it was a labor camp in Auschwitz, which was the canal, so they selected my mother to work in the labor camp. She wanted to stay with her mother, but the Germans really swiped her and said, you go where you're told. So she actually never saw her mother again. So my mother was liberated by the Russians, taken by the Red Cross eventually. She was pretty sick. She had typhus and meningitis, and eventually the Red Cross brought her back to

Belgium. And the first place she went was her sister's apartment. She knocked on the door and there I was.

So it was quite a reunion.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember that?

>> Josie Traum: I remember seeing her, but my mother has filled me in with details because I was six years old and I don't remember many of those details.

>> Bill Benson: One of the details that your mother has shared, can we talk about that?

>> Josie Traum: I knew you were going to bring it up.

>> Bill Benson: Do you want to do it or do you want me to do it?

>> Josie Traum: I can do it. I'll probably cry, but I can do it.

My mother tells me -- because many of these things I don't remember. I was so young. But my mother tells me when she came back and when we were reunited, when I would go to sleep at night, I would tie my nightgown to hers because I was so afraid to lose her again. So my mother told me that. I don't remember doing that, but she tells me that and it makes me cry every time.

>> Bill Benson: Thanks for telling it anyway. I think it's so powerful for you to do that.

Soon after your mother's liberation, which was in April, once she showed up at your aunt's house, she would then take you and the two of you would move, I think, by June had gone to her own home.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: At this point you still don't know anything about your father.

>> Josie Traum: No. Although actually the war in '45, he did start corresponding with us. My dad, the house he was living in London was bombed and he was actually in a hospital for two years. He was injured pretty badly, and so he came back in '46. I was seven years old. I really didn't remember him, because he was 13 months old when he left. So I remember going to the boat, to the port, the city where the boats come in, and I remember my mom saying to me, we went to greet the boat, and

my mother said, there's your father. I had no idea who he was. So it was a lot of adjustments to make, you know, a family who hadn't been together for many years and all of a sudden you add each individual and it's difficult.

>> Bill Benson: Not just add each individual in a surprise way, not knowing that they were even alive. Before you were reunited with your father in 1946 when your mother and you moved to her own place in June of 1945, after what she had been through at Auschwitz and all the losses she had suffered, what do you know about what that time was like for your mother and therefore for you in trying to rebuild a life again without your father at that time?

What was that like in those immediate post-year years -- post-war months really?

>> Josie Traum: I think it was really difficult for my mother. I remember her in Belgium right after the war and some years later, even the United States, her waking up during the night and screaming, having nightmares. And I didn't understand why. I mean, I was only a kid. And myself, I had gone through traumatic times, but it was hard for my mother, because she had gone through hell. You know, having seen her parents die, measured, so it was a -- murdered, so it was a pretty hard time. It was hard for my mom.

>> Bill Benson: And you were six. So time to start going to school.

>> Josie Traum: I started school, yes.

>> Bill Benson: What was that like for you, to all of a sudden, all you had been through, in hiding, lost your parents and now they're back. Your dad is not back yet. And now you're back in school.

>> Josie Traum: That's right. And I never was in school to begin with. I never knew what school was like, so I think it was very nice being with kids, being able to socialize and interact and learning and going to school.

>> Bill Benson: Then, of course, your father returns in 1946 and it would be another three years before you would get to United States. Tell us about what, you know, just in brief about what you can

about that three-year period living in Belgium and resuming a life and their thoughts and decisions to the extent you know about immigrating to the United States.

>> Josie Traum: My parents, because my mom had been through so much, and my dad equally in his own way, they really wanted to leave Europe and wanted to come to the United States, so they applied for papers, got Visas eventually and we came to the United States to really start a new life in 1949.

>> Bill Benson: Was there a reason that it took three years?

>> Josie Traum: It took that long on the waiting list.

>> Bill Benson: On the waiting list, in order to get their Visas and be able to come.

>> Josie Traum: The bureaucracy and paperwork took that long for us to wait. And my father and my mom and I came to the United States along with his brother, the one who went to England with him who survived. And he and his wife and two daughters also came to -- we all came together. And they settled in New York and we settled in New Jersey.

>> Bill Benson: What about your mother's two sisters? My.

>> Josie Traum: My mom's two sisters, first of all, my mom's older sister went to Israel with her three boys. And my mom's younger sister came to the United States and settled in New York.

>> Bill Benson: But didn't come at the same time.

>> Josie Traum: No, she also had to apply for papers individually. It was just a very long process.

>> Bill Benson: So what do you know about what it was like for your parents and you to arrive now in a new country, 1949 and start their life here? What was that like for them?

>> Josie Traum: Well, I think it was very difficult. We actually settled in New Jersey, in North New Jersey, because my mom had an aunt there, and you settle where you have a relative where you can have some connection. So we settled until my parents found an apartment, they found jobs in the garment industry and I think for my parents they settled into work and into living pretty soon after.

And we settled in a community in North New Jersey where there were many survivors who came to settle. I think it was very difficult to settle, but my parents so much wanted to be Americans. They right away went to school, started learning English and the history, because they wanted to become citizens. In those days you have to answer a lot of questions. So they did. And I don't mean they answered questions then, they didn't, but they went to school and they were so anxious to become Americans. In fact, when I would come home from school, I would only speak English to them. We stopped speaking. They would speak Yiddish at home or French, and I would always speak English to them because they so much wanted to speak English.

>> Bill Benson: So that was a choice, you will speak English and only English here.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: When you left Belgium I think you were in third or fourth grade, but when you came here they put you in first grade. Tell us about that.

>> Josie Traum: They put me in first grade not because of my height, because I was never tall. They put me in first grade because I didn't speak one word of English and they thought if you want to speak English you have to start at the beginning, so they put me in first grade. I stayed there about two weeks and then they put me in second grade.

>> Bill Benson: Two weeks.

>> Josie Traum: And on and on until I finally caught up. I graduated on time elementary school. And this was in North New Jersey. And, you know, I felt okay.

>> Bill Benson: There were some rough moments for you in that early stage, and the transition was not easy for you, right?

>> Josie Traum: The second day I was in elementary school, a gang of girls waited for me outside and beat me up. And I was pretty scared. I went home and cried and my mom went the next -- came the next day to the principal to talk to her or him. I don't remember who it was. And the principal said

it's because they thought I was German. Now, I don't think kids at that age knew the difference, but obviously I was different and they ganged up on me. I was hurt. But it didn't happen anymore. They became my friends.

>> Bill Benson: They became your friends after that.

Josie, you lost your grandparents at Auschwitz. What about the rest of your extended family? How many survived and how many did not to your knowledge?

>> Josie Traum: Well, my grandparents had siblings and they were murdered, as were their children, and my mother and father both had -- my father had a brother who was taken to Auschwitz with his wife and two children and they were murdered, although the girl -- the woman survived. She jumped off the train from Auschwitz. She survived. So I have quite a few in my family who did -- who were murdered. And so was Freddy's family.

>> Bill Benson: Freddy was able to leave on what is known as a kinder transport out of Austria. Tell us how you two met.

>> Josie Traum: I studied in Israel for a year, which was a wonderful year, and on the way home, in those days, again, you didn't travel so much by plane. This was in 1956, '57. I went by boat, on a beautiful passenger liner from Israel to New York, and Freddy was the chief radio officer, and he was obviously socializing with the passengers.

I being one of them. And we -- he's been my soul mate. We were married a year later and we've been together 56 years.

[Applause]

That must be for endurance. Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: If you can come back on August 6th when we have Freddy with us, you know, please do.

You worked in child welfare. You worked with abused children for the county of Montgomery in

Maryland. Do you think what you -- to what extent do you think what you experienced in your life contributed to your choice in a career?

>> Josie Traum: I think a lot, absolutely. I can't help but think that you know, I've always wanted to help children, nurture them, and feel part of their lives. And that's what I chose to do because I work with families for 19 years in the county, and that has had a lot to do with it.

>> Bill Benson: When Josie spoke at my son's school, which is a school for kids with learning disabilities, I just -- it was extraordinary to watch her with these kids from ages one through eight.

>> Josie Traum: They were lovely.

>> Bill Benson: And you were lovely.

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: I think we can turn to our audience for some questions. We have a little time for that. So we would invite you to ask a question. I would ask you to make it as brief as you can, and we're going to give you a microphone, so we have folks coming down. We have Fritz and here comes Dora with a microphone over here. They'll pass it to you. I think it needs to be repeated, just to be sure not just Josie, but everybody in the room hears the question, I'll repeat if need be. If anybody has a question, please be brave. We have a hand shot up on the left.

>> Thank you for sharing. Do you know anything about why your mother was involved in the understood ground movement?

>> Bill Benson: The question is, what do you know about your mother's involvement in the underground?

>> Josie Traum: If there's a place where you sign up or you're part of it. I don't know. You know, I never asked her that. That's a very good question and I'm going to ask her. By the way, my mom survived and she's alive today. She's 97.

[Applause]

>> Bill Benson: And I want you just to think about that for a moment, how remarkable that is. 97, still alive, still giving testimony to what she experienced. Her daughter is still alive, who she had to put into hiding, and who also married a Holocaust survivor. So it's extraordinary family, just an extraordinary family.

Do we have some more questions?

All right. We have a young man right here in the middle.

>> Thank you very much for sharing your story. And this is more of an opinion question, but what do you think are some important steps to prevent such evil in the future?

>> Josie Traum: You know, at the end when I speak, I usually read something and I think in a moment or two you will see what I think.

>> Bill Benson: That's a great question. I think Josie is going to end the program in a few minutes with a direct response to that. So we'll get an answer to that.

>> Josie Traum: Great question.

>> Bill Benson: We have a question here and one in the back.

>> Thank you, again, Josie, for a beautiful testimony. I'm curious about the Debrackelaer family and have you kept in touch? Do you know anything about them? It must have been very difficult for them, like you had said, to save you. Do you have any information about them?

>> Bill Benson: Question for the folks in the back, in case you didn't hear, what Josie knows about the Debrackelaers and what became of them and other thoughts about them.

>> Josie Traum: My parents, until we left Belgium in 1949, we were in contact with them. But then it stopped. And when my husband and I went back to Belgium in 1989 I tried to find them. Apparently they had all died, including the young daughter. So I really never found out any more information. And for that matter, I tried to find out the order of the nuns who hid me, because I want them to be recognized. And I've written to the French government and apparently the order is no longer in

existence. And sometimes my understanding is that one order merges with another order and it becomes one. So they're trying to find out, but I have not been successful in finding out.

>> Bill Benson: We have a question towards the back.

>> Thank you for sharing your story. My question to you is what kinds of truth and reconciliation measures have been taken today in terms of between the Jewish people and the Germans and how is the healing process taking place to -- I'm not going to say remove the reality of what happened, but to not have that wall, between, say, if you meet someone on the street that is German?

>> Bill Benson: Josie, is that something you feel comfortable answering?

>> Josie Traum: You know, first of all, I personally feel that you can't blame the children for what the grandparents did or the parents for that matter. In fact, I don't know if you realize this, but in the museum we have volunteers, interns who come from Austria and Germany every year who volunteer to work here instead of going to the German or Austrian army, so they choose to work with survivors and choose to work in an institution like this.

I don't have problems -- dealing and talking with Germans who were younger than me, but if someone is older than me, I treat it more sensitively, because I always wonder what were they doing? Was there a guard in place? Did they arrest place? It's harder. But I'm really impressed with Germany. They've done marvelous things as far as reconciliation.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you for that, Josie. We're going to close the program in just a moment. Thank you for your questions. Thank you for being with us. I remind you that we'll have a First Person program each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. I hope you can come back another time this year. If not, think about us for 2015 and the museum's website will have information not only the rest of the programs this year but again in 2015. It's our tradition at First Person, that our First Person has the last word. So I'm going to turn to Josie to close the program. When Josie is finished she'll step off the stage. If any want to come down and ask another question or just say "hi"

and give her a hug, you accept those.

>> Josie Traum: I need hugs.

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely, please feel free to do that. When Josie is done, I'm going to ask you all, if you don't mind, to stand and Joel our photographer is going to come up on the stage and get a portrait of Josie with you behind her. It really is a powerful photograph. So if you don't mind, when we're done if you would stand, that would be terrific. So Josie.

>> Josie Traum: Okay. Whenever I go to schools and speak to young people, students, I always read this, because to me it's so powerful and it's to answer your question really.

This is written by a Lutheran minister. He was very, at the beginning, very pro-Hitler, because Hitler promised marvelous things. Then what he saw what Hitler was doing, he became very much anti-Hitler and he was actually in prison. And he wrote...

"First I came for the socialists. I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists. I did not speak out, because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews. I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me. And there was no one left to speak for me. "

This to me is so powerful. You have to speak out for your fellow human being. If you see injustices or people mistreating other people, don't just be quiet and ignore it. You've got to say something. And in today's world, in schools I understand there's a lot of bullying. You have to speak out and help protect these people. It is so important. Just because you don't have the right name on your sneakers or your jacket doesn't mean you have to be treated differently. You have to speak out for your fellow human being.

Thank you.

[Applause]

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Stay on the carpet.

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

[Applause]

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

[Program concluded at 12:00 p.m. ET]