Thursday, April 4, 2013

1:00-2:00 p.m.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON: JOSIE TRAUM

Held at:
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW
Washington, DC

(Remote CART)

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>> Bill Benson: Good afternoon, 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 14th year of *First Person*. Our *First Person* today is Mrs. Josie Traum, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2013 season of *First Person* is made possible through the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, to whom we are grateful for again sponsoring *First Person*.

First Person is a series of conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each guest serves as a volunteer here at this museum.

We will continue our program through mid August. The museum's website, at www.ushmm.org, provides information about each of our upcoming *First Person* guests.

Josie Traum will share with us 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 the 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.

We begin with this portrait of Josiane Aizenberg walking on a street in Brussels. Josie was born March 21, 1939 in Brussels, Belgium, to Jacques and Fanny Aizenberg. The arrow points to Brussels.

The German army conquered Belgium in May of 1940. Shortly before the occupation, Josie's father left Belgium to join the British Army. In this photo, we see Josie with her parents in Brussels.

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

After six months of hiding in a convent and growing Nazi suspicion, the Belgian underground relocated Josie to hide with the Debrackelaers, a Christian family in Brussels. Here we see Josie with the Debrackelaers. Josie is in the front, on your right, right here. Behind her are the Debrackelaers. The couple to their left are friends of Josie's grandparents, who were neighbors of the Debrackelaers, and the little girl standing in front of the neighbors is the Debrackelaers' daughter. I think their son is standing right between the two girls in the front row.

Allied forces liberated Belgium in September 1944. Soon after, Josie was

found by one of her aunts, Fanny, her mother's sister. Here we see Josie, Jacques and Fanny after they were reunited in the United States.

Josie would eventually marry Freddie Traum, also a Holocaust survivor. We close our PowerPoint presentation with this wedding portrait of Josie and Freddie.

After moving to the United States with her parents in 1949, and then completing her schooling in Paterson, New Jersey, Josie went to Israel to study for a year. On the return trip, on a ship, she met Freddie Traum, the ship's chief radio officer. Upon her return to the US, Josie attended Montclair State Teachers' College for one year. Josie and Freddie were married on a ship a year after she met him, and she moved to Israel where they lived for five years. While in Israel, the Traums' son Michael and daughter Yael were born.

Upon the advice of medical experts in Israel, the Traums relocated to the United States in 1963 to obtain medical care for their disabled son, Michael. Their third child, Jonathan, who is also disabled, was born in the United States. Eventually, Freddie'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 in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Today, Josie and Freddie live in Silver Spring, Maryland. Josie's volunteer work at this museum includes leading tours of the permanent exhibition for law

enforcement, including police officers, the FBI, judges and others. 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. In February, she spoke to grades 1-8 at Legacy School in Carroll County, Maryland, which one of my sons attend. Next week, Josie and Freddie will speak at the Montgomery College next week as part of the college's commemoration of the Holocaust.

And, as part of the Holocaust Days of Remembrance next week, Josie will join others in reading aloud here in the museum the names of those killed during the Holocaust. Josie will read the names of 100 victims. Anyone can sign up to read names of survivors for five minutes, by going to the website, if you are here or available. Freddie is also with us today. If you wouldn't mind waving, so people know you're here.

With that, I would like to ask you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Mrs. Josie Traum.

[Applause]

Josie, thank you so much for joining us today. Just such a pleasure to have you with us. We have a very large crowd today. We should probably start. We have so much to cover in a short period.

Your parents, Fanny and Jacques Aizenberg, were married in early 1938, and you were born the following March 1939. Just months before Germany and Russia attacked Poland, launching World War II. Tell us about your parents and their life in Brussels prior to war beginning. What was their life like?

>> Josie Traum: OK. First of all, it's a pleasure to be here. I'm so glad there's a full audience. Thank you for coming in.

My parents led a pretty, I guess, newlyweds' life. Both my parents were in the textile and dressmaking and sewing industry. My mother had graduated from technical design art school, and she became a dressmaker and a pattern designer, and she actually worked for the royal family, which was a real big deal at that time.

My dad was a tailor. However, before he became a tailor, he used to be a violinist. Many, many years ago, I'm sure way, way before any of your times, there used to be movies that were silent. Because they were silent movies, they used to have a quartet, an orchestra playing music while the film was being shown. Once the talkies came, once the films became talking, like they are today, my dad lost his job. They didn't need musicians anymore in all of the movie houses. So he went to school, and actually learned to be a tailor.

So both my parents were involved in clothes making, and they were

married, and as newlyweds I was born about a year and a half later. So I think they were a young couple with just me coming around.

>> Bill Benson: Josie, do you know whether or not -- from what they said to you later, that they were married in 1938, later that year in November, of course, things became even more ominous in Nazi Germany with Kristallnacht, and you came along in March 1939. There were war clouds, September the war would begin. Do you think your parents were fearful about the future at that time, when you were born?

>> Josie Traum: I think they really were. At the time, there were rumors in Belgium that when the Germans would invade, it was said, they would leave the women and children alone, and only arrest the men. So therefore, there are always calls on the radio asking people to volunteer for the army.

My dad and his brother heard the calls from the British to come on over, cross the channel and join the British Army. So my dad and his brother, who were both tailors, actually took one of the last ships across the channel in 1940, and came to England to volunteer for the British Army.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to take you back for just a moment before we continue from there, Josie. As a result of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, in November 1938, didn't your parents take in for shelter a Jewish child, for a period?

>> Josie Traum: They did. Jews were running away from many of the eastern European countries, from Poland, Czechoslovakia, trying to find a safer place to be. So my mom -- actually, both my parents and grandparents took in people who would stay with them for a few days till they would find a safer place, perhaps crossing a border in another country. So there was always a lot of movement in our apartment.

>> Bill Benson: Before we come back to the war itself, I just have to ask you to explain how you got your name, Josiane.

>> Josie Traum: My real name is Josiane. It's named for a French singer. My mother adored that name. She thought it was marvelous. Here I was given that very special name. When I came to this country as a little girl, nobody could say Josiane. And so I became a Josie. So here I am, I come to you as Josie.

>> Bill Benson: The Germans, of course, attacked Belgium and France in May 1940. As you explained, with war looking like it was going to come to Belgium, your father responded to the call from the British to go to England to fight for them. As you say, he made it away from Dunkirk. Can you tell us more about Dunkirk?

>> Josie Traum: No, I can't.

>> Bill Benson: There were, I think, several ships --

>> Josie Traum: I see what you're saying. I'm sorry. Only a couple ships made it. Many were torpedoed by the Germans. My dad, being on the ship, made it across the channel, got to England.

>> Bill Benson: Did your mother know that?

>> Josie Traum: She did not.

>> Bill Benson: The last she saw, he was going off to England --

>> Josie Traum: Not knowing what would happen to him.

>> Bill Benson: With him gone, it's you and your mom. What happened then?

>> Josie Traum: My mom and I were living together, with my maternal grandparents, my mother's parents, and we lived very much together in an apartment, hiding. Pretty much in hiding. When the Germans came, you had to have an identity card identifying if you were a Jew. If you were a Jew, when you were walking on the street, a German would stop you and say, "Show me your identification card." Of course, if they saw you were Jewish, they might arrest you, deport you, or you really didn't know what was going to happen.

>> Bill Benson: What about your grandparents? Both sets of grandparents, I believe, were still alive at that time?

>> Josie Traum: My father's parents, my grandfather actually died before I was born. My grandmother from my father's side died once the war began, and it was not war-related. Both my paternal grandparents died. My maternal grandparents, we lived with them, pretty much in hiding together with them.

>> Bill Benson: Your maternal grandmother worked at a place for the homeless at that time?

>> Josie Traum: It was a society that took care of people to make sure they had food. It was like a Jewish kind of community, society. She would -- because of that, she would sometimes get a little bit of food for us. At that time, in Belgium, food was rationed. You only got certain rations once a week. You would pick up the food, and that's really all you would have.

>> Bill Benson: At one point, your grandfather was arrested, wasn't he?

>> Josie Traum: My grandfather was arrested, and he was taken to one of these gathering camps called Malin, or Mecaline. The Jews -- actually, the prisoners would be gathered until they had enough of them, then they would deport them by railroad cars to the concentration camps. So my grandfather was actually taken before my grandmother and mother.

>> Bill Benson: Now it's the three of you, your mother and grandmother.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: How did they make ends meet?

>> Josie Traum: My grandmother worked, not only for the Jewish community, but she also worked what we call hada kaddisha. When a Jewish person dies, you are taken care of; they make sure you have a proper burial, and they watch over you. So my grandmother was very involved, where the Jewish community,

people who were dying, she would get food from them. Really, we did with whatever little we could get.

>> Bill Benson: If I remember right, you were telling me that all healthcare was cut off?

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Here you are, a young child, the clinics and everything were closed to you just because you were Jewish.

>> Josie Traum: Exactly. All of those things were controlled by the Germans, and they were of course closed, so I was not able to go.

When you're a newborn, you go to a special clinic --

>> Bill Benson: Like a well baby clinic?

>> Josie Traum: A well baby clinic, a few times a month, to make sure you're gaining the right weight, getting the shots you need. All of that was closed. I was pretty much on my own with my mom and grandmother.

>> Bill Benson: As you were saying a few moments ago, Josie, you had identification cards, and you never knew what would happen. You describe to me one of your early memories, because you were so young, but you do have an early memory of an incident on a bus.

>> Josie Traum: I do. I remember sitting on a bus, it was before my third birthday. I was really still a little one. My mother and I were riding the bus, public transportation, and a German officer, Nazi, came on the bus, and what they

would do, they would go from row to row and ask for your identification card. You had to show it to them, of course.

I remember sitting next to my mom, who was very, very scared, and I didn't understand why, and I was only 3 years old, not even 3. Anyhow, the German came from row to row, asking for the ID cards. All the passengers on the tram actually would give him the card, and he would read it and give it back.

He got to the last row where my mom and I were sitting, and for some reason he turned around and left the tram, so he never came, he never actually asked my mom for identity cards, which is obviously pretty lucky. I think somebody must have been looking over.

>> Bill Benson: A stroke of luck.

>> Josie Traum: Just a stroke of luck. My mother was shaking. I really didn't understand why.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother got active in the resistance, the underground, which had to be just an extraordinarily brave thing to do.

>> Josie Traum: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what you know about that.

>> Josie Traum: OK. At that time, of course, I didn't understand what was going on.

>> Bill Benson: Right, right.

>> Josie Traum: My mother was hiding people in our apartment. We always had people there hiding till they found a better place to go. She would also deliver newsletters, leaflets for meetings for where the underground, or resistance against the Germans would be meeting. So she was busy with all of these things, and my understanding is she was very involved with that. Because of that, she wanted to make sure that I would be safe. She actually got in touch with the underground and made sure that somebody would pick me up and place me in hiding.

>> Bill Benson: That was one of the real motivators -- a real motivator was in 1942 the Nazis began earnest efforts deporting the Jews.

>> Josie Traum: Right. In 1942 the deportations began. They started gathering Jews, deporting them mainly to Auschwitz. My mother wanted to make sure I would be safe, so one day, 1942 I was 3 years old, and two strange ladies came to pick me up. They actually picked me up. My mother, by the way, was not allowed to know where they were taking me, because they knew when the Germans would come to deport you, to arrest you, they would beat you till you would tell them where the rest of the family was.

So my mother, these two strange ladies came to pick me up, and my mother was not allowed to know where they were taking me. They took me to a convent in Bruges, a beautiful little city near Belgium, near canals. It's really beautiful, lots of convents.

I was taken to a convent, very much like an orphanage. In those days, when people couldn't take care of their kids or didn't have enough food and the war was going on, people would put their kids in a convent, which was like an orphanage. When the parents could, were able to manage and take care of them, they would pick up the children.

So this convent was full of kids, and unbeknownst to me there were three other Jewish children there being hidden. So there were four Jewish kids hidden in this convent.

>> Bill Benson: Along with many other non-Jewish kids?

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Josie, has your mother had the opportunity to tell you what it was like for her to actually put you into hiding to an unknown place, not knowing when and if she would see you again? That was a huge decision for her to make.

>> Josie Traum: It was a huge decision. It must have been so difficult. I think to myself now, my grandchildren, I don't think I'd be able to just give them up and not know where they were going.

Obviously, my mother made the sacrifice in deciding to take a chance and have me be safe, and even though she didn't know where I was going. Indeed, she really didn't know. One important thing to remember in Belgium, in most of Europe, if you were hiding a Jew and the Germans would find you they would just shoot you. No questions asked. They would just shoot you.

So the nuns who hid me were really risking their lives. They were really taking a chance.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know anything about how your mother was able to make the arrangements for you to go, or just her connections in the underground?

>> Josie Traum: Just her connections in the underground. Indeed, they sent two ladies to pick me up. I left. I didn't see my mother again till the end of the war.

>> Bill Benson: Right. Right. You were in the convent, I think for about six months. What do you remember? Again, knowing how little you were. Do you recall anything of your life there?

>> Josie Traum: The nuns were very strict. But my understanding, it's not because -- they were very strict with me. They were strict with all of the kids, not just because I was Jewish. I have spoken to many people who have gone to Catholic school with nuns, they said, "oh, yeah."

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: They get it.

>> Josie Traum: They get it. They were really, really strict. But they saved my life. What can I say? One thing I do remember about the nuns, this shocked me more than anything else, we slept in big dorms, and the nuns in those days wore very stiff habits like you see in "The Sound of Music," very stiff, very tight around here. The nuns at night would take off their headgear to go to sleep. They would sleep with us in the rooms.

I was shocked, they were bald. That gave me the biggest shock. I think it's because it was so hot with the headgear, what they wore, they must have shaved their heads. I know that's what shocked me more than anything else. I had never seen a bald woman.

[Laughter]

I did that, it was pretty scary.

>> Bill Benson: You were saying they were strict, but not just in the sense of don't do this, don't do that. You told me about, not an incident, you were a finicky eater, I believe you said. How did they handle finicky-eating kids?

>> Josie Traum: I remember throwing up, and they would let me stay in bed in my throw-up, which is pretty horrible. They would also put me in a closet to punish me and say the devil would come and get me. But here again, it's not because I was a Jew. This is how they were with all of the kids. I happened to have been a very finicky eater. My mother used to play into it. I survived, though.

>> Bill Benson: You had to, of course, have a different name while you were there. Tell us about the name that you were given.

>> Josie Traum: Belgium has two languages, two different ethnic groups. They speak Flemish and French. So I was given a Flemish name. My first name was the same, Josiane, but instead of Aizenberg, a very Jewish German name, they

gave me the name of Van Berg, a very Dutch name, very Flemish name. So my name did change. They gave me a different name.

>> Bill Benson: You explained to me one time that, you told me what you thought was the most significant impact on you personally while you were in the convent. Do you remember talking about it? It was -- the impact was just the lack of nurturing. Will you say a little bit about that?

>> Josie Traum: This is where my tears come. I strongly, strongly believe, with all of the social work I've done and with the psychology and child development, and what I've really read, I really learned that the first three years in a child's development are the most important, as far as bonding with the caretaker, not necessarily a parent, but a person who takes care of the child, a caretaker that you learn to trust and you bond with.

I must say that my first three years were with my mother, and I bonded with her, and I really felt nurtured and loved. So I feel whatever happened afterwards, being in the convent, having a pretty difficult time, I really feel that I kind of basically relied on those first three years of bonding and nurturing with my mother, and I think they made me strong as a person, as a child.

>> Bill Benson: I know that's hard to talk about, so thank you for that. Josie, after about six months in the convent, the nuns made the decision to move you out of there. Will you tell us what you know about that?

>> Josie Traum: My understanding is that the nuns found out that the Germans were going to come and pick up the four Jewish children, the other three and me. So by night, the nuns smuggled me out of the convent and took me back to Brussels, which is where I was originally from. There, they placed me, they must have had connections with the underground, they placed me with a Christian family in Brussels. You saw the picture of the Debrackelaers. I was with them the remainder of the war. It was a mother, a father, and a little girl. And I pretty much stayed with them for the entire duration of the war.

>> Bill Benson: Almost two full years?

>> Josie Traum: Two full years. And the father, Mr. Debrackelaer, was involved with the resistance, in the underground movement. Very often, he would be taken out during the day and questioned and interrogated, but he never told them that I was there.

He used to actually work in the underground against the Germans, as a Christian, which many Christians did. So I was very, very lucky they kept me. They kept me safe, and they risked their lives. Because, here again, had the Germans known that they were hiding me, they would have been shot.

Also, as I mentioned before, food was rationed in Belgium, and because they were a family of three, mother, father and child, they would pick up food for a week in rations, and I was not listed there, because I was there illegally. So they actually got food for three people and shared it with me.

Mr. Debrackelaer, whenever he was interrogated, never told them that I was there, and actually I remained safe there for the entire duration of the war.

>> Bill Benson: What can you tell us, what do you remember, again knowing how young you were, what life was like living with them? I presume to neighbors you must have been a relative that came in.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: What life was like for you during that time.

>> Josie Traum: I kept very much to my -- well, not I, the family kept very much to themselves. We stayed indoors. I played with the little girl. And our life was very much limited. The family took a risk. They saved my life, which I'm forever grateful for.

>> Bill Benson: During that time do you remember what kind of setting? Did they live in the city, outside?

>> Josie Traum: They were in Brussels, a little outside the city, in Brussels. We were in a main floor, as you come in, it was the main floor. And there was a bedroom where we -- actually, the parents slept in one bedroom and the little girl and I slept in another bedroom. We played, and we were very much to ourselves.

>> Bill Benson: And do you know if neighbors knew you were there?

>> Josie Traum: I don't think so, because I don't remember seeing neighbors.

>> Bill Benson: You really were in the house?

>> Josie Traum: I was very much inside. I would be able to get out once in a while to my grandparents. You saw the picture, of the Debrackelaers with my grandparents' neighbors. So sometimes I would meet with them, and I would be with them, but aside from that, we really kept to ourselves.

>> Bill Benson: The war ended for Belgium, not elsewhere in Europe but for Belgium, in the fall, I believe, of 1944.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: You were liberated with the Debrackelaers and others. One of your aunts found you. Tell us what you know about that, and then what happened from there.

>> Josie Traum: My mom had two sisters, my two aunts, and they were also, by the way, during the war hidden through the underground. They were all hidden in churches. They actually remained in churches for the entire duration of the war.

>> Bill Benson: Actually in the church?

>> Josie Traum: In the church. They stayed there. One aunt had three boys and her husband, and they all stayed in the church, and all survived, all remained alive.

What I forgot to mention before, by the way, my mother, very soon after I was taken away to the convent, my mother was deported to Auschwitz. She and her mother were deported. My grandfather had already been deported to Auschwitz. So my grandparents did not survive. However, my mother did. And

what I do want to mention, my two aunts really were saved through the underground, through churches. Because there was a whole network in the underground, my aunt knew where to find me. There was like a network you could find people who were also hidden.

So my aunt found me, and very soon after that when she found me she brought me to her house. And I stayed there till my mother eventually came back.

>> Bill Benson: Which would be later, in 1945. You were with your Aunt Theresa quite a while.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember any of that time?

>> Josie Traum: They treated me like their pet. She had three sons. They were all older than me. She treated me like a little mascot.

[Laughter]

They spoiled me rotten. They were wonderful to me. They were really terrific. My mother had been deported to Auschwitz, and she survived.

>> Bill Benson: Before we turn to that, if that's OK, tell us a little bit about your aunt's husband, your uncle.

>> Josie Traum: Yes. His name was Maurice. He was a very quiet, shy, meek man. And after the war, we found out he got special honors for killing Germans. He apparently was part of the underground, and none of us could believe it. I

was a little girl, I didn't understand very much, but my mom and her two sisters could not believe that Maurice was able to do this.

He actually went in the underground and attacked Germans and helped Jews as much as he could, and he got a special award, which was amazing to me.

>> Bill Benson: What about your other aunt?

>> Josie Traum: My other aunt was younger. There were three sisters, my mom, her younger sister, each is five years apart. My younger aunt was quite a bit younger. She worked. She was also in a church. She worked -- also, when the Americans came, she started working actually with the Americans.

>> Bill Benson: War would continue in Europe until May of 1945, so a lot longer.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know if there was fear the Germans might come back, or did everybody at that point, do you think they felt really free and liberated?

>> Josie Traum: I think Belgium felt liberated. The Americans and the allies had liberated Belgium, and I think we felt cautious, but very safe. I felt safe, certainly, as a child. I was with my two aunts. I felt safe with my three cousins. So I felt very safe being with them.

>> Bill Benson: Was that a period of hardship, because they were trying to resume their lives, and food?

>> Josie Traum: Of course. They had a store, and their apartment was behind the store, and it was very hard starting to work again, opening your business, getting enough money for food and everything else. So life was difficult. Yet, my aunt took me in. I was just part of the family.

>> Bill Benson: It must have seemed like a miracle that your mother was able to survive and return in April of 1945, after she was liberated.

>> Josie Traum: Absolutely. You know, my mother and her mother were deported at the same time. They were arrested.

>> Bill Benson: Somebody denounced them, didn't they?

>> Josie Traum: We talk about wonderful people in Belgium, the churches, the nuns. There were so many wonderful people. But there were many people who denounced Jews, who would get money for telling the Germans where the Jews lived.

So I was saved, really, by many, many people. However, neighbors denounced my mom, said where she lived, and they found her, and they arrested her and deported her, her and my grandmother.

So my mother was taken to Auschwitz. My grandfather, by the way, died before he got to Auschwitz. He died on one of the cattle cars, on the way to Auschwitz.

My mother and grandmother, as soon as they got to Auschwitz, they had a selection where they put people who were healthier and younger in one line and

people who were a little bit elderly, like my grandmother, who must have been in her late 40s.

Most concentration camps, you got there, they killed you. Auschwitz had a subcamp, which was a labor camp. It was called Birkenau. So they actually would put people who were younger, more healthy looking, onto the labor camp. So my mother and her mother were separated immediately, as soon as they got to Auschwitz. And my mother went to run to be with her mother, and the German really hit her hard and said, "You go where you're told." She actually never saw her mother again.

So, luckily, my mother survived, and my grandparents did not.

>> Bill Benson: What was it like for you to have your mother come back?

>> Josie Traum: Well, first of all, my mother was very, very sick when she was liberated. She was liberated by the Russians. Different concentration camps were liberated by different armies. Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviets, by the Soviet Union. So when she was liberated, she was taken to a hospital by the Russians. She was pretty sick. She had typhus and meningitis, and eventually the Red Cross brought her back down to Belgium. And she got back to Belgium, the first place she went was her sister's house. She knocked on the door, and there I was. So we were reunited.

>> Bill Benson: Up until that point, she probably had no idea you were there, none whatsoever.

>> Josie Traum: No. She had no idea. And I didn't know about her.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother's experience was just beyond description what she went through. She was very ill when she came back. At what point was she able to begin to really take care of you?

>> Josie Traum: Well, I think probably very soon, even though she was sick, she really did take care of me. My dad didn't come back from England until 1946, a year after the war. Where he was living in England, a bomb fell on his house and he was in a hospital for two years. So he really couldn't come back until he was healed. He did come back in 1946, and of course, I didn't remember him because I was 13 months old when he left. I was 7 years old when he came back. So it was really like meeting up with a stranger. For my mom, too, I think. They, all three of us, had very different experiences, and I think it took a while, a long, long while to become used to each other again.

>> Bill Benson: Your father came back in 1946, so better part of a year after your mom got back. What was -- do you know what life was like for her to re-establish her own life, without your father for that year period, and with you? What was that time like?

>> Josie Traum: Well, first of all, I started going to school. I was too young, I couldn't go to school anyhow during the war. I started going to school, and I had some kind of regularity and schedule to my life.

My mom, I think, tried to establish herself. We had a store. The

apartment house we lived in had a store on the bottom floor. My dad used to have a shop there, which he opened again when he came back. My mother started working a little bit with dressmaking, and I think she relied a lot on her sister.

Eventually, our life became somewhat normal. Once my dad came back, my parents both felt they really wanted to leave Europe, and they wanted to come to the United States. So they applied for visas and papers, and in 1949 we actually -- I was 10 years old, in 1949 we came to this country.

>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about that more, I'm going to take you back a little bit. You remember actually waiting for your father when he disembarked. Tell us about that, because that's one of your real memories. But also a little bit about what happened to him, up until the time he came back. I'm not sure what point your mother knew he was alive. What happened during his time?

>> Josie Traum: During his time, first of all, I think I mentioned the British when he came to volunteer in England, he volunteered in a factory making British uniforms, he and his brother were making British uniforms. Once he was injured --

>> Bill Benson: From the bomb that fell on the house?

>> Josie Traum: When the bomb fell on his house, we pretty much lost contact. He had been writing to my mother at the end of the war.

>> Bill Benson: After the end of the war, OK.

>> Josie Traum: 1945, he was writing to my mother. But prior to that, we really, there was no contact whatsoever. My mother didn't know if he was alive, and he didn't know if we were alive. So it was purely by stroke of great luck that we were reunited.

My father came back. There's a port, Astand in Belgium, where the ships come in, it's a port city. My dad came back from England, and my mom and I went to wait for him at the port. We saw him coming down the gangplank, and my mother of course knew immediately who he was. She said, "There's your father." Of course, to me he was a total stranger. I was 7 years old. This was a man I don't remember, because he left when I was so young. That's how I first met him.

>> Bill Benson: You would live together as a family for three years before you came to the United States. What was that period like?

>> Josie Traum: I think it was very difficult. It was a lot of readjustment and adjustment for all of us. My mother had gone through hell, really, and so had my father, in a different way. My mother had lost her parents, she had lost much of her family, and it was very, very hard. It was a hard adjustment.

I remember -- I remember my mother having nightmares and crying and screaming during the night. So it was very, very hard for my parents to become readjusted to each other, not just to each other but then to me. It was like, in a way, three people with totally different experiences

>> Bill Benson: Josie's mother, Fanny, has also been with us at *First Person* program, and she described you tying your -- I know that's hard.

>> Josie Traum: Bill, he knows how to get me. My mother tells me, because there's so many things I don't remember. I mean, I was 6 years old when I saw her again. My mother tells me that when I first became reunited with her, and before going to sleep at night, I would tie my nightgown to hers, because I was so afraid to lose her. She tells me that. I don't remember it.

>> Bill Benson: She said she tells it with a just profound emotion.

>> Josie Traum: I know.

>> Bill Benson: 1949, you make another huge change. You come to the United States. Tell us about that.

>> Josie Traum: We moved to New Jersey, because my mom had an aunt who lived in Paterson, New Jersey. One usually gravitates where you have a relative. We lived with my mother's aunt about a month, till my parents found an apartment. They both found jobs. And we were pretty much on our own.

My parents were really working very, very quickly once we did come to the United States. But adjustment was very hard.

They put me -- I was 10 years old. They put me in the first grade, because they thought if I don't speak English, you know, first grade is fine.

[Laughter]

So I was in the first grade --

>> Bill Benson: You're 10 years old?

>> Josie Traum: 10 years old. I was never very tall, so I never towered over the kids. I was in first grade about two weeks, then in second grade another week, then in the third grade. I finally caught up.

>> Bill Benson: They were convinced you could actually go on grade, yes.

>> Josie Traum: Yes. Then I spoke English. It's interesting, when you're a kid, you really pick up the language very quickly. My parents were very emphatic. At home we would speak French, but when I came home from school I would speak English to them, because they really wanted me to. As soon as we got to this country, to New Jersey, they registered in high school because they wanted to learn English, they wanted to learn history, they wanted to become Americans. So I spoke English to them when I came home.

By the way, Bill did not mention, my mother is still alive. She's 96. Which is incredible.

>> Bill Benson: And she's tiny and frail, but when she starts to talk, it is so powerful.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Absolutely. Soon after you arrived, you were beaten up by a gang of girls.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what the principal used as the explanation for why these girls beat you up. This little French-speaking girl in the school.

>> Josie Traum: Right. Who knew no English. When I got out of school, there was a whole gang of girls waiting for me. I didn't know why. And I felt they were maybe waiting to play with me.

[Laughter]

But they weren't. They really beat me up. I came home, of course, I was crying. My mother went to school the next day, in her broken English, whatever she could speak, and wanted to know why, what had happened. The principal said it's because these girls thought that I was German.

Now, I can't imagine these kids knowing or thinking, even, I might be German, but that's the excuse that they gave. Maybe because I didn't speak English, I looked different, but I got quite a beating. It never happened again. I learned how to run.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Did your aunts stay behind in Belgium or did they also move?

>> Josie Traum: The older aunt, the one five years older than my mom, with her three sons, remained in Belgium for a number of years, then they all moved to Israel. My younger aunt, five years younger than my mom, eventually came to the United States and lived in New York. They both have died, but not war related at all.

>> Bill Benson: You had some remaining extended family that came to the United States as a result of that?

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: How many family members did you lose?

>> Josie Traum: Well, my grandmother, her sisters, my grandfather, his family. Probably, at least, 10 people.

>> Bill Benson: On a different note, tell us about meeting Freddie, if you don't mind.

>> Josie Traum: Freddie.

[Laughter]

I went to study in Israel for a year, and on the way back, on the ship -- in those days, in those days, this was in the 1950s, I went to study in 1956-57, for a year, and getting on the ship I met Freddie, who was the chief radio officer on the passenger liner.

In those days, you didn't travel by plane. They had planes but it was probably very, very expensive. I traveled by boat. It took 14 days from Israel to get to New York. 14 days to meet him.

[Laughter]

So that took me a long time to get to know him. So anyhow, I met Freddie, and we were married a year later.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to have Freddie as a *First Person* in June. So if any of you happen to be back in Washington or live locally, there's another, a whole other part of the Aizenberg-Traum family to hear from.

Josie, we have time to turn to our audience for questions. If you're game, I'd like to do that.

>> Josie Traum: Absolutely. I'd love that.

>> Bill Benson: We have folks helping us with microphones. If you have a question, please wait till you get the microphone in your hand, then make the question as brief as you can, and if necessary I might repeat some of them to make sure we all hear it, even though you have a mic in your hand. Then Josie will respond. I have many I can ask, if I don't have volunteers. Right in the front row. Right here, Paul.

>> Hi, Josie.

>> Josie Traum: Hi.

>> Thank you for taking the time to do this. My question is, how did the Germans know that you were in the convent? Did they have some kind of connections? Because, you said they knew, they were coming for the four children. How did they know you were there?

>> Bill Benson: In case the folks in the back didn't hear, the question is when Josie was in the convent and the nuns had information that it was going to be raided, how did they know that?

>> Josie Traum: First, the Germans were very organized. All the Jews in Belgium and in most European countries were actually registered in the synagogues, in the Jewish community centers. The Germans really knew where most of the Jews lived.

They also had a lot of inside information. They knew that convents and nuns and Christian people were hiding Jews. So whether they had people working with them, people denouncing for money, for whatever reasons, but they knew there were Jewish kids being hidden in the convent.

>> Bill Benson: Periodically, probably had raids and must have known that one was going to eventually come no matter what.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: OK. Thank you very much. We have a question back there. Do we have one right here? Yes, right there. Young man.

>> I was going to say, who or what kept you going through the Holocaust?

>> Josie Traum: Excuse me?

>> Who or what kept you going through all of this? It must have been pretty hard.

>> Bill Benson: How did she get through it all?

>> Yes.

>> Josie Traum: As a child, you don't question many things. I was used to things the way they were. I didn't know life in any other way. I knew I was in

hiding. Didn't know what it was like not to be in hiding. So as a child, you don't question those things as much as you do an adult.

I think you'd get a different answer if you asked my mom what kept her going and what kept the adults going.

>> Bill Benson: One of the things I recall you saying to me the first time I talked to you about this, Josie, you said when the war ended, there you were with your aunt, your words were "I was just a child who really needed to be held." Yeah. OK.

We have right back there. No, back here, then to you with the mic. OK.

>> Can you hear me? Josie, you mentioned that your mother was deported to Auschwitz.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> From there, she went to a subcamp for labor, Birkenau.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> What type of labor did she do there?

>> Josie Traum: Actually, she went daily to Birkenau. They would take the prisoners daily, then back to Auschwitz. She was working in an ammunition factory. She was filling grenades and bombs.

>> Bill Benson: Exceptionally, exceptionally brutal circumstances. She tells me that her eyebrows and eyelashes burned off and would turn yellow because of the chemicals. It was pretty hard.

>> Bill Benson: OK. A question right here. A mic coming to you.

>> Josie, thank you so much. I'd like to ask you a question that I've asked some other survivors, and that is maybe for you and for your other family members, could you tell me maybe would you say that with your experiences and your mother's experiences, has this all been a God-affirming experience for you or a God-denying experience for you?

>> Bill Benson: The question, if you didn't hear in the back, is really the impact from a religious perspective for you, if I can put it that way.

>> Yes.

>> Josie Traum: That's a very hard question. Right now, I'm an observant person and I believe in God. There are too many good things and wonderful things that are happening in this world to make me feel that there is a God. Many people, after the Holocaust, had a very difficult time believing in God. You know, how could this have all happened if there was a God?

I don't know. I feel that I do believe in God, and I am observant, to some extent, traditionally as a Jew. And I think it's made me a strong person.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you. Thank you. We have one right in the middle here, then one over there. Let's do the middle right here. The mic is coming from your other side. There you go. Thanks, Kristin.

>> Hi, Josie. I was wondering, when did your mom start talking to you about her

experiences in Auschwitz? What was it like for you, when you first heard it, what your mom went through in Auschwitz?

>> Bill Benson: Did you hear that OK?

>> Josie Traum: I did. Actually, she did not start speaking to me for many, many years after that. As I mentioned before, I remember during the night her having nightmares, and running through the apartment screaming and crying, and I didn't quite understand many of the things she was going through. As a child, I couldn't understand, because I myself was having a difficult time readjusting to life and to everything else.

I know she tried to speak to some relatives, and they didn't want to hear her. They would actually say, "We don't want to hear about that. That was in the past, and that's bad. Things are different now."

So my mom actually didn't talk for a long, long time, for many years. In fact, I think she only really started talking about her history in the -- when she was 90 years old. Here, I would think, I think it's because of the museum. It gave her a place that she could actually talk and feel comfortable about talking. But I, she didn't -- what I did, I did a lot of reading when I was very young, and I read as much as I could, from different experiences from Eli Wiesel, from different people that have gone through the Holocaust, and I kind of surmised what she had gone through. Little by little she tells us.

>> Bill Benson: Over here, this gentleman.

>> Thank you. Your story is heart-rending. It's wonderful. Thank you for sharing your story.

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

>> My question is, we hear much about the scars of the children and grandchildren of the Holocaust survivors. In your years of social work, I wonder if you might tell us a little more about what the scars are, and how serious are they for the children and grandchildren of the survivors?

>> Bill Benson: Does that -- OK.

>> Josie Traum: Yeah. That's a very, very big question. First of all, let me tell you, I can tell you about my experience or how I feel. I am not only a child of a survivor, but I'm a survivor myself. So I have like a double whammy. And because of that, I think I've been very, very overprotective with my children.

I am so worried that something might happen, even though they might be very, very safe. But I think children do have a lot of scars. I've heard children say, who are now adults, whose parents made them be safe and let them go away, or made them go away, and those children are angry because they were given away, not realizing that the parents, how hard it was for the parents to give up the children for them to be safe.

So there are scars, I think, that are brought from generation to generation. There really are.

You know, you're afraid. I, growing up as a child, was a very good little girl. I was afraid to get my parents angry, because I felt that they had suffered so much. How could I do anything to hurt them? So it works in many, many different ways.

And then, of course, I went into social work, and I worked with abused and neglected children. I wonder why.

[Laughter]

So there's an impact.

>> Bill Benson: Your daughter is a psychologist, right?

>> Josie Traum: A psychiatrist.

>> Bill Benson: Psychiatrist. Excuse me, she's a psychiatrist.

>> Josie Traum: Yes, she is.

>> Bill Benson: I think you told me one time she said, "You've given me a whole lot to --"

>> Josie Traum: Yes, "Given me a lot of material, mom."

>> Bill Benson: I can imagine you were an extraordinary social worker with abused children.

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: Very lucky kids to have you work with them, I'm sure.

>> Josie Traum: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: We're going to close in a moment. I'll turn back to Josie to close. I want to thank all of you for being here. I remind you that we'll have a *First Person* program each Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August, and welcome you back at any time. So please join us again if you can.

When Josie is finished, she's going to step down from the stage. If anybody wants to come, say hi, meet her, get a photograph taken with her, please do that.

So with that, it's our tradition at *First Person* that our first person has the last word. So with that, I'm going to turn back to Josie to close today's program.

>> Josie Traum: OK. Bill, you know what my last word is? This is always my favorite. On the second floor, I don't know if any of you have been through the museum yet, but on the second floor, as you leave the second floor, there's a big quote on the wall, which I think is so meaningful and really explains what the museum is about and what your future generations need to be doing. It's a quote by Martin Niemoller, a Lutheran minister, and it says, "First they 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."

And this, to me, embodies what our task and our duty is. You need to

speak out for people if you see injustice or people treating other people badly because they look different, they're a different color, they're wearing the wrong sneakers, or whatever.

Please speak up and intervene. Do something. I'm here today because people intervened.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

[Applause]

[Ended at 12:57 p.m.]