UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
FIRST PERSON 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. We are in our 17th season of the *First Person* program. Our First Person today is Mrs. Josie Traum, whom we shall meet shortly.

This 2016 season of *First Person* is made possible by the generosity of the Louis Franklin Smith Foundation, with additional funding from the Arlene and Daniel Fisher Foundation. We are grateful for their sponsorship.

First Person is a series of 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 twice-weekly through Mid-August. The museum's website, 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 your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater. 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 with us her "First Person" account of her experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If we have time, we will have an opportunity for you to ask Josie 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 photograph of Josianne Aizenberg walking on a street in Brussels.

Josie was born March 21, 1939, in Brussels, 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. 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 Brugges, Belgium. Here we see Josie and Fanny, shortly before Josie went into hiding. Soon thereafter, Fanny, who worked with the Belgian Underground, the resistance, was denounced and she was deported to Auschwitz.

After six months of hiding in the convent and growing Nazi suspicion, the Belgian Underground relocated Josie to hide with the Debrackalaer family, a Christian family in Brussels. Here

we see Josie with the Debrackalaers. Mr. and Mrs. Debrackalaer are on the right. To their left are neighbors of Josie's grandparents. Their grandson is in the front in the middle with Josie to the right. The Debrackalaer's daughter is on the left.

Allied Forces liberated Belgium in September 1944. Soon after, Josie was found by one of her aunts, who was one of Fanny's sisters. Here we see Josie, Jacques, and Fanny after they were reunited in Belgium.

Josie would eventually marry Freddie Traum, also a Holocaust survivor. We close 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 Patterson, 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, who was also a Holocaust survivor. Upon her return to the U.S., Josie attended Montclair State Teachers' College for one year. Josie and Freddie were married on his ship a year after she met him and she moved to Israel where they lived for five years. While in Israel, the Traum's son Michael and daughter Yael were born.

Upon the advice of medical experts in Israel, the Traums re-located to the United States in 1963 to obtain medical care for their disabled son, Michael. Their third child, Jonathan, who also is disabled, was born in the U.S. 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 2007 from her work as a clinical social worker for abused children for 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. Josie speaks publicly about her experience as a Holocaust survivor in various settings, especially local synagogues and schools in Maryland and Virginia. March Josie and two fellow Holocaust Survivors joined me at the American Society on Aging's annual conference to speak about resiliency and aging.

I'm pleased to let you know that Freddie is here with Josie today.

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

>> [Applause]

>> Bill Benson: Josie, thank you so much for joining us today and being willing to be our First Person. You have a great deal to tell us in a very short period of time so we will get started.

>> Josie Traum: Ok.

>> Bill Benson: Your parents, Fanny and Jacques, were married in early 1938, and you were born in March 1939, just months before Germany and Russia attacked Poland, launching World War II. Tell us about your parents and their life in Brussels, Belgium, in that pre-wartime.

>> Josie Traum: Well, they both came from pretty traditional families, Jewish families. They got married. They were happy. They both had professions. My dad was a tailor and my mom was a designer, dress designer. And she was actually -- before she married, she was a designer for the Belgium royal family, clothes --

>> Bill Benson: A huge honor.

>> Josie Traum: It was a huge honor. My mom went to a school where they taught you textile and designing. And when you graduate, the graduating class, the royal family would come and ask a few of the students to come and work for the royal household. So she did work for them, which was a big deal at that time.

So my parents were married. They were relatively happy. Things were relatively quiet in Belgium.

>> Bill Benson: You mentioned your father was a tailor. Tell us his first occupation.

>> Josie Traum: [Laughter] My dad was actual -- is -- was a violinist. Believe it or not, many years ago, in his time, the movies were silent. They were not talkies. So they usually, because there was nobody talking, usually had a musical quartet accompanying the movie that was showing. So my dad would play the violin, along with three other musicians. He had pretty steady work because whenever there

was a movie, he would be hired and play. However, the talkies came. The movies started having talkies, people talked and they didn't need these musicians anymore. So all of these musicians were fired. So my dad actually went to school to welcome -- to learn to become a tailor. That's how he really worked as a tailor.
>> Bill Benson: Hitler and the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933. Your parents married in 1938. Nazi power in Germany and Austria took a more ominous turn in late 1938 with Kristallnacht or the Night of Broken Glass, and you were born just a few months later in March 1939, just before World War II broke out. Do you know if your parents, when they were having you, before your birth, do you know -- and then after your birth -- do you know if your parents ever expressed later to you how fearful they were about the future or life given all that was happening so close by?
>> Josie Traum: I'm sure they were. I think it was a very precarious time for anyone not knowing what was going to happen. My parents, of course, heard about Kristallnacht, which happened in 1938 when all the Jewish property and synagogues were burned. So I think there was a lot of worry at the time. And my parents used to listen to the radio and they would get a lot of radio messages from the BBC or from England asking people, men, to come and volunteer to be in the British Army. So I think my parents had talked about my dad perhaps going to the British Army.
>> Bill Benson: After Kristallnacht, I think your parents took a Jewish child in to live with you for a period of time. Is that right?
>> Josie Traum: They did. And even afterwards, until things really got very bad in Belgium, The Germans were actually occupiers -- things were much worse for Jews in different countries like Poland and Romania. There were Jews trying to flee those countries. So my mother -- this is after my dad left. My mother would have people -- she was really part of the underground. What she would do, she would get people, Jews, that were trying to flee from Belgium and they would sleep over at our house until they would find another safe place where they could be for a little while. Maybe going to Switzerland, Portugal or Spain. But we often would have Jews who were fleeing other countries coming to live or to be or sleep in our place.
>> Bill Benson: Have a safe refuge for some period of time.
>> Josie Traum: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Josie, of course, World War II began with the German attack on Poland in September 1939. But the war came to Brussels in Belgium in May 1940 when the Germans attacked. Called the low countries, Belgium, The Netherlands and France. Your father left to join the British Army. What do you know about his leaving and what happened to him at that point? And now it's just you and your mom. What happened then?
>> Josie Traum: Right. Actually, Germany invaded four countries in one day, May 10, 1940, they invaded Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France. And those countries fell pretty much immediately. And the Germans took over.

My parents had heard calls from the British asking people to volunteer and join the British Army. And my dad actually decided he and his brother -- his brother was also a tailor. So he and his brother, my uncle, decided to go to Britain and to join the British Army. However, during that time in the 1940s -- in 1940, the Germans were bombing the English channel and really were bombing boats that were trying to get to England. So my dad actually went on one of the last boats that left to cross the English Channel to get into England. So actually my dad and his brother both got to England in 1940. At that time, actually, because of all the bombing and the war starting, my mom had no idea if my dad ever got there to England. There was -- you couldn't communicate because of the war. So my mom actually never knew if my dad ever made it.
>> Bill Benson: And later we'll come back to what you would find out much later.

You and your mother would remain in Brussels, living in an occupied city, in an occupied country, under Nazi occupation, until 1942 when your mother made a profound decision to put you into hiding. Tell us what you can about the events leading up to that, what your mother's and your circumstances were like that eventually got her to the place where she said I've got to hide my child.

>> Josie Traum: Sure. Obviously things got very, very bad in Belgium. The Germans were really all over. People had to carry identification cards. Jews had to wear stars. Things really became very difficult and very hard. Once my dad left, I was with my mom. We were living in an attic apartment with my maternal grandparents, my mom's parents. We were actually pretty much to ourselves and living there. And, of course, as I mentioned before, we had some people coming and staying over for a few days until they went some else.
>> Bill Benson: You had great grandparents as well at that time. Didn't you?
>> Josie Traum: No. Just grandparents.
>> Bill Benson: Ok.
>> Josie Traum: My father's parents died actually just before the war. So we were with my mom's parents. I was with my mom's parents. And things really got pretty difficult. My mom decided, which I, now being a grandmother, realize how hard it must have been for her to decide to let me go. Not only did she decide to let me go but when you're having your child hidden, you really -- the parent, my mother, was not allowed to know where I was going because they knew when the Germans would come say to your apartment, to where you were living, they would actually torture you to find out where the rest of your family was, you know, where your children, where is your husband. So it was decided by the underground that parents were not allowed to know and were not told where their children were going. So my mother had the connection because she was part of the underground, hiding people. She had connections and was able to get people to come and pick me up, which is what they did in 1942 when I was 3 years old.
>> Bill Benson: Before we continue on about that I wanted to ask you about a couple of other things. Among the many, many, many restriction and harsh edicts issued by the Nazis directed at Jews, one of them is that you could not use the health services that were available.
>> Josie Traum: Right.
>> Bill Benson: So Belgium had a series of health clinics for mothers and young infants. So what did that mean to you?
>> Josie Traum: I wasn't able to get any care. You know, especially from a newborn till 3 years old, you're going to your clinic, pediatrician, getting your shots and everything else that you need. So, of course, me, myself and any of the other children, were not allowed to receive any kind of medical help or treatment.
>> Bill Benson: And before you went into hiding, because you were so young, you said that you had just some fleeting memories. You've told me about one of being I think on a bus with your mother?
>> Josie Traum: Yeah. As I mentioned before, once the Germans occupied, we had to have identification cards. And in the identification cards, it actually -- if you were a Jew, there was a large J and also the word “Jude,” which means Jew in French. Everybody had to have an identification card. If you were walking in the street or going anywhere, the German could stop you and ask for your ID card. And when they took your card and if they did see you were Jewish, they could arrest you, deport you, whatever they wanted to do.

One day my mom and I were on a tram in Belgium. They didn't have buses in those days. There were trams that were electric. My mom and I sat in the tram. We were in the last row sitting in the tram and a German came, a Nazi came, on the tram and went row by row asking for your identity card. So my mother was shaking. She was pretty scared. And, of course, I didn't know why. I was just 3 years old. And the German went from row to row asking for the ID card. When he got to the last row where my mom and I were sitting, he just turned around and got off the tram. I don't know why but somebody must have been looking out for me.
>> Bill Benson: And as you said, your mom then made the decision to put you into hiding. She had the connections to do that. And as you also said, as a mother and a grandmother, trying to imagine --
>> Josie Traum: I can't.
>> Bill Benson: Has your mother -- did she ever tell you what it was like for her when she made that decision to put you into hiding, knowing -- not knowing where she would ever -- whether she would ever see you again?

>> Josie Traum: She didn't tell me at the time.
>> Bill Benson: Of course not.
>> Josie Traum: Of course. But she did later on. It must have been tremendously hard. I don't know how she did it but she did, thank goodness. Because I'm here today because of that.
>> Bill Benson: And the underground then took you and found a hiding place for you in a convent.
>> Josie Traum: Two women came to pick me up. All I know is I was screaming and crying because I didn't want to leave my mom and my grandma. These two strange ladies took me to a convent in a place called Brugges -- which is beautiful, full of canals. They call it the Venice of Belgium. Full of convents. They took me to this convent which was more like an orphanage.

In those days, wartime, there was no -- food was rationed. People had a very difficult time feeding their kids. So what they would do is they would put their child in an orphanage until, perhaps, things got better and threaten they would pick them up. At least they would be safe.

So this orphanage or convent was full of children. And unbeknownst to me, I found this out after the war, there were three other Jewish children there. So all the children were Christian except for the four Jewish children. And this was run by nuns.

The nuns, in those days, you know, nuns didn't dress -- today nuns dress like we do, in everyday clothing. In those days they were very stiff habits. I'm sure most of you have seen "The Sound of Music." Well, the nuns were dressed just like the nuns in "The Sound of Music," very stiff, very kind of tight.

And these nuns were very, very strict. Not because I was Jewish. They were strict to all the kids. But, you know, they were risking their lives by taking me in. If a German found any person hiding a Jew, they would just shoot them on the spot, no questions asked. They would just shoot you. So these nuns, they were strict but they saved my life. And these same nuns found out that the Germans were going to come and pick up the four Jewish children who were there. I don't know what they would have done with the children but the nuns -- actually, when they found out, they smuggled the four of us out, back to Brussels, which is actually where I was from. They smuggled us out to Brussels and placed me with a Christian family. I think you saw the slide show, the Debrackalaers. I was with them the entire duration of the war, until Belgium was liberated.
>> Bill Benson: Before you tell us about your life with the Debrackalaers, you stayed in the convent for about a year. You were there for quite a while.
>> Josie Traum: I was there for, yes, a bit under a year.
>> Bill Benson: During that time I think you had -- your name was changed.
>> Josie Traum: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: What was it changed to and why -- there was some significance about that.
>> Josie Traum: Well, first of all, my maiden name, the name I was born with, Aizenberg, although it's a German name, it was a Jewish name. So my name, my identity, was changed to a more German or Dutch-sounding name which was Von Berg. So I was still Josianne, my first name, but it was Von Berg, which had a totally different connotation. So, yes, my name was changed.
>> Bill Benson: So while you're there for one full year, conditions, they are strict, as you said, food is rationed. These are harsh conditions.
>> Josie Traum: Yeah.
>> Bill Benson: Trying to take care of you. They believe they are about to be found out and they have you moved out. So you go to live with the Debrackalaers. You would spend, as you said, the duration of the war with them. Tell us about the Debrackalaer family because they, too, presumably, were risking their lives as well.
>> Josie Traum: Of course. The man, Mr. Debrackalaer, actually was part of the underground also. I don't know what he was doing but he obviously was doing all kinds of things to upset the German plans or to thwart them. And very often he would be taken out for interrogation. I remember him coming back in the morning black and blue because they would beat him. But he never told on me.

They risked their lives. Food was also rationed, so they got food -- you would go to a place to pick up food once a week. And there were three people in that family. I was there illegally, so I was not

listed so they would get food for three people for a week and they would share that with me. So they really risked their lives and kept me alive.
>> Bill Benson: Do you have any insight or sense of how they explained your presence to anybody else that might know that you were in their house?
>> Josie Traum: I really -- I didn't go out very much. I wasn't aware of any neighbors around. I really was not. We stayed in the house pretty much. I played with the little girl. We were very, very much to ourselves.
>> Bill Benson: She was approximately your age.
>> Josie Traum: She was my age, yes.
>> Bill Benson: But you were kept indoors during that time.
>> Josie Traum: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about what -- as you recall, you're in their house, living there with them for quite a period of time. What was the impact on you, as best you can tell?
>> Josie Traum: They saved my life. They risked their lives. Whatever they did for me was wonderful but I really never felt part of the family unit. And maybe that's my own perception. But I used to remember them hugging, the three of them, and I wasn't -- I'm sorry.
>> Bill Benson: I think everybody thinks that's perfectly understandable, Josie.

You had told me, too, that when you were in the convent, even there your needs were being met, they were taking care of you, but they were very strict but not in the least bit demonstrative.
>> Josie Traum: No.
>> Bill Benson: So quite a period of your formative years it was absent affection and things like that. But why I'm bringing it up is you told me before that you had had that -- you knew you had had that so much from your mother and your grandparents, that foundation. Can you say a little bit about that?
>> Josie Traum: Sure. I feel it's crucial for a child for the first three years of life to have a strong bond with a caretaker, not necessarily a parent but someone who takes care of the child and the child knows that there's always someone there. And I feel I really had that with my mom and with my grandmother. It was a lot of affection, hugging, kissing, nurturing. So after that, when I didn't have that, I missed it terribly.

The nuns, you know, they treated all the children the same way. They weren't used to a little one, hugging them, holding them. So I think I really, really missed that very, very much. But I think part of my strength came from the fact that I had it for the first three years of life. I had a very strong bond with my mom and with my grandmother. But that also made it hard being with the Debrackalaers because they were a unit and I wasn't really part of it.
>> Bill Benson: And you would remain, of course, living with the Debrackalaers until the war ended in Belgium in 1944. When it ended, your Aunt Theresa, one of your mother's sisters, was able to find you and bring you to her home. Do you know how that happened and what that time was like for you? The war is over in Belgium but the war is continuing elsewhere in Europe for almost another year.
>> Josie Traum: Yes. Of course.
>> Bill Benson: What was that like for you when your aunt brought you --
>> Josie Traum: First of all, my mom had two sisters, my two aunts. They were hidden through the underground in churches. They actually were saved and were safe. And because they were part of the underground, after the war they were able to find me. There was this whole network of the underground. So my two aunts, my one aunt specifically, Theresa, found me with the family where I had been hidden and she came to pick me up. So I stayed with her. She had three boys, three sons, three brothers, a few years older than me, and, of course, she took me in. I stayed there with her. It was wonderful being with family. They really -- they spoiled me rotten, which was great. It was just wonderful. I was like the boys' little mascot. They kind of tagged me along everywhere.
>> Bill Benson: You were 5 at that point.
>> Josie Traum: 5, 5 years old. But it was wonderful being with family.
>> Bill Benson: Did you know you were Jewish at that point?

>> Josie Traum: You know, I didn't until I came back with my aunt. I was so young when I was put in hiding. I was 3 years old. I really didn't even know what a Jew was. So it wasn't until I was reunited with my aunt that I began to see some of the traditions and some of the things that they were doing in their home.
>> Bill Benson: And both your aunts survived.
>> Josie Traum: Yes.
>> Bill Benson: How were they able to resume their lives? Still a war is going on in Europe. How were they able to feed you and take care of you and their other children?
>> Josie Traum: First of all, they worked. They were able and managed to get food so that I would be able to be fed just like them.
>> Bill Benson: In what must have just seemed like a miraculous event, your mother, Fanny, survived Auschwitz, returned to Brussels after her liberation, April 1945, and was reunited with you and your sisters. You're 6 years old at this time. You hadn't seen your mother for over three years. What do you remember of your mother returning and what that was like for you and everybody else?
>> Josie Traum: You know, the things I remember are many things that my mom filled me in with because at that age, you know, I don't remember a lot of the things. But my mom does fill me in. She's kind of filled in the gaps. It was obviously just wonderful seeing her again.

You know, my mom was returned when she was liberated by the Russians. She was taken by the Red Cross and taken care of. And eventually she was brought back to Brussels. And, of course, 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: And to that point she had no idea.
>> Josie Traum: No. She didn't know I was there. She didn't know where I was. She really didn't know anything. She just wanted to the house. Truly -- I was there. So that was absolutely wonderful.
>> Bill Benson: Your mother suffered horrifically. Can you just tell us a little bit about what happened to her?
>> Josie Traum: Well, when she was liberated -- first of all she was in Auschwitz. You know, most concentration camps were killing centers. You got there and they killed you. Auschwitz had a sub-camp, a labor camp, Birkenau.

By the way, she got there, she was deported with her parents and her parents did not make it. My grandfather died on one of the trains. You know, people, the prisoners, were stuck in a cattle car, 150 prisoners. By the time they got to the concentration camp from the country they came from, they would be stuck on this cattle car without food or water and by the time they got to the camp, 40 or so people were already dead. My grandfather died on one of the trains.

And when they got off the train, there was a selection. Because there was a factory there, they would try to get the prisoners who were young enough on one side and they would go to work in the factory. And the people who were elderly or handicapped or if they were holding children, they would be put on the other side. And my mom and her mother were separated immediately. They thought my grandmother was an elderly person. She was in her 50s. So they were separated immediately. And my mother actually wanted to be in the line with her mother and a German actually hit her and said, “You go where you're told.” She actually never saw her mother again.

So my mother actually survived -- she was in the factory in Birkenau filling -- they were making ammunition, filling grenades and bombs. My mother worked there every single day. So when she was liberated -- she actually was on a Death March. The Nazis realized that the allies were approaching so they were taking some of the prisoners out and making them march towards Germany. And they would march -- actually, my mother marched on the Death March. They called it a Death March because so many people died on this march. My mother was on the Death March from January 1945 till April 1945. She was actually liberated by the Russians. She was in one of the last battles on the river between the Russians and the Germans. She was actually liberated there. She weighed about 65 pounds. She had meningitis and Typhus. And she was a pretty sick person. So the Red Cross actually took care of her for a while and then brought her down, back to Brussels. And that's how we were reunited.

>> Bill Benson: And considering all that she had been through and now she's reuniting with you, what was life like in those months after the war when you were back reunited? Was she able to try to resume some sense of being able to support you? What happened then?
>> Josie Traum: Well, she did get some support from her sisters. We actually -- we went back to live -- after living with my aunt for a while, we went to live in our old apartment. We lived there actually until my dad came back.
>> Bill Benson: Let's turn to that. The following spring, I think 1946, your father, Jacques, returns, makes it back. What happened to him and how did he get back?
>> Josie Traum: My dad couldn't come back -- war ended in 1945. He couldn't come back immediately because the house he had been living in London was bombed and he spent two years in a hospital. He was injured pretty badly. So he came back in 1946. I actually met him when I was 7 years old.
>> Bill Benson: Do you remember that?
>> Josie Traum: Umm, I do. My mom and I went to the port city where his boat came in. This man came walking down the steps. My mom said, "There's your father." I had no idea who he was because he left when I was 13 months old. So I really did not remember him. And it was pretty hard, you know, for my mom and dad and me to kind of become a family again.
>> Bill Benson: Do you know at what point your mom learned that he was alive before he got back?
>> Josie Traum: At the end of the war when she came back to Belgium, she was able to correspond with him. All of these years while she was in concentration camp, she really didn't know what had happened to him nor did he know what happened to her.
>> Bill Benson: So once you're all back together, you're 7 years old. What happened to you from an academic standpoint? You started school.
>> Josie Traum: I started school. I really hadn't missed much school because I was too young to attend school before. So once Belgium was liberated, when I was 5 years old, I went back to school. But up till then I really hadn't missed anything because really I was too young.

My parents, once my dad came back, my parents decided they really wanted to leave Europe. So they applied for permission visas to be able to come to the United States. They applied. And in 1949 we actually did come to the United States and settled in New Jersey.
>> Bill Benson: Why did it take three years?
>> Josie Traum: There were quotas.
>> Bill Benson: Quotas.
>> Josie Traum: There were quotas. We had to wait. We filled out many, many papers. It took a while for it to become available.
>> Bill Benson: During that three-year period that you were all together in Belgium, before you came to the U.S., was your father able to resume his work?
>> Josie Traum: He did. We lived in an apartment building which actually was my parents' building. It had four stories. While we were hiding, by the way, during the war, we lived in the attic apartment. So once my dad came back -- the bottom, the ground floor, was actually a store, a tailoring shop. And my dad used to have bolts of material because in those days you couldn't just go to a store and buy a ready-made suit. So my dad had bolts of material and customers would come in who wanted a suit. They would pick out their material. My dad would measure them, make a pattern. It would take weeks and weeks to make a suit. Because you'd come for different fittings. You'd make a pattern out of paper. Then you get the materials. So you kind of had a relationship with your customers. So my father ran the shop. It was his. He did work. And we lived in back of the shop. We had an apartment.
>> Bill Benson: And then, of course, the quota numbers came up. You were able to make it. You came to the U.S. in 1949. You were 10. What was it like for you and for your parents in light of all that you had been through, to come here and start new life?
>> Josie Traum: It had many challenges. I must say it was very difficult. My dad spoke English because he was in England but my mom and I, of course, did not. We lived -- my mom had an elderly aunt living in Patterson, New Jersey. We lived with her for about a month till my parents found work and our own apartment. My dad worked in the garment district in New York and would commute daily from

New Jersey to New York. And my mom worked in different dressmaking shops. It was hard getting back together. Though my mother, I think it was probably the most difficult. She tried to talk to some family that we had and people didn't want to hear her. They really said, you know, this is all in the past. It was bad. We don't want to talk about it. And so she really had no one to talk to. So it must have been extremely difficult for her.

Me, when I came, I was 10 years old. It was actually two months before my 10th birthday. They put me in first grade because they figured if you don't speak English, you know, you don't know anything. So I was put in first grade.

>> Bill Benson: At 10 years old.

>> Josie Traum: At 10 years old. I was there for two weeks. Then they put me in second grade. I was there for another two weeks, and then third grade. And eventually I graduated from elementary school at the regular age.

>> Bill Benson: And apart from even that, you shared with me that when you first arrived at that school, almost right away you were beaten up by a gang of girls.

>> Josie Traum: Yes. [Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: And your mother went down to see the principal.

>> Josie Traum: The principal.

>> Bill Benson: What was his reaction?

>> Josie Traum: You're right. My first day in school I had a gang of girls waiting outside for me and I was beaten up pretty badly. I didn't know why. I hadn't even said a word to them. I couldn't. So my mom marched down to the principal the next day and wanted to know what had happened. And the principal said, well, the girls thought that you were German. I can't imagine that they would beat me up for that or that they would even think I was German. But it never happened again. And I didn't learn how to fight back.

>> Bill Benson: And you accelerated very quickly, came to the right age and right school level.

>> Josie Traum: I did. Right.

>> Bill Benson: Josie, how many members of your extended family did you lose during the Holocaust?

>> Josie Traum: Well, I would say about 12 people, immediate family.

>> Bill Benson: Immediate family.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: When did you understand or realize how many you had lost?

>> Josie Traum: Well, after the war -- first of all, from my mom telling me what had happened to her parents to my father's -- one of his brothers, his whole family. You know, little by little I started realizing and learning what had happened.

As a teenager, when I got older, I started reading. Because I really couldn't get much information from my mom. I didn't want to ask her a lot because I knew it would hurt her. So I did a lot of reading. I found out a lot of history and what had happened.

>> Bill Benson: Josie's mother, Fanny, who will be 100 years old on December 3, also joins us on the *First Person* program, was here to start our year this year, our very first program of the year. She tells about you tying -- will you --

>> Josie Traum: I knew would ask me that.

My mother tells me this because I don't remember. When she came back and when we were reunited, I would tie my night gown to her because I was afraid to lose her. I guess I was afraid she would go away again. But I don't remember that. And these are the things my mother tells me.

>> Bill Benson: She sure remembers that.

>> Josie Traum: She does. She really does. My mom is 99. She comes here and volunteers every Sunday.

>> Bill Benson: Every Sunday you will find her here, 99.

In addition to your mother, Fanny, your husband Freddie is also a Holocaust survivor.

>> Josie Traum: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: All three of you speak publicly. You're all part of the *First Person* program. What is that like for you to do this, to be able to speak and to know that you have a mother who is still able to do it and a husband, too?
>> Josie Traum: Sure. Well, I think it's so important for today, for the generations, the younger generation even, to understand and to know what happened. I go to a lot of middle schools and high schools to speak. It really gratifies me to see that young people are interested, that they are studying about the Holocaust and that they really are learning a lot. So that is so important to me. And for me it's important to be active here, for Freddie to be active here, and my mom, it's important for her.
>> Bill Benson: I think we have time to turn to our audience to ask if they have some questions.
>> Josie Traum: Ok.
>> Bill Benson: We will close our program with Josie's last words. It's our tradition that the *First Person* has the last word. During asking questions, please stay with us so can you hear Josie wrap up the program. We'd appreciate that.

For those of you, if you want to have a question, either go to the mic, probably the best thing, or maybe we can bring the mic to you. Try to make your question as brief as you can. I will repeat it just to make sure all of us hear it, including Josie and me. And then Josie will respond to your question.

Yes, sir?
>> [Question Inaudible]
>> Bill Benson: What do you think are the most important lessons for young people to learn from the show or the Holocaust?
>> Josie Traum: First of all, in my closing statements, I think I will go over that. I think it's important for people to respond. When you see things being done to other people, people being hurt, or anyone being mistreated, I really strongly believe that you have to speak up. How one person can make a difference. And I think it is so crucial for people to be able to speak up and defend someone and say stop it, you can't do this.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you. I'm glad you had the chance to meet Freddie and Josie in another setting. That's wonderful.

We have another question. Yes, ma'am?
>> [Question Inaudible]
>> Bill Benson: Have you been able to forgive the Germans? And what has the healing process been like for you over the years?
>> Josie Traum: I see. I don't think I can forgive but I don't hold the new generation and the younger people responsible for their -- for what their parents and grandparents did. So I think in a way that, for me is a bit of a healing process. Especially here in the museum, we get young people from Austria and Germany who volunteer. Instead of going to the Army in their country, they come and volunteer here and stay for two years. So to me, in a way that's been healing because I can see -- I can become friendly and close to people as long as they had nothing to do with the Holocaust. It's difficult for me to relate to somebody maybe my age or older because I think to myself what were they doing at that time. But the younger people I can't hold them responsible. And I feel very differently to them.

I don't know if that answers it.
>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

I think we have time for another question.
>> [Question Inaudible]
>> Bill Benson: What did you learn about self-sacrifice from your experience being hidden with the Debrackalaers? Am I getting that right? Ok.
>> Josie Traum: First of all, I'm amazed -- Belgium is a very small country, the size of Delaware, population eight million. 66,000 of those were Jews. As soon as the Germans came in, 28,000 Jews were hidden by Christian people. So you know, I see how much people did sacrifice. They helped tremendously. But that doesn't mean everybody helped. My mother was denounced by our neighbor. Because some of the Christian people would get money if they told the Germans where the Jews were. But I think fortunately in Belgium there were many more people who helped and really risked their lives.

So I think sacrificing your life, I found that in my being here, my being alive, is really because people did sacrifice.

>> Bill Benson: I'm going to turn back to Josie to close our program in a moment. I want to remind you that we'll have *First Person* programs each Wednesday and Thursday through the middle of August. We will resume the program again next spring, March 2017. The museum's website provides -- will provide information about our 2017 program as well. Thanks for joining us. We hope that you can come back another time either this year or next year.

On that note, I'd like to turn it to Josie to close today's program.

>> Josie Traum: First of all, thank you, all of you, for being here. When I speak to young people, I usually like to read a saying that is written actually here in the museum, on the second floor, as you exit. There's a saying on the wall which, to me, is so important. It was said by a luge reason minister, Martin Niemoller. And this is what he said.

"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."

To me, this is so important. You've got to speak out for your fellow human beings. It does make a difference. And this is an answer to you. What do I think is the most important thing? I think it is important for people to be able to speak out.

By the way, this minister, this Lutheran minister at the beginning of the war, he was very much pro Hitler because Hitler promised so many wonderful things. When he saw what Hitler was doing, he was very much against him. He was actually imprisoned.

However, when you go through the museum -- actually, the end of the second floor, this is written on the wall. Just take a moment and read it for yourselves. I think it's so important.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

>> [Applause]